

# A statistical portrait of the trade union movement

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This article (originally released on the eve of Labour Day 1997, and updated with the latest available data) traces the Canadian union movement's numerical strength over the past several decades and profiles the changing and current composition of its membership. It also compares the working conditions of union members with those of non-unionized employees. Some statistics for major wage settlements vis-à-vis inflation rates over the past two decades are presented. Data on strikes, lockouts and the resulting person-days lost offer glimpses of the state of labour unrest over the same period. A final set of statistics compares union density ratios, namely, the extent of unionization among 19 countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

## Union membership and density by sex, 1967 to 1997

The latest data released under the *Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act* (CALURA) cover 1993. To obtain the most recently released information on unions (1997), one must use the redesigned Labour Force Survey (LFS) (see *Data sources*). Since the collection methods, reference periods and coverage of these two sources differ, findings from them can be different. The comparability of the two series is still under study but initial examination shows that the overall LFS data are in line with recent CALURA trends.

- From 2,056,000 in 1967, union membership grew fairly steadily to stand at 3,841,000 in 1990. Since then, it has slowly declined; by 1997, membership totalled 3,547,000 (Table 1).

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## Data sources

### Union membership, density ratios and profile information

All pre-1997 membership, density and profile information presented in this note comes from data collected under CALURA (the *Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act*).

In January 1997, the redesigned Labour Force Survey (LFS) started to collect monthly data on union membership and coverage. Combined with other information obtained from the same survey (for example, wage rates, work volume and detailed demographic data), the revised LFS offers a rich source of data on union members.

Though both sources are managed by Statistics Canada, care should be exercised when comparing their data. Slightly different results emerge for a number of reasons, some of which are listed below:

- For CALURA, the reference period is December 31 of each year, whereas for the LFS it is usually the week that includes the 15th of the month.
  - CALURA is an enumeration of unions with 100 or more members; the LFS is based on a household sample that imposes no restrictions on union size.
  - Unemployed persons and pensioners may belong to a union. They are
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- Most of the increase during the period occurred among women; their ranks rose each year, and their strength of 1,598,000 in 1997 was four times that of 1967 (402,000).
  - Men saw their numbers rise fairly steadily from 1967 to the early 1980s. Thereafter, their numbers fluctuated; their level in 1997 (1,949,000) was considerably less than their peak in 1989 (2,314,000).

included in the CALURA figures, but are excluded from the LFS.

- Multiple jobholders could be counted twice in CALURA if they belonged to different unions in each job, but only once in the LFS.

### Non-wage benefits and work arrangements

The information on non-wage benefits, such as employer-sponsored pension plans and paid sick leave entitlement, is from the November 1995 Survey of Work Arrangements, which was funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and conducted by Statistics Canada.

### Strikes, lockouts and workdays lost and major wage settlements

These data come from HRDC. Data on strikes, lockouts and days lost refer to all work stoppage involving one or more workers. Further information on these statistics may be obtained from Angèle Charbonneau, Workplace Information Directorate, HRDC at (819) 997-3117 or 1 800 567-6866.

### Union density ratios of selected OECD countries

These data come from the OECD *Employment Outlook*, July 1997.

- The overall union density ratio has remained within the 31-to-33 percentage range. It has held this position mainly because of three factors: the growth in female members, persistently high density ratios in the public sector, and a sizeable proportional growth among the self-employed (rather than among employees).

### Unionization in Canada

*“The Canadian trade union movement grew out of the industrialization of the economy early last century. The growing workforce in the industrial sector as well as the increased concentration of businesses in the sector led workers to organize, as they increasingly found themselves performing comparable tasks. Specialized workers were the first to organize against the threat of mechanization. The year 1886 saw the birth of the American Federation of Labor and its Canadian counterpart, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. In 1902, Canadian nationalists founded the Canadian Federation of Labour, in reaction to the massive American influence.*

*Despite these movements, it was not until the 1920s that these groups began to have an influence on working conditions and real income of members (Rea, 1991).*

*These developments were temporarily stalled by the Great Depression of the 1930s after which union membership practically quadrupled (from 1940 to 1956). At the same time, different*

*branches of the Canadian union movement united, a development that encouraged governments to adopt pro-labour legislation and that helped to strengthen the influence and prestige of the labour movement.*

*After 1956, union membership increased more slowly, owing to a decline in the pool of semi-skilled workers, the group most inclined to unionize, and a rise in the number of white-collar workers, less inclined to organize. The expansion of the federal public service, various provincial civil services and certain industries that had traditionally been highly unionized (including the automobile industry) contributed to a moderate increase in union membership by the mid-1960s (Eaton, 1976).” (Extracted from Galarneau, 1996).*

From 1967 to 1997, union membership almost doubled, and most of the growth came from women. However, offsetting increases in the non-union employees caused union density to remain in the 31%-to-33% range during the period.

- In 1967, 4 in 5 union members were men. Today, representation of the sexes is almost equal: 45% of members are women and 55% are men (Chart A).

- About 3 in 10 male employees are union members today, down from just over 4 in 10 three decades ago. Among female employees, about one in 3 is a union member today, double the one-in-6 ratio of 1967.

- Another feature of the union movement pertains to its changing international affiliation status. In 1962, approximately 2 in 3 union members belonged to an international trade union, that is, a union whose headquarters was based outside Canada. Thirty years later (1992), the proportion had fallen to only 3 in 10 (Chart B).

### Non-union workers covered by collective agreements

In addition to union members, the Labour Force Survey identifies those employees who, though not union members, are nevertheless covered by the collective agreements signed by the unions, and thus enjoy union-negotiated privileges. These include some people who choose not to be union members because of their religious beliefs, as well as those who are excluded because of managerial responsibilities. Over the period January to September 1997, an average 334,000 workers fit this category.

### Current union membership

In January 1997, the Labour Force Survey began to collect monthly statistics on union membership and collective agreement coverage (see *Data sources*). To minimize seasonal distortions, the following profile of union membership is based on averages for the first nine months of 1997.

### Public versus private sectors

- Employees in the public sector, that is, those working for the government, crown corporations, schools or hospitals, are more than three times as likely as their private sector counterparts to belong to a union (73% versus 22%) in 1997 (Table 2).
- Indeed, while public employees account for only 18% of the paid workforce, they constitute close to one-half (42%) of the total trade union membership.

Table 1  
Union membership and density by sex

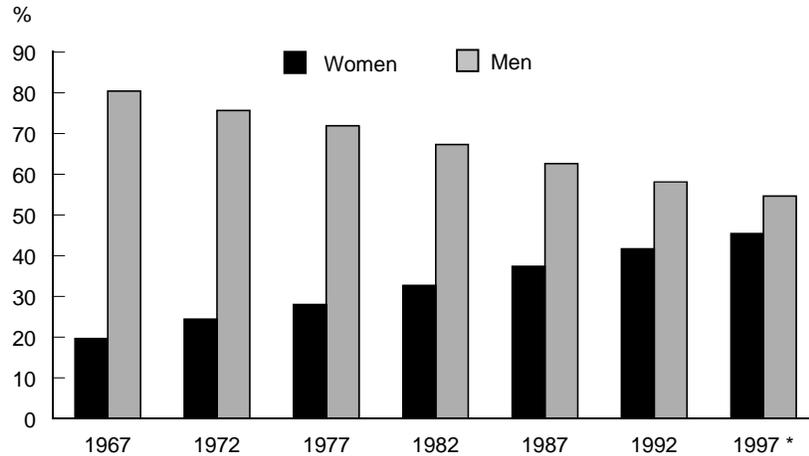
	Union membership			Union density *		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
		'000			%	
1967	2,056	1,654	402	33.2	40.9	15.9
1972	2,355	1,780	575	31.9	37.9	21.4
1977	2,785	2,003	781	31.2	37.4	22.6
1982	2,997	2,016	981	31.0	37.8	24.0
1987	3,614	2,261	1,353	32.0	36.0	27.0
1992	3,803	2,216	1,587	33.2	36.1	29.8
1997 **	3,547	1,949	1,598	31.1	32.4	29.6

Sources: CALURA (1967 to 1992); Labour Force Survey (1997)

\* Union density is the ratio of the number of employees who belong to a union to the number of paid employees.

\*\* Average for the January-to-September 1997 period.

**Chart A**  
**In 1997, nearly half of union members are women.**

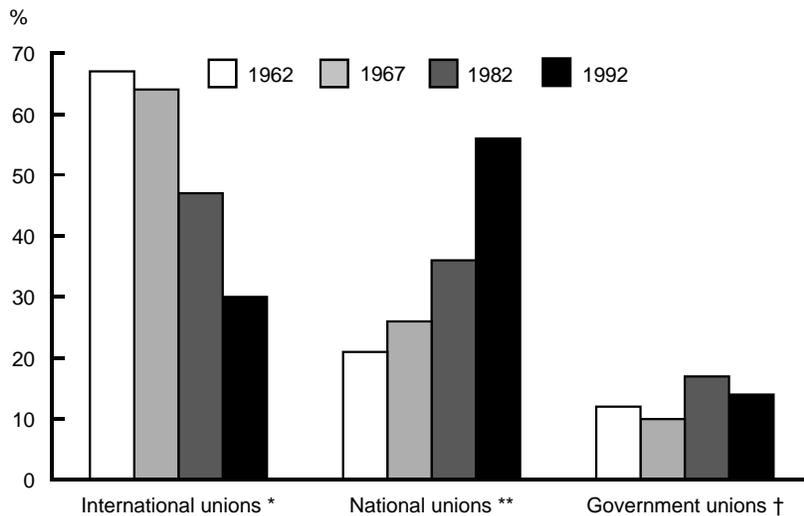


Sources: CALURA (1967 to 1992); Labour Force Survey (1997)  
 \* Average for the January-to-September 1997 period.

### Demographic characteristics of union members

- Union membership is slightly higher among men (32%) than among women (30%).
- Only 11% of young employees (15 to 24 year-olds) are unionized. Workers aged 45 to 54 years have the highest union density ratio (44%), partly a reflection of the high ratios observed among an aging blue-collar and public sector workforce.
- The rate of unionization is higher among workers with higher education. The density ratios among workers with university degrees and those with postsecondary diplomas or certificates exceed the average, and the overall ratio among workers with lower educational attainment is below average.

**Chart B**  
**National unions claim a growing share of members.**



Source: CALURA  
 \* Labour unions with headquarters based outside Canada (primarily in the United States).  
 \*\* Labour unions with headquarters based in Canada.  
 † Organizations of federal and provincial employees whose bargaining rights are established by special legislation.

### Labour market characteristics

- Full-time workers are one-and-a-half times more likely to belong to a union than part-time workers (33% versus 22%).
- Workers in public administration have the highest rate of unionization (65%), followed by those in utilities (62%) and transportation, communication and storage (44%). Those in agriculture (2%) and finance, insurance and real estate (9%) are least unionized. Manufacturing and construction,<sup>1</sup> which had once boasted the highest union rates among the major industries, today have density ratios close to the overall average.
- Blue-collar workers are generally more likely than white-collar workers to belong to a union. About 4 in 10 employees in construction, processing, machining and fabricating, and in material handling and other crafts belong to a union. Although the union density ratio for white-collar workers as a group (29%) is slightly lower than the overall average,

Table 2  
**Union membership and coverage of employees by selected characteristics, 1997 \***

	Total employed	Union membership		Union coverage **		Non-union ***
		Total	Density	Total	Rate	
	'000	'000	%	'000	%	'000
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,414</b>	<b>3,547</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>3,881</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>7,533</b>
<b>Public / Private sector †</b>						
Public	2,070	1,501	72.5	1,604	77.5	466
Private	9,345	2,046	21.9	2,277	24.4	7,067
<b>Sex</b>						
Men	6,010	1,949	32.4	2,132	35.5	3,878
Women	5,404	1,598	29.6	1,749	32.4	3,655
<b>Age</b>						
15 to 24	1,888	202	10.7	244	12.9	1,644
25 to 54	8,640	3,029	35.1	3,297	38.2	5,343
25 to 44	6,350	2,019	31.8	2,214	34.9	4,137
45 to 54	2,289	1,009	44.1	1,083	47.3	1,206
55 and over	887	317	35.7	340	38.4	546
<b>Educational attainment</b>						
Grades 0 to 8	461	150	32.7	159	34.6	301
Some secondary	1,571	396	25.2	433	27.6	1,138
High school graduation	2,369	681	28.8	739	31.2	1,629
Some postsecondary	1,162	263	22.7	290	25.0	871
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	3,764	1,293	34.4	1,410	37.5	2,354
University degree	2,089	763	36.5	849	40.7	1,240
<b>Province</b>						
Newfoundland	163	64	39.3	67	41.2	96
Prince Edward Island	49	13	26.7	14	28.9	35
Nova Scotia	328	94	28.6	101	30.7	228
New Brunswick	267	75	28.0	80	30.1	186
Quebec	2,750	1,028	37.4	1,151	41.9	1,598
Ontario	4,474	1,246	27.9	1,345	30.1	3,129
Manitoba	437	152	34.9	164	37.5	273
Saskatchewan	351	118	33.6	128	36.5	223
Alberta	1,136	253	22.3	293	25.8	843
British Columbia	1,460	503	34.4	538	36.8	922
<b>Work status</b>						
Full-time	9,336	3,096	33.2	3,383	36.2	5,953
Part-time	2,079	451	21.7	498	24.0	1,580
<b>Industry</b>						
Goods-producing industries	3,003	957	31.8	1,043	34.7	1,961
Agriculture	125	3	2.2	3	2.8	121
Other primary	237	68	28.5	74	31.2	163
Manufacturing	2,043	679	33.2	740	36.2	1,303
Construction	464	123	26.6	135	29.0	329
Utilities ††	135	84	62.1	91	67.1	45
Service-producing industries	8,411	2,590	30.8	2,838	33.7	5,573
Transportation, communication and storage	767	338	44.1	358	46.7	409
Trade	1,926	229	11.9	267	13.9	1,659
Finance, insurance and real estate	664	62	9.4	79	11.8	586
Community, business and personal services †††	4,253	1,436	33.8	1,556	36.6	2,697
Public administration	801	525	65.5	578	72.2	223

Table 2  
**Union membership and coverage of employees by selected characteristics, 1997 \* (concluded)**

	Total employed	Union membership		Union coverage **		Non-union ***
		Total	Density	Total	Rate	
	'000	'000	%	'000	%	'000
<b>Occupation</b>						
White-collar	8,248	2,361	28.6	2,604	31.6	5,644
Managerial and administrative	1,657	275	16.6	337	20.3	1,320
Professional	2,268	1,110	48.9	1,194	52.6	1,074
Clerical	1,839	518	28.2	564	30.7	1,275
Sales	981	80	8.2	95	9.7	886
Service	1,503	378	25.2	414	27.6	1,089
Blue-collar	3,166	1,186	37.5	1,277	40.3	1,890
Primary occupations	252	45	17.8	49	19.4	203
Processing, machining and fabricating	1,565	621	39.7	669	42.8	896
Construction	467	197	42.2	210	45.0	257
Transport equipment operating	417	145	34.8	156	37.3	262
Material handling and other crafts	465	178	38.2	193	41.4	272
<b>Firm size</b>						
Under 20 employees	3,980	478	12.0	551	13.8	3,429
20 to 99 employees	3,628	1,124	31.0	1,239	34.2	2,389
100 to 500 employees	2,395	1,120	46.7	1,212	50.6	1,183
Over 500 employees	1,412	825	58.4	879	62.2	533
<b>Job tenure</b>						
1 to 12 months	2,641	340	12.9	410	15.5	2,231
Over 1 year to 5 years	3,293	660	20.1	745	22.6	2,548
Over 5 years to 9 years	1,883	676	35.9	735	39.0	1,148
Over 9 years to 14 years	1,312	554	42.2	598	45.6	714
Over 14 years	2,285	1,316	57.6	1,393	61.0	892

Source: Labour Force Survey

\* Average for the January-to-September 1997 period.

\*\* Includes both union members and persons who are not union members, but who are covered by collective agreements.

\*\*\* Includes employees who are neither union members nor covered by collective agreements.

† Public sector employees are those working for government departments or agencies, crown corporations or publicly funded schools, hospitals or other institutions. Private sector employees are all other wage and salary earners.

†† Includes electric power systems, water systems, gas distribution systems and waste disposal systems.

††† Includes business services; education; health and social services; accommodation, food and beverage services; amusement and recreation services; personal and household services; membership organizations; and other services.

the ratio among professional workers (for example, teachers and nurses) at 49% is the highest for all occupational groups studied, blue- and white-collar alike. This helps explain why density ratios are greater among workers with higher education.

- As expected, union density ratios rise with firm size. During the first three quarters of 1997, they ranged from 12% in firms with fewer than 20 employees to 58% in firms with more than 500 employees.

- Union density ratios are lowest among employees with low job tenure: only 13% of workers with tenure of 12 months or less belong to a union. The ratio rises with tenure: among workers with job tenure of over 14 years, close to 60% belong to a union – again a reflection of the high ratios observed among older, blue-collar and public sector employees.

### Provincial dimension

Union density ratios differ among the provinces. There are several reasons for this, including differences

in industry mix, labour laws and traditions.

- Employees in Newfoundland are most likely to belong to a union (39%), followed by those in Quebec (37%).
- Higher-than-average density ratios are also found in Manitoba (35%), British Columbia and Saskatchewan (34% each).
- Ontario and each of the three Maritime provinces have a union density ratio of slightly under 30%; Alberta has the lowest ratio (22%).

## Wages, other benefits and work arrangements

Available raw data show that unionized jobs generally provide higher wages, greater non-wage benefits and in many respects better work arrangements than non-unionized jobs. Of course, the wage rate and other differences reflect many factors in addition to collective bargaining outcomes. These include differences in the distribution of union and non-union employees by age, sex, job tenure, industry, occupation, firm size or geographical location. The effects of these factors are not examined in this paper, but it is clear from the previous sections that unionized workers and jobs tend to have certain characteristics that are associated with higher wages. For example, union density ratios are higher among men, older workers, those with higher education, workers in professional positions, employees with long tenure, and those in larger firms. Clearly, not all differences in wage and non-wage benefits can be attributed to union status.

- In terms of earnings, data from the Labour Force Survey show that the average hourly wage rate of unionized workers during the first nine months of 1997 was higher than that paid to non-union members. This held true whether they worked full time (\$18.84 versus \$15.18) or part time (\$16.74 versus \$9.76) (Table 3).
- Unionized part-time employees not only work longer hours each week than non-unionized employees, they also earn almost twice as much an hour. As a result, their average weekly earnings are double those of the latter.
- In terms of non-wage benefits, such as coverage in an employer-sponsored pension plan or group RRSP, health care plan, dental plan or paid sick leave entitlement, data from the November 1995 Survey of Work Arrangements show that union members

Table 3  
**Selected job characteristics by union status**

	Union employees *	Non-union employees **
<b>Average hourly wage rate (\$)</b>		
All employees	18.57	14.04
Full-time employees	18.84	15.18
Part-time employees	16.74	9.76
<b>Average weekly earnings (\$)</b>		
All employees	679.13	518.96
Full-time employees	730.03	613.58
Part-time employees	329.65	162.61
<b>Average usual weekly hours, main job</b>		
All employees	36.4	35.3
Full-time employees	38.9	40.3
Part-time employees	19.3	16.4
<b>Non-wage benefits</b>		
Percentage of employees:		
covered by pension/group RRSP	82.8	32.9
with supplemental health care plan coverage	83.7	44.4
with dental care plan coverage	77.0	41.9
with paid sick leave entitlement	77.2	44.7
with paid vacation leave entitlement	84.1	65.3
Percentage distribution of paid vacation leave entitlement:		
2 weeks or under	15.9	36.9
over 2 weeks but under 4 weeks	24.2	33.6
4 weeks and over	59.9	29.5
Average annual paid vacation leave entitlement (days)	20.9	15.1
<b>Work arrangements</b>		
Percentage of employees:		
in full-time jobs	87.4	76.7
in permanent jobs	91.1	86.9
in temporary jobs	8.9	13.1
with flexitime arrangement option	16.7	27.1
who work Monday to Friday inclusive only	65.8	58.2
who work both Saturday and Sunday	5.8	8.4
who do some/all of work at home	8.9	9.1
in job-sharing arrangement	12.1	6.8
<b>Paid overtime and overtime rates of pay</b>		
Percentage usually working paid overtime	18.1	11.7
Average number of paid overtime hours usually worked per week	5.4	6.0
Percentage distribution of overtime rate of pay:		
with straight pay	18.7	41.4
with time-and-a-half or double time	78.4	55.6
other	2.9	3.0

Sources: *Labour Force Survey (hourly wage rate, weekly earnings and usual weekly hours; averages for the January-to-September 1997 period) and Survey of Work Arrangements (November 1995)*

\* Employees who are union members only.

\*\* Employees who are neither union members nor covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

are about twice as likely as non-unionized workers to enjoy these benefits. For each of these non-wage benefits, coverage was about 80% among unionized workers, compared with 40% among non-unionized employees.

- Furthermore, 84% of union members were entitled to paid vacation leave, compared with 65% of non-unionized workers. Also, the average annual vacation entitlement was longer for the former (21 days versus 15 days).<sup>2</sup>
- In terms of work arrangements, also, unionized workers enjoyed some advantages. For example, they were slightly more likely to be in a permanent job (91% versus 87%) and to have a job-sharing arrangement (12% versus 7%). Furthermore, a slightly smaller proportion of unionized employees (6% versus 8%) regularly worked all weekend, that is, both Saturday and Sunday.

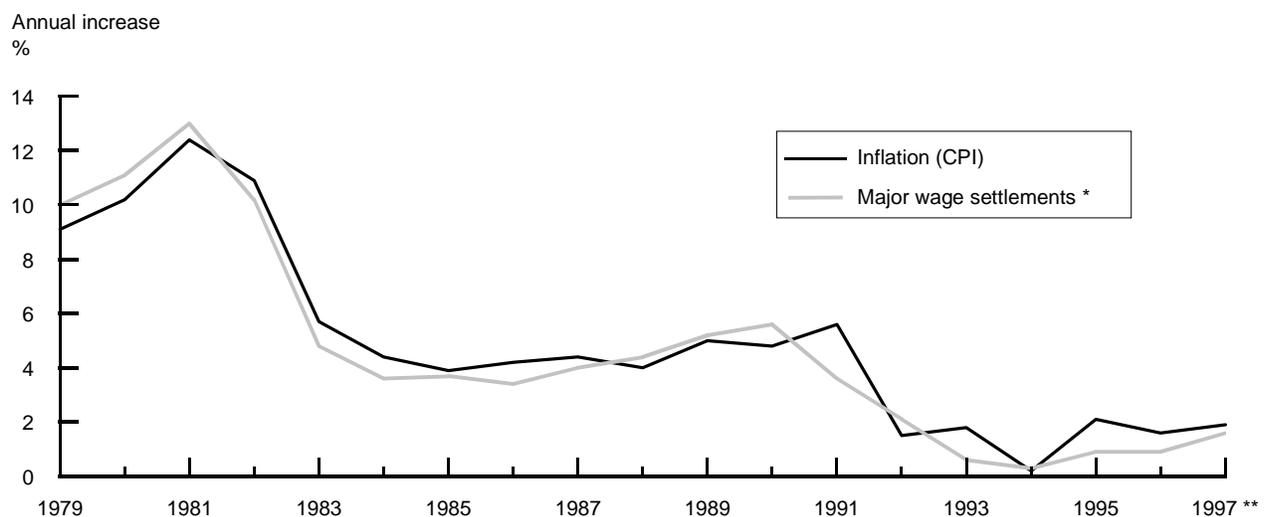
- Unionized employees were more likely than non-unionized employees to work paid overtime each week (18% versus 12%), but when they did so, they worked fewer hours (5.4 hours on average versus 6.0 hours). They were also more likely to receive premium pay for this work: in November 1995, about 78% of unionized workers received time-and-a-half or double time, compared with 56% of non-unionized employees.

### Wage increases and inflation down considerably

- Over the past couple of decades, major wage settlements (agreements involving 500 or more employees) have, with few exceptions, moved fairly well in line with inflation rates, that is, changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) (Chart C).

- From 1979 to 1981, major wage settlements slightly exceeded inflation. Both indicators peaked in 1981 with double-digit increases for wage settlements (13.0%) and for inflation (12.4%). Following the 1981-82 recession, both series tumbled to about half their preceding levels and fluctuated within the 3.5%-to-5.5% range between 1983 and 1991. They fell considerably again in the 1990s, partly as a result of wage freeze and even roll-back policies in both the public and private sectors, as well as poor economic performance. Since the early 1980s, inflation has generally surpassed wage settlements (Table 4).
- So far this year (January to August), there has been a slight upward movement in both series, with wage settlements running at 1.6% and inflation at 1.9%.

**Chart C**  
**Wage increases and inflation rates generally move in tandem.**



Sources: Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources Development Canada, and Prices Division, Statistics Canada

\* Major wage settlements refer to agreements involving 500 or more employees. Figures represent average annual percentage increases in base wage rates.

\*\* 1997 data refer to January to August only.

**Table 4**  
**Major wage settlements and inflation rates**

Year	Average annual percentage increase in base wage rates			Annual change in Consumer Price Index
	Public sector *	Private sector *	Both sectors	
			%	
1979	9.5	10.9	10.0	9.1
1980	10.9	11.6	11.1	10.2
1981	13.1	12.7	13.0	12.4
1982	10.4	9.7	10.2	10.9
1983	4.6	5.4	4.8	5.7
1984	3.9	3.2	3.6	4.4
1985	3.8	3.4	3.7	3.9
1986	3.6	3.0	3.4	4.2
1987	4.1	3.8	4.0	4.4
1988	3.9	5.0	4.4	4.0
1989	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.0
1990	5.6	5.7	5.6	4.8
1991	3.4	4.3	3.6	5.6
1992	2.0	2.5	2.1	1.5
1993	0.5	0.9	0.6	1.8
1994	-	1.2	0.3	0.2
1995	0.6	1.4	0.9	2.1
1996	0.4	1.9	0.9	1.6
1997 **	0.9	2.2	1.6	1.9

Sources: Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources Development Canada, and Prices Division, Statistics Canada

Note: Major wage settlements refer to agreements involving 500 or more employees.

\* Public sector employees are those working for government departments or agencies, crown corporations or publicly funded schools, hospitals or other institutions. Private sector employees are all other wage and salary earners.

\*\* 1997 data refer to January to August only.

Major wage settlements in the public and private sectors have also moved fairly well in tandem; however, with the exception of 1989 when they matched, overall private sector settlements have since 1988 exceeded those in the public sector. Between 1993 and 1996 overall settlements in the public sector have averaged less than 1% each year, while those in the private sector ranged between 0.9% and 1.9%. The pace in wage settlement has picked up slightly so far this year (January to August 1997), with gains in the public sector amounting to 0.9% and in the private sector 2.2%.

**Labour unrest on the rise**

- Annual statistics on strikes, lockouts and person-days lost are affected by several factors, including the nature of collective bargaining timetables, the size of the unions involved, and the state of the economy. That notwithstanding, the number of strikes and lockouts and the resulting person-days lost in 1996, despite a larger workforce, were only one-third the levels of 1980 (Table 5).
- There are several reasons for the abatement: the recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s, the adoption of innovative approaches to industrial relations by employers

and unions, business restructuring, and the effects of increased globalization of the economy, to name a few, have all had an effect.

- In 1980 and 1981, there were over 1,000 strikes and lockouts and about 9 million person-days lost. In spite of fluctuations, the numbers reveal an overall decreasing trend over the years; by 1994 and 1995, despite a larger workforce, strikes and lockouts had fallen to roughly 350, and the resulting person-days lost to around 1.6 million.
- Labour unrest appears to be on the rise again. For example, even though the number of strikes and lockouts in 1996 (328) was the same as that of 1995, twice as many workers were involved (284,000). As well, the number of

**Table 5**  
**Strikes and lockouts, workers involved and days lost**

Year	Strikes & lockouts	Workers involved	Person-
			days not worked
			'000
1980	1,028	439	9,130
1981	1,050	342	8,851
1982	680	464	5,713
1983	645	329	4,441
1984	716	187	3,883
1985	829	162	3,126
1986	748	484	7,151
1987	668	582	3,810
1988	548	207	4,901
1989	627	445	3,701
1990	579	270	5,079
1991	463	253	2,516
1992	404	150	2,110
1993	381	102	1,517
1994	374	81	1,607
1995	328	149	1,582
1996	328	284	3,340
1997 *	180	43	1,256

Source: Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources Development Canada

\* 1997 data refer to January to June only.

person-days lost in 1996 was more than twice that of 1995 (3.3 million versus 1.6 million). This year, by the first six months, 1.3 million person-days had been lost because of strikes and lockouts. In addition, several major unions and their employers were engaged in serious disputes at the time of writing this article.

### International comparisons

Even though the sources, methods and scope of union membership data vary from country to country, the figures compiled by the OECD show striking differences in union density ratios among 19 of its member countries.

- In the mid-nineties, high density ratios were recorded in Sweden (91%), Finland (81%) and Denmark (76%); in contrast, Spain, the United States and France had fewer than one in 5 unionized

Table 6  
Union density ratios of selected OECD countries

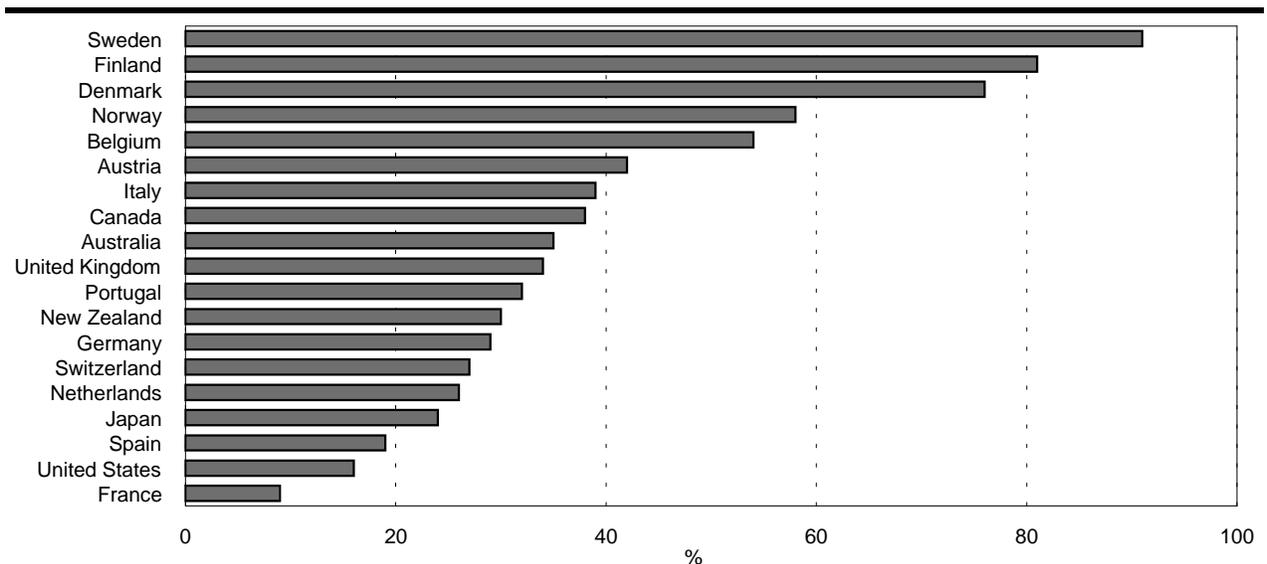
	Trade union density	
	1980	1994 *
	%	
Australia	48	35
Austria	56	42
Belgium	56	54
Canada	36	38
Denmark	76	76
Finland	70	81
France	18	9
Germany	36	29
Italy	49	39
Japan	31	24
Netherlands	35	26
New Zealand	56	30
Norway	57	58
Portugal	61	32
Spain	9	19
Sweden	80	91
Switzerland	31	27
United Kingdom	50	34
United States	22	16

Source: Employment Outlook, July 1997

\* See Chart D for exceptions to the 1994 reference year.

Chart D

Union density ratios are highest among the Scandinavian countries.



Source: Employment Outlook, July 1997

Note: All data refer to 1994 except for Denmark (1993), Finland (1995), Germany (1993), Italy (1992), the Netherlands (1993), Portugal (1990), Sweden (1993) and Switzerland (1992).

workers. Canada was in the middle of the range (Chart D, Table 6).<sup>3</sup>

- France presented a unique position in the sense that while only 9% of its workers were union members, almost everyone (95%) was covered by a collective bargaining agreement. As expected, collective bargaining coverage rates in most other countries exceeded the density ratios.

### Summary

Although one in 3 employees in Canada today belongs to a union – as has been the case for the past three decades – the mix of union membership has changed. Men's proportion has declined and the international unions have lost their predominance over the years: the sexes are now fairly equally represented, and by 1992 only 3 in 10 members belonged to an internationally affiliated union. Also, even though a blue-collar worker is still more likely to be a union member, some white-collar professions, particularly teaching and nursing, boast high union rates. And unionized workers are growing older, in part because of an aging blue-collar and public sector workforce.

Unionized jobs generally provide higher wages, greater benefits and better work arrangements than non-unionized jobs, but not all differences can be attributed to union status. Other factors playing a role include firm size, job tenure, education, age and sex.

After a prolonged "cooling off" period, the past year-and-a-half has witnessed some resurgence of labour unrest. Similarly, wage increases and inflation have seen a slight upward movement so far this year.

Internationally, data on union density ratios compiled by the OECD paint a mixed picture of the 19 member countries studied. Between 1980 and 1994, 5 of the countries (including Canada) recorded an increase in ratio, 13 had decreases and one saw no change. □

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### Notes

1 CALURA density ratios in the construction industry in particular have traditionally been higher than those captured by household surveys like the Labour Force Survey, mainly because CALURA union membership includes both the unemployed and retired, and the household surveys do not.

2 Although federal and provincial employment standards and labour laws generally entitle employees to at least two weeks of paid vacation, some workers do not enjoy such a benefit. These include some contract, term, on-call and casual workers. It is also conceivable that some workers who are expected to take pay in lieu of vacation time may have stated erroneously that they were not entitled to paid vacation.

3 The OECD density ratios for Canada are slightly higher than those captured by CALURA. The former come from the 1995 OECD Survey of Canada.

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