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Article abstract

In this article it is contended that the centrality (or salience) of beliefs is an important but overlooked feature of belief Systems about unions. This theme is pursued through a study of the centrality of beliefs about unions in a sample of Hamilton, Ontario workers. Each participant sorted 48 separate statements about unions, identifying those statements with which she/he most agreed and most disagreed. These data are analyzed in two distinct ways. First, the article outlines general tendencies in the centrality of beliefs for the entire sample. However, people differ in what they think is most important about unions. Therefore, the article also identifies the central beliefs for six typical ways of thinking about unions.

Centrality in Workers' Belief Systems About Unions

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In this article it is contended that the centrality (or salience) of beliefs is an important but overlooked feature of belief systems about unions. This theme is pursued through a study of the centrality of beliefs about unions in a sample of Hamilton, Ontario workers. Each participant sorted 48 separate statements about unions, identifying those statements with which she/he most agreed and most disagreed. These data are analyzed in two distinct ways. First, the article outlines general tendencies in the centrality of beliefs for the entire sample. However, people differ in what they think is most important about unions. Therefore, the article also identifies the central beliefs for six typical ways of thinking about unions.

A belief system about unions consists of "the total universe" of an individual's beliefs about unions (Rokeach 1968:454). The theoretical literature on belief systems presents a complex picture of how social beliefs are organized. Belief systems as a whole can be analyzed along a number of dimensions, including range, differentiation, constraint, dimensionality and integration. The range of a belief system about unions refers to the number of facets of union activity referenced in the belief system. Differentiation concerns the total information about unions contained in the belief system. Constraint measures the extent to which the elements of a belief system are consistent with each other, using some external standard as a measure of consistency.

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Dimensionality groups the elements of a belief system about unions into sub-systems. And integration refers to the connection between beliefs about unions and abstract principles (see Converse 1964:207-209; Rokeach 1968; Petersen and Dutton 1975). Furthermore, the elements within a belief system vary on properties like direction, extremity, intensity and centrality. The direction and extremity (degree of favorableness or unfavorableness) of a belief are familiar concepts. Intensity refers to the strength of conviction with which the belief about unions is held. And centrality involves the importance of the belief to the individual (see Petersen and Dutton 1975).

Unfortunately, one gets little sense of the depth of this conceptual understanding when reviewing the research record. Most quantitative studies only measure the direction and extremity of belief elements and then use this information to characterize the constraint and dimensionality of belief systems (Neuman 1981:1237-1240; Petersen and Dutton 1975:398-399). Studies of belief systems about unions are no exception (see Silverblatt and Amann 1991; Fiorito 1987; McShane 1985; Furnham 1984; Krahn and Lowe 1984a, 1984b; Kochan 1979). As a consequence, we have only a partial understanding of the organization of people's beliefs about unions.

The objective of this study is to extend our understanding of workers' belief systems about unions in contemporary Canada by taking the *centrality* of beliefs into account. A central belief is of great importance to a person, while a peripheral belief is of lesser consequence (Petersen and Dutton 1975; Judd and Krosnick 1982; Nederhof 1989). Centrality is thus a different characteristic than extremity. An individual may "strongly agree" with two different statements about unions. However, if one statement involves an issue which is more important to the individual than the other statement, then the two beliefs differ in centrality despite being equivalent in extremity.¹ A concept which is closely connected to centrality is salience. A salient belief about unions is subjectively striking or prominent for an individual. While a fine conceptual distinction between centrality and salience could be drawn, this study assumes that central union beliefs are highly salient.

In what sense is our knowledge of belief systems about unions deficient because of the absence of information about belief centrality? A major reason for studying beliefs about unions is to anticipate people's behaviour when union issues arise at the workplace or in political-policy struggles (Kervin 1988:197). Not surprisingly, studies have found that central beliefs tend to be much better predictors of behaviour than peripheral beliefs (Nederhof 1989:123-124; Petersen and Dutton 1975). As a consequence, we need to know

¹ Fishbein and Ajzen (1975:219-220) argue that high-centrality beliefs can be expected to be extreme (or strong) beliefs, while low-centrality beliefs may or may not be extreme.

the centrality of a belief in order to predict whether behaviour is likely to be consistent with that belief. For example, a union organizing drive can succeed in a situation where the workforce has many negative beliefs about unions, so long as those beliefs tend to be peripheral rather than central in workers' belief systems about unions.

A second goal of research on belief systems about unions is to understand the cognitive bases for people's general feelings towards unions. It appears that a person's general feeling towards a social object is largely determined by the feelings associated with her/his most salient beliefs about that object (Budd 1986; Eiser and van der Pligt 1988:156). Thus, in order to understand what makes a pro-union or anti-union individual "tick", we need to identify the central beliefs of that individual. This is a subject with intrinsic fascination; it is also essential information if one is interested in assessing the likelihood that attitudes towards labour unions can be changed.

Finally, it is even difficult to interpret the significance of public opinion data without knowing the centrality of particular beliefs. For instance, in six Gallup Polls conducted between 1959 and 1984, a substantial majority of Canadians indicated that unions "should not engage in political activities". Further analysis of the data from polls in 1967, 1982 and 1984 reveals that a clear majority of workers (defined as clerical workers, skilled labour and craftsmen/women, and labourers and service workers) also believed that unions "should not engage in political activities".² Does union involvement in election campaigns and political protests thus threaten to alienate the positive general feelings which many workers have for labour unions in Canada? My contention is that such a question is unanswerable without knowing the centrality of this particular belief in workers' belief systems about unions.

It thus seems clear that our understanding of belief systems about unions will be substantially enhanced if we learn something about belief centrality. Consequently, the objectives of this study are threefold: to measure the centrality of beliefs about unions; to outline general tendencies in the centrality of workers' beliefs about unions; and to identify the salient beliefs of different typical working-class perspectives on labour unions.

² The secondary analysis included data from Gallup Polls 323 (March 1967), 460:1 (April 1982) and 482:1 (February 1984). The percentage of workers responding that unions should not engage in political activities was 60%, 67% and 68% respectively, while the percentage favouring union engagement in political activities was 20%, 20% and 21% respectively. The data were provided by the Social Sciences Data Archives at Carleton University. Neither the Canadian Gallup Poll nor the archive bear any responsibility for the analyses reported here.

METHODOLOGY

Measuring Centrality

One technique for measuring centrality is to ask a respondent to identify the importance of each belief in relation to her/his other beliefs concerning some social object. A sophisticated variant of this technique is called the Q sort (McKeown and Thomas 1988; Brown 1980). In the Q sort carried out for this study, each participant was given 48 one-sentence statements about unions (in random order),³ each typed on a separate card, and asked to physically sort them following this quasi-normal pattern:

(Scale)	MOST DISAGREE			NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE					MOST AGREE		
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
(# of Statements)	2	3	4	5	6	8	6	5	4	3	2

When centrality is measured in this way it is integrated into a measure of the direction and extremity of belief preference. While the "Disagree" and "Agree" verbs evoked preference evaluations, the "Most" adverbs in conjunction with the form of the Q-sort distribution encouraged salience judgements. These judgements allow a person to discriminate among beliefs which have comparable direction and extremity of preference.

Defining the Content of Belief Systems About Unions

A Q sort validly reveals the centrality of beliefs only when each dimension of beliefs about unions is adequately represented on the cards which are sorted. Somewhat different notions of the dimensions of union beliefs can be found in Kochan (1979), Chacko and Greer (1982), Craft and Abboushi (1983), Krahn and Lowe (1984b) and Fiorito (1987). These ideas, along with a review of Canadian Gallup poll questions concerning labour unions and identification of the issues which have dominated recent public discussions about unions, led the author to develop an original map of the dimensions of union beliefs. The dimensions are:

1. Workplace/Economic Defence (Defence)
2. Power in Society (Power)
3. Leadership and Internal Democracy (Leadership)

³ A set of 60 statements was utilized during pretests. The time involved in sorting the 60 statements tried the patience of a participant, so 12 statements were dropped to create the final set of 48 statements.

4. Strikes and Conflict (Conflict)
5. Political Activities (Politics)
6. Collective vs. Individual Rights (Rights)

The first of the dimensions (Defence) concerns workplace/economic instrumentality and the second (Power) deals with the broader power of unions in society. The third (Leadership) combines the issues of union leadership and internal governance, and the fourth (Conflict) deals with the necessity and causes of strikes, picket-line violence and conflict between the state and unions. The fifth (Politics) treats union involvement in party politics, direct political action and the political education of members. The logic behind each of these five dimensions is straightforward and does not require detailed explanation here. However, the remaining dimension (Rights) has not been featured in past research, and thus requires some justification.

A recurring theme in public discussions in the 1980s was the right of unions to spend dues collected from non-members on anything other than contract administration. This is a favourite subject of right-wing organizations in the United States, which present the matter as one of fundamental individual freedom (see LaJeunesse 1984). In the mid- to late-1980s the National Citizens' Coalition, a conservative lobby group in Canada, championed this same cause by funding a high-profile court challenge (the Lavigne case). An Ontario Supreme Court judge ruled in July 1986 that there was legal merit in the right-wing argument (*Globe and Mail* July 14/86:A7),⁴ thus bringing the issue of individual rights versus collective union rights to the forefront of public discussion about unions. This fact, along with Krahn and Lowe's (1984b:154-155) finding that beliefs about compulsory union membership are distinct from instrumental and power beliefs, suggested the need to define a separate Rights dimension for this study.

The purpose of developing this map was to ensure that all the major dimensions of union beliefs were represented in the Q-sort inventory. The total inventory of 48 statements included eight statements for each dimension, four expressing pro-union sentiment and four expressing anti-union sentiment. (An appendix is available from the author upon request.) In writing these statements I borrowed ideas and phrases from a number of studies. Of particular help were items found in Uphoff and Dunnette's Union Attitude Scale (Robinson et al. 1969:287-288), Furnham's study of attitudes towards unions (1984:429-431), and the studies already cited in this section.

⁴ Later court decisions, ending at the Supreme Court of Canada in June 1991, overturned this decision.

Sample and Interviewing

One hundred workers in Hamilton, Ontario completed the Q sort during the summer of 1987. They were contacted during a door-to-door probability survey in census tracts with below-median household incomes.⁵ Screening questions were used to distinguish the working class from owners and managers/supervisors.⁶ Most interviews took one hour or longer to complete, with the Q sort involving 30-45 minutes. Additional questions measured participants' general feelings towards unions, specific feelings towards the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, experiences with unions both in the past and present, and social background.

Located at the head of Lake Ontario, Hamilton is the site of the main production facilities of Canada's two largest steel producers, Dofasco and Stelco. The city is home to about 300,000 people, although it serves as an urban centre for a population double that in size. Stelco was unionized following a major union-recognition strike in 1946. Dofasco has been successful in resisting all attempts to unionize its Hamilton workforce (see Storey 1987). This polarity in the state of labour relations at Dofasco and Stelco has meant that the value of labour unions has long been a subject of debate and controversy for the workers of Hamilton. As a consequence, I anticipated that the sample would include individuals whose beliefs about unions differed greatly. This variation in perspective is an important component of the research design since one of the study's objectives is to identify the salient beliefs of different typical working-class perspectives on unions.

The sample is made up of 39% females and has a mean age of 41 years (standard deviation = 16 years). Sixty percent are manual workers. There is considerable dispersion in union experience, with 41% presently union

⁵ The initial sampling frame was made up of 55 census tracts. These census tracts were stratified by income and proportionately sampled using a table of random numbers. In each of the 12 census tracts which were eventually chosen, a starting point for interviewing was randomly chosen, as was the direction of the route to be followed. Interviewers went door to door from that starting point. The interviewing objective was to interview in a particular census tract until at least eight Q sorts were completed at the end of a working day. In 10 of the 12 census tracts, Q sorts were completed by between eight and eleven respondents. Fewer Q sorts were completed in the final two census tracts since fieldwork was discontinued when 100 total Q sorts were obtained. Responses were obtained at 655 addresses during fieldwork. At 243 of these addresses (37%) someone agreed to be interviewed. The final sample consists of working-class respondents who were fluent in English and willing to commit at least 30 minutes (beyond the 15 minutes of preliminary questions) to completing the Q sort.

⁶ Class membership was assigned on the basis of the respondent's own relationship to the means of production. The retired, disabled and unemployed were assigned to a class based on the most recent job. Family class situation was used to locate housewives and students.

members, 24% having been union members in the past, and 35% having never been union members.

TABLE 1
Centrality of Different Dimensions of Beliefs About Unions

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Mean Centrality Score^a</i>
Defence	2.9
Rights	2.9
Conflict	2.5
Power	2.4
Politics	2.4
Leadership	2.3

^a Study participants sorted the 48 statements about unions on a -5 to +5 scale. However, when analyzing belief centrality the direction of preference is of no consequence. Hence, centrality scores for each statement are calculated from the absolute values of the original Q-sort scores. The centrality score for a dimension is the average for the eight statements in the dimension.

RESULTS

General Patterns of Belief Centrality

Table 1 records the average centrality score for each dimension of belief systems about unions. Two dimensions are most salient for Hamilton workers: Defence and Rights. It is not surprising that the first of these dimensions is central in workers' belief systems about unions, given that immediate defence of workers' interests in the wage relationship is the foundation for union activity. However, beliefs about collective versus individual rights are equivalent in centrality. This probably reflects the deep-seated individualism in Canadian society which unions challenge through their focus on collective rights,⁷ as well as the attention given to individual-rights issues in public discussions of unions in recent years.

More detailed information about the general patterns of belief centrality is provided in Table 2. The first panel lists the ten beliefs with the highest centrality scores in the sample, and the second panel lists the ten beliefs with the lowest centrality scores. Four of the most salient beliefs represent the Defence dimension, and four others represent the Rights dimension. However, although

⁷ Individualism has been identified as a key component of the dominant ideology in capitalist countries. See Kluegel and Smith 1986:chapter 4; Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980:137-138; Huber and Form 1973:chapter 6.

TABLE 2
Beliefs About Unions With High and Low Centrality Scores

<i>Beliefs</i>	<i>Centrality Score (0 to 5 scale)</i>	<i>Preference Score (-5 to +5 scale)</i>
(A) High Centrality		
D2) Not necessary since bosses fair	3.4	-2.5 (consensual) ^a
D5) Protect working people	3.4	+3.1 (consensual)
PL6) Vehicle of socialists bent on destruction	3.4	-3.2 (consensual)
R2) Individual right to withhold political dues	3.3	+1.7
D4) Financially better off with no unions	3.2	-2.5
D3) Improve standard of living	3.1	+2.6 (consensual)
R7) Closed shop principle	3.1	+0.2 (dissensual) ^b
C7) Workers need the strike weapon	3.0	+1.8
R8) Workers have more freedom without unions	3.0	-2.0
R4) Protection of the individual right to scab	3.0	+0.7 (dissensual)
(B) Low Centrality		
L5) Unions more responsive than other groups	1.8	+0.8
L1) Unions leaders less self-interested	2.0	-1.0
PL4) Unions neglect bargaining for politics	2.1	-0.7
PW4) Government policies favour unions	2.1	-1.4
PL7) Union newspapers more reliable	2.1	-0.3
PL8) Union newspapers just propaganda	2.1	-0.7
PL2) Unions too involved in political action	2.2	+0.2 (dissensual)
L6) Unions run in dictatorial fashion	2.2	-0.8
C2) Unions use goon tactics on picket lines	2.2	0.0 (dissensual)
L8) Many union leaders are corrupt	2.2	-0.6 (dissensual)

^a Consensual: 80 % or more of the sample shares an agree or disagree position.

^b Dissensual: At least 30 % of the sample agrees and at least 30 % disagrees.

these two dimensions of union beliefs are equivalent in centrality, they differ in an important way. Hamilton workers tend to share the same opinion on statements from the Defence category (see the second column in Table 2). In contrast, there is considerable disagreement on statements from the Rights dimension. Indeed, the statements R7 "If the majority of workers in a plant vote to have a union, the others should be required to join" and R4 "The police and courts should ensure that any individual has the right to cross a picket line without fear of hindrance or harassment" can be classified as dissensual.

There are two beliefs representing other dimensions which are also high in centrality. The first is a statement from the Politics category which supplies an anti-socialist rationale for opposing unions (PL6). This is a consensual belief in the sample, with participants rejecting the rationale. Also high in centrality is the statement C7 "Labour unions need the strike weapon if they are

to advance the cause of working people." Although the majority agrees that strikes are necessary (preference score of +1.8 in Table 2), this is not a consensual belief in the sample.

Of the ten most peripheral beliefs, four represent the Leadership dimension and four represent the Politics dimension. This finding helps us to put into context the results from public opinion questions concerning these dimensions. For instance, as recorded in Note 2, a majority of Canadian workers consistently tells the Gallup Poll that unions should not be engaged in political activities. However, in this investigation the statements "Unions too involved in political action" (PL2) and "Unions neglect bargaining for politics" (PL4) have low centrality scores. In addition, the low public esteem of union leaders is a consistent finding of public opinion polls.⁸ Yet in this study, beliefs about the ethics of union leaders (L1 "Union leaders are probably less self-interested than any other elite group in Canadian society", L8 "Many union leaders are corrupt", and L6 "Most unions are run in a dictatorial fashion without much input from members") are peripheral for workers. The research cited at the beginning of this article indicates that when a belief is peripheral, consistency between belief and behaviour should not be expected, and the belief does not tend to influence a person's overall feeling towards a social object.

Salient Beliefs for Typical Working-Class Perspectives on Unions

The Q sort is only one of the ways of measuring the centrality of beliefs about unions, and is probably the most cumbersome of all the methods. Nevertheless, the time and effort put into gathering Q sort data is rewarded during data analysis. This is because exploratory factor analysis can be applied in order to identify individuals who have similar belief systems about unions.⁹ Once the individuals in the sample are grouped in this way (see Table 3), we can turn to the questions: What beliefs about unions are most salient for each group? What distinguishes each group's perspective on unions from the perspectives of other groups? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary

⁸ For instance, in a Canadian Gallup Poll conducted in August 1987, labour union leaders were judged to be lower in honesty and ethical standards than 11 other occupations. Forty-five percent of the sample believed the standards of labour union leaders to be low or very low (*Gallup Report*, November 9/1987).

⁹ There is a common unit of measurement underlying each individual's Q sort: "importance to me" (Brown 1980:15). Therefore, correlations can be calculated between each pair of individuals, and factor analysis utilized to identify those individuals who load on a common factor. The factor-analysis programs available in statistical packages like SPSS and SAS are set up to explore the correlations among variables (R factor analysis) rather than the correlations among individuals (Q factor analysis). Thus, the 100 X 48 data matrix was transposed before undertaking the factor analysis.

to calculate an average Q sort for the individuals sharing each typical union belief system (Appendix from the author).

TABLE 3
Features of the Typical Perspectives on Unions

Feature	Perspective ^a					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
(A) Sample Distribution						
Percentage sharing perspective ^b	35	19	11	10	7	11
Percentage positive loading	34	18	11	8	5	11
Percentage negative loading	1	1	0	2	2	0
(B) Union Attitudes						
1. McShane's General Union Attitude ^d						
— Mean ^e	53.0	49.2	44.4	42.2	32.0	26.5
— Standard Deviation	3.4	6.6	6.5	9.3	9.5	11.4
2. Union Feeling Index ^e						
— Mean ^e	150	127	108	103	70	64
— Standard Deviation	29	35	25	29	41	35
3. Postal Union Feeling Index ^f						
— Mean ^e	114	85	94	94	80	57
— Standard Deviation	47	32	40	33	16	34
(C) Personal Experiences with Unions						
1. Ever union member ^e	76%	72%	73%	25%	40%	64%
2. Ever on strike ^e	50%	50%	27%	0%	20%	36%
3. Ever steward or on executive ^e	32%	11%	27%	0%	0%	0%

^a Perspectives are: 1) Political defence organizations; 2) Economic defence organizations; 3) Necessary but flawed; 4) Legitimate but too prone to conflict; 5) Interfere with individual rights; 6) Disruptive for society.

^b An individual's loading on the factor is significant at the .05 level. Where an individual has significant loadings on more than one factor, the largest loading is counted. When calculating mean attitudes, only individuals whose loadings are significant at the .01 level are included.

^c Calculated for those with positive loadings on a perspective.

^d Scale range 8-56. Standardized alpha reliability = .94.

^e Scale range 0-200. Standardized alpha reliability = .83.

^f Scale range 0-200. Standardized alpha reliability = .76.

An exploratory factor analysis revealed six typical perspectives on unions.¹⁰ Ninety-three percent of the sample had a significant loading on at

¹⁰ Factors were extracted using the Unweighted Least Squares method and rotated obliquely using the Oblimin method. An eigenvalue plot indicated a four step scree. The first four factors, accounting for 51.3% of the variance, were on the slope of the plot. The next three factors were at the first step of the scree. They accounted for 9.0% of the variance. Seven factors were

least one common factor. The distribution of the sample according to perspective is recorded in the first panel of Table 3.

The salient beliefs for each of the typical belief systems about unions can be ascertained through a study of the average Q sorts (recorded in the Appendix available from the author). The discussion of these data begins by identifying statements which allow us to see three important divisions among the perspectives. Then, the salient beliefs of each of the perspectives will be described in turn.

One of the statements which had the highest overall centrality in the sample (see Table 2) is D5 "Labour unions are very necessary to protect working people from unfair treatment and exploitation" (+4,+4,+3,+3,0,0).¹¹ This statement is of moderate or high salience for the first four perspectives, with these perspectives encompassing 75% of the sample (see Table 3). Thus it is easy to see why the overall centrality score for the statement is high. What is of importance here, however, is the fact that this statement is peripheral for the last two perspectives while being central for the first four. The same division, although in the opposite direction, is observed in the data for the statement L1 "Union leaders are probably less self-interested than any other elite group in Canadian society" (0, -1, -1, 0, -4, -3). This statement presents union leaders as particularly altruistic. Those holding the last two perspectives reject such a view, and regard this as a particularly important belief. Overall, we get a sense from the results for these two statements that the last two perspectives are generally anti-union in orientation while the first four are pro-union, at least to some degree.

There are also considerable differences among the first four perspectives. This can even be seen in the patterns of response for the following statements from the Defence category: D3 "Labour unions are instrumental in improving the standard of living of working people" (+4,+3,+4,0,0,+1); and D6 "Unions protect lazy workers, but good workers don't need their help at all" (-3,-2,+2,-2,+1,+3). On the first statement (D3) the fourth perspective deviates from the first three, demonstrating that the instrumental value of unions is somewhat in question among those holding this perspective. The second statement (D6) expresses a common complaint of working-class critics of

rotated. This is in keeping with the scree plot results and accords with Brown's practical suggestion regarding the number of factors to rotate in Q factor studies (1980:223). The content of the first six factors was easily interpretable, but this was not the case for the seventh factor. This suggests that it represents a combination of fairly idiosyncratic Q sorts rather than a characteristic perspective on unions. This study followed Brown's advice (1980:223) and disregarded the seventh factor after rotation.

¹¹ The numbers listed after each statement in this section are the average Q sort scores recorded in the Appendix available from the author. They are reproduced in the text in order to facilitate the discussion.

unions, so the tendency of those holding the third perspective to agree with the complaint (whereas those holding the first, second and fourth perspectives tend to disagree) likewise suggests an uneasiness about unions' instrumental value. In summary, it would seem that the first two perspectives are more consistently pro-union than the third and fourth.

The final general division is between the first perspective and the other five. Three statements help us to understand this division: PW3 "Labour unions should have much more of a say in deciding government policies" (+3, -1, 0, +1, +2, -3); PL1 "Unions should be affiliated with pro-labour political parties" (+2, -3, -3, 0, -4, -2); and PL2 "Unions spend too much time and money on political action" (-2, 0, +2, 0, +3, +1). In each case the first perspective stands apart from the rest in favouring greater union power in society and political action by unions. The result for PL1 is of special interest since it strongly differentiates the first perspective from the second and the third (+2 versus -3, -3).

The First Perspective: Unions as Political Defence Organizations

The most salient beliefs of this perspective (defined as beliefs with an average Q sort score greater than or equal to 3 in absolute value) are spread over all six dimensions. However, six of the sixteen salient beliefs are found in the Defence category (Appendix from the author). Thus, unions are fundamentally defence organizations according to the individuals who hold this perspective. A second important characteristic has already been noted: there is a desire to promote the power and political influence of labour unions which is not shared by any of the other perspectives. Finally, while beliefs about union leaders are peripheral, beliefs about union activists are central. This is shown by the importance of the statements L3 "People active in unions bring to light some important problems which most companies would like swept under the carpet" (+3) and L4 "Most of the people active in labour unions are just chronic complainers" (-3).

The data on union attitudes in Panel B of Table 3 confirm the pro-union orientation of this group. On two measures of general affect for labour unions (McShane's General Union Attitude and a Union Feeling Index),¹² the workers holding this perspective are most favourable towards unions. Furthermore, the political thrust of this perspective is confirmed by the results for a third attitude, a measure of affect for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (a union

¹² McShane's General Union Attitude is an index made up of eight likert-scale items (1986:409). The Union Feeling Index measures affective response to labour unions using a feeling-thermometer scale. Two items are included in the index — "Feeling towards the labour movement" and "Feeling about the people who run labour unions". The second of these items is taken from the 1984 Canadian National Election Study (Lambert et al. 1986:167).

which has had a reputation for militancy since the mid-1960s).¹³ In fact, "Political defence organizations" is the only perspective with a score on the Postal Union Feeling Index which is above the midpoint on the feeling-thermometer scale.

A human face can be put on the "Political defence organizations" perspective by considering some information on the four individuals who have the highest loadings for this group. Three were construction workers and the fourth worked on the shopfloor at Firestone (in the Hamilton plant which was closed in 1988). Although all were union members at the time of the survey or had been union members in the recent past, not one of them had ever served as a union steward or executive member. (This is typical of all those holding this perspective since, as is recorded in Panel C of Table 3, only 32% had ever acted in an official capacity for a union.) Finally, the open-ended discussions with these respondents revealed an interesting pattern: three reported that their views about unions were very unpopular with close family members (in the three cases the anti-union opponents were a girlfriend, a father, and everybody in the immediate family except a daughter-in-law). This meant that they were forced to regularly explain and defend their pro-union views to a sometimes hostile audience. It would appear, therefore, that regarding unions as political defence organizations is a controversial perspective in Canada, even in working-class circles. Indeed, even though none of these workers had ever taken a formal leadership role in a union, they were advocates for unions in their day-to-day lives.

The Second Perspective: Unions as Economic Defence Organizations

This perspective is characterized by three sorts of beliefs. First, unions are seen to defend workers' economic interests (three of the ten salient beliefs are from the Defence category). Second, unions are regarded as having organizational integrity (another three of the salient beliefs come from the Leadership category). Third, as was noted above, there is general ambivalence about the role of unions in politics and specific opposition to union affiliation with pro-labour parties.

On both measures of general affect for unions, this perspective is second only to "Political defence organizations" in pro-union sentiment (see Table 3). However, on the Postal Union Feeling Index it has a mean below the mid-

¹³ The Postal Union Feeling Index measures affective response to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers using a feeling-thermometer scale. Two items are included in the index — "Feeling towards the inside postal workers' union, CUPW" and "Feeling towards the leader of the inside postal workers' union, Jean-Claude Parrot." (This research was undertaken before CUPW expanded its bargaining unit to include postal mechanics, letter carriers and truck drivers.)

point of the index (85), and is indistinguishable from the third, fourth and fifth perspectives (which have means ranging from 80 to 94). This confirms the aversion to political action which characterizes this perspective.

Of the three individuals who have the highest factor loadings in this group, two were workers in their early 20s who had never been union members. However, in one case the mother was an active union steward, and in the other the father was on the executive of a union local. Apparently socialization in union-activist families was the major influence on the beliefs about unions of these two individuals. The third was a unionized construction worker. He was more typical of the workers holding this perspective since 72% reported being a union member at some point in their lives (see Panel C of Table 3). This worker alternately praised and criticized unions. His specific complaints concerned the bureaucracy of construction trades unions and the militancy of some unions in the labour movement. However, despite these reservations there was no doubt in his mind that unions are necessary: "We need unions just like we need a traffic cop on the corner during rush hour."

The Third Perspective: Unions as Necessary but Flawed

This is a pro-union perspective which is distinguished by two tendencies. First, the collective rights of unions are more salient than for any of the other pro-union perspectives. Of particular importance are support for the closed-shop principle (item R7, +3) and opposition to the individual right to scab (item R4, -3). Yet, at the same time, there is unhappiness with unions in a number of areas. Two such areas were noted above: a tendency to agree with the statement "Unions protect lazy workers, but good workers don't need their help at all" (D6) whereas the other pro-union perspectives disagree; and opposition to union involvement in politics. The latter unhappiness is further illustrated by the importance of the statements R2 "Union members should have the right to withhold dues which are earmarked to be spent on political causes they don't support" (+3) and C5 "If a labour law is bad, unions are quite right to ignore it" (-4).

As is recorded in Panel B of Table 3, on both measures of general affect for unions this perspective ranks third (although its mean is statistically indistinguishable from the fourth perspective). On the Union Feeling Index the mean score is 108. This is slightly above the mid-point, thus confirming the argument that this is a mildly pro-union orientation.

Of the three workers who have the highest loadings for this group, two worked at Stelco and the third at Ford in Oakville, Ontario in unionized jobs. This is typical of the entire group in the sense that 73% reported being in a union at some point (see Table 3). The working-class culture in large unionized

factories tends to produce support for the closed shop and opposition to scabs (two of the salient beliefs for this perspective). Two of the three workers had been through strikes in the past although both chose to find temporary jobs rather than do picket duty. This reflects their ambivalence towards union struggles. One, who had attended a business school after high school, only turned to factory work because the wages were so much better than in the insurance field. The second had been a union steward for three years in the early 1980s but had resigned to take a relief foreman job; he rotated between being a foreman and worker depending on the holiday schedules of regular foremen.

In informal discussions about their unions, two of the workers complained about union stewards protecting workers who were not doing their jobs. "People who deserve to be fired should be fired," was the view of one. The third worker offered another criticism: while his union had done a good job at improving health and safety conditions for workers, "now health and safety has gone too far" since all the regulations and inspections were interfering with efficiency. However, despite believing that unions are flawed, the necessity of unions was acknowledged. As one of the workers put it, "You need a powerful union to fight a strong company."

The Fourth Perspective: Unions as Legitimate but too Prone to Conflict

As was noted above, this too is a perspective which combines pro-union and anti-union views. However, of particular concern for those holding this perspective is the negative role of unions in conflict. The following beliefs about conflict are salient: C1 "Picket line violence is almost always caused by provocative actions taken by management or police" (-4); C5 "If a labour law is bad, unions are quite right to ignore it" (-4); and R4 "The police and courts should ensure that any individual has the right to cross a picket line without fear of hindrance or harassment" (+3). Furthermore, this perspective stands apart from the first three perspectives on three other statements in the Conflict category: C2 "The 'schoolyard bully' character of unions is illustrated by the goon tactics often seen on picket lines" (+2 where the first three perspectives range from -2 to 0); C6 "When unions disobey the law, they should be put into trusteeship by the government" (+2 where the first three perspectives range from -2 to 0); and C7 "Labour unions need the strike weapon if they are to advance the cause of working people" (0 where the first three perspectives range from +2 to +4).

This group differed sharply from the first three groups in personal union experience (see Panel C of Table 3). Only 25% had ever been union members, compared to about 75% for each of the first three groups. And not a single individual holding this perspective had ever been on strike or served in an official capacity with a union. Of the three individuals who have the highest loadings

for this group, only one was presently a union member. He was a young worker from a professional background who was bitter towards unions because of a failed union organizing drive at a company where he had previously worked. One of the others had been a white-collar union member before being promoted to a professional position which was excluded from the bargaining unit. And the third, who had never been a union member, explained that her mixed views on unions had been shaped, on the one hand, by employment experiences at Dofasco, and on the other by her husband's long involvement as the chief steward of a public sector union local.

The Fifth Perspective: Unions Interfere with Individual Rights

This is the first of two perspectives which are anti-union in orientation. Two types of beliefs characterize those holding this perspective. First, there is disagreement with union involvement in politics, as evidenced by the location of the statements PL1 "Unions should be affiliated with pro-labour political parties" (-4) and PL2 "Unions spend too much time and money on political action" (+3). Second, there is opposition to the collective rights of unions. This is best seen by the saliency of the following beliefs: R2 "Union members should have the right to withhold dues which are earmarked to be spent on political causes they don't support" (+4); R4 "The police and courts should ensure that any individual has the right to cross a picket line without fear of hindrance or harassment" (+4); and R7 "If the majority of workers in a plant vote to have a union, the others should be required to join" (-4). The relative importance of issues of individual rights is also demonstrated by the following items: R1 "How unions spend dues money is a group decision, and individual members should abide by the decisions of the majority" (-1 where the other five perspectives range from +2 to +3); and R8 "Workers are better off without unions because they have more freedom and independence in their working lives" (+2 where the other five perspectives range from -3 to 0).

The attitude data in Table 3 confirm the anti-union orientation of this perspective. On both measures of affect for unions it ranks fifth, and on the Union Feeling Index its mean is 70, well below the midpoint of the thermometer scale.

As was the case with the fourth perspective, none of the workers in this group had ever served in an official capacity with a union. The one individual who had strike experience was a mail dispatcher who retired from the Post Office in 1981; despite (or perhaps because of) living through the turbulent labour struggles in the Post Office in the 1960s and 1970s (see Davidson and Deverell, 1978), he was cool in feelings towards his own union (CUPW) and unions in general. Item R4 "The police and courts should ensure that any individual has the right to cross a picket line without fear of hindrance or harassment" was placed in the +5 position in his Q sort. Furthermore, the two

individuals with the highest factor loadings for this group were university-educated workers. One was an elementary school teacher who was a strong proponent of the notion that unions, although necessary 40 years ago, now had a detrimental impact because they were too large and bureaucratic.

The Sixth Perspective: Unions as Disruptive for Society

A wide variety of anti-union beliefs characterize this perspective. As was the case for the fifth perspective, items from the Rights category are important. However, unions' negative role in labour conflicts is also salient. This is shown by the location of the items R3 "Union members are justified in intimidating and scaring scab labour in order to protect their jobs" (-5) and C1 "Picket line violence is almost always caused by provocative actions taken by management or police" (-3). Furthermore, this is the only perspective which tends to disagree that unions need the strike weapon (item C7; -2 where the other five perspectives range from 0 to +4). Finally, it has the most negative overall view of the role of labour unions in society, as demonstrated by the location of the items PW2 "Labour unions have become too powerful for the good of the country" (+3 where the other perspectives range from -2 to +2), and PW3 "Labour unions should have much more of a say in deciding government policies" (-3 where the other perspectives range from -1 to +3).

The anti-union thrust of this perspective is demonstrated by the attitude data in Panel B of Table 3. Not only is "Disruptive for society" ranked last on the two measures of general affect for unions, it is last by a wide margin on the Postal Union Feeling Index (with a mean of 57).

The four workers with the highest factor loadings in this group expressed visceral antipathies towards unions. Two themes dominated their comments. One was that unions are greedy. This view was poignantly expressed by a worker employed for the minimum wage as a waiter in a restaurant which served clients from a major unionized manufacturer. The second theme concerned the negative impact of strikes. Both a high school teacher and a service technician reported that their views towards unions had been soured while on strike. The former objected to how the strike had poisoned relations between him and a school trustee who lived nearby, while the latter didn't like the confrontational spirit of the picket line. The service technician also objected to the fact that Stelco workers would not talk to his father for years after the 1946 strike because his father had been a strikebreaker.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This is the first attempt to study systematically the centrality of beliefs about unions. As a consequence, this research advances our substantive, conceptual and methodological knowledge in the area.

The first substantive contribution is the identification of general patterns of belief centrality. Specifically, beliefs from the Defence and Rights dimensions tend to be much more salient for Hamilton workers than beliefs from the Conflict, Power, Politics and Leadership dimensions. When interpreting public opinion polls on union issues, then, we need to keep in mind that some categories of beliefs about unions are much more salient to workers than others. The results of this study suggest that doubts about union involvement in politics or the ethical qualities of union leaders do not undermine the legitimacy of unions in the eyes of the majority of the working class.

There are also at least two ways in which labour unions can use this information on the general patterns of belief centrality. First, it would appear that negative beliefs about unions can often be neutralized by cuing positive beliefs which are more central to workers. This suggestion is in line with Converse's proposition "that when the attitude toward one of two objects must change, the object which is less central ... is more likely to undergo change" (1970:185). Second, issues of individual vs. collective rights are salient to many workers, and need to be addressed in a thoughtful fashion.

A second substantive contribution is the delineation of six typical perspectives on labour unions. For each perspective a different combination of beliefs about unions is salient. A general implication flowing from the descriptions of the perspectives is that pro-union and anti-union workers do not tend to possess belief systems which are strict mirror images of one another. Another general implication is that there is more than one typical rationale for liking unions, just as there is more than one typical rationale for disliking them.

Two of the perspectives identified in this research ("Political defence organizations" and "Economic defence organizations") mirror an important division in the union movement: social unionism vs. business unionism. It is likely that this division in the union movement both creates and is sustained by the existence of these two different ways of thinking about unions in the working class.

The other four perspectives are held by workers who have some reservations about, or oppose, labour unions. Researchers are well aware that many workers, including union members, have ambivalent or negative feelings towards unions (Lowe and Krahn 1989:402; Lipset 1986:304-309). However, until now there has been no systematic examination of the belief systems of such workers. A key finding of this study is that there are typical ambivalent

and anti-union perspectives on unions, just as there are typical pro-union perspectives. An interesting question for future research is: what social forces generate these ambivalent and anti-union perspectives? My suspicion is that an answer will involve the learning of dominant interpretations of unions popularized by the mass media as mediated by personal class and labour-market experiences.

This study reveals a wide divergence in belief systems about unions in the Hamilton working class. The ongoing public debates about the role of unions in contemporary capitalist society are thus paralleled by ongoing private debates among coworkers, friends and family members. The vitality and relevance of the union movement is reflected by the deep-going union loyalties of many workers; the challenges confronting the union movement are reflected by the ambivalence and negativity of other workers.

Of course, what is typical for Hamilton workers may or may not be typical for workers in other parts of the country. Further investigation is required to establish the generalizability of these findings. However, given the common features of working-class experience across Canada, and the important role of the mass media in conveying information about and interpretations of union activities, my expectation is that the typical perspectives on unions identified in this research will be similar to the typical working-class perspectives in any major urban centre in Canada. It would also be useful to research whether these six perspectives encompass the range of typical perspectives on labour unions found in the business class and the old and new middle classes.

The substantive contributions of this study could not have been achieved without measuring the centrality of beliefs about unions. Therefore, the conceptual discussion which introduced the article is the foundation for whatever overall contribution the study makes to our knowledge of belief systems about unions. To reiterate, the social-psychological evidence suggests that knowledge of belief centrality is an absolute necessity if we wish to predict behaviour on the basis of particular beliefs, to understand the bases for feelings towards unions, or to gauge the likelihood that attitudes towards unions can be changed. This is an impressive claim which raises an epistemological question. Given that centrality is just one of the characteristics of belief systems, why does its measurement advance our knowledge of belief systems so far beyond the standard correlation-constraint approach?

The issue here is sensitivity to the subjective context of beliefs. One way to establish a framework for interpreting the meaning of a particular belief is to undertake one or more in-depth interviews with the individual professing the belief. Examples of studies of political belief systems which apply this method are Lane (1962), Sennett and Cobb (1973), and Reinerman (1987). In contrast, quantitative belief system research has traditionally treated each belief as a

discrete datum, and neglected to situate beliefs in the context of individual subjectivity. However, this study demonstrates that quantitative research need not ignore the subjective context of beliefs; measuring the salience of union beliefs allows us to investigate belief systems about unions in a way which combines subjective authenticity and quantitative rigour.

Finally, it is necessary to put the methodological contribution of this study in perspective. This research is the first to use a Q sort and Q factor analysis when investigating belief systems about unions. This method is ideally suited for a detailed study of belief centrality. In particular, it enables the researcher to develop quantitative portraits of typical belief systems about unions. At a general methodological level, this study demonstrates that intensive, systematic research is needed in order to delve into unexplored questions concerning people's beliefs about unions. Depending upon the question, such research could be quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of the two.

A note of methodological pragmatism must also be offered. Because of the length of time involved in completing a Q sort, and the fact that a Q sort cannot be completed during a telephone interview, most future research on union beliefs is unlikely to utilize the Q method. Nevertheless, it is possible to measure belief centrality using techniques which are compatible with standard survey formats. For instance, a respondent can be presented with a short list of statements and asked to indicate those which are most important to her/him (Budd 1986:669).¹⁴ The point here is that the argument about the need to take centrality into account when studying belief systems about unions is not determinately tied to the particular method employed in this study.

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¹⁴ The results of this study could be used when constructing the list of statements. For instance, a list could include two salient beliefs from each of the six typical perspectives on unions which are identified here.

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Noyau des systèmes d'opinions à propos du syndicalisme

Cet article soutient que la centralité (ou la pertinence) est un facteur important mais négligé dans les systèmes d'opinions à propos du syndicalisme. Ce propos fait l'objet d'une étude auprès d'un échantillon représentatif d'ouvriers d'Hamilton en Ontario. Chaque personne interrogée a mis en ordre 48 propositions différentes concernant les syndicats, en identifiant les assertions qu'elle approuvait ou désapprouvait le plus. Ces données sont analysées de deux façons distinctes. Les tendances générales

du noyau des convictions syndicales dans l'ensemble de l'échantillon sont d'abord soulignées. Mais comme les individus ont des opinions diverses sur ce qu'ils croient être le plus important dans le syndicalisme, on procède également à l'identification des opinions les plus centrales dans 6 types globaux de convictions à propos de l'action syndicale.

Il existe trois raisons pour effectuer une enquête sur le noyau des convictions à propos du syndicalisme. Premièrement, les convictions les plus centrales ont tendance à mieux prédire les comportements que les convictions périphériques. Deuxièmement, les sentiments généraux d'un individu envers un syndicat sont largement déterminés par la direction et par le caractère extrême de ses convictions les plus centrales. Troisièmement, il est difficile d'interpréter les sondages d'opinion publique au sujet des syndicats sans connaître la pertinence des diverses convictions.

Dans cette étude, le processus d'évaluation du noyau des convictions (connu sous le nom de triage-Q — ou *Q-sort*) n'est valable que lorsque le domaine du contenu est adéquatement représenté par les assertions qui sont proposées pour le triage. La tâche préliminaire la plus critique de cette enquête fut donc de définir le contenu (étendue et nombre des dimensions) des systèmes d'opinions à propos du syndicalisme. Ces dimensions sont: (1) défense économique sur les lieux de travail (défense économique), (2) pouvoir dans la société (pouvoir), (3) leadership et démocratie interne (leadership), (4) droits collectifs vs droits individuels (droits), (5) grèves et conflits (conflit), (6) activités politiques (politique). L'inventaire total des 48 assertions comprenait 8 assertions pour chaque dimension dont quatre pro-syndicales et quatre anti-syndicales. Le triage-Q fut complété par cent ouvriers de Hamilton en Ontario lors d'un sondage porte-à-porte entrepris au cours de l'été 1987.

Chez les ouvriers d'Hamilton, la défense économique et les droits sont les deux dimensions les plus centrales parmi les six. L'importance de la première dimension n'est pas surprenante, étant donné que la défense immédiate des intérêts économiques et salariaux des ouvriers forme la base des activités syndicales. L'importance des convictions relatives aux droits reflète probablement l'individualisme enraciné dans la société canadienne, lequel est mis en question par les syndicats qui convergent vers les droits collectifs; elle reflète aussi l'attention portée aux questions de droits individuels lors de discussions publiques sur le syndicalisme au cours des dernières années.

Lorsque l'on assemble des données par la méthode du triage-Q, une analyse factorielle exploratoire peut être utilisée afin d'identifier les individus qui possèdent des systèmes de convictions syndicales similaires. Une fois que les individus sont regroupés de cette manière, on peut répondre aux questions suivantes :

- Quelles sont les convictions syndicales les plus importantes pour chaque groupe?
- Qu'est-ce qui distingue la perspective de chaque groupe des perspectives des autres groupes?

L'étude a révélé six perspectives différentes sur le syndicalisme: la première percevoit les syndicats comme des organisations de défense politique. Dans cette perspective, les convictions relatives à la défense économique sont centrales. De plus, on trouve ici un soutien au rôle politique des syndicats, ce qui n'est partagé par aucune des cinq

autres perspectives. La deuxième perspective perçoit les syndicats comme des organisations de défense économique : elle met l'accent sur la façon dont les syndicats défendent les intérêts des ouvriers au travail et sur le marché du travail. En même temps, il y a une ambivalence générale envers le rôle politique des syndicats ainsi qu'une opposition explicite à l'affiliation des syndicats à des partis travaillistes.

La troisième perspective perçoit les syndicats comme un outil nécessaire mais imparfait sous plusieurs angles. Par exemple, les ouvriers partageant ce point de vue croient que les syndicats se mêlent trop de politique. La quatrième perspective combine elle aussi des convictions pro- et antisyndicales. Elle perçoit les syndicats comme étant légitimes mais trop portés aux conduites conflictuelles.

Les deux dernières perspectives ont une orientation antisyndicale. La cinquième met l'accent sur le fait que les syndicats entravent les droits individuels et elle désapprouve l'engagement des syndicats dans la politique. La sixième perspective perçoit les syndicats comme un élément perturbateur dans la société. Elle fait montre de l'opinion d'ensemble la plus négative à propos du pouvoir des syndicats. De plus, les syndicats sont ici perçus comme une entrave aux droits individuels et comme responsables des conflits sur les lignes de piquetage.

L'implication générale de ces analyses est que les ouvriers pro- et antisyndicaux ne semblent pas avoir des systèmes d'opinions symétriques les uns par rapport aux autres. En effet, c'est une configuration différente d'opinion qui constitue le noyau de chaque perspective. Une autre implication générale est qu'il y a plus d'une base idéologique pour fonder l'opinion prosyndicale tout comme il y a plus d'une base pour fonder l'opinion antisyndicale.

Finalement, cette étude démontre qu'en analysant la centralité des systèmes d'opinions à propos du syndicalisme, on peut aborder ceux-ci d'une façon qui combine l'authenticité d'une démarche subjective et la rigueur d'une approche quantitative.

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