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by

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Trade Union Membership and Activism among Young People in

Great Britain

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Summary

As union membership has fallen, the unions have
increased their recruitment efforts among previously
marginal groups, including young workers. Analysis of
NCDS, a unique source of national individual-level data
on union membership and activism, suggests that for young
as for older workers, union membership tends to "go with
the job" rather than being the product of individual
characteristics. Low membership among young workers
appears to be due more to their over-representation in
poorly unionised jobs than to apathy or antagonism
towards unionism. Current trends in the youth labour
market suggest that membership is likely to decline still
further. The same factors that are associated with a low
probability of union membership are also associated with
a low probability of activism. As recruitment in adverse
circumstances depends critically on the perseverance of
activists, the prospects for the union movement are not
encouraging.

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP AND ACTIVISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN GREAT BRITAIN

Joan Payne

INTRODUCTION

Having risen steadily throughout the 1970's, trade union membership in Great Britain went into decline after 1979 and has as yet shown no signs of recovery. The loss of members has been attributed to rising unemployment, and in particular to the disproportionate loss of jobs in the traditionally well unionised sectors of the production industries. New jobs created in recent years have been predominantly in the service sector and very largely part time — characteristics which are not historically associated with strong unionism.

In response to these changes the unions are increasing their efforts to recruit among groups which in the past they have treated as marginal. Announcing a new recruitment drive, the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union recently stated, 'Our new unionism will address itself to the problems and aspirations of groups of temporary and part time workers, women, young people and members of ethnic minorities who have, quite frankly, been neglected in the past' (The Guardian, Feb. 27 1987). In the case of young workers there is plenty of

scope for action, for their trade union membership has always been low. The 1983 General Household Survey (G.H.S.) showed that only 21 per cent and 24 per cent respectively of male and female full time employees aged 16-19 were members of a trade union or a staff association, whilst membership was roughly three times as great — 67 per cent of full time male employees and 58 per cent of full time female employees — in the age group 45 to 64 (O.P.C.S. 1985). Bain and Elsheikh (1979) have demonstrated that in 1951, 1961 and 1971 union density was significantly less in industries where the workforce was relatively young, though more recent data suggest the differences in union density between groups may now have declined somewhat (Batstone 1987 forthcoming). Nevertheless Bain and Elsheikh's finding has been confirmed at the individual level in two studies based on the 1975 National Training Survey (N.T.S.): Bain and Elias (1985) and Booth (1986) report that when a range of personal characteristics is controlled, age and number of years of work experience are still significantly associated with union membership. In recent years several trade unions have set up youth sections and in some cases lower youth subscription rates have been introduced for the first time. This effort arises partly from a fear that the norms of trade union membership which prevail when a young worker first enters the labour market will influence behaviour throughout the the working life. This fear is compounded by the very large numbers of young workers who at the time of writing are on the Youth Training Scheme (some 347,000 in January 1987), many of whom, if present trends continue, may

go on to join the new Job Training Scheme for under 25's. Though not formally excluded from trade union membership, these young people have considerably lower rates of membership than ordinary employees.

Studies in the field of industrial relations tend to take the workplace as the unit of analysis, and as a result analyses of individual level data on union membership which cover a full cross-section of the population are relatively rare. Studies of young workers are even rarer. One data source which has not until now been exploited for this is the National Child Development Study (N.C.D.S.), which contains information on the membership patterns of a large national sample of 23 year olds in 1981 - a date when the recent decline in union membership was well under way. The first purpose of this paper is to use these data to explore the levels and correlates of trade union membership among young workers. By comparing the results of this analysis with the N.T.S. studies mentioned above, it may be possible to determine whether low membership among young workers results simply from the fact that more of them have the characteristics which are associated with a low probability of membership in an all-age sample of workers, or whether the variables which are correlated with union membership are different for the young. The difference between these two explanations could have implications for the way in which the unions conduct their recruitment campaigns.

There is currently also much political interest in trade union activism, and it might be argued that recent trade union legislation has had the effect of curtailing the power of the activist and increasing that of the non-active member. In so far as the level of activism among the younger generation of trade unionists is indicative of future trends, the academic debate on the explanation of individual activism might usefully be turned towards young people. The second part of the paper uses the N.C.D.S. data to analyse the predictors of activism among young workers.

This analysis is also of interest in that it is based on a national sample, and not, like previous British studies (for example Fosh (1981), Reiner (1978) and Batstone et al (1977)), on a paricular workplace or union. Fosh, summarising the literature on individual activism, identifies several opposing theories. The most important of these, the 'stake in the job' and 'political agitator' theories, posit extrinsic ends to active trade unionism, and against these Fosh provides evidence for her own simpler theory that trade union activists are more likely to be motivated by a belief in the value of collective action. Other writers have suggested that activism is the result of a higher sociability drive. All these theories seek to explain differences in individual levels of activism in terms of differences in personal characteristics, whether of attitudes and beliefs or other more easily measurable attributes. It is a priori plausible to suppose that personal characteristics are indeed more important here than

in the explanation of union membership. Nevertheless if militancy is indicative of activism, some plants, some industries, and even some parts of the country are by reputation far more active than others, and studies based on particular workplaces or unions cannot pick up this variation. Moreover,it is possible that the same changes in occupational structure which are responsible for the fall in union membership are also leading to a decline in union activism, whether or not this is accelerated by recent legislation. It seems useful therefore to supplement previous studies with an analysis based on national individual level data in which the effects of personal characteristics can be compared with the effects of the worker's wider environment.

The work was carried out as part of a larger ESRC funded research project to analyse data from N.C.D.S. on employment histories between the ages of 16 and 23 (1). Other results from this project so far are published in Micklewright (1987) and Payne (forthcoming 1987).

REASONS FOR LOW UNION MEMBERSHIP AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Several explanations have been put forward for why union membership is low among young workers, the relative importance of which has implications for the future strength of the trade unions and for the nature of any effective recruitment campaign. The simplest is the 'exposure effect' described by Bain and Elsheikh (op. cit.): an older worker, in virtue of longer experience in the workforce, has had

more opportunities to join a union. If this were the only explanation the unions should not be worried by low membership among young people, but have merely to wait for them to grow older.

A more sophisticated explanation is that young workers have a different industrial distribution from older workers, tending to be found disproportionately in those sectors of industry, for example the distributive trades and miscellaneous services, which are not well unionised (2). Spilsbury et al (1986), developing this argument, maintain that the non-availability of trade unions at the place of work is the major reason why union membership is low among young people. Using employment history data on 18-24 year olds and examining the changes in membership which accompany job changes, they estimate that if all young people had a trade union at their place of work, their membership levels would be twice as great. The significance of this for the unions depends on the extent to which the occupational and industrial distribution of young workers will change as they move into the adult labour market, and the extent to which the nature of their jobs reflects long-term changes in the country's industrial structure. Other explanations considered by Bain and Elsheikh posit differences in attitudes towards unionism between older and younger people. Older people may value more highly the sickness or superannuation benefits associated with union membership and remember the 'bad old days' before union influence was strong, and young people, with their more prolific

educational qualifications, may rely on individual rather
than collective advancement. Prandy et al show that views
on the value of trade unions contribute importantly to the
prediction of individual trade union membership, but they
see these views as 'forms of adaptation by individuals to
their situation' rather than as causal agents (1983, p.32).
Nevertheless the Deputy General Secretary of the Transport
and General Workers' Union has stated, 'It is generally
accepted that young people have a poor attitude towards
trade unions, and that we and other unions do not do enough
to overcome this' (Morris 1986).

It would be difficult to devise a direct empirical
test of the causal relationships between attitudes and union
membership. An explanation in these terms would however
seem to imply that workers make a conscious individual
decision to join or not to join a trade union. Against
this, there is much to be said for the view that, among
manual workers at least, trade union membership is more
properly regarded in many cases as 'going with the job'
rather than as the product of a personal choice. The
Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys found that in 1980 40
per cent of manual employees in establishments with 25 or
more employees were covered by a closed shop, though by 1984
this had fallen to 30 per cent (Millward and Stevens 1986).
At the other extreme, around a third of establishments in
both years did not recognise any trade union. The report of
the 1980 survey noted the polarisation of membership in the
private sector: over one third of establishments had no

trade union members, either manual or non-manual, while
nearly one third had 90 per cent or more of their manual
workers in trade unions (Daniel and Millward 1983). The
1983 G.H.S. also found that 42 per cent of full time male
employees and 51 per cent of full time female employees in
establishments of all sizes said that there was no trade
union or staff association at their place of work which they
were eligible to join (O.P.C.S. 1985).

Given these facts, it is not surprising that analysis
of the N.T.S. showed that while age and sex were related to
individual trade union membership, other personal
characteristics were insignificant as predictors (Bain and
Elias op. cit., Booth op. cit.). On the other hand region,
industry, establishment size and earnings were all
significant. If analysis of N.C.D.S. gives the same
results, it would support the view that an important
explanation of low membership among young workers lies in
the types of jobs in which they work.

UNION MEMBERSHIP IN N.C.D.S.

N.C.D.S. is a longitudinal study of all young people
who were born in Great Britain between March 3rd and March
9th 1958, plus immigrants born during the same week who
settled in Great Britain before the age of 16. Data on this
cohort have been collected at various intervals from birth
onwards. The most recent sweep of the full cohort, known as
N.C.D.S. IV, took place in 1981 when the respondents were
23. At this age over 12,500 young people were interviewed,

representing 76 per cent of the original birth cohort excluding those known to have died or emigrated. Details of the survey methodology can be found in Shepherd (1985).

Estimates of union membership among 23 year olds derived from N.C.D.S. agree quite well with estimates from the 1983 G.H.S. (3). The latter reports that 47 per cent of male employees in the age range 20 to 24 who were working full time were members of a trade union or staff association (O.P.C.S. 1985, Table 7E); the N.C.D.S. figure for full time male 23 year old employees in 1981 was 48 per cent. The corresponding figures for females were G.H.S. 45 per cent and N.C.D.S. 46 per cent. Thus in this age group women full time employees are only slightly less likely than men to be union members. The G.H.S. figures show a tendency for sex differences in membership levels among full time employees to increase with age, and in fact in the youngest age group, 16 to 19 years, women were more likely to be union members than men. In the N.C.D.S. cohort overall more male employees than females were union members (48 per cent compared to 44 per cent respectively), but this difference resulted in part from the much smaller proportion of men than women working part time (1 per cent compared to 10 per cent) (4).

In addition to the 47 per cent of employees in N.C.D.S. who were union members at the time of interview, a further 15.5 per cent (15.7 per cent of male employees and 15.2 per cent of female employees) had been in a union at

some time in the past but were no longer members. These young people were not asked why they had left their union, but the evidence suggests that the reasons were connected with changes of employment rather than with changes of attitude or belief. Only 12 per cent had held only one job compared with 36 per cent of other employees, and 43 per cent had held more than three jobs, compared to 22 per cent of other employees. Among the women, 16 per cent were currently working part time compared to 9 per cent of other employees.

MODELLING UNION MEMBERSHIP

The sample for the analysis of union membership comprised N.C.D.S. respondents who were in employment as employees at the time of interview at age 23: 3901 males and 3283 females (5). Because the labour market is highly segregated by sex the model was fitted separately for male and females. The dependent variable was binary: current membership yes/no, and the standard technique in this situation is logistic regression. The G.L.I.M. system (C.D. Payne 1985) was used here to fit a straightforward additive model of the form:

$$\log \frac{p}{1-p} = a + bX_1 + cX_2 + dX_3 + \dots$$

where p is the probability of being a union member (and $\frac{p}{1-p}$ are the odds of union membership rather than non-membership), a (the constant), b, c, d... are the coefficients to be estimated, and X_1, X_2, X_3... are the

independent variables.

Both Bain and Elsheikh (op. cit.) and Booth (op. cit.) review in some detail the reasons for supposing that the variables which are included in the model are significantly associated with union membership, and these arguments are not repeated here. Table 1 gives full definitions. Two measures of unemployment are used: the regional unemployment rate at June

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

1981 (when interviewing for N.C.D.S. IV began), and the industry unemployment rate at May 1981 (both classifications being based on Employment Gazette figures) (6). The region variable may also pick up differences in industrial structure and local traditions. Union recognition is measured in two ways: the level of coverage by collective agreements in the industry (based on 1984 New Earnings Survey data) and the respondent's own statement of whether wages or salary or conditions of service were negotiated by a trade union. The latter variable could perhaps also be interpreted as an indicator of the perceived effectiveness of the trade union. Among the workplace factors included are the number of employees, whether the workplace was a branch of a larger organisation, and membership of the private or public sector. The skill and status of the respondent's job is measured by its social class according to the O.P.C.S. 1980 classification, and a separate variable

identifies those in a <u>managerial position</u> (indicated by
their condensed K.O.S. classification). Further variables
relating to the particular job are<u> full or part time
working</u> and <u>gross weekly earnings</u>, with separate bandings
for men and women reflecting their different earnings
distributions. Following the N.T.S. analyses, earnings are
treated as exogenous, though there is some debate (reviewed
by both Bain and Elias <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>. and Booth <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>.) about
whether simultaneous equation estimation methods would be
more appropriate. Personal characteristics include
<u>qualifications obtained during the course of employment</u>
(classified according to the order of precedence used by the
Department of Education and Science), <u>G.C.E. passes</u>,
<u>marital status</u> and <u>children</u>, and whether the respondent had
a <u>second job</u>. A number of aspects of work history are also
measured, namely <u>work experience</u>, <u>past unemployment</u>, <u>total
number of jobs held</u> and <u>time spent out of the labour force</u>.

Coefficients obtained from the additive model of the
log of the odds of union membership can also be expressed as
multiplicative effects on the odds of membership. Odds are
an alternative way of expressing probabilities: in a sample
of 100 workers where 40 are union members and 60 are not,
the probability of being a member is 40 per cent, but the
odds of membership rather than non-membership are 40/60,
i.e. 0.67. In other words, respondents are two-thirds as
likely to be union members as to be non-members. In the
G.L.I.M. system the multiplicative effects corresponding to
the first level of each variable are constrained to the

value one so that all interpretation is made relative to these base categories. The more the coefficient departs from the value one, the bigger is the effect, with a value of greater than one increasing the odds of membership compared to the odds in the base category, and a value of less than one decreasing the odds. These multiplicative effects are reported in Table 2. The 'constant' parameter, 0.04 for men and 0.03 for women, gives the odds of union membership for respondents who are at level 1 of all of the independent variables.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Goodness of fit in the G.L.I.M. scheme is assessed by a measure called deviance. For males, the full model specifying all the independent variables 'explains' 47 per cent of the deviance remaining when the constant term only is fitted, while for females this pseudo-R^2 is 39 per cent.

If a series of separate models is fitted, we can test whether each variable of the full model makes a significant reduction to the deviance, given the independent variables which are already included in the model (7). In the present case variables were added to the model in the sequence in which they are listed in Table 2. The column headed 'significance' reports the P value for the null hypothesis that the reduction in deviance following the addition of the variable to the model has arisen by chance.

RESULTS

The most important single predictor of union
membership in the N.C.D.S. sample is union recognition in
the respondent's job as measured by the respondent's
statement (TUNEG): where there is no recognised union the
odds of membership are reduced to one twentieth for men and
nearly as much for women. This is not surprising given that
employers would have been more likely to grant recognition
where union density was already high, and conversely that
employees would be more likely to think it worth joining the
union if it was already recognised. The 1980 Workplace
Industrial Relations Survey reported that in the
establishments it surveyed, variations in the level of trade
union membership among manual workers broadly followed
variations in the recognition of manual unions. Despite the
very large coefficient for TUNEG in the N.C.D.S. sample, the
classification of industry according to the level of
coverage by collective agreements also has a significant
effect on the odds of membership.

Both measures of unemployment are significant. In
comparison with Greater London and the South East, the odds
of membership in the regions with high unemployment are
doubled for both men and women. This may be due to the very
strong traditions of unionisation in these parts of the
country rather than to unemployment itself. The
relationship between the industry unemployment rate and
membership is complex: the odds of membership are greater
in industries with a high unemployment rate than in

industries with low unemployment, but not as great as in industries where the unemployment rate is only medium. The construction industry stands apart as an industry with an unemployment rate well in excess of any other, and here the odds of membership are less than half the odds of membership in industries with low unemployment. The same pattern is found for both males and females. It seems probable therefore that the effect of industry has more to do with other industrial characteristics and traditions - for example, whether the closed shop is widespread - than with the rate of unemployment.

Working in the public as opposed to the private sector substantially increases the odds of union membership, though by a bigger factor for men than for women. The odds of union membership increase steadily with workplace size, an effect which is also stronger for men. For both sexes, working in a branch of a larger organisation increases the odds of membership in the smallest establishments. The odds of union membership are much lower in professional occupations than in all other social classes, with skilled non-manual workers as the next least unionised group; this is true for both men and women. Note that intermediate workers - for example, teachers, technicians, nurses and local government officials - have much higher odds of membership. There is a strong relationship between membership and being in a non-managerial position: this more than doubles the odds for both sexes. All these findings are as would be expected from a reading of the

literature on union membership.

The findings in relation to part time employment, however, are new. It is well known that part time workers are less well unionised than full time employees, and it is often suggested (for example, by Bain and Elsheikh (op. cit.)) that this is because they are less committed to their jobs than full time workers. In the N.T.S. analysis by Bain and Elias this variable significantly reduced the probability of membership for both men and women (op. cit.). In contrast, in the N.C.D.S. analysis this variable is insignificant for men, and for women, although it just reaches the 5 per cent level of significance, the effect is to slightly increase rather than to reduce the odds of membership. The explanation probably lies in the fact that the N.C.D.S. analysis controls for union recognition (which, it will be recalled, was unavailable in the N.T.S.), for it is likely that the union recognition and the proportion of part time employees in an establishment are inversely related. Another factor involved may be the women's labour market history. The analysis shows that spending six months or more out of the labour force - usually in the present sample because of childbearing and childcare - significantly reduces the odds of membership. An earlier study showed that in many cases the women in N.C.D.S. whose careers were interrupted in this way returned to jobs which were lower in status than the jobs they held before (J. Payne 1985); the downward mobility occasioned by interruptions in women's working lives was also a major finding of the Women in

Employment Survey (Martin and Roberts 1984). Women who are trying to combine employment with the care of young children depend very heavily on finding work which is convenient for transport and hours, and these aspects of a job often outweigh considerations of pay and conditions. Because the job choice of such women is heavily restricted, it is relatively easy for their employers to discourage unionisation if they so wish.

Earnings are also significantly related to the odds of membership. As has been mentioned above, the relationship is probably more complex than the simple one-way causal relationship which the model expresses. With the simple specification adopted here, the odds of membership for men rise with earnings, but at the highest earnings levels they start to fall again. For women the relationship is more erratic and there is no falling off in the odds of membership in the highest earnings band (which starts at a lower figure than the highest earnings band for men). This is probably because the highest earners among women are more likely than men to be in the well unionised intermediate level occupations.

· The results for the qualification variables need interpreting with care. The most common qualifications obtained by men during the course of employment are connected with apprenticeship training, in particular City and Guilds Craft and similar qualifications which are classed at level 2 of the variable TQUL, and lead to

employment in skilled trades. It is not surprising
therefore that the odds of union membership for men with
such qualifications are significantly greater than the odds
for men either with no training qualifications or with
qualifications of a higher standard. For women however the
most common qualifications obtained during the course of
employment are clerical and commercial qualifications such
as the RSA examinations; most of these are also classified
at level 2 of the variable. These qualifications tend to
accompany employment in junior non-manual jobs, which we
have seen have relatively low levels of union membership.
Thus for women, being at level 2 of TQUL appears to reduce
the odds of membership, though the variable as a whole is
not significant. Turning now to G.C.E. qualifications, we
find that for men the odds of union membership are not much
affected by the possession of O Levels, but that having A
Levels reduces the odds substantially. For women the
effects are much smaller, and do not reach significance.
The difference between the sexes almost certainly results
from the segmentation of the labour market for men and
women, with a higher proportion of well qualified women in
the highly unionised intermediate level occupations.

Of the other personal characteristics included in the
model, having a second job and marital status are
insignificant for both men and women. Not having children
is significant for women but the increase in the odds of
membership over women who do have children is small.

The total number of jobs ever held is the only one among the employment history variables which is significant for both men and women. The odds of membership decline as the number of jobs increases, so that for men and women who have held five or more jobs the odds of membership are half the odds for those who have held one job only. Frequent job changing is traditionally regarded as an indicator of lack of personal commitment to a job, which might be expected to lead to lack of interest in union membership. However it also tends to be associated with employment in certain sectors of industry, particularly service industries, which have low wages, high staff turnover, and low union densities (see J. Payne 1985). Thus a case can be made for regarding frequent job changing in some respects as an occupational rather than a personal characteristic. None of the other employment history variables are significant for men. The significance of time spent out of the labour force for women has already been commented on. Because the sample members are all of the same age, the variable WKEX (total number of years in full time jobs) picks up the effects of an interrupted career and of a prolonged education, and is significant at the .05 level for women but not for men. Past experience of unemployment is however insignificant for both sexes.

It has been noted that by far the most important predictor of individual union membership in the N.C.D.S. is union recognition as measured by the respondent's statement. This is a variable that was not available in the N.T.S.

analyses, and some of the predictors of membership which were shown to be important there may act in part through their relationship with union recognition. The N.C.D.S. data provide an opportunity to explore the interactions between these variables. The model was refitted to the subsample of employees who said that their wages or salary or conditions of service were negotiated by a trade union, with sample sizes of 2403 men and 1982 women. The results are shown in Table 3.

Because one of the most important sources of variation in membership has been eliminated, the pseudo-R^2's are much smaller in the subsamples: 21 per cent for men and 10 per cent for women. However, no variables which are insignificant in the larger samples become significant in the subsamples, and, with one exception, all the variables which are significant in the larger samples remain significant in the subsamples. The exception is time spent out of the labour force, which is significant at the 5 per cent level for women in the full sample, and where the value of the coefficient decreases only slightly in the restricted sample. For men, the coefficients for the significant variables which are greater than one in the full sample are also greater than one in the subsample, and similarly for those which are less than one, with the not surprising exception of two levels of the other variable used as an indicator of union recognition, the level of coverage of the industry by collective agreements. For women also, only two coefficients change direction (level 2 of SIZE and part time

versus full time employment), but in both cases the coefficient in the subsample is close to one. Restricting the sample to young people who say their job has a recognised union therefore does not change the general picture of the predictors of union membership. It might be supposed that where there is a recognised union for the respondent's job, personal characteristics might be relatively more important than the other characteristics of the job or the wider working environment as predictors of union membership, but this appears not to be the case. For men, the size of the coefficients for the variables IND2, PRIV, SIZE, SOCL and EARNM are in fact larger in the subsample than in the full sample, and while the coefficients for level 3 of WKEX is also larger, those for the other variables measuring personal characteristics are either somewhat smaller or not much changed. For women the picture is more complex, with some of the coefficients for the variables measuring characteristics of the job and the wider working environment increasing while others diminish, but the coefficients for the variables measuring personal characteristics are very little changed.

It is unwise to make a very detailed comparison between the findings from the N.C.D.S. and those based on the N.T.S. all-age sample of workers (Bain and Elias op. cit., Booth op. cit.). The measures of the independent variables differ in some respects, being constrained by the two data sets, and the present analysis includes some variables which were not available in the N.T.S. Insofar as

comparison is reasonable, however, the findings of the earlier studies are replicated in the N.C.D.S. Leaving aside union recognition, the predictors of union membership which have the biggest coefficients in both data sets are the characteristics of the job or the wider working environment, while in both data sets relatively few personal characteristics reach significance and their coefficients are smaller. In particular, measures of region, industry, establishment size, social class of job and earnings have large coefficients in both the N.T.S. and the N.C.D.S., and the way in which they affect the probability of membership is very similar. From the evidence of this comparison it appears that union membership 'goes with the job' just as much for young as for older workers, and that therefore low union membership among young people is likely to be to a large extent a product of the occupational distribution of the young.

TRADE UNION ACTIVISM

For the purposes of the present paper young workers were defined as union activists if they said they had ever served as a local union official or shop steward, stood in a picket line, or put forward a proposal or motion at a union meeting (8). By this definition 17 per cent of male full time employees and 17 per cent of male part time employees were activists, compared to 7 per cent of female full time employees and 3 per cent of female part time employees. The sex difference in activism is thus somewhat greater than the sex difference in membership.

It has been argued above that the characteristics of
a job and the wider working environment may be important
predictors of individual activism, and that data from a
sample that is not restricted to a particular workplace or
union ought thus be used to contribute to the academic
debate on the nature of the active trade unionist.
Unfortunately in the N.C.D.S. the question on activism was
asked without specifying which job the respondent was active
in, and so it was only possible to derive information about
activism in a job whose characteristics were known for those
respondents who had held one job only since first leaving
full time education. This reduced the sample to 1291 men
and 1052 women, of whom 16 per cent and 7 per cent
respectively were activists, and at the same time reduced
the possible contribution of the employment history
variables to the explanation.

In the absence of data in N.C.D.S. relating to belief
in trade unionism ideals and other relevant attitudinal
variables, the model was restricted to the independent
variables already specified in the model of union
membership. It is in any case unclear whether such
attitudes should be treated as determinants or consequences
of activism: people who become involved in union affairs
for other, perhaps accidental reasons, are likely to develop
pro-union attitudes during the course of their involvement.
Because of the smaller sample size in the analysis of
activism it was necessary to reduce the number of levels

specified for some of the independent variables in order to
get reliable estimates of the coefficients. As in the
analysis of membership, the dependent variable was binary,
in this case active/not active, and logistic regression was
used to fit a straightforward additive model.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The results are shown in Table 4. The models for
both men and women fit much less well than the model for
membership in the full sample, with a pseudo-R^2 of only 16
per cent for men and 15 per cent for women, suggesting
either that the model fails to specify some important
predictors of activism or that the predictors of activism
are so individual as to be, in practical terms, incapable of
measurement. Nevertheless there are some parallels between
the findings for membership and for activism. These are
more evident in the analysis of men, for, because of the
small proportion of women who are activists, only the
variables with the very largest effects reach significance
for women.

For men all the personal characteristics measured are
insignificant as predictors of activism. In contrast a
number of the variables relating to the job and the wider
working environment are significant and some have effects
which are quite large. When the respondent's wages and
conditions are negotiated by a trade union or staff
association the odds of activism are nearly six times

greater, and moderate to high coverage of the industry by collective agreements also significantly increases the odds. Other significant predictors for men are region, public versus private sector employment, establishment size, and manual versus non-manual employment. Three of these variables, namely whether wages and conditions are trade union negotiated, industry coverage by collective agreements and manual versus non-manual employment, are also significant for women. In addition G.C.E. qualifications are significant for women but not for men, women with A Levels being less likely to be active than women with no G.C.E. qualifications or with O Levels only.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Union membership is low among young workers. This has sometimes been thought to be the result of anti-union attitudes among the young, but previous research on union membership tends to suggest that union membership 'goes with the job' and is often not the result of a conscious individual choice. The analysis of N.C.D.S. data has shown that for young as for older workers characteristics of the job and the wider working environment are much more important as predictors of membership than are the characteristics of the individual worker. It has also shown that the existence of union recognition for a job is by far the most important predictor of whether the incumbant is a union member. Given that there are marked differences in the occupational distributions of older and younger workers, this suggests that low membership among young people is due

more to their over-representation in poorly unionised jobs
than to a fundamental apathy or antagonism towards trade
unionism.

Union membership in Great Britain has declined
steadily since 1979. It is a plausible hypothesis that the
decline among older workers is due to them losing their jobs
in the traditionally well unionised industries and failing
to regain employment, whilst the decline among young workers
is due to them taking jobs in the growth areas of the
economy which are not well unionised. Millward and Stevens
(op. cit.) have shown that there has been a fall between
1981 and 1984 in the proportion of establishments which
recognise a trade union, which has come about not because
establishments have withdrawn recognition from unions, but
because of the disproportionate closure of establishments
where there is union recognition. They show that
establishments where no union is recognised are more likely
than establishments where there is union recognition to be
of recent foundation.

There is further evidence for this hypothesis in the
growth of part time and temporary employment, the bulk of
which has gone to young people (Lewis 1987). The proportion
of teenagers in work who worked part time was 6 per cent in
1979; by 1985 it had risen to 25 per cent. Since the
introduction of the Youth Training Scheme, unemployment in
the age group 20-24 has outstripped unemployment among
teenagers. This age group also is now showing an increase

in part time work: among male workers from under 1 per cent to 3 per cent between 1979 and 1985 and among women workers from 10 per cent to 14 per cent over the same period. In contrast in the age group 25+ part time work grew only 0.4 per cent among men and 1.7 per cent among women. Temporary work is also growing in importance for the young: the proportion of teenage workers on temporary contracts rose between 1981 and 1985 from 2.5 per cent to 3.8 per cent among full time workers and from 39 per cent to 48 per cent among part time workers. For the age group 20-24 the corresponding growth was from 0.8 per cent to 2.5 per cent for full time workers and 17 per cent to 27 per cent for part time workers. Once again, the corresponding increase was much less in the age group 25+ (Lewis, op. cit.). The recruitment of these previously marginal groups of part time and temporary workers into the trade unions will thus be essential to the survival of the union movement as a significant force.

The analysis of union activism among young workers is limited in that it refers only to people who have not changed jobs at all. It nevertheless suggests that previous studies of activism, in focussing on differences between individuals within a single workplace or union, have not attached enough importance to the quite large differences between workplaces, industries and jobs. The incorporation of such factors in models of activism draws attention away from competing theories about the motivation of activists and towards the structural constraints on activity, within

which individual motives for activism could be very
heterogeneous. The analysis shows that some of the factors
which are important in predicting individual union
membership are also important as predictors of individual
activism. It is therfore at least arguable that, whatever
legislation may be enacted, current changes to the economic
structure of the country are themselves antagonistic to
union activism.

NOTES

(1)   E.S.R.C. Grant No. F00 232294, Young People's Early
Careers: Analysis of Employment History Data from the
National Child Development Study.

(2)   See Ashton and Maguire (1983) and Department of
Employment (1984) for data on the occupational and
industrial distribution of young workers.

(3)   Like the G.H.S., the N.C.D.S. made no distinction
between membership of a trade union and membership of a
staff association (though the N.T.S. analyses refer
specifically to trade union and not staff association
membership).   Although Prandy et al (1983) found that among
white collar workers the predictors of staff association
membership differred from the predictors of trade union
membership, this is unlikely to make much difference to the
results.   Membership of staff associations fluctuates from
year to year, but according to figures reported by the
Certification Officer, around the time of N.C.D.S. IV it was
something under 2 per cent of total trade union and staff

association membership. When reporting results from N.C.D.S. the term 'trade union membership' should be assumed to cover membership of staff associations as well.

(4) There is a discrepancy between N.C.D.S. and G.H.S. figures on membership of female employees working part time in that the G.H.S. reports that 21 per cent in the age group 20 - 24 were members. The G.H.S. figure is however based on only 52 female part time respondents compared to 402 in N.C.D.S. (some part time respondents in the G.H.S. were not asked the question by mistake), and the 95 per cent condidence intervals of the G.H.S. figure encompass the probably more accurate estimate from N.C.D.S.

(5) Fifty-nine per cent of cohort members who were unemployed at the time of interview had been union members at some time in the past, but only 8 per cent had retained their membership during their current spell of unemployment. Of the self-employed only 6 per cent were members. A small number of respondents were working as 'temps' for an agency, and had no workplace data. All these groups were omitted from the analysis.

(6) The classification of industry by unemployment level had, for technical reasons, to be made at the level of the one digit industrial divisions. In contrast the classification of industry by level of coverage of collective agreements was made at the level of the two digit industrial classes, and it cross-cuts industrial divisions.

(7) Nelder and Baker (1985) argue that for the kind of model fitted here this method of testing significance should be used in preference to the t distribution.

(8)   The classification of activists is based on the
following question in the N.C.D.S. questionnaire:

READ OUT AND CODE FIRST 'YES'.

Have you ever... READ OUT UNTIL 'YES'...

...served as a local union official or shop steward?

...stood in a picket line?

...put forward a proposal or motion at a union or staff association meeting?

...gone on strike?

...voted in a union or staff association meeting?

...been to a union or staff association meeting?

CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES

Thus although standing in a picket line may be thought to be
part of the normal duties of union membership on some
occasions, and therefore not specially to indicate activism,
it was not possible to exclude those who said they had only
stood in a picket line from those classified as activists
unless those who said they had put forward a proposal or
motion were also excluded.

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TABLE 1

Variable Definitions and Distributions

Variable	Definition	Level	Percentage of Sample males (base N=3901)	females (base N=3283)
REGN	regional unemployment rate at June 1981	1 low: < 8% (Greater London, S.E.)	32	34
		2 medium: 8-12% (East Anglia, S.W., E. Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside)	26	25
		3 high: 13-14% (W. Midlands, N.W., N., Scotland, Wales)	42	40
IND2	industrial unemployment rate at May 1981 (1980 SIC)	1 low: < 5% (8: Banking etc., 9: Other Services)	25	55
		2 medium: 5-7% (1: Energy & Water, 7: Transport & Communication)	14	6
		3 high: 9-12% (6: Distribution etc., 0: Agriculture etc., 3: Metal Goods etc., 4: Other Manufacturing, 2: Extraction of minerals etc., manufacture of metals etc.	51	38
		4 very high: 25% (5: Construction)	10	1
TUNEG	whether respondent's wages, salary or conditions negotiated by TU or staff association	1 yes	62	61
		2 no	38	39

Table 1 Continued ...

INDY	level of coverage of industry by collective agreements (1984 NES)	1 < 40%	11	15
		2 40% – 54%	18	15
		3 55% – 69%	19	13
		4 70% – 84%	28	21
		5 > 85%	25	36
PRIV	type of organisation where employed	1 private firm/ltd. company	70	59
		2 other	30	41
SIZE	number of employees at workplace	1 25 or less, not a branch of larger organisation	15	12
		2 25 or less, but a branch	16	21
		3 26-99	23	23
		4 100-499	23	23
		5 500 or more	24	21
SOCL	OPCS social class of job	1 professional etc.	6	3
		2 intermediate	17	24
		3 skilled non-manual	19	53
		4 skilled manual	41	8
		5 semiskilled and unskilled	16	13
FTPT	full or part time	1 full time	99	91
		2 part time	1	9
MAN	managerial status	1 yes	12	7
		2 no	88	93

Table 1 Continued ...

Variable		Category		
EARNM	gross weekly earnings: males	1	<£80.00	15	—
		2	£80.00 – £89.99	10	—
		3	£90.00 – £99.99	14	—
		4	£100.00 – £109.99	14	—
		5	£110.00 – £119.99	12	—
		6	£120.00 – £129.99	10	—
		7	£130.00 – £149.99	11	—
		8	£150.00 or more	13	—
EARNF	gross weekly earnings: females	1	<£70.00	—	30
		2	£70.00 – £79.99	—	18
		3	£80.00 – £89.99	—	16
		4	£90.00 – £99.99	—	13
		5	£100.00 – £109.99	—	9
		6	£110.00 – £119.99	—	7
		7	£120.00 or more	—	7
TQUL	qualifications obtained on training courses or apprenticeships during the course of employment (GHS classification)	1	none	60	81
		2	medium: up to City & Guilds Craft standard	19	9
		3	high: above City & Guilds Craft standard	21	10
GCE	GCE qualifications (inc. Scottish equivalents) obtained any time	1	none	41	26
		2	low: 1–4 O'Levels	25	29
		3	medium: 5 or more O'Levels	12	18
		4	high: A'Levels	22	27
JOB2	whether has a second job	1	yes	15	10
		2	no	85	90

Table 1 Continued ...

Code	Description	Category		
MAR	marital status	1 single	61	51
		2 married	37	45
		3 widowed, separated or divorced	2	4
KIDS	whether has children	1 yes	17	9
		2 no	83	91
WKEX	total time in full time jobs	1 low: < 4 years	16	24
		2 medium: 4–5 years	17	26
		3 high: 6 years or more	66	50
UNEM	total time spent unemployed as percentage of time between leaving full time education and age 23	1 low: < 4%	77	79
		2 high: 4% or more	23	21
NJBS	total number of full or part time jobs ever held	1 one only	33	32
		2 two	25	25
		3 three	17	18
		4 four	11	12
		5 five or more	14	13
OLF	total time spent out of the labour force (excluding full time education)	1 low: < 6 months	96	88
		2 high: 6 months or more	4	12

TABLE 2
PARAMETER ESTIMATES FOR THE ODDS OF UNION MEMBERSHIP:
FULL SAMPLE

Vari-able	Level	Males		Females	
		multiplicative estimate	signi-ficance	multiplicative estimate	signi-ficance
CONSTANT		0.04		0.03	
REGN	1 low unemployment	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 medium	1.37		1.33	
	3 high	1.99		2.09	
IND2	1 low unemployment	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 medium	1.95		1.42	
	3 high	1.13		1.12	
	4 very high	0.32		0.44	
TUNEG	1 TU negotiation	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 no TU negotiation	0.05		0.07	
INDY	1 collective agree-ments <40% cover	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 40% - 54%	0.86		1.36	
	3 55% - 69%	1.30		1.31	
	4 70% - 84%	1.66		1.84	
	5 > 85%	1.36		2.25	
PRIV	1 private sector	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 public sector	2.68		1.77	
SIZE	1 <26, not branch	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 <26, branch	1.82		1.21	
	3 26 - 99	2.71		1.51	
	4 100 - 499	3.66		1.75	
	5 500+	4.25		2.01	
SOCL	1 prof	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 intermed	3.88		6.24	
	3 skilled non-man	2.44		3.47	
	4 skilled man	3.63		4.23	
	5 semi/unskilled	3.32		6.71	
FTPT	1 full time	1.00	n.s.	1.00	.05
	2 part time	0.72		1.12	
MAN	1 manager	1.00	.001	1.00	.01
	2 not manager	2.35		2.22	

TABLE 2 CONTINUED...

EARNM	1 <£80	1.00	.001		—	—
	2 £80 – £89	0.91			—	
	3 £90 – £99	1.41			—	
	4 £100 – £109	1.60			—	
	5 £110 – £119	1.71			—	
	6 £120 – £129	1.85			—	
	7 £130 – £149	1.71			—	
	8 £150+	1.66			—	
EARNF	1 <£70	—	—		1.00	.001
	2 £70 – £79	—			1.79	
	3 £80 – £89	—			1.57	
	4 £90 – £99	—			1.91	
	5 £100 – £109	—			2.32	
	6 £110 – £119	—			2.09	
	7 £120+	—			2.36	
TQUL	1 none	1.00	.02		1.00	n.s.
	2 medium	1.32			0.86	
	3 high	0.87			0.91	
GCE	1 none	1.00	.001		1.00	n.s.
	2 low	0.94			0.97	
	3 medium	0.99			0.86	
	4 high	0.63			0.86	
JOB2	1 2nd job	1.00	n.s.		1.00	n.s.
	2 no 2nd job	1.00			0.91	
MAR	1 single	1.00	n.s.		1.00	n.s.
	2 married	1.11			1.08	
	3 wid/sep/div	1.65			0.99	
KIDS	1 has children	1.00	n.s.		1.00	.05
	2 no children	0.83			1.11	
WKEX	1 low	1.00	n.s.		1.00	.05
	2 medium	1.42			1.40	
	3 high	1.61			1.41	
UNEM	1 low	1.00	n.s.		1.00	n.s.
	2 high	1.02			0.88	
NJBS	1 1	1.00	.01		1.00	.001
	2 2	0.85			0.94	
	3 3	0.74			0.83	
	4 4	0.72			0.67	
	5 5+	0.52			0.47	
OLF	1 low	1.00	n.s.		1.00	.05
	2 high	0.73			0.68	

TABLE 3
PARAMETER ESTIMATES FOR THE ODDS OF UNION MEMBERSHIP: EMPLOYEES IN A JOB WITH A RECOGNISED UNION

Vari-able	Level	Males multiplicative estimate	signi-ficance	Females multiplicative estimate	signi-ficance
CONSTANT		0.03		0.03	
REGN	1 low unemployment	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 medium	1.36		1.36	
	3 high	2.00		2.27	
IND2	1 low unemployment	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 medium	2.37		1.89	
	3 high	1.33		1.20	
	4 very high	0.30		0.21	
INDY	1 collective agree-ments <40% cover	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 40% - 54%	0.47		1.32	
	3 55% - 69%	0.78		1.01	
	4 70% - 84%	1.04		1.39	
	5 > 85%	0.76		1.50	
PRIV	1 private sector	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 public sector	3.12		1.79	
SIZE	1 <26, not branch	1.00	.001	1.00	.01
	2 <26, branch	2.12		0.91	
	3 26 - 99	3.72		1.18	
	4 100 - 499	4.57		1.35	
	5 500+	5.38		1.43	
SOCL	1 prof	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 intermed	4.02		7.68	
	3 skilled non-man	2.95		4.44	
	4 skilled man	3.80		5.20	
	5 semi/unskilled	3.48		8.56	
FTPT	1 full time	1.00	n.s.	1.00	.01
	2 part time	0.70		0.97	
MAN	1 manager	1.00	.02	1.00	.01
	2 not manager	2.16		2.32	

TABLE 3 CONTINUED...

EARNM	1 <£80	1.00	.001	–	–	
	2 £80 – £89	1.00		–		
	3 £90 – £99	1.64		–		
	4 £100 – £109	1.77		–		
	5 £110 – £119	1.82		–		
	6 £120 – £129	2.12		–		
	7 £130 – £149	1.91		–		
	8 £150+	1.81		–		
EARNF	1 <£70	–	–	1.00	.001	
	2 £70 – £79	–		1.71		
	3 £80 – £89	–		1.54		
	4 £90 – £99	–		1.59		
	5 £100 – £109	–		2.23		
	6 £110 – £119	–		1.87		
	7 £120+	–		2.56		
TQUL	1 none	1.00	.01	1.00	n.s.	
	2 medium	1.42		0.99		
	3 high	0.76		0.79		
GCE	1 none	1.00	.01	1.00	n.s.	
	2 low	0.94		1.00		
	3 medium	1.01		0.93		
	4 high	0.78		0.93		
JOB2	1 2nd job	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.	
	2 no 2nd job	1.13		0.92		
MAR	1 single	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.	
	2 married	0.99		1.10		
	3 wid/sep/div	1.74		0.99		
KIDS	1 has children	1.00	n.s.	1.00	.02	
	2 no children	0.77		1.20		
WKEX	1 low	1.00	.001	1.00	.01	
	2 medium	1.45		1.41		
	3 high	2.32		1.67		
UNEM	1 low	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.	
	2 high	0.94		0.92		
NJBS	1 1	1.00	.01	1.00	.001	
	2 2	0.86		1.00		
	3 3	0.82		0.75		
	4 4	0.88		0.59		
	5 5+	0.47		0.46		
OLF	1 low	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.	
	2 high	0.85		0.76		

TABLE 4
PARAMETER ESTIMATES FOR THE ODDS OF UNION ACTIVISM: EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE HAD ONE JOB ONLY.

Vari-able	Level	Males multiplicative estimate	Males signi-ficance	Females multiplicative estimate	Females signi-ficance
CONSTANT		0.02		0.004	
REGN	1 low or medium unemployment	1.00	.01	1.00	n.s.
	2 high unemployment	1.38		1.42	
IND2	1 low or medium unemployment	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s
	2 high or v. high	1.01		3.02	
TUNEG	1 TU negotiation	1.00	.001	1.00	.001
	2 no TU negotiation	0.17		0.19	
INDY	1 collective agree-ments <55% cover	1.00	.01	1.00	.01
	2 55% - 69%	1.80		0.96	
	4 70%+	1.62		3.07	
PRIV	1 private sector	1.00	.05	1.00	n.s.
	2 public sector	1.38		1.86	
SIZE	1 <26, not branch	1.00	.01	1.00	n.s.
	2 <26, branch, or 26 - 99	2.69		0.90	
	3 100+	3.58		1.37	
SOCL	1 non-manual	1.00	.001	1.00	.05
	2 manual	1.37		1.88	
FTPT	1 full time	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 part time	1.12		0.94	
MAN	1 manager	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 not manager	0.87		1.35	
EARNM	1 <£100	1.00	n.s.	—	—
	2 £100 - £129	1.10		—	
	3 £130+	1.44		—	
EARNF	1 <£70	—	—	1.00	n.s.
	2 £70 - £99	—		2.25	
	3 £100+-			3.43	
TQUL	1 none	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 some	1.27		0.39	
GCE	1 none	1.00	n.s.	1.00	.01
	2 low or medium	0.92		1.24	
	3 high	0.80		0.60	
JOB2	1 2nd job	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 no 2nd job	1.24		1.08	

TABLE 4 CONTINUED...

MAR	1 single	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 married	1.09		0.73	
	3 wid/sep/div	1.35		1.40	
KIDS	1 has children	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 no children	1.30		0.57	
WKEX	1 low	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 medium	1.47		3.00	
	3 high	1.54		2.77	
UNEM	1 low	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 high	1.16		1.56	
OLF	1 low	1.00	n.s.	1.00	n.s.
	2 high	0.60		2.45	