

## Community Influences on Attitudes Towards Unions.

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Article abstract

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# *Community Influences on Attitudes Towards Unions*

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The central focus of industrial relations research is on overt behavior, whether manifested in union joining, grievance activity, collective bargaining or strikes. Much less attention has been directed to the attitudinal basis of this behavior.<sup>1</sup> Past inquiries into union attitudes have typically focused on the determinants of union joining,<sup>2</sup> or member participation in unions.<sup>3</sup> Results from these attitudinal studies have been rather fragmentary.<sup>4</sup> One can detect, however, a predominant tendency to account for differing beliefs about unions in terms of personal characteristics such as age, marital status, type of work, and years of union membership.<sup>5</sup> There also appears to be a long-standing consensus in the literature that most workers support unions for instrumental rather than ideological reasons.<sup>6</sup> A recent national U.S. survey thus found that the predominant view of unions stressed individual gains through collective bargaining.<sup>7</sup>

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Our understanding of the determinants of attitudes towards unions — be they supportive, indifferent, or negative — is thus still quite rudimentary. Moreover, a number of major weaknesses have been identified in such studies. For example, their scope has been restricted mainly to employees in one organization or to union members. This has created a narrow empirical base, a problem compounded by the lack of public-private sector comparisons.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the instrumentalism hypothesis suggests that workers only support unions when they feel dissatisfied with the material rewards of their job.<sup>9</sup> This ignores the possible role of organizational factors and the employee relations practices of management in predisposing workers to collective bargaining. It has also been pointed out that studies of unionization fail to recognize that workers' union attitudes may vary according to their motives for joining.<sup>10</sup>

In short, the prevailing view of the determinants of union attitudes is based on the characteristics of individual workers, who are often union members, and their degree of dissatisfaction with the work situation. A more comprehensive understanding of union attitudes would result, however, were this perspective broadened to encompass a) perceptions of unions within the general public, and b) an emphasis on how such opinions are shaped by large-scale social and economic structures. This paper represents a first step in this direction, focusing on the impact of aggregate-level community characteristics on residents' attitudes regarding unions.

By drawing together scattered references in the literature, we document that community characteristics are indeed considered formative in patterns of industrial relations. Industrial relations scholars may intuitively agree that public opinion influences community industrial relations in a variety of ways — such as the propensity of worker to organize unions or go on strike, the nature of public back-lashes during industrial disputes, and public policy concerning unions. Yet to our knowledge this paper is the first attempt to examine systematically how the characteristics of a community shape residents' views of unions. Using data from a 1981 survey conducted in the western Canadian cities of Edmonton and Winnipeg, we address the following research question: are the differences in attitudes towards unions found in the populations of these two cities simply a result of variations in residents' individual characteristics, or do macro-level community attributes also contribute to the formation of these attitudes?

## THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

For sociologists community is a basic unit of analysis in many investigations of the quality and structure of social relationships.<sup>11</sup> We will limit our discussion to local communities, although it is important to recognize that the concept is of sufficient scope to incorporate any relationship with «a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time».<sup>12</sup> This comprehensive definition illustrates how the notion of community forces the analyst to adopt a more holistic view of individuals within their larger social context.

Despite its usefulness in social analysis, the notion of community has received little attention from industrial relations scholars. A notable exception is a 1965 symposium published in *Industrial Relations*.<sup>13</sup> In it Seidman observes that the focus of industrial relations researchers on occupational, industrial, or labour market factors has directed attention away from the community where the enterprise is located and in which management and workers reside.<sup>14</sup> Yet Derber asserts that there is «a persuasive logic in the hypothesis that union-management relations are significantly influenced by community environment».<sup>15</sup> Community thus provides a useful vantage point for industrial relations research.

The classic statement of how industrial relations patterns reflect community characteristics is Kerr and Siegel's cross-national analysis of the inter-industry propensity to strike.<sup>16</sup> Their thesis rests on the effects of social isolation and integration, both of which define the character of social relations within a community. Industries with a high strike propensity — such as mining, maritime shipping and longshoring — are typified by a large number of workers performing unpleasant jobs in isolated, socially homogenous settings. In contrast, industries with a low strike propensity — such as railroads, agriculture and trade — tend to employ workers who are integrated into the social fabric of a larger and more industrially diverse community. «The most general explanation of the inter-industry propensity to strike», conclude Kerr and Siegel, «is the nature of the industrial environment and, particularly, its tendency to direct workers into isolated masses or to integrate them into the general community».<sup>17</sup> The wide variation in levels of unionization and strike activity across regions in both Canada and the U.S. seems to lend credence to the 'isolated mass' explanation. Anderson and Gunderson tentatively arrive at this conclusion after noting the high incidence of strikes in construction, mining, transportation equipment, iron and steel, and pulp and paper between 1966 and 1975 in Canada.<sup>18</sup> The location of many of these industries in single-industry towns further suggests

that social and demographic factors which coalesce at the level of the community must play a more prominent role in the analysis of industrial behaviour.

Stern's research has advanced the furthest in this direction.<sup>19</sup> He attempts to identify which community factors underlay varying levels of strike activity in 243 U.S. metropolitan areas during 1968-1970. By utilizing a cross-sectional model he is able to account for 59% of the variance in inter-city strike rates in terms of city population size, level of unionization, plant size, national bargaining, and economic vulnerability. Results show that city size is the crucial factor. The economic position of the workers is of secondary importance, while industrial structure exerts only a weak effect. Stern suggests that high strike cities may differ along other socio-economic dimensions, such as income inequality and quality of life. However, the implications of these additional differences for industrial relations have yet to be explored<sup>20</sup>.

It is also important to recognize that occupational characteristics, when coterminous with local communities, may influence the industrial attitudes and behaviour of workers. Indeed, a hallmark of the single industry town with a tradition of labour militancy is the close connection between work and community life. In short, the social bonds forged through close work relations and common job experiences become rooted in the larger social environment. This creates what is referred to as an 'occupational community'. We thus find, for example, that a major correlate of union participation is a sense of community based upon recurrent interactions with other union members on and off the job.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, the size of a community may help explain variations in industrial relations. Studies of white-collar unionism indicate that when such workers live in smaller towns, their greater direct exposure to unions may facilitate unionization.<sup>22</sup> The more personal social relations in smaller towns may also provide unionizing employees with support in the face of opposition from management.<sup>23</sup> However, there also is some evidence suggesting that large U.S. cities are more highly unionized than smaller cities, independent of key variables such as region, occupation or sex.<sup>24</sup> This hypothesis has not been tested with current data, nor have the characteristics associated with size been examined in order to account for this difference.

Studies of American auto workers have emphasized the centrality of blue-collar community life in shaping workers' union attitudes and behaviour. One study found that the degree of union participation and union orientation among Michigan auto workers was related to their degree of integration in the plant, the local neighbourhood and the wider com-

munity.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, the level of union participation was negatively associated with the degree to which workers were integrated into the community through membership in voluntary organizations. Another study found that United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of American International Union (U.A.W.) members living in suburbs tended to withdraw from union affairs more so than their urban-dwelling counterparts.<sup>26</sup> These suburban workers developed a more individualistic and conciliatory approach to solving work problems as they strived to achieve the middle class ideals of their new environment. But on the other hand, many blue-collar workers tend to remain in their traditional working class communities. This low mobility fosters close neighbourhood ties based on extended kin and friendship networks which, in turn, forge a distinctive working class outlook.

In sum, a variety of studies suggest that community characteristics, independent of the attributes of individual residents, exert a formative influence in industrial relations. There is, however, recent evidence which appears to run counter to the general thrust of this argument. Getman's study of voting behaviour in National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections downplays industrial and residential location, finding that workers' pre-campaign attitudes towards unions were a much better predictor of how they voted.<sup>27</sup> But we must also consider the possibility that workers' attitudes towards unions are more complex than acknowledged by Getman and other researchers. For example, the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey found that U.S. workers generally agree that unions are large, powerful institutions requiring government regulation. In contrast, instrumental beliefs regarding the economic benefits of unions varied along the lines of education, region and union membership.<sup>28</sup> This evidence of attitudinal multi-dimensionality suggests that only certain clusters of union-related attitudes may exhibit inter-community differences. Beliefs that unions are too powerful are frequently diffused through regional and national news media. Alternatively, beliefs that union members benefit from their affiliation may vary across communities, depending on local histories of industrial relations.

The preceding literature review yields a simple working hypothesis which will guide our analysis of survey data. After controlling for the effects of individual characteristics, we expect to find significant differences in union attitudes between residents of the two cities from which we draw our sample. An important corollary is that because we measure a range of union attitudes, we also expect to find greater inter-city variation on some dimensions than on others. Our choice of cities allows us to consider which of the following community features exerts most influence on union at-

titudes: industrial structure, general economic climate, community social relations, and the historical nature of trade unionism and class relations. Indeed, Winnipeg and Edmonton are a study in contrast in terms of their socio-economic and labour history.

## DATE AND MEASUREMENT

The 1981 Edmonton Area Study was the fifth survey in an annual series administered and supported by the Population Research Laboratory and the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. A Winnipeg Area Study was simultaneously undertaken by members of the Sociology Departments of the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg. The two studies used identical questionnaires in one-hour long structured interviews with residents of these cities in February of 1981. In both communities, up-to-date municipal records were used to generate simple random samples of household addresses. One adult (18 years of age or older) was to be interviewed in each household. The final samples of 400 in Edmonton and 336 in Winnipeg represented response rates of 75% and 74% respectively.<sup>29</sup> Comparisons with census data showed the samples to be representative of the cities from which they were taken in important demographic aspects.<sup>30</sup>

A set of 14 Likert-style attitudinal statements about unions in general, the benefits they provide for workers, their role in contemporary society, and the amount of power they wield were administered by interviewers to sample members. Respondents answered using a 7-points «strongly disagree — strongly agree» response scale. Eleven of the items were selected from the Uphoff and Dunnette unionism in general scale; three were taken from the survey instrument used in the 1977 York University «Social Change in Canada» study.<sup>31</sup> Minor wording changes were made in some of the Uphoff-Dunnette items to more accurately reflect contemporary Canadian industrial relations and to make the items applicable to the general population, not just to blue-collar industrial workers.

## FINDINGS

The attitude statements and the average responses to each for both cities and the two cities combined are displayed in Table 1, ranked by level of agreement. It is interesting to note, first of all, that respondents in these two cities share certain beliefs about unions. Nine of the 14 attitude statements do not differentiate between the two cities. In addition, sample members agree more strongly with statements about workers' right to refuse

unsafe jobs, about the power of big unions, and about the benefits of union membership than they do with statements about the necessity for all employees in a unionized workplace to join the union. The moderate level of agreement with *both* the ideas that unions are too powerful and, on the other hand, that they benefit their members may seem contradictory. But our literature review would lead us to anticipate this outcome. In other words, it is possible for individuals to have positive as well as negative attitudes toward unions, depending on which component of the union's function and role in society is being considered. This observation is even more noteworthy given the virtually identical findings of the U.S. 1977 Quality of Employment Survey.<sup>32</sup>

More important for this paper, however, are the statistically significant differences between cities in responses to five of the items. Edmonton residents were more likely to agree that «workers should have the right to refuse to work in conditions which they consider to be unsafe», although both cities showed very high levels of agreement with this statement. Winnipeg residents were significantly more likely to agree that unions provide better wages and working conditions, that they are necessary for dealing with selfish employers, and that the growth of unions has strengthened democracy. In sum, Winnipeg residents are more likely to believe that union membership is beneficial to workers. Similar city differences do not appear for the items about powerful unions or for those regarding union membership rights.

In order to answer our research questions, we conducted factor analyses (for the two cities combined and for each separately) to reduce the fourteen attitudinal items into a smaller number of reliable attitude indices.<sup>33</sup> Examination of the results (not shown) suggested that two distinct and interpretable scales could be constructed. The first, labelled «big labour» (Alpha = .76), is composed of the average of responses to the four statements about overly powerful unions, their negative effects, and the need for government control of unions (the average of items 3, 4, 7 and 10 in Table 1). The second scale, labelled «business unionism» (Alpha = .68), taps the instrumental «bread and butter» assessment of unions as providing material benefits for members (the average of items 5, 6 and 9 in Table 1).<sup>34</sup> These two scales are remarkably similar in content to two of the union attitude factors identified in Kochan's analysis of the 1977 U.S. Quality of Employment Survey.<sup>35</sup> In that national study the two scales were weakly negatively correlated ( $r = -.19$ ), as they also are in our two-city study ( $r = -.26$ ). In both our samples, respondents who agreed that unions provided economic benefits for their members also tended to disagree with the «big labour» sentiments, and vice versa.



TABLE 1  
Attitudes Toward Unions: Edmonton and Winnipeg, 1981

	average scores <sup>a</sup>		
	Edmonton	Winnipeg	Total <sup>b</sup>
1. Workers should have the right to refuse to work in conditions which they consider to be unsafe.	6.58	6.27 <sup>c</sup>	6.44
2. Employees should have representatives on the board of directors of the organization for which they work.	5.48	5.39	5.44
3. The high wage demands of unions contribute directly to inflation.	5.06	5.20	5.12
4. We need more laws to limit the power of unions.	4.88	4.81	4.85
5. Employees of an organization have better wages and working conditions when all of them belong to a union.	4.56	5.18 <sup>c</sup>	4.84
6. A non-union employer generally pays lower wages than a unionized employer.	4.47	5.12 <sup>c</sup>	4.76
7. Unions impose too many restrictions on employers.	4.66	4.66	4.66
8. During a strike, management should be prohibited by law from hiring workers to take the place of strikers.	4.66	4.60	4.64
9. The selfishness of employers can be fought only by strong unions.	4.15	4.67 <sup>c</sup>	4.39
10. Labour unions should be regulated to a greater extent by the government.	4.37	4.40	4.38
11. The growth of unions has made our democracy stronger.	3.90	4.28 <sup>c</sup>	4.07
12. If the majority of workers in a workplace vote to have a union, the others should be required to join.	3.61	3.62	3.61
13. Most unions gain their membership by forcing workers to join through threats and intimidation.	3.50	3.38	3.44
14. Workers should have to join a union in order to hold a job.	2.20	2.34	2.26

<sup>a</sup> Average of the «strongly disagree (1) - (7) strongly agree» numeric responses given to each question.

<sup>b</sup> N = 400 for Edmonton and N = 336 for Winnipeg. About 5% to 8% of the sample did not respond to most of the items with about 10% non-response for items 6, 7 and 10, and 16% non-response for item 13.

<sup>c</sup> Statistically significant differences between cities ( $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 2**  
**Attitudes Toward Unions: «Big Labour» and «Business Unionism»**  
**Scales by City, Union Membership, Employment Status and Sex**

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>average scores<sup>a</sup></i>	
	<i>Big Labour<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Business unionism<sup>c</sup></i>
City:		
Edmonton	4.75 (378) <sup>d</sup>	4.41 (372)
Winnipeg	4.77 (314)	4.98 (308) <sup>e</sup>
Union Membership:		
Yes	4.11 (176)	5.25 (179)
No	4.98 (516) <sup>e</sup>	4.46 (501) <sup>e</sup>
Employment Status:		
Employed full-time	4.63 (376)	4.66 (376)
Not employed full-time	4.91 (316) <sup>e</sup>	4.68 (304)
Gender:		
Male	4.58 (325)	4.69 (323)
Female	4.91 (367) <sup>e</sup>	4.65 (357)

<sup>a</sup> Average of the «strongly disagree (1) - (7) strongly agree» answers.

<sup>b</sup> Average of items 3, 4, 7, and 10 in Table 1.

<sup>c</sup> Average of items 5, 6, and 9 in Table 1.

<sup>d</sup> Parentheses contain sub-sample sizes.

<sup>e</sup> Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ).

Average scale scores are compared across categories of several independent variables in Table 2. As expected, after examining the individual attitude items in Table 1 we find a statistically significant difference between cities on the «business unionism» scale. Residents of Winnipeg are more likely to agree that unions improve the economic situation and working conditions of their members. City of residence does not have a significant effect on the «big labour» scale, but the opposite is the case for the other three independent variables. Union members, those who were employed full-time, and men were less likely to agree with the idea that unions are too powerful and should be regulated. These zero-order differences show that the two scales can differentiate between population sub-groups. Further, they also demonstrate the need for a multi-variate analysis. Table 2 does not reveal whether it is union membership status, employment status, or gender which

most affects perceptions of unions as big and too powerful, since a higher proportion of males are employed full-time and belong to unions. Similarly, we cannot tell whether it is city of residence, union membership, or a combination of both which determines the strength of «instrumental» attitudes toward unions.

Multiple regression analysis of the two attitude scales combined gender, employment status, union membership status, and city of residence with a wide array of other independent variables. The extra demographic variables were age and marital status (married/not married). Additional social status variables were total 1980 household income (measured in 47 categories), years of education, home ownership (yes/no), and occupation (binary variables for managers, professionals, clerical/sales/services, and blue collar occupations, with at home/retired/student as the residual category). Other work-related measures were the number of months of full-time employment in the year previous to the interview and the total number of full-time jobs ever held. Binary variables for whether the respondent's spouse was a union member and for whether the respondent's father had been working in a blue-collar job when the respondent was 16 years of age were also included as indirect measures of contact with union ideas.<sup>36</sup> Finally, several other attitudinal measures were included as independent variables. One was a Likert-style measure of overall life satisfaction, another asked the respondent to compare his/her present financial state to that of a year previous; and a third was constructed from two «powerlessness» items.<sup>37</sup>

The step-wise multiple regression analyses identified several key explanatory variables for each of the two attitude scales. The addition of further independent variables to the equations failed to appreciably increase the amount of explained variance. Nor did it significantly alter the effects of the key predictor variables. Hence, the analyses were re-run using only the independent variables identified as important in the earlier broader examination. These reduced-form multiple regression equations are presented in Table 3.<sup>38</sup>

City of residence did not have an important net effect on the «big labour» scale responses and is retained in the equation to demonstrate that fact. Thus, for some beliefs, namely that unions are too powerful and need to be controlled by government, city of residence matters little. Much as expected, however, union membership exerts a strong negative effect on this dimension of union attitudes. We also find that those in clerical/sales/service occupations were more in agreement with «big labour» sentiments, as were home owners and those who evaluated their financial position as improving.

TABLE 3

**Attitudes Toward Unions: Reduced-form<sup>a</sup> Multiple Regression  
Equations for the «Big Labour» and «Business Unionism» Scales**

*A. dependent variable = «big labour»*

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>st. error</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>r</i>
City (Edmonton = 1)	-.029	-.075	.096	0.62	-.008
Union member	-.290	-.874	.110	63.18	-.289
Clerical/sales/services	.098	.267	.098	7.36	.113
Home owner	.090	.241	.097	6.13	.093
Financially better off than one year ago	.066	-.130	.072	3.28	.040
Constant		4.467			

N = 692 Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .101

*B. dependent variable = «business unionism»*

City (Edmonton = 1)	-.157	-.457	.113	16.50	-.207
Union member	.223	.716	.125	33.05	.254
Managerial occupation	-.116	-.641	.214	8.97	-.165
Spouse union member	.129	.541	.162	11.12	.140
Total household income (1980)	-.095	-.010	.004	5.57	-.114
Age	.068	.006	.004	3.09	.073
Constant		4.659			

N = 603 Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .133

<sup>a</sup> The other independent variables used in the regression equations, and then dropped from the analysis, are discussed in the text.

The second reduced-form equation in Table 3 demonstrates an aggregate-level impact of city of residence on attitudes toward unions, thus supporting our hypothesis. Controlling on other important variables, Edmonton residents were significantly less likely to agree that unions provide economic benefits and improvements in working conditions for their members (Beta = -.157). Significant positive effects were also found for union membership of both respondent (Beta = .223) and spouse (Beta = .129). Managers as well as individuals with higher 1980 household incomes were less likely to agree that unions served the immediate interests of their membership. After controlling on as many relevant individual-level variables as the data permitted, we still find that city of residence exerts a significant effect on instrumental attitudes toward unions.<sup>39</sup>

## DISCUSSION

To summarize, we have not found a «community» effect on individuals' agreement with the «big labour» image of unions. As we suggested earlier when commenting on a somewhat similar U.S. finding, the pervasiveness of this belief may be a function of its frequent repetition in regional and national news media. At the same time there exist inter-city differences in the «business unionism» type of attitudes which cannot be accounted for by variations in the personal characteristics of the residents of these cities. In the remainder of the paper we will explore four possible macro-level explanations of why Winnipeg residents believe more strongly than do their Edmonton counterparts that unions provide members with tangible benefits. An examination of the differences in industrial structure, general economic climate, social relations, and union character of these two cities may yield useful generalizations about the role of community characteristics in shaping public perceptions of unions.

Differences in the industrial structures of the two cities do not appear of a sufficient magnitude to explain the differences in attitudes. The distribution of the Edmonton and Winnipeg survey samples, respectively, in major industrial categories is as follows: 8.7% and 10.1% in manufacturing, 8.2% and 5.1% in construction, 7.7% and 11% in transportation and communications, 14.5% and 13.7% in trade, 3.7% and 6.3% in finance/real estate/insurance, 35.5% and 35.1% in service industries, 9% and 11% in public administration and defence, and 6% and 0.6% in oil and gas. In brief, Winnipeg has a more developed manufacturing, transportation, and financial base; Edmonton has greater employment concentration in oil and construction. What diminishes the possible impact of these contrasting industrial structures on industrial relations is the prevalence of blue-collar workers in four of these five sectors. Furthermore, the presence of oil/mining and transportation in such industrially diversified urban settings would not likely produce the divergent industrial relations patterns which Kerr and Siegel attribute to these two industries. One should thus look beyond basic industrial profiles for community factors underlying city differences in union attitudes.

Edmonton's relatively large oil and construction sectors reflect the city's central position in Alberta's energy-induced economic boom during the 1970s. Manitoba's economy during the same period is most aptly described as stagnant. Consequently unemployment was higher, incomes were lower, and there were generally fewer economic opportunities for workers in Manitoba than in Alberta. During February of 1981, when the surveys were conducted, the seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate in

Manitoba was 6.3% compared to 4.4% in Alberta.<sup>40</sup> The average weekly income (in firms of more than 20 employees) in the same month was \$301 in Manitoba and \$377 in Alberta.<sup>41</sup> While these differences in the economic climate are not as pronounced as others found inter-regionally in Canada, they clearly document that economic opportunities were more limited in Winnipeg than Edmonton in 1981.

Resident's subjective assessments of their city round out this objective picture. Respondents were asked to rate their city on the semantic differential dimensions of «poor economic climate — good economic climate» and «poor chance to get ahead — good chance to get ahead». On a scale of 0 to 100, Edmonton residents had average responses of 72 and 78 respectively for these two items. Winnipeg residents, in contrast, were much less positive about their city's economy, with average scores of 45 and 60 respectively.

The less favourable economic climate in Winnipeg may therefore partly account for why its residents believe that unions serve as a means of improving wages and working conditions. The more buoyant Alberta economy, conversely, is likely to engender an individualism which leads workers to shun unions in the hope of 'making it' on their own. Using Hirschman's distinction between the 'exit' and 'voice' options for expressing discontent, it appears that workers in a boom economy like Alberta's can more easily rely on 'exit' as a mechanism for achieving what they desire in a job because opportunities are plentiful. On the other hand, Manitoba workers may more readily seek a 'voice' option in the form of trade unions due to the relative immobility which pervades the labour market.<sup>42</sup>

Another factor associated with Alberta's expanding resource economy which may affect industrial relations is rapid population growth. During the 1970s Edmonton was widely known as a 'boom town'. Between 1976 and 1981 the city's population grew 18.1%, compared with a 1.2% increase in Winnipeg's population.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Alberta's major urban centers of Edmonton and Calgary were among Canada's most rapidly expanding cities during the 1970s. Population growth meant a faster pace of social change. One significant result was a relatively unstable and mobile workforce. In the energy and construction sectors this characteristic combined with the temporary nature of many work sites to make it easier for employers to ward off unionization. The absence of stability and social cohesion within the workforce, as Lucas found in his study of single-industry towns during their recruitment phase, tends to make union activities difficult.<sup>44</sup>

Another plausible macro-level explanation focuses on the quality of social relations. Rapid population growth in a city may be associated with weak personal ties among residents. This might reduce social cohesion, as

well as residents' sense of identification with and commitment to the community. Accordingly, Winnipeggers are likely to share a stronger feeling of community: 26.2% of the Winnipeg sample had always lived in that city, compared to only 13% of Edmonton respondents. Insights relevant to Edmonton's situation may be derived from the Affluent Worker Studies conducted in the British auto manufacturing town of Luton.<sup>45</sup> The researchers concluded that the residents' high rate of geographic mobility constituted an important demographic characteristic of Luton «as a community»<sup>46</sup>. The workers' orientations towards their jobs, in addition to being related to their reasons for moving to Luton, were reinforced by the rapid growth of the town: «Because Luton is, as it were, a town of migrants, even those inhabitants who have not themselves been geographically mobile are nonetheless significantly affected by the mobility of others».<sup>47</sup> This puts succinctly the impact a community can have on the activities and attitudes of its workforce. Although the Luton workers were unionized, they could be distinguished from other workers by their strong instrumental orientation to work and a privatized life-style, as evidenced by a lack of kinship or neighbourhood ties. At the risk of stretching the parallels between the character of the Edmonton and Luton communities too far, it can be suggested that the process of rapid population growth contributes to how Edmontonians view unions.

But to what extent can perceptions of unions also be a product of the local industrial relations scene? A comparison of unionization levels and strike activity reveals that Edmonton and Winnipeg have more in common than one might expect in light of the above discussion. In 1975, when the cities were of similar size, Winnipeg had only several thousand more union members than did Edmonton.<sup>48</sup> This fact must be considered within the context of more rapid union growth in the province of Alberta than in Manitoba during the 1962 to 1977 period, again an outcome of the former's expanding economy.<sup>49</sup> In terms of industrial conflict, both provinces recorded about one-third the number of person-days lost per paid worker due to strikes and lockouts as did the country as a whole between 1975 and 1979.<sup>50</sup> The Alberta rate was only .03 person-days less than the Manitoba rate, hardly a noteworthy difference. The major contrast, then, is between the relatively low level of industrial conflict in these two provinces and the much higher national average. A finer breakdown of strike data reveals that in 1980, the year directly preceding the survey, the city of Edmonton experienced substantially more industrial conflict than did Winnipeg.<sup>51</sup>

While these recent data on union membership and strikes portray something of the distinctive character of a community's pattern of industrial relations, it is useful to probe more deeply into the historical

record. Each community has its own tradition of unionism which largely mirrors its organization of social classes and their degree of consciousness. This historical line of inquiry offers compelling hypotheses for future research, despite the difficulty in empirically measuring exactly how a tradition of unionism rooted in the past affects contemporary industrial relations.

In 1919 Winnipeg was the site of one of the most powerful demonstrations of working class militancy in North America labour history.<sup>52</sup> The Winnipeg General Strike — in which the city's growing industrial labour force struggled to gain collective bargaining rights — ended in failure but the legacy of the event lived on. For our purposes the interesting question is how the strike, as a manifestation of strong working class organization in the city, left a permanent mark on the collective conscience of the Winnipeg population. We have documented the fairly high degree of stability among the city's residents. This helps sustain the proposition that the succeeding generation of workers inherited the under-currents of class identification and conflict which surfaced in the 1919 strike.

Bercuson's analysis of the general strike supports this somewhat speculative argument. He claims that the class divisions accentuated by the strike still remain, finding geographical expression in the form of a solid working class community in the north end of the city. To elaborate: «Fifty years after the general strike there were still bitter debates over its causes and meaning... The Winnipeg general strike has been the key event in the collective memories of both groups who fought it. The strike provided the original mythology and martyrology that strengthened division within the community... generations grew to maturity who continued to re-fight the battle in 1919 in almost every arena of social conflict, from school sports to the street battles of excitement-seeking juveniles to civic and provincial politics.»<sup>53</sup> Bercuson thus detects a continuity between the 1919 strike and the election of a social democratic provincial government fifty years later. There can be little doubt that early working class experiences in a community help cast an ideological framework within which future politics and industrial relations are played out. It is in this respect that Winnipeg's labour history may have influenced the perceptions of its current residents towards unions.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that while individual characteristics are important in accounting for differences in attitudes towards unions, they alone cannot account for attitudinal differences across communities. Sociology



has long recognized the importance of community for explaining the actions and beliefs of individuals. Some industrial relations scholars have also pointed out the centrality of social integration and cohesion, group homogeneity, and value systems — all rooted within the local community — in patterns of industrial relations. Our analysis of survey data from two western Canadian cities provides some empirical support for such a thesis.

The most significant finding to emerge from our comparison of Winnipeg and Edmonton is that while residents of both cities shared a «big labour» set of beliefs, they differed significantly in responses to the «business unionism» scale. In probing the community-related factors which might underly this divergence in attitudes, we examined industrial structure, general economic climate, social relations, and union tradition. In our opinion, differences in the local industrial structures are less likely than the other three factors to have produced the different union attitudes, but the speculative nature of the analysis cautions against any overly-broad generalizations.

Despite this, we would argue that future research into attitudes towards unions would profit from paying careful attention to the community-level factors we have identified. Future research could also usefully address the question of why «big labour» beliefs are more pervasive than are «business unionism» attitudes, which we have found to differ considerably between communities. Finally, this paper also raises some further questions about individual differences in union attitudes. Why are people in lower white-collar occupations more likely to maintain a big «labour» perspective about unions? Similarly, why do those with a middle-class standard of living (home owners and those who feel that their financial position has improved) perceive unions as overly-powerful? These questions which link class position and union attitudes present interesting directions for future inquiry.

Returning to our concern with community differences, we note in conclusion that of the four macro explanations we explored, the historical pattern of class relations and unionism is the most difficult to test. The city of Edmonton is now (1983) experiencing the full weight of the economic recession, with high unemployment and little population growth. This sets the stage for a follow-up study, which we would like to conduct in the mid-1980's, to measure the impact of a recession on residents' union attitudes. In light of our present analysis, we would hypothesize a convergence in attitudes between the populations of the two cities as their economic circumstances become more alike. However, if this is not the case then perhaps the historical traditions of unionism will be elevated to a more prominent role as an explanation of community differences in attitudes toward unions.

1 Thomas A. KOCHAN, «How American workers view labor unions», *Monthly Labor Review*, 102, April 1979, 23.

2 Studies of union joining which examine employee attitudes towards unions include: Julius G. GETMAN, Stephen B. GOLDBERG and Jeanne B. HERMAN, *Union Representation Elections: Law and Reality*, New York, Russell Sage, 1976; Chester A. SCHRIESHEIM, «Job Satisfaction, Attitudes Toward Unions, and Voting in a Union Representation Election», *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 63, 1978, 548-552; J. Malcolm WALKER and John J. LAWLER, «Dual Unions and Political Processes in Organizations», *Industrial Relations*, 18, 1979, 32-43; Louis U. IMUNDO Jr., «Attitudes of Non-Union White-Collar Federal Government Employees Toward Unions», *Public Personnel Management*, 5, 1974, 87-92; D.E. MERCER and D.T.H. WEIR, «Attitudes to Work and Trade Unionism Among White-Collar Workers», *Industrial Relations Journal*, 3, 1972, 49-60; Michael E. GORDON and Larry N. LONG, «Demographic and Attitudinal Correlates of Union Joining», *Industrial Relations*, 20, 1981, 306-311; F.C. COOK, S.C. CLARK, K. ROBERTS and Elizabeth SEMEONOFF, «White-Collar and Blue-Collar Workers Attitudes Toward Trade Unionism and Social Change», *Industrial Relations Journal*, 6, 1975-76, 47-58; Bagar HUSAINI and James A. GESCHWENER, «Some Correlates of Attitudes Toward and Membership in White-Collar Unions», *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 48, 1968, 595-602; Russell L. SMITH and Ann H. HOPKINS, «Public Employee Attitudes Toward Unions», *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 32, 1979, 484-495; A.J.M. SYKES, «Some Differences in the Attitudes of Clerical and of Manual Workers», *Sociological Review*, 13, 1965, 297-310; B.C. ROBERTS, Ray LOVERIDGE, John GENNARD and J.V. EASON, *Reluctant Militants: A Study of Industrial Technicians*, London, Heinemann, 1972.

3 Studies of member participation which examine attitudes towards unions include: William H. FORM and H. Kirk DANSEREAU, «Union Member Orientations and Patterns of Social Integration», *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 11, 1957, 3-12; William SPINRAD, «Blue-Collar Workers as City and Suburban Residents — Effects on Union Membership», in Arthur B. SHOSTAK and William GOMBERG (eds.), *Blue Collar World: Studies of the American Worker*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1964, 215-225; D.L. TAGLIACOZZO and J. SEIDMAN, «Typology of Rank and File Members», *American Journal of Sociology*, 61, 1956, 546-553; Nigel NICHOLSON, Gill URSELL and Jackie LUBBOCK, «Membership Participation in a White-Collar Union», *Industrial Relations*, 20, 1981, 162-178. For a useful overview of research on attitudes towards unions see George STRAUSS, «Union Government in the U.S.: Research Past and Future», *Industrial Relations*, 16, 1977, 215-242.

4 STRAUSS, *op. cit.*, 217.

5 See, for example, the early and influential study by Walter H. UPHOFF and Marvin D. DUNNETTE, *Understanding the Union Member*, Bulletin 18, Industrial Relations Center, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1956, 18.

6 See, for example, SCHRIESHEIM, *op. cit.*, 548; SMITH and HOPKINS, *op. cit.*, 491; GORDON and LONG, *op. cit.*, 307-308.

7 KOCHAN, *op. cit.*, 24.

8 SMITH and HOPKINS, *op. cit.*, 491. Several recent studies attempt to overcome these limitations: KOCHAN (*op. cit.*) uses the national sample of the 1977 U.S. Quality of Employment Survey; SMITH and HOPKINS (*op. cit.*) use a five state sample of public employees; and Allen M. PONAK and C.R.P. FRASER compare the attitudes of union activists in the public and private sectors in «Union Activists Support for Joint Programs», *Industrial Relations*, 18, 1979, 197-209. STRAUSS (*op. cit.*) 242, is generally critical of attitudinal studies on methodological grounds. He calls for comparative research utilizing more sophisticated methodologies, and the development of standardized questionnaires.

9 WALKER and LAWLER, *op. cit.*, 34-35.

10 GORDON and LONG, *op. cit.*, 306.

11 See R.A. NISBET, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York, Basic Books, 1966.

12 *Ibid.*, 47.

13 The symposium proceedings were edited by Joel SEIDMAN, *Industrial Relations*, 4, 1965.

14 Joel SEIDMAN, «Community Influences on Industrial Relations», *Industrial Relations*, 4, 1965, 1-7.

15 Milton DERBER, «A Small Community's Impact on Labor Relations», *Industrial Relations*, 4, 1965, 27.

16 Clark KERR and Abraham SIEGEL, «The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike — and International Comparison», in A. KORNHAUSER, R. DUBIN and A.M. ROSS (eds.), *Industrial Conflict*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1954, 189-212.

17 *Ibid.*, 205.

18 John C. ANDERSON and Morley GUNDERSON, «Strikes and Disputes Resolution», in John Anderson and Morley Gunderson (eds.), *Union-Management Relations in Canada*, Don Mills, Addison-Wesley, 1982, 226-227. Fisher's analysis of strikes in British Columbia also lends support to the Kerr-Siegel thesis. See E.G. FISHER, «Strike Activity and Wildcat Strikes in British Columbia: 1945-1975», *Relations Industrielles*, 37, 1982, 291-293. The thesis is not without its critics. See, for example, Edward SHORTER and Charles TILLY, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1974, 286-295, for a rejection of the thesis as an explanation of the historical pattern of strikes in France.

19 Robert N. STERN, «Intermetropolitan Pattern of Strike Frequency», *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 29, 1976, 218-235.

20 *Ibid.*, 232.

21 STRAUSS, *op. cit.*, 222. Two good examples of occupational communities in the U.S. are northern printers and southern textile workers. For printers see Seymour Martin LIPSET, Martin TROW and James COLEMAN, *Union Democracy*, New York, Free Press, 1956 and Robert BLAUNER, *Alienation and Freedom*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1964, ch. 3; for textile workers see BLAUNER, *op. cit.*; ch. 4. BLAUNER, *op. cit.*, 243, claims that occupational communities are rare among urban factory workers, but this hypothesis remains largely untested.

22 See, for example, C. Wright MILLS, *White Collar*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956, 306; Peter BOWEN and Monica SHAW, «Patterns of White Collar Unionization in the Steel Industry», *Industrial Relations Journal*, 3, 1972, 8-34; Graham S. LOWE, *Bank Unionization in Canada: A Preliminary Analysis*, Toronto, Center for Industrial Relations, University of Toronto, 1980, 66-72.

23 LOWE, *op. cit.*, 66-72. It has also been suggested that small and medium size communities may be more conducive to industrial harmony than large urban centers because of the greater interdependence between all segments of the community. See Arnold TANNENBAUM, «Unions», in James G. MARCH (ed.), *Handbook of Organizations*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1965, 732.

24 Ruth KORNHAUSER, «Some Social Determinants and Consequences of Union Membership», *Labor History*, 2, 1961, 39-40.

25 FORM and DANSEREAU, *op. cit.*, 4.

26 SPINRAD, *op. cit.*

27 GETMAN et al., *op. cit.*, 65.

28 KOCHAN, *op. cit.*, 24.

29 For details of sampling procedures see: Clifford KINZEL, «Selected Findings from the 1981 Edmonton Area Survey», Edmonton Area Series Report N° 20, Population Research Laboratory, University of Alberta, August 1981; Raymond F. CURRIE and Charlene THACKER, «Selected Findings from the 1981 Winnipeg Area Survey», Edmonton Area Series Report N° 22, Population Research Laboratory, University of Alberta, April 1982.

30 In order to test the full impact of community-level factors on attitudes, we did not exclude housewives, students, or retirees. This decision is based on the assumption that a community effect would be pervasive across all occupational groups and, further, that any confounding effects of examining groups other than paid workers would be controlled for in the regression equation. Retirees accounted for 8% of the Edmonton sample and 12.8% of the Winnipeg sample; students comprised 4% and 4.2% respectively; and housewives constituted 17.7% and 17% respectively. In the case of students and some housewives we are looking at future participants in the paid labor force.

31 See UPHOFF and DUNNETTE, *op. cit.* Details of the York study are available from the Institute of Behavioural Research, Survey Research Center, York University, Downsview, Ontario, Canada. Despite its age, the Uphoff-Dunnette scale of twenty items of «unionism in general» is still used by researchers. See, for example, GORDON and LONG, *op. cit.* The scale has good validity and reliability, as reported by UPHOFF and DUNNETTE, *op. cit.*, 13-17, 38. ROBINSON et al. note its wide range of item content and careful construction. See John P. ROBINSON, Robert ATHANASIOU and Kindra B. HEAD, *Measures of Occupational Attitudes and Occupational Characteristics*, Ann Arbor, Mich., Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, 1969, 287.

32 KOCHAN, *op. cit.*, 24.

33 The total sample factor analysis and the Edmonton analysis produced three distinct factors. The items about better wages and working conditions (items 5, 6 and 9 in Table 1), about required membership in a union shop (items 12 and 14), and about strengthened democracy (item 11) loaded highly on factor one. The second factor had high loadings for the items about overly powerful unions, inflationary wage demands, and the need for more government control of unions (items 3, 4, 7 and 10). The third factor, with strong loadings for items 1, 2 and 8 in Table 1, was more difficult to interpret than were the other two. The Winnipeg analysis differed only in the splitting of the first factor into two: an improved wages and benefits factor, and a required membership in a union shop factor. While it is not unusual, given the nature of our hypothesis about city differences, to discover different attitudinal configurations in two different cities, these fairly similar results suggest that a careful selection of a limited number of items for two attitude scales would be appropriate for both cities.

34 For both scales, cumulative missing data problems were reduced by taking the average of a minimum of two items. This tactic added about 80 cases to the «big labour» analysis and about 40 cases to the «business unionism» analysis. If fewer than two of the four «big labour» items or less than two of the three «business unionism» items were not answered by a particular respondent, that individual was dropped from analysis employing that scale.

35 KOCHAN, *op. cit.*

36 For the first of these binary variables, single respondents were given the same value (0) as were married/common law respondents with a non-union spouse. Since we did not have information on union membership of respondents' fathers, we chose the much weaker measure of work in a typically unionized occupation.

37 The financial evaluation statement read: «Would you say that you (and your family) are better off or worse off or just the same financially than you were a year ago?» The powerlessness items were: «There's little use in writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average person», and «In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average person is getting worse, not better».

38 Several features of the complete «big labour» equation (N = 604) could be noted. Although the coefficients were not statistically significant, respondents with a union spouse were less likely to agree with the «big labor» sentiments, as were those in blue-collar occupations. Addition of the job satisfaction variable reduced the sample to 408 full-time employed respondents, but did not alter the results beyond revealing a small but significant positive effect for the job satisfaction measure. More satisfied workers were more likely to agree with the notion that unions were too powerful, net of the effects of the other key variables. For the complete «business unionism» equation (N = 594), the effects of income were weakened with inclusion of education, marital status, and home ownership measures, but the other coefficients were fairly stable. Job satisfaction did not have a significant effect on this dependent variable scale (N = 410).

39 When city of residence was used as a covariate (results not shown), a few additional inter-city variations in the effects of the variables on union attitudes became apparent. Home ownership had a significant net negative effect only in the Winnipeg sub-sample. Similarly, age had a positive effect on «business unionism» attitudes only among Winnipeg residents.

40 Statistics Canada, *Canadian Statistical Review*, Ottawa, Supply and Services, February 1982, 47.

41 *Ibid.*, 53.

42 Albert HIRSCHMAN, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1970.

43 Statistics Canada, 1981 Census, interim population data. Part of Edmonton's growth was a result of territorial expansion.

44 Rex A. LUCAS, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971, 61.

45 John H. GOLDTHORPE, David LOCKWOOD, Frank BECHHOFFER and Jennifer PLATT, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behavior*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968.

46 *Ibid.*, 151.

47 *Ibid.*, 151.

48 Winnipeg had 92,444 union members in 320 locals, while Edmonton had 90,226 members in 198 locals. See Statistics Canada, *Corporations and Labor Unions Return Act, Report for 1977, Part II Labor Unions*, Ottawa, 1979, 45.

49 *Ibid.*, 40.

50 Manitoba lost .32 person days per paid worker, Alberta lost .29, while the Canadian average was .94. See Labour Canada, *Strikes and Lockouts in Canada*, Ottawa, 1980.

51 Winnipeg registered 28,070 person days lost due to strikes and lockouts. Edmonton similarly recorded 18,130 person days lost, but when province-wide disputes are included the total for the city jumps to 109,380. Data compiled from Labor Canada, *op. cit.*

52 For historical accounts of the strike see David Jay BERCUSON, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974; D.C. MASTERS, *The Winnipeg General Strike*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950; Norman PENNER (ed.), *Winnipeg 1919*, Toronto, James Lewis & Samuel, 1973.

53 BERCUSON, *op. cit.*, 194.

### ***L'influence de la collectivité locale sur les attitudes envers les syndicats***

Dans l'étude des attitudes du public à l'endroit des syndicats, les chercheurs en relations professionnelles ont généralement retenu comme facteurs explicatifs des caractéristiques individuelles telles le sexe, l'âge, le statut matrimonial et la durée de l'adhésion syndicale. Cet article vise à aller au-delà de ces explications d'ordre individuel en explorant l'influence de la collectivité locale sur l'attitude de la population envers les syndicats. Une étude approfondie des relations professionnelles confirme l'opinion selon laquelle la collectivité locale constitue une variable latente, mais cependant importante, qui laisse percevoir que le nombre de variables communautaires peuvent influencer les relations professionnelles au niveau local.

On a utilisé des données recueillies à Edmonton et à Winnipeg pour vérifier ou tester cette proposition générale. L'analyse des réponses à une série de questions de type Likert, portant sur l'opinion des répondants en le syndicalisme, permet de dégager deux attitudes prédominantes: celle du «syndicat musclé» décrivant celui-ci comme une organisation trop puissante, qui cause l'inflation et exige un fort contrôle gouvernemental; celle du «syndicat d'affaires», laquelle estime que celui-ci procure à ses membres de meilleurs revenus. On a ensuite introduit des analyses régressives multiples dans lesquelles la ville de résidence constituait une variable indépendante binaire et qui comprenaient comme variables additionnelles des variables individuelles (âge, sexe, statut matrimonial, revenus, adhésion syndicale, etc.). On n'a découvert aucune différence significative entre les deux villes pour ce qui est de l'attitude dite du «syndicat musclé». En ce qui concerne l'attitude dite du «syndicat d'affaires», on a identifié des divergences entre les deux villes qui ne peuvent s'expliquer par les caractéristiques personnelles des répondants. Les répondants de Winnipeg étaient d'une façon significative plus enclins qu'à Edmonton à être d'accord avec l'opinion que les syndicats procuraient à leurs membres des revenus plus intéressants.

On a utilisé des éléments additionnels observés au niveau de la communauté locale pour approfondir davantage cette constatation générale. La diversité dans la structure industrielle et les effectifs syndicaux entre les deux villes semble trop peu marquée pour expliquer cette différence dans le comportement de leurs habitants à l'endroit des syndicats. Mais les divergences dans le climat économique et social entre les deux villes et, en particulier, leurs traditions syndicales contraaires peuvent avoir un effet très fort sur la perception qu'a du syndicalisme la population actuelle. En 1981, l'économie locale à Edmonton était beaucoup plus à l'optimisme qu'à Winnipeg. Voilà un facteur qui peut expliquer la différence de comportement envers les syndicats dans l'une et l'autre villes. D'autre part, les attitudes plus positives des habitants de Winnipeg à l'endroit des syndicats peuvent découler de la longue histoire de l'activité syndicale dans cette dernière ville, histoire qui remonte à la grève générale de 1919. Les auteurs ont l'intention de reprendre cette étude du milieu de la décennie 1980, alors que l'économie d'Edmonton ressemblera davantage à celle de Winnipeg en vue de vérifier ces explications. Si l'on constate les mêmes divergences entre les deux villes à l'endroit du comportement de leurs habitants envers le syndicalisme, on pourra en attribuer l'explication à l'histoire du syndicalisme dans les deux villes.