

Rowing Against the Tide: The Struggle to Raise Union Density in a Hostile Environment

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1. Introduction

Canada is one of very few advanced industrial countries in which union density is not in sharp decline, and in which union membership is still growing in terms of absolute numbers. Canadian unions continue to make gains for their members and for all workers, and remain an important force in the workplace, in society and in politics. Set against the background of sharp union decline in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and many other broadly comparable countries, this performance by Canadian unions is quite impressive (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003).

Despite continental economic integration, one in every three Canadian workers is still covered by a collective agreement, more than double the proportion in the US, and union membership as a share of the workforce is now not far below the level of many continental European countries and exceeds that in the United Kingdom. As shown in Table 1, union membership as a proportion of all wage and salary earners has held up relatively much better than in most other advanced industrial countries since 1980, with the exception of Sweden.

However, the proportion of workers covered by collective bargaining arrangements is still much higher in most of the larger European countries because of the formal and informal extension of union-negotiated agreements to non-union workers.

	1980	2000
	(%)	(%)
Canada	35 (37)	28 (32)
United States	22	13
United Kingdom	51	31
Germany	35 (80)	25 (68)
Italy	50 (80)	35 (80)
Sweden	80 (80)	90 (80)
Japan	31	22
New Zealand	69	23
Australia	48	25

(Figure in brackets is % employees covered by collective bargaining arrangements.)
Source: OECD Employment Outlook, 2004. Table 3.3. p.145.

	Union Membership	Union Membership as % of non-agricultural paid workers
	(000s)	(%)
1980	3,397	35.7
1984	3,651	37.2*
1988	3,841	34.8
1992	4,089	35.8
1996	4,033	34.3
2000	4,058	31.9
2004	4,261	30.4

Source: Workplace Gazette, Vol. 2, #3, 1999, and Vol. 7, #3, 2004.
Labour Program, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).
*peak year

As shown in Table 2, total Canadian union membership has continued to gradually rise to well over 4 million workers today, including from 2000 to 2004. However, union density – the proportion of all workers who belong to a union – has slipped from the high point of 37.2% in 1984 to just above 30% today. Less than one-in-five private-sector workers now belong to a union. (For a detailed statistical analysis see: Jackson and Schetagne, 2003; Akyeampong, 2004; Morissette, Schellenberg and Johnson, 2005. Note that there are different estimates of union density from different surveys, and that union membership as a proportion of all workers is somewhat less than collective bargaining coverage since some non-union workers, such as lower level supervisors, are covered even though they are not union members.) New union organizing is taking place, especially among women and minority workers in services jobs. But it is not enough to counter the ongoing loss of union jobs from economic restructuring and the fact that job growth in the private sector is concentrated in mainly non-union sectors and occupations.

The bad news is that Canadian unions risk marginalization if the ongoing process of union renewal does not eventually begin to reverse the slow decline of union density. The good news is that unions are increasingly aware of this challenge, and are doing something about it.

This paper provides background factual information of broad trends in the job market and is organized as follows. Part Two very briefly summarizes the

reasons why union density is important. Part Three describes some of the key forces driving density. Part Four surveys the broad historical trends in Canadian union density. Part Five sets union density and organizing in the context of the changing structure of the Canadian labour market. Finally, Part Six provides an overview of recent trends and describes the context for organizing strategies and union renewal.

2. Why Union Density is Important

Union representation provides access to rights and protections, and has an important positive impact upon wages, benefits and working conditions. (For a longer discussion of the “union advantage” see Jackson, 2003.) As shown in Table 3, the union wage advantage is particularly high for women, younger workers and workers in lower-paid sales and services jobs. The union wage advantage does reflect factors other than belonging to a union, such as working in the public sector. However, holding all other relevant factors such as age, education, industry and occupation constant, union workers in Canada earn 7% to 14% more per hour than non-union workers, are about three times more likely to be covered by an employer-sponsored pension plan, and are twice as likely to be covered by a medical or dental plan (Fang and Verma, 2002; Lipsett and Reesor, 1997). The union advantage is greatest for workers who are otherwise disadvantaged in the job market, notably women, workers of colour, young workers, and the relatively unskilled. As a result, unions help

equalize outcomes and opportunities between different groups of workers and disproportionately improve conditions for low-wage and precarious workers.

Table 3 - The Union Wage Advantage in 2003				
	Union	Non-Union	Union Advantage	Union Advantage as % of Non-Union
Median Hourly Wage				
All	\$20.00	\$14.00	\$6.00	42.9%
Men	\$21.00	\$15.98	\$5.02	31.4%
Women	\$18.75	\$12.02	\$6.73	56.0%
Average Hourly Wage				
All	\$21.01	\$16.65	\$4.36	26.2%
Men	\$22.00	\$18.69	\$3.31	17.7%
Women	\$19.94	\$14.55	\$5.39	37.0%
Age 15-24	\$12.66	\$9.88	\$2.78	28.1%
Public Sector	\$23.10	\$22.09	\$1.01	4.6%
Private Sector	\$18.70	\$16.17	\$2.53	15.6%
Sales and Service Occupations	\$13.16	\$11.28	\$1.88	16.7%
Processing and Manufacturing Occupations	\$18.11	\$14.76	\$3.35	22.7%
Source: Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey. Data from "Gender and Work" database.				

Achieving high union density is important since it extends the union advantage to more workers, and since it can change the way in which the job market operates on a community, sector-by-sector and even national basis. If union density is low and is confined to workers with a lot of bargaining power, there is a risk that unionized workers will become a privileged labour aristocracy rather than a broad, inclusive, and equalizing social movement. If union density is high, as in the Scandinavian countries, collective bargaining can produce a job market marked by quite small wage differences and by low levels of low-paid and insecure work. It should be noted that union impacts in Sweden and some other European countries are amplified by centralized or

industry-wide collective bargaining, and by the ability of unions to influence or dominate statutory works councils.

High union density gives the labour movement potential power in the workplace, in the labour market and in politics. While undercut to some degree by growing international competition, high union density can provide the power to take wages, benefits and working conditions out of the competitive equation faced by employers, and the ability to set decent wage floors and to promote good working conditions across whole sectors. For example, high union density in Sweden means that hotel, retail, child and elder care workers are paid much closer to average wages than is the case in Canada, benefitting mainly women and minority workers who would otherwise be low paid. About one-in-four full-time workers in Canada in the mid-1990s (23.7%) were low paid – defined as earning less than two-thirds of the median national full-time wage – compared to just one-in-twenty (5.2%) in Sweden. One-third of women in Canada were low paid, compared to just 8.4% in Sweden (OECD, 1996).

Even in a North American context, high union density in an economically relevant sector in a local labour market can make a big difference for workers. For example, high union density in Las Vegas has significantly raised wages, benefits and access to good jobs for hotel and hospitality industry workers and made it very difficult for employers to resist unionization (Meyerson, 2004). City-wide *Justice for Janitors* campaigns and agreements have raised wages

and benefits for US building cleaners. In Canada, sector-wide union organization and sectoral bargaining have underpinned significant gains for groups such as security guards in Quebec, and (under the NDP government) BC community services workers. In the final analysis, density is about power.

3. Key Forces Driving Union Density

In most advanced capitalist countries, including Canada, the two historical bastions of union strength have been the male industrial working-class and, more recently, mainly women workers in public and social services. In Canada, the two historically large waves of union organization came in the 1940s with the rise of mass industrial unions, and in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of public services unions. Union strength has, from at least the 1980s, been challenged by de-industrialization, deregulation, privatization, and the increased importance of the private services sector of the economy. It is important to note that the latter includes both low-paid and insecure jobs, and well paid and fairly secure professional and technical “knowledge-based” jobs. Union coverage typically extends to only a minority of both kinds of private services workers, particularly when they are employed in small firms.

The two key differences, between low-union density countries, like Canada and high-union density European countries like Sweden, is the size of the broader public services sector compared to the private services sector, and the extent of

union coverage of private service sector workers. In a “post-industrial” economy, unions will live or die less by their ability to hang onto traditional areas of strength than by their ability to expand into growing areas of employment.

Unions have been forced to confront major changes, not just in the economy, but also in the wider society. The emergence of a more diverse and more highly educated workforce which is now almost equally divided between women and men, and includes many workers of colour has posed challenges for labour movements that were once made up mainly of white, male, manual workers. Unions were once a powerful expression of tightly knit, working-class communities, but old solidarities and forms of class consciousness have declined. What workers expect of unions has also changed, with quality of work, equality and work-life balance issues becoming as important as the “bread and butter” issues of wages and benefits.

Most union members become members by being hired into a job in an already unionized workplace, rather than by actively joining or supporting a union campaign to organize a non-union workplace. Most non-union members stay that way simply because there is no active union campaign to certify the workplace in which they work. Changing union density is thus a function of three trends: net changes in employment in already-unionized workplaces as a result of closures, layoffs and new hirings; net changes in employment in non-

union workplaces and predominantly non-union sectors and occupations; and, the rate at which non-union workers are organized into unions.

Changes in employment in both union and non-union workplaces are mainly driven by employers and are outside the direct control of unions. The gradual, ongoing rise of private services and of a “knowledge-based economy” strongly influences changes of employment by industry, occupation, firm size, form of employment (i.e., part-time vs full-time, permanent vs temporary, employee vs self-employed), and level of education and skills. Sheer inertia and the slow decline of union membership in traditional areas of strength can slow union decline, but ultimately unions must organize in sectors of the job market which are expanding if they are to achieve success.

Union density will also be influenced by the changing composition of the workforce, especially by age, gender and race, which is overlaid upon the changing industrial and occupational mix. Unlike the big structural economic shifts which have often tended to work against unions, the increased participation of women and workers of colour in the workforce has been positive. Women, minorities and youth are now significantly more likely to support new organizing efforts than are white older men.

The Vector Poll commissioned for the 2003 CLC conference on union renewal found that one-in-seven non-union workers (14%) would “very likely” vote for a

union tomorrow if they had the chance. Another 19% would be “somewhat likely” to vote yes, indicating potential one-third support even before any union campaign for certification. Forty-three per cent of non-union workers would be “very or somewhat likely” to join a union if there were no grounds for fear of employer reprisal. This underlying support for unions is even higher among young workers aged 18-29 (52%), visible minorities (54%) and women (50% vs 37% for men). This does not mean that workers are beating down the doors to join unions. But it does show that many workers are aware of the union advantage and could be persuaded to join an organizing drive.

Despite adverse structural changes and an often very hostile public policy environment, unions remain potential authors of their own fate. The process of union renewal, which is the subject of this book, is about changing unions to meet new realities, about how to increase bargaining strength, and about how to reach out to unorganized workers. Canadian unions have changed quite profoundly since the late-1980s as a result of mergers, internal organizational changes, and the ongoing shift of members to new sectors and occupations. The changing face of the labour movement is underscored by the fact that membership is now almost equally divided between women and men (though women lag in terms of equal representation among leaders and staff), by the increased participation of workers of colour, and by the greater weight being given to new bargaining issues and to union organizing.

The fragmentary evidence on new organizing shows that Canadian unions have been less complacent than some other labour movements. From the mid-1970s to the late-1990s, anywhere between 60,000 and 100,000 workers, or as many as 2% of all non-union workers, have been organized into unions through new certifications (minus decertifications) each year (Katz-Rosene, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Martinello, 1996). There has been a downward trend since the high point of the mid-1980s, with some ups and downs, and by the late-1990s, just under 1% of all non-union paid workers were joining unions each year. The organization rate has been consistently much higher than average in Quebec and, until recently, in British Columbia. The content and administration of labour laws clearly make a major difference. In Ontario, more than 30,000 workers were organized into unions in 1994-95, after the passage of new labour laws by the NDP government, but the total had fallen back to just 14,000 by 2002-03.

Unions as social and political actors can shape the broad terrain of new organizing in several key respects. At the most basic level, union-friendly labour law is both reflective of and a key cause of union success. At a wider level, a vital and active labour movement can reach out to and attract non-union workers, and engage the community as a whole in causes and campaigns which lay the basis for organizing and bargaining success. The success of unions is, for example, intimately bound up in increasing the size

and scope of the public sector and community-based social services, as opposed to competitive and privatized delivery.

The key point is that unions are able to row against (or even with) the tides of economic and social change and help steer their own destiny. In Canada, new organizing has not been enough to prevent gradual density decline. But, it has been enough to make a difference, particularly in private services and in the broader public sector.

4. Longer-Term Trends in Union Coverage

Table Four provides data on union coverage in 1981 and 2004. Union density (union members as a percentage of employees) has fallen by about seven percentage points from 37.6% to 30.6% over this period. The decline mainly took place in the recession and slow recovery period of the late-1980s through the mid-1990s when many jobs were lost in unionized workplaces due to industrial restructuring, and overall density has been stable since 1997.

Table 4 - Trends in Unionization Rate		
	1981	2004
Total	37.6	30.6
Men	42.1	30.4
Women	31.4	30.8
Non Commercial Sector	61.4	61.4
Commercial Sector	29.8	20.0
Age		
17-24	26.4	13.6
25-34	39.8	26.1
35-44	42.0	32.8
45-54	41.7	41.2
55 and over	41.9	38.2
Newfoundland and Labrador	45.2	39.1
Prince Edward Island	38.0	30.1
Nova Scotia	33.8	27.4
New Brunswick	39.8	28.8
Quebec	44.2	37.4
Ontario	33.7	27.3
Manitoba	37.9	35.4
Saskatchewan	37.9	35.2
Alberta	28.4	21.7
British Columbia	43.3	33.1
Selected Industry	1981	1998
Manufacturing	43.9	31.3
Construction	39.9	27.0
Distributive Services	43.0	33.1
Business Services	5.7	6.9
Consumer Services	13.7	11.0
Source: Morissette, Rene, Grant Schellenberg and Anick Johnson. "Diverging Trends in Unionization." Statistics Canada Cat. 75-001-XPE. Perspectives on Labour and Income. Summer, 2005. pp. 1-8.		

The decline in union coverage since the early 1980s has been much more pronounced among younger than older workers. This is likely the result of low rates of hiring into larger, already unionized workplaces in sectors like public services and manufacturing, and higher rates of hiring into smaller, non union workplaces in private services.

Density decline has also been far greater among men than among women. Between 1981 and 2004, the unionization rate for men fell sharply from 42.1% to 30.4%, while it remained quite stable for women, slipping only slightly from 31.4% to 30.8%. The historically large difference in union coverage between women and men (more than 10 percentage points in 1981) has now almost completely disappeared. This is mainly because women are much more likely than men to work in highly unionized public and social services than in the private sector, where union density is now under 20%. Two-thirds of union women work in the public sector (defined as direct government employment, plus employment in directly government-funded institutions, such as schools, universities, colleges, and hospitals) and just one-third work in the private sector. By contrast, more than 60% of unionized men work in the private sector. (Note that the data in Table 4 for non-commercial services include all health, social services and education workers, even though some of these workers are not public sector workers.)

Union coverage is very high, above 70%, in both education and public administration, and well above average in health and social services (which has a significant not-for-profit and private-for-profit sector as opposed to public sector component parts, such as doctors' offices and long-term care homes). These three sectors alone now account for more than half of all union members. The public and social services labour force which is made up mainly of women workers has continued to be a key source of union strength, despite

privatization, contracting-out and attacks on the bargaining rights of public sector workers. As will be noted below, this reflects significant recent organizing successes in the broader public sector.

Meanwhile, private-sector union density has fallen from about almost 30% in 1981 to under 20% today (18.2% in 2003). Private-sector density is much more variable than public sector density, ranging from a low of just 9.5% in Prince Edward Island and 12.6% in Alberta, to 17.4% in Ontario, to highs of 21.4% in British Columbia, and 27.4% in Quebec (Jackson and Schetagne, 2003. Data for 2002). The process of private-sector density decline has slowed but has not been completely halted since 1997. New private-sector hiring, especially of younger workers and new immigrants, seems to have taken place more in non-union than in union workplaces, and new organizing has fallen far short of job growth. Between 1997 and 2003, the number of private-sector employees grew by 1,569,000, while the number of unionized private-sector workers rose by just 210,000 (Akyeampong, 2004).

The fall in private-sector density partly reflects the loss of unionized jobs in the traditional bastions of male blue-collar unionism. Between 1981 and 1998, density fell from 43.9% to 31.3% in manufacturing, from 43.0% to 33.1% in distributive services (transportation, utilities, warehousing), and from 39.9% to 27.0% in construction (see Table 4). The big negative forces of free trade, globalization, technological change and deregulation have clearly had a

negative impact. Increased competitive pressures have almost certainly increased employer hostility to unions, especially where new non-union firms have undercut established unionized firms.

Union coverage has always been very low in private consumer services like stores, hotels, and restaurants as well as in financial and business services. However, density slipped only modestly in consumer services, from 13.7% to 11.0%, between 1981 and 1998. This probably reflects a combination of stable employment in some traditionally unionized sectors, and some successful new organizing, more or less matching job growth.

Turning to geographical trends in union coverage, Ontario and Alberta, where job growth has been most rapid, have experienced somewhat greater-than-average declines in density from already well below-average levels. The highest union density provinces – Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan and, to a lesser extent, Quebec – have, by contrast, experienced below-average declines in density. This suggests that relative union strength is self-reinforcing to a degree because of the ability of stronger labour movements to influence party politics, governments, and thus, legal rules affecting new organizing. Disturbingly, union density is much lower than the national average in two fast-growing cities, the huge Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (22.4%) and Calgary (21.5%). (For detailed data see Jackson and Schetagne, 2003.)

5. A Labour Market Framework for Analyzing Union Organizing and Union Renewal

Table 5 - Employment by Broad Occupation				
	Men		Women	
	1989	2003	1989	2003
Management	10.6%	10.6%	6.3%	6.7%
Professional Occupations in Business and				
Finance	2.3%	2.8%	2.0%	3.0%
Natural and Applied Sciences	7.2%	9.6%	1.9%	3.1%
Professional Occupations in Health	1.1%	1.2%	4.6%	4.5%
Social Science, Government, Religion	1.9%	2.1%	2.5%	4.2%
Teachers and Professors	2.6%	2.7%	4.1%	5.2%
Art, Culture, Recreation and Sport	2.1%	2.5%	2.8%	3.3%
Sub-Total Professional / Highly Skilled	17.2%	20.9%	17.9%	23.3%
Technical, Assisting Occupations in Health	0.8%	0.8%	4.3%	5.1%
Financial, Secretarial, Clerical, Administrative	7.8%	7.0%	30.2%	24.1%
Sales and Service Occupations	18.2%	19.8%	31.1%	32.2%
Blue Collar	45.3%	40.9%	10.1%	8.5%
Sub-Total Blue-Collar and Pink-Collar	72.1%	68.5%	75.7%	69.9%

Source: Statistics Canada. Labour Force Historical Review. 2003.
Sub-total categories are not from original source.

Table 5 provides a very broad framework for looking at union representation and organizing in relation to the changing occupational structure of the job market, which is divided along overlapping lines of gender and education/skill level.

Four key points can be noted.

First, about one-third of both women and men are employed in professional or highly skilled occupations, and this proportion has been increasing since the late-1980s. However, there is a very gendered division of labour between

professional/highly skilled men and women. Men are relatively much more concentrated in management, professional occupations in business and finance, and professional jobs in natural and applied sciences (mainly to be found in the private sector) while professional and highly skilled women are much more likely than men to be found in health care, social services and education (jobs which are mainly in the public sector). Further, women predominate in technical, assisting jobs in health. About one-in-five of all women work in health, education and social services jobs.

Second, the proportion of men working in blue-collar jobs has been falling, from 45% to 41% since 1989, but remains high, while very few women are employed in such jobs. This “blue-collar” category includes processing and assembly jobs in primary industries and manufacturing as well as labourers, the construction trades, and transport and equipment operators.

Third, the proportion of women in administrative, secretarial and clerical “pink-collar” jobs has been falling, from 30% to 24%, but remains fairly high. These kinds of jobs are divided between the public and private sector.

Fourth, one-in-five men and one-in-three women work in generally low-paid sales and service jobs, overwhelmingly to be found in the private services sector. This is the area of the job market dominated by smaller firms, by non-standard part-time and temporary contract jobs, by young workers and recent

immigrants. It has been growing somewhat as a share of the total job market over time.

To summarize, there has been a modest shift from traditional male blue-collar and traditionally female pink-collar jobs to both higher paid and higher skilled jobs, and, to a lesser extent, to low-paid, private-service jobs with the upward movement of women on the occupational ladder being strongly associated with the growth of public and social services.

Unions and Professional/Managerial Jobs

Almost one-in-four men (23%) work as managers, in professional jobs in the natural and applied sciences and in professional jobs in business and finance, compared to 13% of women. This group of jobs includes managers, engineers, accountants, systems analysts, consultants, and so on. These kinds of jobs have been growing modestly since the late-1980s with the rise of the so-called “new economy” and “knowledge-based economy,” though there is no evidence that this ongoing shift is any greater than it was in earlier periods. In terms of industrial sectors, many of these jobs are to be found in financial services, and in services to business, but also in government employment. While a small layer of women has shared in professional/managerial job growth in the private sector, the great majority of professional/managerial women are to be found in public and social services, especially in social sciences occupations.

Union coverage is very low in these kinds of jobs unless they are to be found in the public sector, and few union organizing efforts appear to have taken place. This is not unusual in a comparative context, though unions of salaried private-sector professionals and among bank workers are strong in a few countries, like Sweden. If there is to be success here in the future, it is most likely to come from small unions of professionals (likely to be found in the public or quasi-public sector) expanding into the private sector by reaching out to workers in similar kinds of occupations.

Union and Public and Social Services Jobs

One-in-five women work in professional and technical and assisting jobs in health, education and social services, three times the proportion of men. This group includes nurses, teachers, social workers, and health and community social services workers with technical skills. Most of these jobs are to be found either directly in the public sector, or in the broader public sector of community and social services which are largely financed by governments. This group of jobs is both significant in size and growing.

Union coverage is high in these kinds of jobs, and union density has been stable or increasing despite the pressures of privatization and contracting-out to non-governmental organizations and commercial providers. It is notable that union coverage is quite high, at 28% in 2002, even in the private/not-for-

profit part of health care and social services. Union density (measured by the proportion of workers who are union members) rose from 69.7% to 72.0% in the direct public sector between 1997 and 2003, and also rose from 52.6% to 53.4% in health and social services, and from 68.2% to 69.0% in educational services (Table 6. For further detail see Akyeampong, 2004. Table 4).

Table 6 - Changes in Union Density, 1997 to 2003 (Union Density is Members as % of Employees)		
	Union Density	
	%	
	1997	2003
Total	30.8	30.3
Sex		
Women	29.3	30.0
Men	32.1	30.5
Public Sector	69.7	72.0
Private Sector	19.0	18.2
Age		
15 to 24	10.8	13.5
55 and over	35.2	36.3
25 to 44	31.5	30.1
45 to 54	43.6	40.8
Province		
Newfoundland and Labrador	39.1	38.2
Prince Edward Island	26.9	28.3
Nova Scotia	28.4	27.4
New Brunswick	27.9	26.4
Quebec	36.9	37.6
Ontario	27.7	26.8
Manitoba	35.1	34.9
Saskatchewan	33.0	34.3
Alberta	22.4	22.4
British Columbia	34.0	32.4
Work status		
Part-time	21.4	23.3
Full-time	32.9	31.8
Job status		
Non-permanent	22.7	25.1
Permanent	31.8	31.0
Job tenure		
1 to 12 months	12.9	14.7
1 to 5 years	19.8	23.1

5 to 9 years	35.7	30.8
9 to 14 years	41.9	40.2
Over 14 years	57.1	53.9
Workplace size		
Under 20 employees	11.9	12.6
20 to 99 employees	30.8	30.9
100 to 500 employees	46.4	42.9
Over 500 employees	58.0	54.1
Occupation (ranked by increase in density)		
Childcare and home support	31.4	38.6
Support staff (health)	50.8	54.1
Nursing	78.1	81.0
Construction trades	37.7	40.6
Culture and recreation	24.5	26.7
Health professionals	39.9	42.0
Legal, social and religious	38.6	40.0
Secondary/elementary teachers	87.4	88.6
Retail	12.0	12.8
Travel and accommodation	26.1	26.8
Protective services	52.8	53.2
Wholesale	6.1	5.8
Contractors and supervisors	31.4	31.0
Teachers and professors	75.4	75.0
Helpers and labourers	34.7	34.2
Financial and administrative	22.4	21.8
Unique to primary industry	16.9	16.1
Other teachers	47.0	46.1
Transport equipment operators	37.8	36.9
Food and beverage	9.9	8.9
Professional	18.0	16.9
Labourers	39.5	38.3
Machine operators and assemblers	39.3	38.0
Natural and applied sciences	26.9	24.8
Management	11.3	9.1
Clerical	29.5	27.0
Other trades	42.3	39.2
Technical (health)	61.6	57.5
Major industry groups (by descending order of density change)		
Local administration	59.4	64.9
Federal administration	66.0	69.2
Construction	29.9	32.7
Finance and insurance	8.1	9.0
Educational services	68.2	69.0
Health care and social assistance	52.6	53.4
Retail trade	13.6	14.2
Professional, scientific and technical	4.1	4.5
Utilities	67.4	67.7
Provincial administration	70.7	71.0
Agriculture	3.3	3.5

Other services	9.0	9.2
Real estate and leasing	7.6	7.6
Business, building and other support services	12.9	12.9
Accommodation and food services	7.9	7.4
Wholesale trade	10.4	9.4
Transportation and warehousing	43.0	41.7
Non-durable manufacturing	33.2	30.9
Information, culture and recreation	28.1	25.4
Natural resources	28.2	24.9
Durable manufacturing	33.3	29.8
Source: Ernest Akyeampong . "The Union Movement in Transition." Statistics Canada. Cat. 75-001-XIE. Perspectives on Labour and Income. August, 2004.		

The large public and social services labour force has continued to be a key bastion of union strength. The direct public sector was cut in the first half of the 1990s, but has since been growing in numbers. Between 1997 and 2004, the direct public sector added almost 400,000 new jobs, mainly in health care and social services, and public-sector union membership grew proportionately more as density rose slightly. Moreover, unions have actively organized workers in private and non-profit, often contracted-out services, such as long-term care, child care and home care as well as in academic-support positions. There has been a significant concentration of new certifications in this area of the job market (Katz-Rosene, 2003). Some of this organizing has been among workers with technical skills, such as child care and health-support workers, while other workers (such as cleaners) would be classified as service workers.

Public services unions such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and provincial government workers' unions (united at the national level in National Union of Public and General Employees - NUPGE) have actively organized not just within but also around the boundaries of the formal public

sector, and have had some notable successes. Some formerly private-sector industrial unions have also actively organized in this area. It should be noted that the unionization rate is also very high, at 73%, among part-time workers in public services, contrasting sharply with a unionization rate of just 13.5% among part-time workers in the private sector.

As shown in Table 6, the occupational groups which showed the largest increase in union density between 1997 and 2003 include childcare and home support workers, support staff in health, nurses, health professionals, and teachers.

Unions and Male Blue-Collar Workers

Looking at longer term changes within the private sector, there has been a marked decline in union density in the traditional bastions of male blue-collar unionism, from manufacturing to the resource industries to transportation (trucking, airlines, railways and ports) and utilities.

Density has fallen from almost one-half to under one-third of all workers in manufacturing since the early-1980s. This is a big enough sector for the drop to have had a major impact on overall union density in the total private sector. About one-third of the fall of private-sector union density since the peak is explained by the fall within manufacturing alone. It is important to note that

this slippage is due more to the decline of density within manufacturing than to the loss of manufacturing jobs as such. Similarly, the rate of unionization among male blue-collar workers has been falling more rapidly than the slow decline in the proportion of blue-collar workers in the male work force.

The density decline in manufacturing has been pervasive across most sub-sectors and occupations and is almost certainly closely linked to a huge turnover in establishments since the mid-1980s and the shift of jobs to small and non-union plants. For example, a lot of the job growth in the auto industry has been in non-union Japanese assembly plants, and in non-union parts suppliers, rather than in the unionized Big 3 and closely associated unionized suppliers. Widespread industrial restructuring in response to free trade with the US after 1988 and increased trade with developing countries likely drives down union density through a combination of large job losses in union plants because of plant closures and layoffs, and much greater employer hostility to new organizing in a highly competitive environment. Under free trade, workers in Canadian manufacturing have been more directly exposed to competition from mainly non-union US and Mexican manufacturing operations.

There has been a marked decline of union density in other industries which have undergone similar restructuring – primary industries, transportation and, to a lesser extent, communications and utilities. Deregulation saw the rise of

non-union airlines and telecommunications companies, forcing unions at union airlines and telephone companies on the defensive. The rise of non-union construction, particularly in the institutional and commercial sector, has been similarly destabilizing, though construction-union density has actually reversed direction and increased since 1997. The industrial construction sector remains highly unionized in some provinces, and construction union employment has benefited from the housing and commercial building boom in some cities.

Since 1997, union density has continued to slip in manufacturing, resources, and transportation industries and most blue-collar occupations such as machine operators, transport-equipment operators and labourers (see Table 6). New union certifications in these kinds of industries have been few and far between, and largely confined to smaller operations. It is interesting to note that, while union density continues to be much higher in large than small plants and operations, it has fallen much more in large industrial operations and actually increased a bit in small operations. As noted, support for unions is currently weaker among men than among women, perhaps reflecting the fact that the wages of unionized male workers have barely kept pace with inflation in recent years.

Unions and Low-Wage Private Services

Union coverage has always been very low in private consumer services like stores, hotels, and restaurants but seems to have held up relatively much better than in the traditional high union density blue-collar industries since the late-1980s. As shown in Table 6, coverage is low (14.2%) in retail trade, but has been on the rise since 1997. Many workers in grocery stores and a few department stores are represented by unions, and new certifications are not uncommon in retail trade. Coverage is very low, but has always been very low, in accommodation and food services (i.e., restaurants and hotels). Unions remain a presence in big city hotels. Coverage is extremely low in business services, though unions have successfully organized some groups of workers like security guards and building cleaners in recent years. Union organizing is especially difficult in high-worker turnover sectors dominated by part-time jobs. Control of hours gives employers an important extra lever in fighting unions, and low density in highly competitive industries makes it very difficult, not just to organize, but also to make gains for workers after certification.

Statistics Canada occupational data (see Table 6) suggest that the union presence in low-wage private services has been stable between 1997 and 2003, rising from 12.0% to 12.8% among retail workers, from 52.8% to 53.2% in protective services (i.e., security guards) and slipping a bit from 9.9% to 8.9% among food and beverage workers. It is worth noting that union success in

these areas of the job market, once gained, makes a big difference for workers. In 2003, just 14.4% of sales and services workers were unionized. They earned an average \$15.41 per hour, or 34% more than the average of \$11.47 earned by non-union workers (Jackson, 2004. Table 3).

6. Overview of Recent Trends and Some Implications for Union Renewal

The traditional bases of Canadian union strength were among male blue-collar workers in large industrial workplaces and among women public and social services workers, many in professional and technical jobs. The former base has been undercut by structural economic change, strong employer resistance to unions and, perhaps, by a growing dissonance between unions and the values, attitudes, and perceived interests of male blue-collar workers. The latter base has remained strong, partly because of continued occupational shifts, and partly because it has been well-defended. The labour movement can learn a lot from the reasons for relative success, which seem to owe a lot to a fit between what unions are saying and doing, and what women workers expect from their unions. The highly gendered pattern of union growth and decline merits careful reflection.

Since 1997, union density has been remarkably stable, rising slightly among women and falling a bit among men, rising in the public sector, while falling a bit in the private sector. At the margins, the recent growth of unions seems to

have been in sectors and occupations where unions have been traditionally weak: among youth and workers of colour, in non-standard jobs, and in smaller workplaces. Union density among workers of colour is rising, albeit from below average levels. It rose from 19.7% to 21.3% between 1996 and 2001 (Jackson and Schetagne, 2003. Table 25). As shown in Table 6, which provides data on changes from 1997 to 2003, union density has risen significantly among young workers (10.8% to 13.5%). It has increased in part-time jobs (from 21.4% to 23.3%) while falling in full-time jobs; has risen in non-permanent jobs (from 22.7% to 25.1%) while slipping slightly in permanent jobs; and has risen significantly among low-job-tenure workers while falling among high-tenure workers. Among workers with less than five-years job tenure, density rose from 19.8% to 23.1%, while falling from 57.1% to 53.9% among workers with more than 14 years job tenure. Density has also increased in very small workplaces, while falling in larger workplaces.

In sum, density has been rising among precarious, probably lower-paid workers, reflecting new organizing in private services and among less secure workers in the broader public sector. As indicated in recent certification data, most new bargaining units are in smaller workplaces. It seems that conscious union efforts to reach out to, and to organize, vulnerable workers have begun to pay off. To this considerable extent, unions can cite some success in dealing with the downside of the new economy – much more insure forms of work, and

a high incidence of low pay, especially among women, youth and workers of colour.

At the same time, a note of caution is in order. Since 1997, a lot of jobs have also been created in relatively highly skilled and well-paid jobs, including in larger workplaces. Since 1997, there has actually been stronger growth in full-time than in part-time jobs, and in very large as opposed to very small workplaces. As noted above, the long-term trend is toward the creation of more professional and skilled jobs, and blue-collar work remains important as a share of all private-sector jobs. Unions cannot confine their organizing efforts to just the most precarious parts of the private sector.

In a new economy marked by increased polarization of the work force, unions must work harder than ever to build labour unity and solidarity across lines of gender and skill. It is good news that labour's efforts to organize the most vulnerable seem to be paying off, in significant part because of the ongoing and still incomplete process of union renewal. But, the wider challenge of building a strong labour movement in a changing job market and a changing society remains very much with us.

Table 7 - Where Can We Find New Members?					
A Profile of Non-Union Employees - Private Sector Only - in 2003					
	Union Coverage	Number of Non-	Percentage of Non-Union Private-		
	in 2003	Union Workers	Women	Part-Time	Age 15-25
		(000s)			
All Industries	19.9%	8,282	48.5%	20.3%	22.2%
Agriculture	3.9%	115	34.8%	21.3%	33.6%
Forestry, Fishing, Mining, Oil and Gas	24.8%	172	20.0%	3.8%	13.6%
Utilities	49.8%	17	31.1%	0.0%	10.1%
Construction	33.0%	417	16.8%	7.8%	20.6%
Manufacturing	32.6%	1,483	33.7%	4.4%	11.6%
Trade	14.1%	1,839	50.9%	28.6%	30.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	32.0%	337	28.6%	12.5%	10.7%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Leasing	7.2%	693	63.4%	14.0%	11.6%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	4.9%	613	50.0%	10.5%	11.4%
Management, Administrative and Other					
Support	14.2%	397	49.4%	18.1%	23.5%
Educational Services	14.8%	65	63.8%	41.7%	20.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	28.2%	475	88.0%	32.1%	13.3%
Information, Culture and Recreation	23.2%	384	49.4%	27.5%	31.4%
Accommodation and Food services	8.1%	846	61.7%	44.2%	47.5%

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey Data from the Gender and Work Database.

Table 7 provides a broad context to frame some of the organizing challenges and opportunities facing the labour movement. Of the 8.3 million non-union private sector workers in Canada, almost 1.5 million are to be found in manufacturing, one-in-three of whom are women workers. Many of these unorganized workers, especially women and recent immigrants who are more attracted to unions than white male workers, are employed in small plants and are not well paid. There are also more than 400,000 non-union construction workers. In short, there is still a lot of organizing potential among blue-collar workers.

But the biggest opportunities lie in private services, especially among women workers. There are more 1.8 million trade (mainly retail trade) workers, the majority of whom are women. More than one-quarter of trade sector workers work part-time, and almost one-third are younger workers, who are more attracted to unions than are older workers. Similarly, there are 846,000 non-union workers in accommodation and food services, predominantly women and young workers, many of whom are in part-time jobs.

Finally, there are 475,000 non-union workers in the private sector part of health care and social assistance, overwhelmingly women, many of whom also work part-time.

The key concluding point is that the challenge of reversing a slow union density decline through new organizing is formidable, but recent breakthroughs in both private services and the broader public sector give hope that union renewal can begin to reverse union decline.

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[...] (Rowing against the tide: the struggle to raise union density in a hostile environment, [...] in Paths to union.Â For instance, in a letter of 28 January 2000 Mediaset argued that, without the ceiling, 'now RAI can raise its advertisement prices as and when it wishes with no commercial risk attached'. eur-lex.europa.eu. eur-lex.europa.eu. In other words, a hostile work environment is the sum of actions, communications or behaviors from a work acquaintance (colleague, boss, client, vendor) that alter the terms, conditions, or expectations of a comfortable workplace for an employee. What is NOT a Hostile Work Environment? A common misconception is that a hostile work environment is a place that's generally unpleasant.Â Discrimination against the "weak" is also illegal, including employees who have a disability, take medical leave, or use workers' compensation. Discriminatory comments like these often said casually, with a smile, or played off as a joke. But being discriminated against creates a hostile atmosphere for the employee, where they feel unsafe and disrespected by their employer. [P]rovides an overview of the trends and patterns of union density in Canada and its implications for union renewal. Of particular interest is [the author's] analysis of the opportunities for new organizing in various industries and occupations. - Editors' introduction. A project of the J.N. Desmarais Library at Laurentian University.