

UPDATE ON ...

LABOR'S DEMOGRAPHICS

As in years past, unionization levels have continued to vary widely according to demographic and occupational characteristics of the U.S. workforce, as well as geographic region. The unionization level of the total employed U.S. wage and salary workforce is one measure. However, in order to obtain a more balanced perspective, it is also important to consider the specific levels of union membership in both public and private sector areas of employment, which play a significant role in the U.S. economy. Using data compiled and supplied by the U.S. Department of Labor, this briefing paper provides a statistical summary of unionization levels for employee wage and salary workers in the U.S. and Maine.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2009, out of a total U.S. employed workforce of 124.5 million wage and salary workers, 15.3 million or 12.3 percent were union members.¹ The actual number of union members in 2009 declined by 771,000 from the previous year, “largely reflecting the overall drop in employment due to the recession.”² During this same period, the total number of employed wage and salary workers in the U.S. also experienced a decline of 4,887,000.³

Percentage of Unionization: Overview by Sex, Race, and Age

In terms of composition, the diversity of U.S. unions has continued. For example, out of the total number of union members, 45 percent (6.9 million) of these unionists were women, and 55 percent (8.4 million) were men. Union membership rates among Blacks or African Americans was 13.9 percent, for Whites it was 12.1 percent, Asians had a rate of 11.4 percent, and for people of Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, the rate was 10.2 percent. Black or African American men had the highest unionization rate of 15.4 percent.⁴

The age group having the highest levels of union membership were women and men between the ages of 55 to 64 years, with a unionization rate of 16.6 percent. Women in this age group were union members at a rate of 15.5 percent, while men were at a level of 17.8 percent. Young workers aged 16 to 24 had the lowest unionization rate at 4.7 percent.⁵

¹ U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Membership (Annual) News Release,” Released 1/22/10, Table 1, p.8. Except where noted, all of the statistical information and data contained in this briefing paper are derived from this report which can be accessed online at:

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.htm>

² *Ibid.*, p. 1

³ *Ibid.*, Table 1, p.8

⁴ *Ibid.*, Table 1, p.8-9

⁵ *Ibid.*

Unionization by Employment Sector, Industry, Occupation, and Full-Time/Part-Time Status ⁶

Sector, Industry, and Occupation

The latest BLS report portrays the continued widening disparity between unionization in the public versus private sectors. Specifically, for 2009, the rate of unionization in the public sector (37.4 percent) was more than five times higher than in the private sector (7.2 percent). The public sector containing the highest level of union membership was local government with a rate of 43.3 percent, followed by state government at 32.2 percent, and the federal government at 28 percent.

However, while the overall rate of employee unionization was much lower in the private sector, there were industries with significantly higher rates, particularly in a number of important U.S. employment areas. Table I documents the unionization levels in these industries:

**Table I: 2009 Unionization Levels In Important Private Sector Industries
(numbers in thousands)**

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Total Employed in Industry</u>	<u>Members of Unions</u>	
		<u>Total Number</u>	<u>% of Total Employed in Industry</u>
Utilities	906	237	26.1
Transportation & Warehousing	4,256	908	21.3
Telecommunications	1,088	174	16.0
Construction	6,613	958	14.5
Educational services	3,816	494	12.9
Motion picture & sound recording	331	42	12.8
Manufacturing	13,454	1,470	10.9

Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Membership (Annual) News Release,” 1/22/10, Table 3, p. 13, 15-16

Also, there were a number of specific occupational groups in both the public and private sectors that had high levels of unionization. These included occupations in: education, training and library (38.1 percent), protective services (35.6 percent), construction and extraction (21 percent), transportation and material moving (18.2 percent), natural resources, construction, and maintenance (17.7 percent), community and social services (16.1 percent), production (14.8 percent), healthcare practitioner/technical occupations (13.6 percent), which included RN’s, LPN’s, and a number of other health care occupations.

⁶ Data for this section derived from BLS report, p.2, and Tables 1 and 3

Industries with low levels of unionization were largely in the service sector involving wholesale and retail trade (5.3 percent), agriculture and related industries (1.1 percent), publishing (5.3 percent), and various other services with rates of 1 to 3 percent.

Full-Time/Part-Time Status

In its study, the BLS defined “full-time workers” as those “who usually work 35 hours or more per week at their sole or principal job,” and “part-time workers” as those “who usually work fewer than 35 hours per week at their sole or principal job.”⁷ Data showed that 13.6 of full-time workers, and 7.0 percent of part-time employees were unionized.

Unions and Non-Members

For 2009, a total of 1.6 million wage and salary workers were not union members, but still were represented by a union and received rights, protections, wages, and benefits provided by that representation. Data revealed that “nearly half” of these non-members were government employees.⁸

Unionization in Maine and other States

According to the BLS annual study, in 2009, 11.7 percent (63,000) of Maine’s total employed wage and salary workforce were unionized.⁹ States having a high concentration of union members, (20 percent or more), were New York, Hawaii, Alaska, and Washington. States with low union levels, (5 percent or less), included North and South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Virginia, and Mississippi.

Additional data also emphasized the sharp contrasts in unionization levels across the country by region. For example, in its report based on the BLS study, the Maine Department of Labor points out that: “the highest rates of union membership were generally in the Pacific, industrial Mid-West, and Mid-Atlantic regions, and the lowest rates in the South, Plains, and Rocky Mountain regions.”¹⁰

Of particular significance is the fact that according to the BLS study, “about half of the 15.3 million union members in the U.S. lived in just six states: California (2.5 million), New York (2.0 million), Illinois (1.0 million), Pennsylvania (0.8 million), Michigan (0.7 million), and New Jersey, (0.7 million), though these states accounted for only one-third of wage and salary employment nationally.”¹¹

Earnings and Union Affiliation¹²

Based on BLS data, Table II shows that in 2009, the “median weekly earnings” of full-time wage and salary employees, 16 years and over, who were members of a union or employee association were \$908. In contrast, median weekly earnings were \$710 for wage and salary employees who were non-union (see definitions in table). This constituted a weekly earnings differential of nearly 28 percent (\$198) between these two groups. This table also reveals union/non-union wage and salary differences for the following groups: Women, Black or African Americans, Asians, people of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and Whites.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁹ *Ibid.*, Table 5. According to the BLS, for 2009 this is based on a total number of 543,000 employed wage and salary workers.

¹⁰ Maine Dept. of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Labor Market Digest, “Union Membership in 2009,” Feb. 2010 edition, p. 8.

¹¹ BLS, p. 4

¹² BLS, data in this section derived from Table 2. According to the BLS, “in addition to coverage by a collective bargaining agreement, the [wage] difference reflects a variety of influences including variations in the distributions of union members and non-union employees by occupation, industry, firm size, or geographic region.”

Table II: Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers, 16 Years and Over, by Union Affiliation and Selected Characteristics

2009 Median Weekly Earnings

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Union Members*</u>	<u>Non-Union Workers*</u>	<u>Difference</u>	
			<u>Dollars</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Total	\$908	\$710	\$198	27.8%
Women	840	628	212	33.7%
Men	957	786	171	21.7%
Black/African Am.	749	581	168	28.9%
Women	717	560	157	28.0%
Men	780	599	181	30.2%
Asian	907	870	37	4.2%
Women	936	756	180	23.8%
Men	888	959	- 71	-7.9%
Hispanic or Latino				
Ethnicity	774	516	258	50%
Women	683	493	190	38.5%
Men	824	535	289	54%
White	934	728	206	28.2%
Women	859	639	220	34.4%
Men	981	811	170	20.9%

Source: BLS, Table 2, p. 11-12. ***Note:** According to the BLS, union members “refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.” Non-union “refer to workers who are neither members of a union nor represented by a union on the job.”

The Challenges for Labor

The challenges confronting workers and their unions are both ongoing and formidable. Some examples include: earning an adequate living wage or salary, representing the rights of labor in employment law, taking action to prevent employment discrimination, organizing new members and unions in a changing economy, engaging in collective bargaining and contract maintenance, dealing with employment loss and dislocation, and working to attain lifelong educational opportunities for workers and their families. Adding to these challenges, in recent years there have been major transformations in the U.S. and world economies, new technological innovations in the world of work, and dramatic developments in labor relations, including major organizational change within the labor movement itself. A remarkable aspect regarding the history of organized labor in the U.S. has been its continued ability to adapt to change. The future will reveal how workers and their unions deal with these latest challenges and changes.

Prepared as a Public Service by the Bureau of Labor Education, University of Maine, 2010

