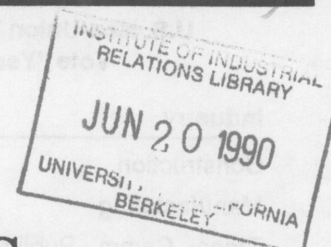


Reporter

June 1990

Number 272



UNION SUPPORT AMONG WOMEN AND MINORITY WORKERS

by Ramon Castellblanch

The stereotype of a union member is a middle-aged Ohio man of East European stock working in manufacturing, or the same man working coal in Pennsylvania. Is this who most unions should be looking to organize? No, most unions should focus their organizing efforts to groups with large numbers of women, minorities, people under 35, and low-income workers. These are the as-yet unorganized workers who are most likely to want a union.

A 1984 Louis Harris Poll commissioned by the AFL-CIO makes this fact clear. The poll asked non-union workers if they would vote "Yes" if their workplace had a union representation election. It shows that lower-skilled and blue-collar non-union workers are far more likely to vote "Yes" than skilled and white-collar workers. Further, it reveals that the service and construction industries are where a union is most wanted and that the Pacific and Mountain states are the U.S. regions where more non-union workers say that they would vote "Yes."

How Different Groups Support Organizing

Table 1 shows that lower-skilled and blue-collar non-union workers were far more likely to vote "Yes" (% Yes) than skilled and white-collar workers.

Table 1
Non-Union Workers Who Would
Vote "Yes" by Occupation

Occupation	% Yes
Professional	24%
Manager, Official	17%
Clerical Worker	27%
Sales Worker	30%
Skilled Craftsman, Foreman	27%
Operative, Unskilled Laborer	43%
Service Worker	50%
All Occupations	34%

The poll shows that some states have higher percentages of workers who would vote "Yes."

Table 2
States With Workers With a
Substantially Higher Probability of Voting for Union

State	% Yes
Washington	48%
California	46%
Kentucky	42%
Michigan	41%
Colorado	40%
Virginia	39%
Wisconsin	38%

Institute of Industrial Relations 2521 Channing Way, Rm. 300, Berkeley, CA 94720 (415) 642-0323
University of California at Berkeley

Center for Labor Research and Education

Table 3 shows that non-union workers in the manufacturing and transportation and public utilities sectors were the least likely to vote "Yes." The table omits public sector workers because the poll did not have good data for them.

Table 3
U.S. Non-Union Workers Who Would
Vote "Yes" by Industry

Industry	% Yes
Construction	45%
Manufacturing	22%
Trans., Comm., Public Utilities	24%
Retail and Wholesale Trade	34%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	24%
Services	37%

The poll also shows the types of businesses where workers are most ready to vote "Yes."

Table 4
Types of Businesses With Workers With a
Substantially Higher Probability of Voting for Union

Type of Business	% Yes
Hotels and Personal Services	47%
Construction	45%
Eating and Drinking Places	42%
Elementary and Secondary Schools	41%
Food Stores	40%
Health Services	38%

How Characteristics of a Group's Workers Affect Union Support

To show why non-union workers in certain occupations, industries, and regions are more likely to vote "Yes," this paper uses regression analysis. Regression analysis helps show which characteristics of a group of workers influence the union vote in the group, while holding all the other characteristics constant.

Table 5 largely explains why some groups are more pro-union than others. The occupations, industries and regions

with more non-union workers ready to vote union tend to have more workers with the table's pro-union characteristics.

The following table shows how adding workers of different backgrounds to a group affects the "Yes" vote. For example, adding low-income workers to an occupational group, an industry, or a region would raise the pro-union vote in that group. Adding workers with more formal education to a group would lower the pro-union vote in that group.

Table 5
How Adding Certain Kinds of Workers to
Group Changes Pro-Union Vote

Raises Pro-Union Vote

Low-Income workers
Ethnic Minority Workers
Women Workers
Workers With Union Tradition*
Workers Under 35 Years of Age

Lowers Pro-Union Vote

Workers Satisfied With Job
Workers With More Education

**Union tradition is past union membership or a union member(s) in the household.*

All other things being equal, unions should orient their organizing efforts on groups with high percentages of women, minorities, people under 35, and low-income workers. Of course, there are other considerations in winning organizing struggles; companies that can easily move or that are impervious to union pressure should be avoided. But these problems should not be universal to all occupations, industries and regions whose workers have above-average union sentiment.

Unions interested in organizing should make further use of polls. Polling data is useful because it helps unions get the most "bang" for their organizing buck. More detailed study about where workers prefer unions is needed. For example, industrial divisions should be separated by occupations. Insurance clerical workers may be more inclined to unions than average insurance workers. Some omitted industries should be studied. The Harris Poll omits building service workers, a rapidly growing group. Better use of polls is an important step that union organizers should take.

This article does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Center for Labor Research and Education, the Institute of Industrial Relations, or the University of California. The author is solely responsible for its contents. Labor organizations and their press associates are encouraged to reproduce any LCR articles for further distribution.