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ARTICLE

An Experimental Organization of Precarious Professionals: The Two-Step Unionization of Québec Archaeologists

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Abstract: This article discusses the sector-wide organization of contractual archaeologists in Québec, beginning with the formation of a workers' committee and leading subsequently to union accreditation. We theorize the difficulty of organizing these "precarious professionals" and suggest that self-organization outside of an industrial relations framework may be required to overcome barriers to their unionization. Deliberation, norm setting, and informal parlays with employers lead to clarifying class distinctions that professional identification often occludes, while self-organization increases worker confidence in collective action.

Keywords: precarious employment, professional workers, mobilization theory, union organizing, contractual archaeology

Résumé : Cet article traite de l'organisation sectorielle des archéologues contractuels au Québec en commençant par la création d'un comité de travailleurs et menant par la suite à l'accréditation syndicale. Nous mettons en théorie les difficultés qui ont entravé l'organisation de ces «professionnels précaires», et proposons que l'auto-organisation en dehors d'un cadre de relations industrielles peut être nécessaire pour surmonter les obstacles à leur syndicalisation. La délibération, l'établissement des normes et les discussions avec les employeurs conduisent à clarifier les distinctions de classe que l'identification professionnelle occulte souvent, tandis que l'auto-organisation augmente la confiance des travailleurs dans l'action collective.

Mots-clés : emplois précaires, professionnels, théorie de la mobilisation, syndicalisation, archéologie contractuelle

Despite innovation in organizing workers in precarious employment, prevailing union strategies remain moulded on labour laws that have not been revised to account for precarious work.[1] In Wagner Act regimes, workers may

1. First, we would like to thank all the archaeologists who participated in our online surveys, roundtable, or various aspects of the CNTAQ organization. Thank you also to our colleagues who helped to shape the SNAQ-CSN in its first few months, along with our colleagues at the CSN

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only secure the right to collective bargaining through exclusive union representation following a unionization campaign culminating in a workplace majority vote or, in Québec, a card-check procedure. Campaigns are commonly opposed by employers and require high levels of commitment among workers to overcome this opposition. For workers who are intermittently employed on short contracts in small firms, the barriers are such that they have no effective access to trade-union rights under this model.[2] Mobilizing to overcome these barriers is particularly difficult in sectors of the economy where workers' professional value commitments overlie class divisions and discourage attribution of harm to employer discretion.[3] This article discusses one such case: the organization of young precariously employed professional workers in the field of contractual archaeology in Québec. This organization process involved two distinct steps: first, a committee was formed to mobilize workers and raise demands for increased wages and better working conditions outside of an industrial relations framework; and second, a unionization campaign was launched by the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), quickly resulting in sector-wide accreditation.

A small group of workers formed a committee in 2017 to explore avenues to address precarity in the sector.[4] This committee judged that a high level of labour fragmentation, years of habituation to precarious employment, and a lack of worker and trade-union consciousness precluded a unionization attempt in the near term. Therefore, they opted to mobilize workers through a series of research and consultation activities geared toward the creation of a sector-wide labour standard. Over the course of the following two and a half years (from summer 2017 to fall 2019), this committee developed into a workers' centre–like organization, the Centre de normalisation du travail en archéologie québécoise (CNTAQ), with modest success in terms of raising wages and setting work norms by opening up and mediating joint discussions

for their precious help. Thank you also to our friends at LiUNA for the many talks we had on unionization-related subjects. Very special thanks to the committee members of the CNTAQ, namely, Antoine Loyer Rousselle, Mélanie Gervais, Luis Trudel-Lopez, Mélanie Girard, and Jennifer Gagné; to Pierre Desrosiers for his advice on the archaeological sector in Quebec; and to Jonathan Michaud for his work on the first roundtables with the employees and research assistance. We also wish to thank the reviewers for their carefully considered suggestions on an earlier version of the manuscript.

2. Roy Adams, "From Statutory Right to Human Right: The Evolution and Current Status of Collective Bargaining," *Just Labour* 12 (Spring 2008): 48–67; Urwana Coiquaud, "La Représentation Collective des Travailleurs Précaires: Évolution et Défis Contemporains," *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 66, 4 (2011): 631–654.

3. Marie-José Legault & Johanna Weststar, "The Capacity for Mobilization in Project-Based Cultural Work: A Case of the Video Game Industry," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 40, 2 (2015): 203–221.

4. CNTAQ, "Présentation du Projet de Normalisation de la Pratique Archéologique Professionnelle au Québec," CNTAQ, Montréal, August 2017.

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between workers and employers. The CNTAQ also allowed for voicing concerns regarding professional ethics (scientific standards, heritage preservation, and responsibility to the public) and relating these systematically to precarious employment relations.[5] When the limits of this approach became manifest in 2019 a second organization, the Syndicat national des archéologues du Québec (SNAQ-CSN), launched a card-check certification campaign resulting, by the time of this writing, in the accreditation of seven of the largest firms in the sector. While the SNAQ-CSN consolidated the mobilization work conducted by the CNTAQ, it focused more narrowly on working conditions (wages, seniority, health and safety) and eschewed the broader questions of work organization and professional ethics that the CNTAQ had raised. This outcome represents a rare example of a successful sector-wide unionization of young precariously employed workers, and it offers important lessons for unions seeking to organize a similar workforce.

In theorizing this process, we advance two interconnected arguments. First, we argue that the collective agency of workers in precarious employment is best studied through participant action research (PAR) conducted alongside workers as they engage in collective action and build organizations that are suited to their particular contexts. The rise of precarious work challenges approaches to the study of work that subordinate problems (such as precarious work) to tools (the existing institutions, including unions) that were designed with the purpose of regulating previous rounds of class struggle. In recognition of this, research on the organization of workers in precarious employment has come to be more attuned to micro-organizational and individual practices that workers employ, in various contexts, to cope with or resist precarious employment relations.[6] This involves studying forms of worker agency "from the bottom up" rather than foregrounding the institutional logics of unions and union-led mobilization of workers.[7]

In conducting PAR alongside the CNTAQ, we came to understand how the organizational and tactical decisions these workers made related back to their understanding of their work and employment relations. It was through PAR that we came to theorize contractual archaeologists as "precarious professionals," defined as workers with professional training and university credentials

5. CNTAQ, *Rapport sur les Tables de Réflexion* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2018); CNTAQ, *Rapport des Consultations Menées auprès des Employeuses et Employeurs en Archéologie Professionnelle au Québec* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2018).

6. Charles Umney & Lefteris Kretsos, "Creative Labour and Collective Interaction: The Working Lives of Young Jazz Musicians in London," *Work, Employment and Society* 28, 4 (2014): 571–588; Lisa Berntsen, "Reworking Labour Practices: On the Agency of Unorganized Mobile Migrant Construction Workers," *Work, Employment and Society* 30, 3 (2016): 472–488; Stephanie Procyk, Wayne Lewchuk & John Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment: Causes, Consequences and Remedies* (Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2017).

7. Mauricio Atzeni, "Searching for Injustice and Finding Solidarity? A Contribution to the Mobilisation Theory Debate," *Industrial Relations Journal* 40, 1 (2009): 5–16.

who aspire to the ethical employment of their specialized knowledge in the service of a public good, but who do not benefit from the degree of labour control that this requires by virtue of their intermittent, project-based employment. We came to understand that these workers are difficult to organize both because they are precariously employed and because their subjective identification as professionals binds them to their employers and clouds an understanding of their distinct interests as workers. Shared commitments to a socially undervalued and poorly regulated profession further militates against the attribution of workplace dissatisfaction to employer discretion, a key moment in mobilization theory and in the organizing model more commonly referred to in North American debates.[8]

We further argue that such difficult-to-organize workers gain awareness of their interests as workers through the process of self-organization, deliberation among themselves, and informal parlays with employers, as mediated by a workers' committee such as the CNTAQ. By raising expectations and revealing the material contradictions that underlie professional discourse, the experiential learning afforded by workers' committees brings workers to an understanding of the need for unionization. The CNTAQ may be understood as an example of what Stanley Aronowitz had in mind when calling attention to the possibilities of workers forming "discussion and study groups focused on the immediate problems of the workforce" that may lead to union accreditation or new forms of unionism appropriate to their occupations and professions.[9] We do not argue that minority unionism or non-union associations be substituted for Wagner Act unionism among this segment of the workforce.[10] Indeed, our case well illustrates the limits of informal organization and parlays with employers when workers do not benefit from the protections afforded by labour law or the resources that unions are able to mobilize and bring to the bargaining table. Informal organization is better than no organization, provided, as Alison Braley-Rattai is careful to note, that it does not foreclose unionization.[11] In our case informal organization was necessarily preliminary to union accreditation.

8. John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves* (London: Routledge, 2012); Alexandra Bradbury, Mark Brenner & Jane Slaughter, *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* (Detroit: Labor Notes, 2016); Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

9. Stanley Aronowitz, *The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers' Movement* (London: Verso, 2016), 166.

10. For a critique of minority unionism, see Lance Compa, "Careful What You Wish For: A Critical Appraisal of Proposals to Rebuild the Labor Movement," *New Labor Forum* 24, 3 (2015): 11–16; Brad Walchuk, "The Pitfalls of Embracing Minority Unionism," *Journal of Workplace Rights* 6, 3 (2016): 1–12.

11. Alison Braley-Rattai, "Harnessing the Possibilities of Minority Unionism in Canada," *Labor Studies Journal* 38, 4 (2014): 329.

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The article is organized in five sections. In the first, we discuss our research methods and advance an argument that PAR is well suited to the study of workers' collective agency. The second section discusses the nature of work in contract archaeology in Québec, including employment relations, sector regulation, and labour process. In the third section, we theorize "precarious professionals" and review the literature that has grappled with the difficulties of organizing both precariously employed workers and professional workers. In the fourth section we discuss the approach of the CNTAQ to consulting and mobilizing contractual archaeologists through a discourse of professionalism, including the limits of this approach, the formation of the SNAQ, and its early organizing wins. We conclude by reflecting on the conditions of possibility of this case and its implications for academic and union practice in the future.

Research Methods

The study of worker agency challenges research methods premised on epistemological detachment. It is difficult, as Marshall Ganz has noted, to infer the rationality of workers' agency through post-hoc reconstruction of the decisions that were made.[12] The reasoning behind organizational and tactical choices is immediately evident in the process of making these decisions, and the creativity involved is expressed in the moment. While methods of rational reconstruction typically seek to identify variables to explain outcomes, in the organizing thought process the emphasis is on understanding the way in which different actions, rather than variables, are combined, synchronically and diachronically within an evolving context, to further a collective project.

Participant action research, defined as a process in which both practitioner and academic researcher are involved as "co-producers" of an actionable form of knowledge, is well suited to understanding why certain choices were made as it gives researchers unmediated access to the deliberations through which workers express creativity.[13] Such access must be negotiated and is conditional on committing to the same goals as the protagonists.[14] This introduces a tension between academic research and the instrumental and local "concrete science" in which practitioners are engaged. Tony Huzzard and Hans Björkman usefully draw on the distinction made by Michael Gibbons et al. between mode 1 knowledge, which is concerned with generalizable findings resulting from scientific procedure, and mode 2 knowledge, which is of a local and experimental

12. Marshall Ganz, "Why David Sometimes Wins: Strategic Capacity in Social Movements," in David M. Messick & Roderick M. Kramer, eds., *The Psychology of Leadership: New Perspectives and Research* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 205.

13. David Coghlan & Terresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2010).

14. Stephen Kemmis, "Researching Educational Praxis: Spectator and Participant Perspectives," *British Educational Research Journal* 38, 6 (2012): 885–905.

nature geared toward social change.[15] In PAR, this distinction is submerged but not absent. For the purposes of furthering scientific inquiry, PAR researchers must engage in a reflexive process of rational reconstruction that connects rich observation to research questions of interest to a scientific community. Contrary to critiques of PAR for lacking scientific rigour, it is precisely through "continual collective, critical reflection and open debate" with social agents that scholars ensure the "validity of its knowledge outcomes."[16]

Both authors were involved to different degrees in the organizing processes discussed here. Ian MacDonald was contacted by the CNTAQ in the spring of 2017 to provide research assistance and advice on worker mobilization, and he conducted action-oriented research alongside the committee in 2017 and 2018. Manek Kolhatkar was a founding member of both the CNTAQ and SNAQ and was centrally involved in both the research activities and the union organizing discussed below. Each author's role was distinct. The workers on the committee made the decisions and the non-decision-making academic offered advice, helped with developing external alliances, and provided graduate student support. From a research methods perspective, a shared commitment to the goal of better work legitimized full and unmediated academic access to a process of worker organizing that would otherwise have to be imperfectly reconstructed through an interview-based research methodology. In turn, the processes of academic writing and publishing permit intellectual self-reflection on workers' practice and may contribute to the success of future organizing.

With respect to the activities of the CNTAQ, research methods formed an integral part of the organizing process. Research was directed by the committee, which ensured that every activity and output served an organizing function. Some research activities were conducted by graduate assistants, always with input from the worker committee, but most were conducted by worker activists in the organizing process. These activities involved a series of six roundtable discussions in fall 2017 with workers (n=54), and a second series of roundtable discussions with 40 workers was conducted in the summer and fall of 2018. Semi-structured interviews lasting an average of two hours were conducted with twenty employers of the ten largest firms (in terms of archaeological permits annually awarded, a legal prerequisite for any archaeological activity and employment) in the sector over the winter of 2017–18, and a second series of interviews was conducted in fall 2018. The main findings from interviews with employers and roundtable discussions with workers,

15. Tony Huzzard & Hans Björkman, "Trade Unions and Action Research," *Work, Employment and Society* 26, 1 (2012): 161–171; Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott & Martin Trow, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2000).

16. Paul Brook & Ralph Darlington, "Partisan, Scholarly and Active: Arguments for an Organic Public Sociology of Work," *Work, Employment and Society* 27, 2 (2014): 238.

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along with two online surveys directed mainly at workers (n=131 and n=116, or approximately 75 per cent of the contractual workforce), were published online in five separate reports on the committee's website and Facebook page.[17] In our reconstruction of the events under examination we have relied on these published reports as well as on field notes taken in nearly every internal strategy session, organizing activity, and public event, as well as hundreds of emails exchanged over a period of eighteen months. With respect to the activities of the SNAQ, we have relied on the personal recollection and notes of Kolhatkar.

Employment Relations, Regulation, and Labour Process

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK is seasonal and project based, with projects lasting anywhere from a day to a couple of months, the length being largely determined by the hours agreed to in client contracts rather than what is found on site.[18] Workers are called up by employers and hired for the duration of a project on unwritten contracts with no formally established pay standards. The workers cycle through projects and firms and depend on their reputations and positive relations with employers to secure the next contract. Workers can progress through various career stages, beginning as "field technician," then progressing to "field assistant" and "project leader." Each career stage creates bottlenecks that encourage competition between workers as the sole way of improving wages and working conditions. Half of the workers hold master's degrees, but employers may prefer field experience given that education is not legally required in most cases. Our survey data revealed that most field technicians earn an average of $19,629.87 a year from archaeological work and that workers at higher career levels earn a maximum of $42,000.[19] The contractual workforce is gender balanced and young, with very few continuing to work past the age of 40 given the low wages and the absence of retirement benefits at

17. CNTAQ, *Rapport sur les Tables de Réflexion*; CNTAQ, *Rapport des Consultations Menées auprès des Employeuses*; CNTAQ, *Rapport du Sondage sur les Conditions de Travail en Archéologie Professionnelle Québécoise* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2018); CNTAQ, *Rapport des Consultations auprès des Employé(e)s et des Employeur(se)s sur la Version 2 du Contrat-Type, Été 2018* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2018); CNTAQ, *Rapport du Second Sondage du CNTAQ sur l'Année 2018: Données Sociodémographiques et sur l'Emploi, OBNL et Contrat-Type* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2019).

18. Nicolas Zorzin, "Contextualising Contract Archaeology in Quebec: Political-Economy and Economic Dependencies," *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 26, 1 (2011): 119–136; Zorzin, "Archaeology and Capitalism: Successful Relationship or Economic and Ethical Alienation?," in Cristóbal Gnecco & Dorothy Lippert, eds., *Ethics and Archaeological Praxis* (New York: Springer, 2015), 115–139.

19. CNTAQ, *Rapport du Sondage*.

lower career levels.[20] Of approximately 250 people active in the private sector, 172 work as seasonal contractual workers.[21]

There is an element of instability to the work that is inherent to its nature, notably its seasonal rhythm and the "archaeological unknown," which refers to the unknowability of what will be found on site once excavations begin. This is exacerbated by the subordination of archaeological firms to deadlines imposed by their clients. Precarious employment relations, however, result from the work being progressively outsourced to profit-making firms.[22] The modernizing Québec state of the 1960s and 1970s created a developer-funded market for archaeology in response to popular opposition to the destruction of cultural heritage driven by the massive infrastructure projects and urban development of the period. Provincial law (the *Loi sur les biens culturels* of 1972, replaced in 2012 by the *Loi sur le patrimoine culturel*) requires developers to contract with archaeological firms to protect and inventory any finds prior to their recovery and destruction. The firms must apply for a permit from the Ministry of Culture and Communication (MCC), which is tasked with ensuring that firms comply with the law, meet certain professional standards, and produce a final site report that conforms to the rules and is submitted on time. The largest clients are public-sector entities.

While the law ensures a steady flow of contracts to private firms, the MCC has seldom exercised the power over developers that is mandated to it (e.g. fines for non-compliance), which is necessary to protect cultural heritage from the bulldozers.[23] The ministry has also been criticized for its inadequate management of archaeological heritage owing to loosely defined regulations, requirements, and planning.[24] As is universally the case of cultural ministries,

20. CNTAQ, *Rapport sur les Tables de Réflexion*; Nicolas Zorzin, "Archéologie au Québec: Portrait d'une Profession," *Archéologiques* 23 (2010): 1–15; Zorzin, "Contextualising Contract Archaeology"; Zorzin, "Archaeology and Capitalism"; CNTAQ, *Rapport du Sondage*.

21. Pierre Desrosiers, "Les Firmes d'Archéologie au Québec," *Archéologiques* 30 (2017): 71–92.

22. Zorzin, "Contextualising Contract Archaeology"; Nicolas Zorzin & Christian Gates St-Pierre, "The Sociopolitics of Archaeology in Quebec: Regional Developments within Global Trends," *Archaeologies* 13, 3 (2017): 412–414.

23. Zorzin & Gates St-Pierre, "Sociopolitics of Archaeology."

24. Stéphane Baillargeon, "Une Polémique Autour du Traitement Réservé à des Restes Humains Déterrés à Québec," *Le Devoir*, 29 January 2020, https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/571721/une-polemique-autour-du-traitement-reserve-a-des-restes-humains-deterres-a-quebec; Baillargeon, "En Archéologie, un Fossé Entre les 'Savants' et les 'Entrepreneurs,'" *Le Devoir*, 30 January 2020, https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/571820/les-archeologues-universitaires-reclament-patience-et-longueur-de-temps; Réginald Auger, William Moss & Gilles Samson, "La Palissade de Beaucours... des Éléphants dans la Pièce," *Le Devoir*, 7 February 2020, https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/572443/la-palissade-de-beaucours-des-elephants-dans-la-piece; Simon Santerre, "L'Acquisition des Données en Archéologie Québécoise et leur Présentation dans les Rapports d'Intervention," *Archéologiques* 32 (2020): 53–71.

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the MCC is classed near the bottom within the hierarchy of the Québec state in terms of resources and prestige. Lax regulation was further weakened by the new 2012 law, which downloaded ministerial responsibilities to municipalities, and further empowered the large clients over archaeologists in general by granting developers the right to sue archaeological firms for holding up development past contract end dates, as well as offering them access to archaeological permits to do the work in-house.[25] Both provincial and federal government entities have cut nearly all capacity in the sector and the work is now contracted out to private firms.

Although archaeological firms may be beneficiaries of marketization and privatization, they are subordinated, as a part of this same process of neoliberal market-making in public goods, to state discipline and the exigencies of the large clients. Weakened by the state, firm owners are placed in a subordinate and even apologetic position vis-à-vis their clients. Within the value chain, power is exercised by the large clients whose tendering practices constrain the business practices of the firms and can even dictate employment practices, all the while externalizing the management of precarious employment. As the work is labour intensive, competition for contracts turns on underestimating the time necessary to do quality work and maintaining low wages for the contractual workforce. In the absence of a rigorous and mandatory scientific standard of work, price-based competitive bidding encourages firms to cut costs by undermining the methodological rigour of a project.[26] Firms will also conduct the more research-oriented work at a financial loss and ask employees to do this work without pay.[27]

Previous research on employment relations in contractual archaeology has emphasized precarity and proletarianization, not professionalism, as the dominant trajectory. The market created by provincial legislation has tended to deprofessionalize the work by narrowly defining its social value as well as, through competitive contracting and regulatory design, giving birth to class differentiation and a precariously employed labour force. Market regulation results, at best, in the protection and inventorying of the province's heritage ("preventive archaeology") as opposed to studying it, understanding it, and conveying its meaning to the public.[28] Rather than a public good, heritage becomes a resource that is managed by profit-making firms.

The labour process in contractual archaeology is at once "physical" and "intellectual," involving site analysis, digging and sifting, material identification and preservation, inventorying, and report writing. Work is hierarchized

25. Zorzin & Gates St-Pierre, "Sociopolitics of Archaeology."

26. CNTAQ, *Rapport sur les Tables de Réflexion*; CNTAQ, *Rapport des Consultations Menées auprès des Employeuses*.

27. CNTAQ, *Rapport sur les Tables de Réflexion*.

28. Pierre Desrosiers, "La Recherche Archéologique au Québec: Quelle place au Soleil?," *História: Questões & Debates* 66, 1 (2018): 15–42.

between physical and intellectual work. Field technicians are hired to do most of the physical work. This work ranges from heavy pick and shovel work to fine unearthing of human remains in often awkward bodily positions that requires one to remain still for hours at a time. Archaeological work is repetitive by nature, and a workday usually involves a reiterative process of digging, filling up buckets and wheelbarrows, emptying these buckets and wheelbarrows, settling back to one's digging station, and starting over. In the process, layers and structures are slowly revealed, and the satisfying and picturesque excavated settlement that abounds in magazines, books, and museums slowly emerges. Field assistants are required to do most of the intellectual work. They focus on recording everything (through notes, drawings, photographs, and, increasingly, digitization), a task of tremendous importance given that field archaeology is the controlled and systematic destruction of a site. Project leaders devise general excavation strategies and manage the overall unfolding of the excavation, including dealing with the developers that archaeologists routinely need to work with.

This distinction between physical and intellectual work is used to segment the work between field tasks, which requires the largest number of workers, and post-field tasks, which comprises laboratory work, analysis of results, and report writing. The latter is usually done by the project leader, sometimes with the assistance of field assistants. Field technicians can be hired to do basic laboratory work such as artifact cleaning. This distinction is also employed to justify the above-mentioned hierarchy, along with field technicians' low wages and skill devaluation. In turn, this contributes to workers' feelings of being expendable and undervalued. However, archaeologists, at all levels of practice, must develop a specific and highly specialized set of skills that requires care, judgement, dexterity, and attention to detail.[29] It cannot be automated or replaced by new technologies, whose introduction in the field may simply enhance work (e.g. photogrammetry, drone photography, laser scanners).[30] The major problem is, rather, a lack of adequate regulation regarding scientific rigour and overall quality of work, since archaeologists may be required to work quickly rather than precisely in order to make up for unexpected delays and short time frames caused by restricted budgets and a lowest-bidder framework.

Archaeological work can be dangerous. Besides working around heavy machinery and in deep trenches, archaeologists deal routinely with

29. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

30. Diane Martin-Moya, Alexandre Bisson-Larrivée, Julien Riel-Salvatore, Fabio Negrino, Manek Kolhatkar, Catherine Brun, Jean-Baptiste Le Moine, Benjamin Albouy, Yassmine Ghalem, Anthony Rochon & Isabelle Ribot, "Apports de la Documentation 3D par Photogrammétrie pour l'Archéologie et la Bioarchéologie: Récentes Applications et Concepts de Recherches en Contexte Académique et Contractuel," *Archéologiques* 33 (2020): 81–98.

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contaminated soils, especially in urban settings. They are also required to adapt to various conditions, including heat or cold waves and heavy rains. Health and security are major issues. In 2010, the death of a long-time and highly respected archaeologist at the bottom of a trench shook up the profession and led to increased regulation and control by provincial health and safety inspectors. A few years later, inadequate handling of contaminated soils led to heavy sickness symptoms experienced by half of a team, including Kolhatkar. Indeed, this event – and not low wages, lowest-bidder framework, or skill devaluation – was central to triggering the awareness that general disrespect and mistreatment had been normalized by the workforce and that worker organizing was long overdue. Health and safety issues opened the door to voicing other concerns.

In short, the workers who go into the field with university training grounded in a publicly oriented vision of the importance of the work and of its inherent scientific value are unable to perform their labour to this ethical standard. As Nicolas Zorzin writes, "Without options, archaeologists are not in a position to challenge the present system of organisation, nor to take any ethical decisions on the fieldwork. Here, ethical decisions could consist of, for example, challenging the legitimacy of a development project based on their archaeological expertise and their critical point of view as citizens, thus conflicting with corporate obligations, which in turn could potentially threaten their position in units and compromise their career."[31] In a British context, Paul Everill calls these workers (or "diggers") the proletariat of archaeology.[32] Zorzin, in research based largely on interviews with workers who have quit the profession in Québec, has called them "a reserve army."[33] These critiques have great merit in linking precarious employment relations to neoliberal regulation and the capitalist imperatives that narrowly circumscribe the social value of the work. But in overemphasizing the practical irrelevance of professional standards and normative professional commitments, they fail to identify the sources of collective mobilization and power required to organize these workers.

Organizing Precariously Employed Professionals

Precarious employment here is defined as low-wage, insecure work providing little in the way of workplace benefits or health and safety protections.[34] The workers on the committee identified simply as precarious (*précaire)* and

31. Zorzin, "Archaeology and Capitalism," 123.

32. Paul Everill, "British Professional Archaeology: Antiquarians and Labourers; Developers and Diggers," in Yannis Hamilakis and P. G. Duke, eds., *Archaeology and Capitalism* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2007), 119–136.

33. Zorzin, "Archaeology and Capitalism," 123.

34. Leah F. Vosko, ed., *Precarious Employment: Understanding Labour Market Insecurity in Canada* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

as precarious professionals (*professionels précaires*). Identifying as precarious signals that workers refuse to accept the status quo as normal or just, and the identifier has grounded a culture of solidarity in anti-capitalist mobilization targeting the state.[35] Unionization, however, requires that workers ascribe workplace injustice to employers and calculate that the balance between risks and rewards favours a unionization attempt. In emphasizing dependence on employers and insecurity in labour markets, precarious identification is likely to undermine workers' confidence in collective action and resistance, and it may be defeatist inasmuch as it points toward "exit" rather than "voice" as the solution to workplace injustice.[36] Workers in precarious employment may be more likely to ascribe their dissatisfaction to the nature of work in their sector or to the state's perceived regulatory failure, as a result of having experienced generally poor working conditions in a variety of firms.[37] With respect to the risk/reward calculation, reliance on intermittent contracts heightens the implicit threat of employer retaliation, raising the costs of union activity while interfirm mobility reduces the incentives to organize any one particular workplace.[38] This calculation is especially discouraging both for precariously employed workers and for the unions that seek to organize them under the Wagner Act model, which is premised on high-conflict, individual workplace–based accreditation.

It is partly for reasons of low workplace commitment that the literature on the collective action of precarious workers has emphasized the multidimensional nature of precarity and the increased salience of extra-workplace social relations and identities as a basis upon which to mobilize and build workers' power against employers and the state.[39] Precarity should not be conflated, however, with de-skilled work or work that has been emptied of meaning or affective attachment. Precarious work can involve different degrees of worker

35. Bret Neilson & Neil Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, 7–8 (2008): 51–72.

36. Kevin Doogan, *New Capitalism?* (London: Polity Press, 2009); Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (London: Polity Press, 2008), 247.

37. Melanie Simms & Deborah Dean, "Mobilising Contingent Workers: An Analysis of Two Successful Cases," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 36, 1 (2015): 173–190.

38. Valerio De Stefano, "Non-standard Work and Limits on Freedom of Association: A Human Rights-Based Approach," *Industrial Law Journal* 46, 2 (2017): 185–207.

39. Cynthia J. Cranford & Leah F. Vosko, "Conceptualizing Precarious Employment: Mapping Wage Work across Social Location and Occupational Context," in Vosko, ed., *Precarious Employment*, 43–66; Rina Agarwala, "Redefining Exploitation: Self-Employed Workers' Movements in India's Garments and Trash Collection Industries," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 89 (Spring 2016): 107–130; Sarah Mosoetsa, Joel Stillerman & Charles Tilly, "Precarious Labor, South and North: An Introduction," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 89 (Spring 2016): 5–19.

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skill, autonomy, vocational identity, and even class location.[40] Occupational identities have been mobilized to organize precarious workers on a sectoral instead of a workplace basis, and the persistence of these work-based identities have grounded calls for responding to precarity by way of rebuilding occupational unionism, guilds, and the professions.[41]

Professionalism is classically understood as a middle-class signifier built on the basis of an occupational closure afforded by the control that discretionary use of abstract knowledge affords over the labour process.[42] Beyond occupational closure, professionalism is compatible with other organizational principles, including trade unionism, and indeed, the Canadian labour movement is increasingly composed of professional workers.[43] This requires adaptation, taking into account the ways in which commitments to meritocracy, public service, professional status, and reputation overlay and dampen the likelihood of professional workers defining their interests collectively in opposition to those of their employers. Professionals are notably wary of attributing workplace dissatisfaction to employer discretion, although this would seem not to be an insurmountable barrier to their mobilization, at least exceptionally in already unionized contexts or in non-union forms of collective action.[44]

An aversion to attributing blame to employers is thus overdetermined by precarious employment and professional identifications and labour-market experience in sectors characterized by precarious work. Precariously employed professionals may not be wrong to attribute workplace injustice to the organization of work, neoliberal regulation, or the undervaluation of

40. Iain Campbell & Robin Price, "Precarious Work and Precarious Workers: Towards an Improved Conceptualisation," *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 27, 3 (2016): 314–332.

41. On sector-wide organization of precarious workers, see Peter Ikeler & Giovanna Fullin, "Training to Empower: A Decade of the Retail Action Project," *Journal of Labor and Society* 21, 2 (2018): 173–191; on the potential to rebuild occupational unionism, see Dorothy S. Cobble & Leah F. Vosko, "Historical Perspectives on Representing Nonstandard Workers," in Françoise F. Carré, Marianne A. Ferber, Lonnie Golden & Stephen A. Herzenberg, eds., *Nonstandard Work: The Nature and Challenges of Changing Employment Arrangements* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 291–312; on calls for rebuilding the professions as a means of countering precarious work, see Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

42. Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism Reborn: Theory, Prophecy, and Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

43. Marion Crain, "The Transformation of the Professional Workforce," *Chicago-Kent Law Revue* 79, 2 (2004): 543–615; Shelagh Campbell & Larry Haiven, "Struggles on the Frontier of Professional Control: Leading Cases from Canada," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 33, 4 (2012): 669–689; Larry Savage & Michelle Webber, "The Paradox of Professionalism: Unions of Professionals in the Public Sector," in Larry Savage & Stephanie Ross, eds., *Public Sector Unions in the Age of Austerity* (Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2013), 114–125.

44. Legault & Weststar, "Capacity for Mobilization"; Simms & Dean, "Mobilising Contingent Workers."

their labour, and workplace organizing against employers may well not represent to their eyes a credible solution to grievances born of precarious work. Perceiving workplace grievance in terms of neoliberal regulation and social undervaluation is likely to reaffirm shared employer/employee commitments to embattled professional values while it also "lets employers off the hook" by normalizing self-exploitation, as Donna Baines has observed in her study of care workers.[45] For precariously employed workers, professional identification carries the danger of rationalizing precarity and exploitation on the grounds that the work is its own reward.[46]

In summary, aversion to ascribing injustice to employers, shared commitments to the nature of the work, and fear born of unstable and unequal relations with employers pose considerable barriers to unionization. Overcoming employer opposition requires that workers place a high value on unionism prior to having experienced its benefits. Unionization campaigns rely on one-on-one conversations in which workers are brought to an understanding of the necessity and viability of forming a collective organization that alone can represent their interests as workers within the employment relationship. These campaigns take time, must be conducted in secret, and do not permit the deliberative spaces in which workers may articulate their own understandings of their workplaces and relations with employers, or engage themselves in the types of activities they regard, whether rightly or wrongly, as better suited to their milieu. By not requiring workers to subscribe to a conflictual understanding of employment relations, the formation of workers' committees sets a lower bar for participation, and it permits workers to learn through the experience of collective organization and action that workplace relations are, nevertheless, conflictual and that collective organization can deliver better work.

Step 1: Informal Organization and Norm Setting

Half of the workforce, and nearly all of the employers, belong to a professional association – l'Association des archéologues du Québec (AAQ) – whose remit is to develop the practice of archaeology in Québec. As with most such associations, the AAQ is dominated by employers, who are largely responsible for financing the organization and control the executive directly or passively, via an implicit threat to exit. The CNTAQ was formed by worker members of the AAQ as a response to the latter association's failure both to advance the profession and to represent the interests of its precariously employed wage-earning members. In preliminary discussions with the workers' committee that would

45. Donna Baines, "Moral Projects and Compromise Resistance: Resisting Uncaring in Nonprofit Care Work," *Studies in Political Economy* 97, 2 (2016): 124–142.

46. Daniel Mercure & Marie-Pierre Bourdages-Sylvain, *Travail et Subjectivité: Perspectives Critiques* (Québec: Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2017).

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eventually become the CNTAQ, various possible solutions to precarious work, including unionization, were set aside. The committee members were leery of the term "union" (*syndicat*) and were concerned about the implications of a unionization attempt on their relations with employers. They genuinely valued these relationships and the professional community they made possible. They also exhibited deference to employer authority that is partly rooted in their vulnerability on the labour market and is partly a reflection of the broader neoliberal culture. Committee members favoured a process that they would control, that would evolve through an open and consultative process, and that would seek to maintain the widest possible consensus within the community even as it foregrounded the interests of the contractual workforce. The committee came to agree on a strategy of re-regulating the sector in the workers' interests by, first, building a worker-controlled organization and, second, drafting a pattern agreement based on the demands generated in the process of mobilizing workers and conferring with employers in an informal negotiation process.

Initially, the committee understood its project as a consultative exercise. This consultative orientation derived from the mandate the committee had given itself, which was to identify practical solutions to the problem of precarious work. The consultative mandate at times served as a shield to protect committee members from the charge that they were stirring up trouble, exaggerating problems, or imposing foreign ideas. The committee relied on a rigorous methodology meticulously explained to all to in order to avoid such a dangerous exposure. To this end, the committee published reports on a regular basis on the CNTAQ website and organized numerous conferences open to all, employers and employees alike, so that all could follow the project's proceedings and development. When the committee members felt targeted or "individualized," they reminded the community of the essentially consultative nature of the process – that it was one of reflecting and aggregating information rather than imposing a direction, and that such a direction flowed from the consultative work everyone could freely check. Continuous consultation also sought to ensure that the committee did not develop its understanding too far ahead of the community. This was dictated by the nature of what the committee referred to as a "normalization project." As one of the leaders put it, "if the community doesn't understand the cause of a problem, the solutions we propose will fail, and we will once again be reproached as biased and seeking confrontation."[47] The information sessions also served to bolster the legitimacy of the committee and maintain momentum. This practice of reporting back and deliberation derives from political organizing. The committee members had all participated in the 2012 Maple Spring, a province-wide student strike that brought down a neoliberal government over the issue of tuition fee increases.

47. CNTAQ email exchange, 27 May 2018.

The first organizing activity involved inviting workers in groups of six to ten to meet in the evenings at organizers' apartments around takeout and drinks, with the intent of agreeing on wage rates and work standards to impose across the sector. The invitations were sent through professional online networks, word of mouth, and email lists compiled through the personal networks of committee members. Approximately one-third of the total workforce attended this first series of roundtable meetings.[48] Workers would not share wage and income information in the small group setting and so the committee launched an anonymous web survey to reveal to the community how low wages, poverty-level incomes, and recourse to unemployment insurance were common experiences and could not be considered individual failures.[49]

The discussions were framed by questions eliciting work experiences, grievances, and demands, including the changes to work rules, wages, and benefits that would be required to ensure better work. The ability to share personal experiences of having felt pressured to work without pay, having worked without adequate health and safety protections, and having participated unwillingly in the destruction of artifacts dispelled what Robert Merton referred to as "pluralistic ignorance": a situation in which a majority of group members privately reject a norm but, by incorrectly assuming that most others accept this violation as normal, go along with it.[50] This sharing of grievance, violations of shared norms, and the attribution of harm to employers and sector regulation was encouraged by the informal small group setting, the conviviality of the atmosphere, and likely also the assurance of anonymity provided by university ethics protocols. These discussions raised worker expectations and were productive of solidarity and identification with the committee.

Employers were consulted twice in the process. The first series of interviews was conducted with the optic of better understanding employers' perspectives on and frustrations with current regulations and their relations with clients. The committee used these interviews to gain a better understanding of the contracting process and to identify where workers and employers shared common grievances and interests. Employer comments were synthesized in a report that stressed areas of shared interest – in particular, the frustration of not being able to do quality work, the absence of norms around health and safety, and the general dependence on the large client firms.[51] In presenting this document in a public information session, making it available on the website and through social media, the CNTAQ was able to frame employer interests in ways consistent with its project of normalizing working conditions. The committee would patiently explain how only a workers' organization capable of enforcing wage

48. CNTAQ, *Rapport sur les Tables de Réflexion*.

49. CNTAQ, *Rapport du Sondage*; CNTAQ, *Rapport du Second Sondage*.

50. Cited in Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, 36.

51. CNTAQ, *Rapport des Consultations Menées auprès des Employeuses*.

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floors and working standards across the sector could overcome the competitive firm practices that were at the root of commonly perceived problems. The second series of employer consults was conducted under the optic of negotiating specific articles in the pattern agreement and the salary scale. Again, these negotiations were transcribed, presented publicly, and made available on the website.[52]

The committee maintained in public discourse a "common interest" frame that attributed low pay and poor work standards to faulty sector regulation, interfirm competition, and the low value placed on the work, rather than to employer malfeasance. The committee positioned the demand for better work as a response not only to the employers' own professed commitment to quality work but also to their privately voiced frustrations at having to cut corners to satisfy client pressures in the context of what was perceived as faulty regulation. This frame was constructed through appeals to professionalism. Committee members came up with a slogan to encapsulate this: "By the community for the community, not by the market for the client." This common-interest frame was constantly put forward in the committee's public communications in the hope of keeping employers onside, and it allowed the committee to proceed with building its legitimacy while the employers felt themselves to be consulted and even involved to some extent in the process of standardizing professional work. Shared commitments to professionalism not only allowed but required this common framing. Importantly, the framing dampened employer fears and delayed employer counter-mobilization.

The appeal to professionalism catered to creating power in contradictory ways. By framing demands for improved wages and working conditions in terms of values that the employers must publicly uphold, professionalism reaffirmed an already established bond between workers and their employers. At the same time, the public claim that precariously employed workers could not perform work of a professional quality put pressure on the employers by implicitly tarnishing the public image that they must maintain. The scientific rigour of the research and the common-interest framing sought to delegitimize this perspective. Common-interest framing in terms of professional values also allowed the committee members to use AAQ spaces strategically for the purposes of organizing and outreach.

The demands for improved working conditions raised in the worker consults were synthesized in a sectoral pattern agreement (*contrat-type*) of six pages and twenty articles. The *contrat-type* is a tool to improve work standards that artists' unions and associations in Québec use when collective bargaining is not considered feasible.[53] These are short documents intended to be used

52. CNTAQ, *Rapport des Consultations … sur la Version 2 du Contrat-Type, Été 2018.*

53. Maude Choko, "L'Autonomie Collective au Service de la Protection des Travailleurs Autonomes: Comment Favoriser leur Accès à un Travail Décent à la Lumière du Cas des Artistes au Québec," PhD diss., McGill University, 2015.

as models by the members of these associations in their individual contractual relations with employers or clients. The CNTAQ contract specifies work standards, including employer responsibility for ensuring a healthy working environment, in the lab and in the field (Art. 13, 14, 15); per diems, travel and hospitality policy (Art. 6, 7, 8); and minimum work-hour protections (Art. 12). The contract also refers to provincial employment norms legislation in the matter of overtime and vacation pay (Art. 10, 11), included as a pedagogical device after the consults revealed widespread employer violations of employment norms. A salary scale with wage floors (importantly, not fixed rates) set according to four classifications is included as an annex to Art. 4.[54] The floor allows for workers with greater experience and/or credentials to bargain individually above these rates within given categories.

The salary scale was constructed as an extension of the worker consults. The workers justified their wage demands on the grounds of material quality of life, the attainment of university credentials, and work experience. Following the consults, a subcommittee was formed and trained on how to conduct job comparisons for the purposes of wage setting. Workers were asked to submit job evaluations by classification and these were scored according to the criteria used by the province's treasury board (Sécretariat du Conseil du trésor) and pay equity legislation.[55] The scores were attributed treasury board rankings (18, 23, 27, and 31 for "technician," "assistant," "specialist," and "project leader," respectively), which specify wage floors of $25, $30, $35, and $40 per hour, respectively. These results were reported back to the community using public meetings, the web, and social media. They were communicated powerfully alongside the survey findings on current wages, incomes, and reliance on social assistance.

The CNTAQ's pattern agreement derived its legitimacy from the consultative process, including the employer "interviews" or informal negotiations, the university-legitimated research conducted on comparative remuneration, and detailed reference to work standards legislation (*Loi sur les normes du travail*, *Loi sur la santé et sécurité au travail*) and other official documents. The document reflected back to the community as a whole what they themselves had identified as working conditions necessary to produce work of a professional standard. It made explicit and public a set of norms that were privately held prior to the organizing and consulting work. Its effectiveness proved uneven and modest. In the winter 2019 season, an online survey used to evaluate wage increases showed that wage rates had increased by an average of $2 per hour for the lower grades.[56] More informally, workers reported that working conditions

54. CNTAQ, *Rapport des Comparaisons Salariales : Archéologues Professionnels et Professions Équivalentes* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2019), electronic report.

55. The committee received advice and training on comparative remuneration from a colleague.

56. CNTAQ, *Rapport du Second Sondage*.

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including basic site infrastructure were being communicated prior to hiring. Workers ascribed these limited gains to the work of the CNTAQ. They proudly sported the CNTAQ logo on their helmets, wallets, and other personal belongings and sent pictures of this to the committee for anonymous publication. These gains fell short of addressing precarity in the sector, however, and were unevenly applied. A distinction became apparent between "good employers" who were converging on CNTAQ norms and "bad employers" who were continuing as before.

The limits to the CNTAQ's normalization strategy became increasingly apparent in the 2018 and 2019 seasons. Two factors stand out: the beginnings of an employer counter-mobilization, and the inability of the CNTAQ to enforce the compliance of low-road employers. Counter-mobilization first emerged at the AAQ's 2018 spring conference. Worker mobilization may have posed a mounting threat to employers' power, the more so as the CNTAQ had begun expanding its work toward a broader archaeological ethics that tied working conditions to questions of scientific rigour, heritage preservation, and responsibility toward the public.[57] At the general assembly, an executive from one of the major archaeological firms lectured the CNTAQ, arguing that while it was legitimate to mobilize around improved wages and job security, it was "presumptuous" to criticize the sector's loose scientific and ethical standards, and this was insulting to employees and employers, along with the universities, the ministry, and other institutions that composed Québec's archaeological landscape. Resounding applause from employers, executives, project leaders, and some members of the AAQ's executive board demonstrated that this perspective was widely shared among the upper strata of the sector. As the season progressed, some employers began to confront the CNTAQ more aggressively, targeting specific individuals as a means of estranging workers from the committee.

This was a pivotal moment because it revealed the material conflict that underlay the employers' "we are all archaeologists" discourse. While the CNTAQ resumed its work for the remainder of the summer and fall of 2018, it was felt that an important battle had been lost and that a consensual project of normalization was foundering on the class contradictions at play. Likewise, while the CNTAQ continued producing research showing that precarious employment is the result of poor sector regulation – an attempt at avoiding direct conflict with employers – workers began to feel that the consensual frame promoted by the CNTAQ would not hold for much longer. Without this consensus, the CNTAQ would be ineffective in shaping wages and working standards in the market. Furthermore, in the absence of legal protections for non-union associative activity, open employer hostility made it difficult to involve more workers in CNTAQ activities. The organization remained

57. CNTAQ, *Déclaration d'Intention: Vers une Archéologie à Échelle Humaine* (Montréal: CNTAQ, 2018).

dependent on the unsustainable work of a core group of activists, who began to feel isolated and vulnerable.

Step 2: Unionization

The awareness that unionization was becoming necessary came not from the CNTAQ but from various workers who began broaching the question in private with Kolhatkar. He contacted a small group of workers, unrelated to the CNTAQ, to take part in an initial meeting, resulting in a further meeting with a larger group and two representatives from the CSN. The CNTAQ's public work had allowed workers to assess one another and learn who could be trusted with a full-fledged unionization campaign. CSN representatives acknowledged the important work done by the CNTAQ, as it had mapped the sector precisely and done the work that would be needed to evaluate a sector's needs. It was felt, however, that unionization should not be pressed and that the CNTAQ's strategy of implementing a standard agreement should be given more time. Union representatives emphasized the risks of what would be a long campaign to organize firm by firm until most of the sector was accredited.

The summer 2019 season saw little change in wages or employment practices: wages below scale for many grades and insufficient to raise workers at the lower grades above the poverty line; sanitary infrastructures that would not meet government standards, let alone CNTAQ minima; inadequate provision of water and protective gear; work enforced during heat waves; and no progress on benefits that would allow workers to build careers. Subjectively, however, this was perceived differently in the context of normalization. Below-scale wages and inadequate infrastructure were now perceived as injustices that could be attributed to employers who refused to respect the norm. Interestingly, this was perceived as unjust not only to workers but also to firms that had raised standards in an attempt to meet CNTAQ norms. The variation in wages and working conditions that workers experienced as they cycled from one firm to another now appeared more significant, and employer arguments that lower wages and inadequate working conditions were dictated by varying market conditions only reaffirmed the need for sector-wide regulation.

The CSN was contacted once more to discuss the risks and benefits of a unionization process, and at the end of the summer of 2019, this same small group of workers decided to proceed with unionization. The organizing committee began assessing which workers to approach to create an informal structure with leaders in various strategic places, with broad coverage among firms, at various career levels and with influence over their peers, and which workers to avoid if it was felt that they were rising quickly within their firms or had close contact with their employers. The SNAQ-CSN was officially registered at the end of September 2019. A card-check certification campaign was launched in October; during regular evening meetings at the CSN's headquarters on De Lorimier Avenue, the committee built careful lists with

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colour-coded assessments of worker attitudes toward unionization (red to avoid, yellow for unsure, green for yes). At the end of each meeting, committee members were assigned a list of names to contact for card signing.

The arguments for unionization reprised many of those that the CNTAQ had developed, including the need for a sector-wide solution to wage-based market competition and an emphasis on finding solutions that would benefit both workers and employers. It was argued that both employers and employees were harmed by poor sector regulation and that unionization was required to improve the practice of archaeology in Québec. It should be noted that while these arguments were prepared by the SNAQ committee, they were already widely accepted by workers at large. Indeed, the campaign was seldom met with resistance or strong debate regarding the pros and cons of unionization. Unionization was mostly understood as the logical next step in the process that the CNTAQ had launched, now carried forward by new people within a new structure.

The campaign did not go as the CSN representatives had planned. It was over very quickly, with a comfortable signature-to-employee ratio for every major firm secured by mid-November, after only six weeks of campaigning. It did not rely on the production of any union materials or communications that a formal communications committee might have produced. The organizing committee was disciplined, well organized, highly motivated and benefitted from an accurate map of the sector and thus was highly autonomous from the CSN. When the CSN representative filed the cards with the labour board on Friday, 29 November 2019, it was the first time in his experience that union accreditations covering nearly all firms in a sector had been filed in a single day. When he communicated these results by phone and in person to employers on Monday, 2 December, he was amazed to find that not a single employer had realized that a union campaign was underway – this despite approximately 100 contractual archaeologists, representing 60 per cent of the workforce, having been contacted. This discretion speaks to a newly won understanding of workers having interests distinct and in conflict with those of their employers. It is of particular significance given the close affective and personal ties that have long overlain employment relations in this profession, as well as the aversion of both the CNTAQ and SNAQ to recognize in their public discourse that workers and employers have opposing interests.

Concluding Discussion

The precarious professionals whom we collaborated with work in a sector defined by the marketized and project-based provision of a public good by privately owned firms – a typical neoliberal construct. Their success has been conditioned by constraints and opportunities that are particular to this form of work organization. Both the public nature of the work and the normative commitments to work of a professional quality created an opportunity for

worker activists to reframe sectoral interests in ways that effectively mobilized precariously employed workers. The public nature of the work, and the professed mixed (material and normative) motivations of employers, allowed the CNTAQ to increase the salience of normative concerns relative to the imperatives of competitiveness and profit maximization. The structural critique of neoliberal marketization was designed to externalize conflict within the employment relationship and thus avoid, or at least delay, employer countermobilization. In the initial absence of any union interest in organizing these workers, the supportive role of academics in this process may be considered as a further condition of possibility. Contributions in the form of material resources, knowledge, and social legitimacy were especially important in the early phase of the project. Academics should play this role, if only to better understand informal processes of worker organization that are otherwise difficult to study.

The members of the CNTAQ organizing committee are representative of a cohort of highly educated young people in Canada and Québec who have graduated into degraded labour markets that offer little in the way of unionized employment. Their choice of working in the field of archaeology derived from their desire to perform meaningful work as much or more than it did professional-class aspirations. Professional discourse can well be regarded as an attempt at rent-seeking or class differentiation when voiced by traditional middle-class occupational groups.[58] When professional discourse is mobilized by low-waged precariously employed workers, we might recognize that behind this middle-class invocation lies a more radical demand that expresses producer pride and echoes distantly the historical claims of workers to exercise control over the labour process. Appeals to professional identity and values tap into deep frustrations felt by workers who have chosen to work in a low-paying field because they care about the nature of the work. The inability to perform work to a scientific standard is experienced as a hurt added to the harm of low pay and absence of benefits. If, for the employers, the choice of having pursued a passion does the work of justifying low wages, the workers' demand for organization is a refusal of this bargain: we cannot perform work to a high professional standard because we are precariously employed.

This contradictory pairing of professional and precarious identification was central to the motivations of the worker leaders on the CNTAQ committee. While the commitment to professionalism and very low levels of trade-union consciousness initially foreclosed a unionization attempt, this same commitment also explains why these leaders were willing to invest so much of their time and energy in worker organizing. The investment they have made in their skills, and their commitment to the work itself, foreclosed "exit" as a solution to their precarity. The activism of the committee members was driven not only by the refusal of precarious employment but also by their professional

58. Terence J. Johnson, *Professions and Power* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

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attachment to the work and their insistence that it be better valued. Organizing to improve wages and working conditions is, beyond the question of material necessity, a means of increasing the value that society accords to their line of work. Organizing for better pay and working conditions is their solution to the tension between professionalism and precarious employment.

In organizing, the CNTAQ made selective use of tactics inspired from the "organizing model" as well as from mobilization theory that were offered up in academic exchanges.[59] The small group meetings were designed to collectivize a sense of grievance. Attendance and participation at public meetings were structure tests of the organization, and the small wins were designed with a view to increasing confidence in collective organization. By contrast, the SNAQ ran a traditional card-check campaign that would not have succeeded without this "deep organizing" and the divisions between workers and employers that this organizing brought to the surface. However, both the CNTAQ and the SNAQ went to great lengths to avoid attributing blame to employer discretion, a key moment in the organizing model and in mobilization theory. This is strongly suggestive of the subjective barriers to unionization among a workforce characterized by youth, precarious employment, and professional aspirations. Québec contractual archaeologists did arrive at an experience of collective grievance against workplace injustice, and this did lead them to successful unionization. It is worth summarizing how this process occurred circuitously via the activities of a workers' committee rather than in the context of a union campaign.

As a non-union organization, the CNTAQ was able to research the sector in full view of the employers and, indeed, with significant participation on their part. This resulted in a very detailed map, with information on firm-level contracting and employment practices. Research work allowed the CNTAQ to identify worker leaders and to evaluate the trustworthiness of most of the workforce. By socializing worker experience and soliciting workers' demands, the CNTAQ allowed workers to see beyond their individual circumstances and gain an understanding that their dissatisfaction with the work and their remuneration was a common experience and not an individual circumstance or failure. The process of self-organization, leading to small victories without significant employer backlash, increased the confidence of workers that collective organization can make a difference to wages and working conditions. Most important was the creation of a powerful norm, legitimated by worker participation, academic research, and government instruments and work standards. This norm only marginally shifted employer practices. As employers largely failed to respect this norm or attempted to meet it in a highly uneven fashion, workers experienced a shared frustration at employer discretion. They also came to understand that without a legally protected right to collective

59. Particularly influential were Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*; Bradbury, Brenner & Slaughter, *Secrets of a Successful Organizer*; and McAlevey, *No Shortcuts*.

bargaining, norm setting alone would be insufficient to address precarious work. When employers did begin to mobilize against the CNTAQ, they were forced to abandon in practice their oft-stated disavowal of their distinct interest as employers, revealing the conflictual nature of employment relations in the sector. Finally, the CNTAQ's work created a shared consciousness or culture that allowed the SNAQ committee to meet workers on a nearly universal understanding that wages and working conditions were inadequate and that sector-wide constraints were necessary to change employer behaviour.

We believe it unlikely that this could have been achieved through patient one-on-one discussions between union organizers and workers in the context of a card-signing campaign. Changed understanding occurred as a result of self-organization, collective action, and shared reflection. Workers' committees set the bar lower for worker participation and avoid risks related to conflicts with employers who, in a profession characterized by precarious employment, hold tremendous power over their employees. Informal worker organization prior to launching campaigns also reduces the risks to unions. In this case, it was only after a process of self-organization that a union made the calculation that these workers were worth the investment of union staff time.

Workers' committees are unstable formations with complexly determined trajectories. Whether such committees eventually opt for unionization can only be considered a contextual matter, involving factors such as the class location of the workers, emerging threats to professional status, employer strategic response, the politics of worker leaders, and union interest in mounting a campaign. In our case, the CNTAQ did seek to be recognized by employers as a legitimate association for the purposes of collective negotiations, sought an audience with the ministry to discuss a re-regulation of the sector, and was ultimately rebuffed on both accounts. If the employers had taken the threat of unionization more seriously, they would have recognized the CNTAQ as a means of blocking union entry, and the CNTAQ would likely have served this function. That they did not take this threat seriously, we believe, speaks to a complacency among small employers of precariously employed workers who, it is generally understood, have very little recourse to unionization under existing labour law. The CNTAQ was expected to fade away, not to serve as a bridgehead for the CSN.

Neoliberal capitalism is a laboratory of work organization and employment forms that diverge from the standard employment model. Unions that attempt to follow the work beyond this model will need to experiment in the process and form of worker organizing and consider adapting union discourse to new worker subjectivities. It is suggestive of the lack of trade-union consciousness in this generation of highly educated precariously employed workers that, in a struggle to improve their wages and working conditions, they would decide first to form a committee instead of a union. The first step on the road to unionization may be not to convince workers that they must challenge employer power if they are to improve their working conditions,

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but to support them in their decision to organize themselves. In organizing, the nature of capitalist employment relations will rise to the surface, and it is likely that unionization will come to be understood as necessary, if only for the legal protections that this affords associative activity. For precariously employed professionals, further adaptations to union repertoires may require a recognition of how professional identification can mobilize workers and create liabilities for employers even in the absence of attributing workplace injustice to their discretion. The demand for collective representation arises from a gap between precarious work and professional aspiration, while the desire to improve wages and working conditions is often conjoined with larger social demands to reorganize and revalue the work according to a professional standard.