

## INTEREST IN UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY: CANADIAN EVIDENCE

*Milosh Raykov*  
Senior Lecturer,  
Department of Education Studies,  
University of Malta,  
Msida, MSD 2080, Malta  
[milosh.raykov@um.edu.mt](mailto:milosh.raykov@um.edu.mt)

*D. W. Livingstone*  
Canada Research Chair in Lifelong  
Learning and Work,  
Professor Emeritus,  
OISE, University of Toronto,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
[dwlivingstone@gmail.com](mailto:dwlivingstone@gmail.com)

---

### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the results of a 2010 national survey of Canadian non-managerial employees' membership and interest in worker organizations. This is the first general survey to include associations as well as unions. Profiles of membership and interest in unions and associations are presented, then demographic, organizational and attitudinal factors related to interest in joining these worker organizations are examined. The findings suggest that, in spite of some recent decline in union density, most Canadian non-managerial workers who are interested in collective representation are members of at least one of these organizations. The strongest interest in joining is expressed by those who are highly educated, poorly paid and feel underemployed—even if allowed some workplace “voice”. The limited prior focus on unions needs to be expanded to attend to both unions and associations as worker-controlled vehicles of representation, particularly to identify strategic alliances with the growing numbers of professional employees.

---

### INTRODUCTION

The proportion of the employed labour force with membership in labour unions has been declining in recent decades in nearly all advanced capitalist countries (e.g., Visser 2006; Jackson 2006; Pinto and Brookfield 2011). Dominant neo-liberal rhetoric insists that increased individual competition and initiative lead to higher productivity and, less emphatically, to higher profits. It is reasonably clear from objective evidence that organized workers tend to obtain higher wages and benefits (e.g., Fang

and Verma 2002; Card et al. 2004) and receive more provision of formal training (Green 1993; Kennedy et al. 2009; Livingstone and Raykov 2005, 2008). It can also be argued that a more highly organized labour force is likely to be more productive in a general sense because of more stable, co-operative working conditions (e.g., Mishel and Walters 2003) and that a more organized labour force is beneficial for societal well-being.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this study is to assess the extent of current membership and interest in *worker-controlled* organizations in the Canadian labour force, identify factors related to interest in joining these organizations, and suggest some implications for future organizing.

The approach used in this study includes membership and interest in both labour unions and other worker-controlled organizations including professional associations. Labour unions are generally regarded as organizations of workers who have banded together to achieve common goals such as protecting the integrity of trades, achieving higher pay, and negotiate employment conditions with employers. But we believe that an exclusive focus on union representation is inadequate to reflect the extent of current workers' interest in collective bargaining institutions. Workers may join various other organizations that speak for their collective interests, most notably associations that represent their occupations. Professional associations are seen as groups of people in specialized occupations who seek control over legitimate practice of the occupation and self-regulation of claimed public interest. But many associations have been actively participating in the setting of economic as well as professional occupational standards and becoming less distinguishable from labour unions (Campbell and Haiven 2012; Ichniowski and Zax 1990; Maragouhoveks 1997). There has also been increasing research interest in non-union forms of employee representation in workplaces (see Gollan and Lewin 2013; Campolieti et al. 2013). This may include professional and staff associations within workplaces in some instances but predominantly comprises consultative committees established by or in conjunction with employers. Worker associations are surely diverse but the extent to which workers have joined and are interested in joining worker-controlled associations is worthy of much greater attention than received to date.

We should note here that the general focus of this study is on non-managerial employees, rather than managers and supervisors who may have closer allegiance with employers, or the self-employed who work for themselves. In particular, four classes of professionals can be distinguished (i.e., professional owners, self-employed professionals, professional managers and professional employees). Our interest is in associations composed mainly of professional employees as opposed to those dominated by owners, self-employed and managers (see Livingstone 2014). Regardless

of whether non-managerial workers are wage-earners of diverse skill levels or salaried professional employees, a primary interest of their organizations is to negotiate working conditions with employers. In many countries, many workers are legislatively covered by collective agreements without being members of unions or associations (Flanagan 1999). This is not the case in Canada which has one of the most decentralized, least coordinated bargaining systems among advanced capitalist countries (Traxler 1996). Beyond basic employment norms, unorganized workers are largely on their own versus employers. In any event, we aim to estimate the extent of membership and interest in unions and associations among Canadian non-managerial employees today.

## **GENERAL CONTEXT**

In the context of a globalizing capitalist system, an emergent “knowledge economy” in Canada has been characterized by declining minorities of jobs in manufacturing and materials processing occupations while growing majorities of jobs involve information processing with increasing amounts of the information being mediated by use of computers.<sup>2</sup> Growing proportions of jobs are designated as professional and technical occupations distinguished by forms of specialized knowledge, while growing proportions of the general labour force are also attaining post-secondary education. There has also been growth of managerial employees to coordinate production increasingly based on information service commodities. Conversely, increasing reliance on automated production processes and movement of transnational corporate manufacturing to cheaper labour sites have led to substantial reductions in the size of the organized industrial working class. In addition, there have been reductions in the proportions of (non-professional) clerical, sales and personal service workers. Automation has led to the rapid rise of self-service, growth of back office administrative functions, as well as the export of portable service jobs to less developed countries. It is possible that growing proportions of positions now formally identifiable as either managerial or professional employees have only marginal claims to authority or specialized knowledge, increasingly contribute to the collective labour process and are not very distinguishable from service or industrial workers.

The general class composition of the Canadian labour force has changed significantly over the past generation.<sup>3</sup> Between 1982 and 2010, the industrial working class fell from 30 percent to 18 percent of the employed labour force, while service workers declined from 33 percent to 23 percent. Professional employees nearly doubled from 14 percent to 25 percent of the employed labour force while managers tripled from 4 percent to 12 percent (Jackson 2006; Livingstone 2012). Secondly, at least within the limits of sample survey

findings over this period, these changes in class structure appear to have been associated with declining expressions of working class consciousness. As lesser numbers of workers have assembled in large industrial work sites, the numbers expressing a clear working class identity have also diminished. Among industrial workers, the traditional core of the union movement, 51 percent identified themselves as “working class” in 1982; by 2010, the proportion had dropped to 29 percent. Many workers who express a “middle class” identity may do so recognizing there are many less well off than they are, but they may continue to hold oppositional political views to capitalist owners. A pivotal issue in this regard is attitudes toward management’s right to hire other workers to replace those on strike. In 1982, industrial workers led the opposition to “scabs” at 72 percent; by 2010, this figure had dropped to 57 percent. General labour force opposition had dropped from 62 percent to 54 percent (Livingstone and Scholtz 2010, forthcoming). Such changes in class composition and apparent political consciousness may be making the role of workers’ organizations in holding and attracting supportive members increasingly difficult. Other specific factors, including the rise of contingent employment, government downsizing and deregulation of labour standards, and rising employer opposition to unions (e.g., Rose 2008) indicate an increasingly challenging context for organization workers in Canada.

### **PRIOR SURVEY RESEARCH ON INTEREST IN JOINING WORKERS’ ORGANIZATIONS**

Prior relevant survey research has focused almost exclusively on workers’ interest in joining unions. The Worker Representation and Participation Survey (WRPS) originating in the US found in the mid-1990s that around a third of non-unionized employees expressed an interest in joining a union (Freeman and Rogers 1999: 68-69). A comparable British survey based on 1998 data found that around 40 percent of non-unionized employees expressed a willingness to join a union (Charlwood 2002). More recent comparable surveys in Australia and New Zealand have found similar expressions of “unmet demand” by around a third of non-unionized employees (see Pyman et al. 2011). All of these surveys have been conducted in countries which have experienced very large reductions of unionization in the wake of neo-liberal state regimes (Pinto and Brookfield 2011). A comparable survey was conducted in Canada in the mid-1990s, where union density had remained much more stable, but the expressed interest of non-unionized workers in joining unions was also found to be about one-third (Freeman and Rogers 1998/2001). An earlier longitudinal Canadian survey of recent graduates had found that less than 20 percent initially expressed interest in joining a union immediately after entering the employed labour

force in 1986 but that this proportion more than doubled within two years (Lowe and Rastin 2000). Many studies in Canada and elsewhere have documented much lower actual union membership rates among younger workers and attributed this at least partially to prevalent employment in non-unionized, private, service sector workplaces with limited chances to unionize (e.g., Bryson et al. 2002). Comparative analyses of interest in unionization and “collective voice” in Canada and the US have found stronger expression in the US and attributed this to both relatively lower union coverage there and deep institutional impediments including more restrictive labour legislation (Campolieti et al. 2011). Research on non-union workers’ interest in joining unions has generally found higher expressions of interest among younger workers with less opportunity to join, visible minorities who have experienced job discrimination and less educated, lower paid, non-professional workers, as well as those who feel they have little decision-making power in their jobs (e.g., Freeman and Rogers 1999; Pyman et al. 2011).

There are no known prior national Canadian surveys that have addressed non-unionized workers’ general interest in joining associations or other organizations besides unions controlled by workers. As growing numbers of workers in economies increasingly reliant on information processing are called upon to use specialized knowledge in their jobs, associations formed to represent professional and semi-professional occupations have also grown. Such organizations range from associations of university professors and engineers to associations of an array of technicians; many of these associations style themselves as distinct from unions, have less formal collective bargaining power but may be regarded by their members as valued alternatives in negotiating with their employers. Limited research on national membership in some professional associations in the US suggests that while their absolute numbers of members have continued to grow, membership rates have fallen in recent times (Putnam 2000: 83-85). A limited survey of professional and technical workers conducted in the US in the 1997-2000 period found significant interest among non-unionized professionals to join unions to more effectively address workplace concerns (Hurd and Bunge 2004). Various case studies have identified an array of motivational and practical factors related to joining or not joining particular professional associations (e.g., Bauman 2008; Skarlicki et al 2000). It should also be noted that research on associations generally has remained rather incoherent (see Knoke 1986). All we can claim here is a preliminary exploration of both unions and other organizations that represent members of their occupations. The current study addresses membership in and interest in joining both unions and other worker-controlled organizations among the current Canadian labour force.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The 2010 Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) survey was a representative random sample of all adult Canadians over age 18 (N = 2,028). The sample was limited to those who speak English or French, and reside in a private home (not old age/group homes/penal or educational institutions) with a telephone. All Canadian provinces and households and individuals within households were given an equal chance of selection using random digit dialing. The final response rate for the 2010 survey was 40 percent including all eligible households, or 45 percent if including only completions plus definite refusals—as many survey organizations now do (Northrup and Pollard 2011). The data presented in this report are weighted by known population characteristics of age, sex, and educational attainment to ensure profiles are representative for Canada as a whole. The WALL survey included questions on conditions of paid and unpaid work, formal and informal learning activities and social background. (The interview schedules, an integrated codebook, summary reports of all basic findings and further design details are available at [www.wallnetwork.ca](http://www.wallnetwork.ca).) The current study focuses on non-managerial employees in the paid labour force (N = 789), their membership and interest in unions and other organizations representing their occupations, and possible factors related to interest or lack of interest in these organizations.

We should note here the general limits of survey data to provide insights into social processes generally. Cross-sectional surveys are at best static snapshots of isolated individuals which can say little about workers' lived collective experience in specific socio-historical contexts (see Fantasia 1995). In particular, the views regarding unions and associations in this 2010 survey were expressed in a period in which Canadian unions generally were exhibiting pessimism and uncertainty about their future direction (Camfield 2010), while many associations remain barely visible to potential members or labour researchers. These survey data offer merely rough approximations of general sentiments of interest in unions and associations among employment aggregates. The data may be of limited use in organizing efforts with particular groups of workers but they should offer relevant benchmarks to estimate future macro-trends in levels and forms of worker-controlled organizations.

Three types of non-managerial employees are distinguished in this study: *industrial workers, service workers and professional employees*. Workers without substantial ownership claims and devoid of official supervisory authority or recognized autonomy to exercise specialized knowledge include industrial workers who produce, distribute or repair material goods, and also service workers who provide a wide array of sales, business, social and other

services. Professional employees may have task autonomy based on their recognized specialized knowledge to design production processes for themselves and others and to execute their own work with a high level of discretion, but they still remain vulnerable as sellers of labour without control over the final product/service.

Respondents were asked whether they were currently members of a union; if not, they were asked whether they were interested in joining a union; then they were asked whether they were members of another organization representing members of their occupation; if not, they were asked whether they were interested in joining such an organization. This procedure aimed to generate profiles of all respondents' membership and interest in unions and other worker-controlled organizations. Many of the prior surveys have asked about interest in joining unions in more specified or conditional ways and may not be fully comparable, but virtually none have asked about other worker-controlled organizations.

In the current study, data about association membership were collected to complement union membership status. Non-union members were asked if they currently belong to another organization that represents the members of their occupation. The remaining participants who were not members of a union or other organization were then asked if they would they "like to become a member of such organization." This set of questions was designed to make possible comparisons regarding the extent of employees' interest in union and association membership, as well as to avoid the type of questions that ask about hypothetical situations of readiness to vote for a union or other organization that represents the members of their occupation.

To examine relations of interest in joining unions and other worker organizations with socio-demographic factors, organizational factors and attitudes, this study uses descriptive, bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the incidence of membership and interest in unions and other organizations. Bivariate techniques, crosstabs and chi-square tests are used to determine associations between basic variables.<sup>4</sup> (Most statistically significant results are indicated in the following manner:  $p < 0.05 = *$ ,  $p < 0.01 = **$ , and  $p < 0.001 = ***$ ). Tables containing descriptive frequency distributions and bivariate relations of membership and interest with other factors are reported in the text. Multivariate analyses including raw and adjusted logistic regression analyses with controls for other relevant factors (e.g., demographic factors of age, sex, race and education) have also been used to determine the stability of associations among variables. Relevant adjusted odds ratios are reported in the text with levels of statistical significance. The full tables with raw and adjusted odds ratios are available from the authors on request.

## **UNIONIZATION TRENDS IN CANADA**

We begin by summarizing general trends in unionization rate in Canada during the period between 1996 and 2013, based on information from the Statistics Canada (2014) CANSIM database. These data, covering all non-agricultural paid workers, show that between 1996 and 2013 the general unionization rate in Canada dropped slightly from 33.7 percent to 31.2 percent. Most of the decline was in the private sector where the overall union rate declined from 21.3 percent to 17.5 percent and men's historically higher rates dropped from 26 percent in 1996 to 20.9 percent in 2013. The largest declines in unionization were in the manufacturing sector, reflective of the shrinking industrial working class. Public sector rates remained much higher, actually growing slightly then returning to just under 75 (74.6) percent in 2013. Unionization rates among women remained fairly stable and by 2013 were marginally higher (32.6 percent) than the declining male rate of unionization (30.0 percent). In terms of age groups, there was a decrease of about 4 percent (from 37.8 to 33.9 percent) in unionization rates among 25 to 54-year-old employees who represent the greatest part of the labour force. There was a smaller increase among 15 to 24-year-old employees (from 13.1 to 15.2 percent) and a significant increase among employees over 65 years old (from 13.2 to 25.8 percent), both of whom make up small portions of the entire labour force. Overall, the picture is one of gradual decline in unionization rates over this period, in contrast to much larger decreases in most Anglo-American countries. As noted above, there are no prior general surveys of association membership to ascertain patterns in Canada.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

### **MEMBERSHIP AND INTEREST IN UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

The general unionization rate in the 2010 WALL survey for all non-agricultural paid workers was about one-third, comparable within margin of error to the most recent Statistics Canada estimates. However, as noted above, our main interest is in non-managerial employees. Their basic pattern of membership and interest in unions and other occupational organizations (mainly associations) is summarized in Table 1.



**Table 1**  
 Union/ Association Status,  
 Non-managerial Employed  
 Labour Force, Canada, 2010

Status	%
Union member	41
Association member only	16
Union interest	4
Association interest only	6
Non-member, no interest	34
N = 723	

Source: WALL (2010).

Over 40 percent of non-managerial employees are members of unions. Over 15 percent are members of other organizations representing their occupations. Around 10 percent of these members are members of both unions and other organizations. Well over half of all non-managerial employees are members at least one of these organizations. In addition, around 4 percent of these workers express interest in joining a union and 6 percent express interest in joining another representing organization. Only one-third of these workers are neither members of a workers' organization nor express interest in joining one. While bargaining capacities may vary greatly, the finding that about two-thirds of Canadian non-managerial employees are either members or interested in becoming members of these organizations presents a picture of a more fully organized labour force than most past research (which has typically included managerial employees and self-employed, and ignored organizations besides unions). On the other hand, only around 10 percent of all non-managerial employees, or 22 percent of all non-members, express an interest in joining either a union or an association when they are asked simply, as we have, with no hypothetical conditions.

There appear to be some differences between employee classes in membership and interest in unions and other occupational organizations. As Table 2 summarizes, professional employees are the most likely members of unions (50 percent), members of associations (19 percent) and also least likely to express no interest in joining (21 percent). Service workers are least likely to be union members (31 percent) and most likely to indicate no interest in joining (47 percent). Industrial workers are less likely than professional employees to be members of either unions (42 percent) or associations (12 percent); they are also more likely than professional employees to express no interest in joining (35 percent). Perhaps most notably, relatively few non-members in any of these classes of employees express interest in joining.

Only around 10 percent of professional employees, industrial workers or service workers indicate interest in joining either a union or an association.

**Table 2**  
Union/ Association Status by Employee Class, Canada, 2010

Employee class	Union member (%)	Association member (%)	Union interest (%)	Association interest (%)	No interest (%)
Professional employee	50	19	2	8	21
Service worker	31	15	3	4	47
Industrial worker	42	12	8	4	35
Total	41	16	4	6	33
<b>Combined Totals</b>	<b>57</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>33</b>

Source: WALL 2010.

Since the main objective of this study was to examine non-managerial employees' interest in joining a union or a professional association, the further analysis includes three distinctive groups of employees: members of a union and/or association; non-members interested in joining a union or a professional association; and non-members not interested in joining a union or a professional association. This way of grouping was selected to increase reliability since a relatively small percentage of the selected sample demonstrated an interest in exclusively joining either a union (4 percent) or an association (6 percent).

The demographic profiles of those who are currently members of unions or associations, those interested in joining these organizations and those who are not interested suggest some significant differences. As Table 3 indicates, those in the youngest age group (18 to 24), those with the lowest formal education (no high school diploma) and those in the lowest income group (under \$30,000) are less likely than other non-managerial employees to be members of organizations that bargain for them. These youngest, least educated and lowest income workers also appear to express the *least* interest in joining these organizations. Those of non-white racial origins express greater interest in joining than whites, while women appear to be somewhat less interested than men. Perhaps most notably, small majorities of the youngest and least educated workers indicate no interest in joining. Among the small minority who are interested in joining, there is some indication that younger, more educated workers with lower incomes are more interested, but the numbers in this minority are too small for statistical significance.

**Table 3**  
Age, Sex, Education, Race, Income and Membership  
or Interest in Joining a Union or Association,  
Non-managerial Employees, Canada, 2010

	Member of a union and/or association (%)	Non-member, interested (%)	Non-member, not interested (%)
<b>Age</b> [Chi-Square = 50.58***]			
18-24	30	14	56
25-34	55	14	31
35-44	63	11	26
45-54	65	6	29
55-64	66	6	29
<b>Sex</b> [Chi-Square = 16.78***]			
Male	60	14	27
Female	54	8	38
<b>Race</b> [Chi-Square = 8.61**]			
White	58	9	33
Non-White	50	18	32
<b>Educ. Attainment</b> [Chi-Square = 43.40***]			
No diploma	39	8	53
High school diploma	47	10	42
College certificate	64	7	29
University degree	63	15	23
<b>Income</b> [Chi-Square = 43.65***]			
Less than \$29,999	39	14	47
\$30,000-\$59,999	64	10	26
\$60,000 or more	69	6	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>33</b>

Source: WALL, 2010, N = 789 (professional, service and industrial workers)

We also look more closely at demographic factors related to interest in joining unions or associations, using multiple logistic regression that simultaneously controls for age, sex, race, education and income. Workers with university degrees (adjusted odds ratio 6.1,  $p = .002$ ) more than those without post-secondary education, men more than women (adjusted odds ratio 5.1,  $p = .001$ ), those of Non-White racial background more than Whites (adjusted odds ratio 2.5,  $p = .04$ ) and those with incomes under \$30,000 (adjusted odds ratio 5.90,  $p = .003$ ) exhibit most interest in joining. When these other factors are controlled for, age is not a significant factor. More detailed inspection suggests that there are now substantial numbers of highly

educated workers of various ages who are relatively poorly paid and relatively receptive to joining professional associations. However, once again, it is important to keep in mind that non-members expressing interest in joining unions or associations make up a very small minority of non-managerial employees in Canada (10 percent) and that the young, poorly educated and poorly paid who say they are not interested in joining make up a much larger part of the employed labour force.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS RELATED TO EMPLOYEE INTEREST IN JOINING UNIONS OR ASSOCIATIONS

There are several organizational factors that are known to be associated with unionization. We know that the public sector is much more highly organized than the private sector and that larger workplaces tend to be more highly organized than smaller ones (e.g., Campolieti et al. 2013). We predict that those in more precarious jobs would be more interested in joining worker-controlled organizations, and that workers with less benefits would be more interested in joining. Contending arguments are made about the effect of participation in workplace decision-making and interest in worker-controlled organizations: either workplace participation is claimed to diminish such interest and exclusion to increase it, or workplace participation is seen as increasing interest in union membership (see Campolieti et al. 2013). The 2010 WALL survey permits testing all of these factors in relation to interest in joining. The basic findings are summarized in Table 4.

Our primary focus here is on significant differences between non-members who are interested in joining and those who are not interested. While the vast majority of non-members of unions and/or professional associations are in the private sector, most private sector non-members express no interest in joining unions or associations and the *proportion* who are interested (14 percent compared to 50 percent who are not) is no greater than in the already highly organized public sector (3 percent compared to 12 percent who are not interested). In terms of size of workplace, smaller workplaces clearly are less highly organized, with only about 40 percent organized in workplaces with under 10 workers, compared to around 70 percent in workplaces with over 500 workers. But again the *proportion* who are interested in joining is comparable across different workplace sizes, with about three times as many workers not interested in joining as are interested. Even in workplaces under 10 workers, only 14 percent express interest. We have tested two dimensions of precariousness, part-time hours and temporary or seasonal jobs. In each instance, those who are not organized are more likely to be in precarious jobs. For instance, 45 percent of part-timers are organized compared to 59 percent of full-timers. But the proportion of

part-timers who express interest in joining (16 percent compared to 39 percent who do not) is similar to full-time non-members (9 percent compared to 32 percent who are not interested). As for benefit provisions, among members of worker-controlled organizations, nearly three-quarters have health, pay and pension benefits while among non-members over 50 percent have none of these. But, regardless of the extent of benefits coverage, the non-members not interested in joining exceeds those interested by a ratio of about three to one.

**Table 4**  
Organizational Factors Related to Interest in Joining Unions or Associations,  
Non-managerial Employees, Canada, 2010

Factor	Member of any org. (%)	Non-member, interested (%)	Non-member, not interested (%)
<b>Sector</b> [Chi-Square = 166.62***]			
Private company	36	14	50
Public sector and gov.	85	3	12
<b>Number employed at workplace</b> [Chi-Square = 29.75***]			
<10 employees	41	14	45
11-49	55	11	34
50-99	64	8	27
100-499	64	9	28
500+	71	7	22
<b>Precarious job</b> [Chi-Sq = 10.61**]			
Work 30 hrs or more	59	9	32
Work 29 hrs or less	45	16	39
<b>Number of benefits</b> [Chi-Sq = 61.94***]			
None	28	18	54
Some	53	12	35
Some	59	10	31
All	73	6	22
<b>Participation in organizational decision-making</b> [Chi-Square = 13.16***]			
Yes	53	14	33
No	60	7	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>33</b>

Source: WALL, 2010.

Finally, participation in workplace decision-making does appear to be positively related to interest in joining worker organizations. A growing majority of non-managerial employees generally are participating in some form of organizational decision-making at least in occasional ways, even if it has no significant relationship with membership in worker-controlled organizations (Livingstone and Raykov 2008). But there is a significant difference among non-members. Those non-members who are interested in joining are twice as likely to be participating in workplace decisions (adjusted

odds ratio 2.0,  $p = .03$ ) as those who are not interested in joining a union or association.

#### ATTITUDINAL FACTORS RELATED TO INTEREST IN JOINING UNIONS OR ASSOCIATIONS

Prior research on non-union workers' interest in joining unions has identified job dissonance or dissatisfaction, perceptions of job benefits and general political views as pertinent types of attitudinal factors or predictive theories (e.g., Charlwood 2001; Schnabel and Wagner 2007). To begin to explore factors related to workers' interest in joining unions or associations, we posit that greater interest should be associated with greater general job dissatisfaction, perceived mismatch between qualifications and job requirements, unmet demand for further training opportunities and support for workers' right to strike. The basic findings are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
Attitudinal Factors Related to Interest in Joining Unions or Associations,  
Non-managerial Employees, Canada, 2010

Factor	Member of any org. (%)	Non-member, interested (%)	Non-member, not interested (%)
<b>Job satisfaction</b> [Chi-Square = 22.70***]			
Very satisfied	64	8	27
Somewhat satisfied	52	11	37
Neither/dissatisfied	40	17	43
<b>Subjective qualification-job match</b> [Chi-Square = 17.60***]			
Overqualified	49	16	35
Adequately qualified	61	7	32
<b>Unmet demand for education</b> [Chi-Square = 20.59***]			
No	52	8	40
Yes	62	13	26
<b>Right to strike</b> [Chi-square = 53.79***]			
Agree	68	9	23
Neutral or disagree	42	11	46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>33</b>

Source: WALL, 2010.

Job dissatisfaction has been found to be a quite diffuse measure, with majorities of many groups of workers expressing general satisfaction, particularly in periods when unemployment is relatively high. Unorganized workers do tend to express lower satisfaction with their jobs than members (chi-square = 22.7,  $p = .001$ ). But non-members interested in joining do not show any greater dissatisfaction than those not interested, in terms of

adjusted odds ratios (.45,  $p = .08$ ). With regard to match between qualifications and job requirements, organized workers are less likely to be overqualified for their jobs than unorganized workers (chi-square = 17.6,  $p = .001$ ), and those interested in joining are about twice as likely as the uninterested to be overqualified for their jobs (adjusted odds ratio = 2.1,  $p = .01$ ). Unmet demand for training opportunities also has more pertinence for those interested in joining; they are almost three times as likely to have unmet demand for further training (adjusted odds ratio = 2.9,  $p = .001$ ). Finally, regarding respondents' views on the right to strike, a pivotal issue for workers' movements, members support this right much more strongly than uninterested non-members (chi-square = 53.79,  $p = .001$ ). Although there is general support for the right to strike among most workers, those interested in joining are significantly more supportive than those who are not interested in joining (adjusted odds ratio = 2.04,  $p = .015$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The 2010 WALL Survey is the first known Canadian national-level survey of membership and interest in both unions and associations. The primary focus has been on non-managerial workers, the workers most eligible to be members of worker-controlled organizations representing their collective rights in negotiations with employers. Many prior surveys have included managers and supervisors who have mixed allegiances with employers and other employees, as well as the self-employed who are effectively their own employers. Some in each of these employment classes do join unions or associations, but for this exploratory study they are left aside. The major finding for the non-managerial labour force is that the majority of these employees are members of either a union or an association or both. For example, about 70 percent of professional employees are members of such worker-controlled organizations. Of this total, 30 percent are union members only, about 20 percent are association members only and about 20 percent are members of both unions and associations. Another 10 percent of professional employees express interest in joining, while only 20 percent exhibit no interest. Most Canadian non-managerial employees who perceive a need for collective representation versus their employers appear to have some form of it now. Some union members may not want to be represented, but are compelled by the Rand formula. But there are only small numbers who express interest and are not members, so there may be fairly limited *immediate* potential for general growth in membership proportions or density per se.

The strongest interest among non-members is expressed by highly educated, poorly paid employees and particularly non-whites. Women non-

members express less interest, perhaps reflective of greater “family binds” (Livingstone, Pollock and Raykov 2014) and perhaps the recent greater loss of unionized jobs by men. In terms of organizational factors, some degree of participation in workplace decision-making appears to be related to interest in joining unions or associations. In terms of attitudinal factors—consistent with greater interest of highly educated, poorly paid employees—those who feel they are over-qualified for their jobs are more interested in joining. Those who have unmet demand for further education and those with stronger support for the right to strike are also more likely to want to join. It should also be noted here that the strongest interest in joining these organizations is expressed by the unemployed and particularly recent immigrants. But among the employed labour force, the greatest interest is now found among those who are highly educated, poorly paid and subjectively underemployed—even if they have been allowed some workplace “voice”.

We suggest that professional employees may be seen as the new skilled trades in “knowledge-based economies”. The skilled trades in the old manufacturing-based economies led the formation of classical craft unions and development of the union movement in the 19th century. Current professional employees may have less direct control of the means of production than classic skilled trades, but their specialized knowledge gives them considerable potential power to build new worker-controlled craft unions (see Stone 2004), and to ally with less skilled workers to negotiate for better working conditions. Some employee associations may be little more than ectoplasms as collective organizing vehicles at this point. These associations may range from small, local occupational groupings to national organizations. But, as the numbers of professional employees continue to grow, some studies indicate that professional associations may be increasingly complementing or converging with unions (Ichniowski and Zax 1990; McHugh and Bodah 2002; Ross 2013; Wilson 2007). Campbell and Haiven (2012) document how several groups of professionals in Canada are effectively adopting both professionalism and collective bargaining strategies to reconcile their position of relative dominance as elite knowledge specialists with one of subordination as hired employees.

The predominant prior focus on unions as worker-controlled organizational forms needs to be expanded to attend to both unions and associations, as well as to consider employer-controlled forms of worker voice in workplaces, and the relations between these different forms of representation in terms of demographic, organizational and attitudinal factors. Of course, neither membership nor expressed interest in such organizations is equivalent to active engagement in them. There is clearly great need for more active engagement of many members in many North American workers’ organizations (e.g., Mcalevey and Ostertag 2012). There is



also likely a need for graduated bargaining rights especially to reach minorities in some workplaces (Doorey 2013) and to appreciate that many workers who have some form of representation do need more active connection. In any event, retaining and building membership in worker organizations will likely require stronger alliances between public and private sector organizations, as well as between unions and associations in both sectors. Such alliance initiatives can be built on the recognition that substantial numbers of workers, and especially professional employees, are already members of *both* unions and associations.

It may well be that the greatest potential for growth of worker-controlled organizations is now among the growing numbers of professional employees and that such growth can be found in more combined memberships in both unions and associations. The extent to which associations are complementary to unions or in competition with them should be a question of urgent priority for both organizers and labour researchers.

In light of the finding that the greatest interest in joining worker organizations is expressed by those who are highly educated, feel underemployed and have limited decision-making roles in their workplaces, general drives to retain and build membership could effectively give more priority to job redesign measures to increase recognition and reward of non-managerial workers' skills (Livingstone 2009; Livingstone and Raykov 2005). In these times, with the previously highly organized public sector under increasing threat in Canada, greater understanding of specific factors related to interest in unions and associations in both public and private sectors is of increasing strategic importance to their effective survival.

## NOTES

- 
- <sup>1</sup> For example, Sweden has one of the highest global rates of unionization as well as among the highest ratings on various quality of life indices (e.g., Global Age Watch Index, 2013)
  - <sup>2</sup> For critical analyses of the features of the “knowledge economy” and its’ relation to the “knowledge society”, see Livingstone and Guile (2012).
  - <sup>3</sup> We can identify eight major current employment-based class groupings in the class structure grounded in divisions of ownership, formal management authority and specialized knowledge: *large employers, small employers, the self-employed, managers, supervisors, professional employees, service workers, and industrial workers*. For fuller discussion, see Livingstone (2009).
  - <sup>4</sup> Given small numbers in the sample expressing interest in joining either unions or associations and the overlap between them, it has not been possible to estimate whether there are any significant differences between these subgroups in influencing factors.

---

**REFERENCES**

- Bryson, A., R. Gomez, M. Gunderson, and N. Meltz. 2002. *Youth-adult Differences in the Demand for Unionization: Are American, British and Canadian Workers All That Different?* Centre for Economic Performance discussion paper 0515. London, UK: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Camfield, D. 2011. *Canadian Labour in Crisis: Reinventing the Workers' Movement*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Campbell, S. and L. Haiven. 2012. "Struggles on the Frontier of Professional Control: Leading Cases from Canada." *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 33(4):669-689.
- Campolieti, M., R. Gomez, and M. Gunderson. 2013. "Does Non-Union Employee Representation Act as a Complement or Substitute to Union Voice? Evidence from Canada and the United States." *Industrial Relations* 52(S1):378-396.
- Campolieti, M., R. Gomez, and M. Gunderson. 2011. "What Accounts for the Representation Gap? Decomposing Canada-US Differences in the Desire for Collective Voice." *Journal of Industrial Relations* 53(4):425-449.
- Card, D., T. Lemieux, and W. Riddell. C. 2004. "Unions and Wage Inequality." *Journal of Labor Research* 25(4):519-562.
- Charlwood, A. 2002. "Why Do Non-union Employees Want to Unionize? Evidence from Britain." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40(3):463-491.
- Doorey, D. 2013. "Graduated Freedom of Association: Worker Voice Beyond the Wagner Model." *Queen's Law Journal* 38(2):515-548.
- Fang, T. and A. Verma. 2002. "Union Wage Premium." *Perspective on Labor and Income* 3:50-65.
- Fantasia, R. 1995. From Class Consciousness to Culture, Action, and Social Organization. *Annual Review of Sociology* 21:269-287.
- Freeman, R. and J. Rogers. 1999. *What Workers Want*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1998/2001. Worker Representation and Participation Survey (WRPS): Data for the book, *What Workers Want*, Cornell Press, spring 1999. Retrieved 27 February 2014  
<http://users.nber.org/~freeman/wrps.html>.
- Global Age Watch Index. 2013: A Summary. Retrieved 27 February 2013  
[www.globalagewatch.org](http://www.globalagewatch.org)
- Green, F. 1993. "The Impact of Trade Union Membership on Training in Britain." *Applied Economics* 25(8):1033-1043.
- Gollan, P. and D. Lewin. 2013. "Employee Representation in Non-Union Firms: An Overview." *Industrial Relations* 52(S1):173-193.

- Haiven, L. 2006. "Expanding the Union Zone: Union renewal through alternative forms of worker organization." *Labor Studies Journal* 31(3):85-116.
- Hurd, R. W. and J. Bunge. 2004. Unionization of Professional and Technical Workers. The Labor Market and Institutional Transformation. Pp. 179-206 in *Emerging Labor Market Institutions for the 21st Century*, edited by R. Freeman, J. Hersch & L. Mishel. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jackson, A. 2006. "Rowing Against the Tide: The Struggle to Raise Union Density in a Hostile Environment." Pp. 61-78. In *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*, edited by P. Kumar and C. Schenk. Toronto: Broadview Press.
- Ichniowski, C., and J. S. Zax. 1990. "Today's Associations, Tomorrow's Unions." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 43(2):191-208.
- Kennedy, S., R. Drago, J. Sloan., and M. Wooden. 2009. "The Effect of Trade Unions on the Provision of Training: Australian Evidence." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 32(4):565-580.
- Knoke, D. 1986. "Associations and Interest Groups." *Annual review of sociology*, 12:1-21.
- Livingstone, D. W. (ed.). 2009. *Education and Jobs: Exploring the Gaps*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . 2012. "Probing the Icebergs of Adult Learning: Comparative Findings and Implications of the 1998, 2004 and 2010 Canadian Surveys of Formal and Informal Learning Practices." *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 25(1):47-71.
- . 2014. "Interrogating Professional Power and Recognition of Specialized Knowledge: A Class Analysis." *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 5(1):1-16.
- Livingstone, D.W., and M. Raykov. 2005. Union Influence on Worker Education and Training in Canada in Tough Times. *Just Labour* 5(Winter):50-64.
- . 2008. Workers' Power and Intentional Learning: A 2004 Benchmark Survey. *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations* 63(1):30-54.
- Livingstone, D.W. and D. Guile (eds.). 2012. *The Knowledge Economy and Lifelong Learning: A Critical Reader*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Livingstone, D.W., K. Pollock and M. Raykov. 2014. "Family Binds and Glass Ceilings: Women Managers' Promotion Limits in a 'Knowledge Economy'". *Critical Sociology* (forthcoming).
- Livingstone, D.W and A.E. Scholtz. 2010. "Work and Learning in the Computer Era: Basic Survey Findings". Pp. 15-56 in *Lifelong Learning in*

- 
- Paid and Unpaid Work: Survey and Case Study Findings*, edited by D.W. Livingstone. London: Routledge.
- . Forthcoming. "Reconnecting Class Theory and Labour Process Analysis: A National Inquiry into Class Structure and Class Consciousness."
- Bauman, S. 2008. "To Join or Not to Join: School Counselors as a Case Study in Professional Membership." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 86(2):164-177.
- Lowe, G. and S. Rastin. 2002. "Organizing the Next Generation: Influences on Young Workers' Willingness to Join Unions in Canada." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 38(2):203-222.
- Maragouhoveka, T. 1997. "Professional Associations or Unions? A Comparative Look." *Library Trends* 46(2):232-244.
- McAlevy, J. and B. Ostertag. 2012. *Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell): My Decade Fighting for the Labor Movement*. London: Verso.
- McHugh, P.P. and M.M. Bodah. 2002. "Challenges to Professionalism and Union Voting Intentions: The case of pharmacists." *Journal of Labor Research* 23(4):659-671.
- Mishel, L. and M. Walters. 2003. How Unions Help all Workers. *EPI Briefing Paper*, 143. Retrieved 27 February 2014  
[http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers\\_bp143](http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_bp143).
- Northrup, D. and J. Pollard. 2011. *The 2010 National Survey of Learning and Work: The Second WALL Survey: Technical Documentation*. Toronto: Institute for Social Research, York University.
- Pinto, S. and J. Beckfield. 2011. "Organized Labor in European Countries, 1960-2006: Persistent Diversity and Shared Decline. Comparing European Workers Part B: Policies and Institutions." *Research in the Sociology of Work* 22(2):153-179.
- Putnam, R. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Pyman, A., J. Teicher, B. Cooper and P. Holland. 2009. "Unmet Demand for Union Membership in Australia." *Journal of Industrial Relations* 51(1):5-24.
- Rose, J. B. 2008. "The Prospects for Union Renewal in Canada." Pp. 101-107 in *Labor and Employment Relations Association Series. 60th Annual Meeting*. edited by A. E. Eaton. New Orleans, Louisiana, January 4-6, 2008.
- Ross, C. 2013. "New Unions in the UK: The Vanguard or the Rearguard of the Union Movement?" *Industrial Relations Journal* 44(1):78-94.
- Schnabel, C., & J. Wagner. 2007. "Union Density and Determinants of Union Membership in 18 EU Countries: Evidence from Micro Data, 2002/03." *Industrial Relations Journal*, 38(1):5-32.

- Skarlicki, D. P., C. Lucas, T. Prociuk and G.P. Latham. 2000. "Factors Explaining why People Join, Remain In, or Leave a Scholarly Society: The Canadian Psychological Association." *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne* 41(1):69-74.
- Statistics Canada. 2014. Table 282-0078. Labour Force Survey Estimates (LFS), Employees by Union Coverage, North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), Sex and Age Group. Retrieved 24 January 2014 (<http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a05?lang=eng&id=2820078>).
- Stone, K. 2004. *From Widgets to Digits: Employment Regulation for the Changing Workplace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Traxler, F. 1996. "Collective Bargaining and Industrial Change: A Case of Disorganization? A Comparative Analysis of Eighteen OECD Countries." *European Sociological Review* 12(3):271-287.
- Visser, J. 2006. "Union Membership Statistics in 24 Countries." *Monthly Labor Review* 129(1):38-49.
- Wilson, T. 2007. *The Future for Unions*. London. Unions 21. Retrieved June 29 2014 [www.unions21.org.uk/download/76](http://www.unions21.org.uk/download/76).