ASSESSING FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD FACULTY UNIONS: A SURVEY OF FOUR PRIMARILY UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITIES

Jonah Butovsky, Larry Savage, and Michelle Webber

This study examines the views of full-time unionized university faculty at four primarily undergraduate universities in Ontario, Canada, on a broad range of issues related to postsecondary education, faculty associations, and the labor movement. The purpose of the study is twofold: first, to better understand the views of unionized professors regarding the role and effectiveness of their faculty unions and of labor unions more generally, and second to explore what impact such views might have on shaping the strategic orientation and political priorities of faculty associations in a context of unprecedented austerity measures and neoliberal restructuring in Ontario’s postsecondary education sector. Based on the findings of a mixed-methods survey, we found that university professors were relatively satisfied union members with a healthy degree of union—as opposed to class—consciousness, but had little appetite for engaging in political activities beyond the narrow scope of postsecondary education. This finding, we argue, reinforces the false division between the “economic” and the “political” in the realm of labor strategy, thus potentially undermining the capacity of unionized faculty associations to effectively resist neoliberal restructuring both on campus and in society more broadly.

Introduction

Higher education in Canada, as in most advanced capitalist democracies, is undergoing profound neoliberal restructuring. The neoliberal university, several decades in the making, is characterized by the growth of precarious and contingent academic workforces, the intensification of work (including the introduction of onerous regimes of accountability governance1), a focus on more revenue-generating academic programs and corporate–university linkages, the “professionalization” of senior academic administrators, contracting out, higher tuition fees, and greater student debt loads (Clawson and Page 2011; Cote and Allahar 2011; Ginsberg 2011; Nelson 2010). This process is embedded in a much larger neoliberal policy context in which income inequality is growing and financial capital continues to guide the political priorities of state actors (Harvey 2007).
Because the postsecondary sector is one of the most densely unionized in Canada (Dobbie and Robinson 2008), unions representing workers in higher education are central to struggles concerning the defense of public services, the quality of education, and the protection and the expansion of secure jobs in universities. Yet the different class positions and increasing internal stratification of university workers have prompted different groups of employees to defend their interests in different ways (Berry 2005). The focus of this study is on full-time faculty members, a small yet understudied group who occupy some of the most privileged positions in universities and whose commitment to unionism and broader notions of solidarity is often in question.

Given the central role played by full-time, unionized, university professors in both resisting and reinforcing the neoliberal university, we sought to better understand their views regarding the utility and purpose of their faculty unions, and to explore what impact such views might have on shaping the strategic orientation and political priorities of these faculty unions amid unprecedented austerity measures and neoliberal restructuring in Ontario’s postsecondary sector.

As a case study, we focus on faculty associations at Brock University, Trent University, Nipissing University, and Lakehead University. We surveyed faculty at these particular universities because, while they are geographically dispersed, they are all primarily undergraduate, public, and unionized institutions with relatively similar faculty complements. We decided to focus on primarily undergraduate universities because, unlike research-intensive universities, they are often overlooked in the literature, and the number of unionized faculty members in primarily undergraduate universities in Ontario far exceeds union ranks in the province’s research-intensive universities. Ontario is an ideal site for a case study because, in addition to being Canada’s largest province, it represents a central theater for union struggle. Moreover, according to Newstadt (2008), “the transformation of Ontario’s post-secondary [sector] parallels so closely the trajectory of neoliberalism that it is a tremendously insightful and in many ways paradigmatic example of state restructuring.”

The survey findings, in short, demonstrated that professors at Brock, Trent, Nipissing, and Lakehead universities were relatively satisfied union members with a healthy degree of union—as opposed to class—consciousness. The findings also revealed that respondents had little appetite for engaging in political activities beyond the narrow scope of postsecondary education. This finding, we argue, reinforces the false division between the “economic” and the “political” in the realm of labor strategy, thus potentially undermining the capacity of unionized faculty associations to effectively resist neoliberal restructuring both on campus and, certainly, in society more broadly.

The Political Economy of Higher Education in Ontario

In the 1960s, the Ontario provincial government invested in a massive expansion of postsecondary education, leading to the establishment of several
new, primarily undergraduate, universities, including Brock University and Trent University, both established in 1964. By the mid-1970s, however, the neoliberal university was beginning to take shape, as the era of university expansion was replaced by a period of contraction, prompting professors at a number of universities to transform their faculty associations into bona fide unions in an effort to better protect the interests of faculty members (Axelrod 2008; Rastin 2000).4

This first wave of faculty unionization was followed by a second, smaller, wave in the 1980s. This era of neoliberal restructuring unfolded unevenly across the country, but was characterized in general terms by employers’ more aggressive stance in collective bargaining, job cuts, contracting out and privatization, restrictions on the right to strike, growing use of back-to-work legislation, and the introduction of continental free trade (Axelrod 2008; Panitch and Swartz 2003; Rastin 2000).5 Newstadt (2008) argues that the neoliberal university began to take on more “definitive dimensions” in the 1980s and 1990s, “not because fiscal restraint had ‘hardened,’ but because what amounted to a form of structural adjustment, drew increasing support from university administrators, an ever larger portion of the professoriate, and a good number of students as well.” While university professors undoubtedly played no small role in producing and reproducing the neoliberal university, they also simultaneously sought to defend their immediate employment interests through unionization.6

The Great Recession, which battered the global economy in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, hit the province of Ontario particularly hard, leading the provincial Liberal government to impose austerity measures on public sector institutions, including universities, as a way of mitigating budgetary shortfalls and disciplining public sector workers. Ontario already had the lowest per-student funding in the university sector in Canada since the early 1990s (Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT] 2012), and in 2010 funding to Ontario universities was 24 percent below the national average (CAUT 2011). In an effort to cope with the funding situation, many of the province’s universities decided to more aggressively pursue partnerships and fund-raising initiatives with the corporate sector, sought to increase student enrollment, and instituted hiring freezes, or increased the proportion of courses taught by cheaper, part-time contingent faculty. A number of Ontario universities, including Brock, also sought to reduce expenditures through program reviews and prioritization exercises designed to bolster profit-generating units at the expense of non-revenue-generating departments. Paradoxically, a new layer of university managers was hired to respond to these budgetary pressures.

In 2010, the Liberal government directed public and para-public sector employers to negotiate two-year wage freezes with unionized employees. The directive, however, was undermined when an arbitrator ruled that the provincial government had no authority to impose wage freezes without legislating them. Worried about dealing with the political fallout of legislating wage freezes, the provincial government established the Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s
Public Services in March 2011 in order to recommend ways of reducing spending and eliminating the mounting provincial deficit. The establishment of the Commission, headed by former TD Bank Chief Economist Donald Drummond, was widely viewed as an attempt to provide the governing Liberals with the political cover needed to implement a public sector austerity agenda (Cohn 2012). Unsurprisingly, the final report of the Commission called for massive cuts in public spending and public services. According to an analysis by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), “Drummond’s model of labor relations consists primarily of hard bargaining on the part of broader public sector (BPS) employers, with government . . . supporting the employer when the going gets tough” (OCUFA 2012, 3). The analysis continued by observing that Drummond “is counting on the devastating size of his cuts to the funding of public services to force the parties to bargain concessionary agreements, eliminate jobs, and find ‘efficiencies,’ which obviously can only translate into dramatically higher workloads for the remaining public sector workers” (OCUFA 2012, 3).

With the Commission’s findings in hand, the provincial government wasted no time implementing a program of public sector austerity. In the fall of 2012, the governing Liberals passed a law allowing the provincial government to override locally negotiated agreements with elementary and high school educational workers if the terms of the agreements did not match provincial policy mandates. The provincial government’s decision to use the new law to unilaterally implement a wage freeze, unpaid days off, and claw back sick days was fiercely resisted by a number of teachers’ unions, spurring work-to-rule campaigns and a number of constitutional challenges. Similar government legislation was drafted to include all public and para-public sector workers in Ontario, but was delayed when the government prorogued the legislature in October 2012.

Within this context of mounting government austerity, we launched our faculty survey. Using both quantitative and qualitative questions, the survey explored the state of higher education, the work of faculty, and the changing conditions of faculty work. We also explored respondents’ thoughts on the role of faculty associations as political actors and their perceptions concerning the effectiveness of their own associations. Additionally, we asked questions about respondents’ views on labor unions more generally. Our findings demonstrate that, on the whole, the faculty members surveyed are quite satisfied with their unions’ ability to negotiate higher salaries, defend academic freedom, and preserve collegial governance in the university. We also found that most members are content for their union to be active on issues within their university or, at most, within higher education more broadly. Only a small minority see their union as a conduit for broader political engagement, and an equally small minority see no political role whatsoever for faculty unions. Similarly, a minority of faculty members see their interests in line with other unionized groups on campus, suggesting that there are important barriers to building solidarity and engaging in meaningful and sustained collective action with adjuncts, teaching
assistants, and other university workers. One of the clear themes derived from
the survey results is the notion that faculty increasingly see their unions as
playing a central and positive role in defending their professional status,
autonomy, and material privileges. Thus, we argue that the professors surveyed
share a strong union, rather than class, consciousness. In the sections that follow,
we dive deeper into the details of these findings and consider their implications
for faculty associations who continue to struggle against growing austerity in
Ontario universities.

Methods

Between June and October of 2012, our mixed-methods surveys were dis-
tributed to all full-time faculty members at Brock, Lakehead, Nipissing, and
Trent universities.

Despite the inherent limitations of survey-based research, we managed to
obtain acceptable response rates and reliable university-level samples across a
range of variables. After eliminating the names of people who had retired, moved
to another university, or were in fact administrators, the university-level
response rate varied from 27 percent for Nipissing and Trent, 28 percent at
Lakehead, and 41 percent at Brock. Our response rates are within the range
typically found with surveys of university professors (Goldey et al. 2010;
Nakhaie and Brym 2011). To gauge the reliability of our university-level
samples, we compared the characteristics of our sample with the characteristics
of the institutions as a whole. We found no significant differences between our
sample and the entire faculty regarding rank, age, and gender. We also compared
the early respondents in each university-level sample (first quarter to last
quarter) and discovered there were no significant differences between those two
groups. For these reasons, we can infer that those who did not reply are not
substantially different from those who responded.

Using an online survey program, we posed 71 questions, a number of which
were open-ended. In addition to questions about faculty work, faculty unions,
and organized labor more generally, we asked a range of demographic questions
to determine whether there were significant variations in the membership based
on gender, age, rank, and so forth. We pretested the survey instrument on a
number of faculty members to give us confidence in the validity of our measures
and interviewed these faculty members after they took the survey to ensure they
interpreted our questions in the way we intended them. The analysis that follows
is based primarily on the responses to survey items that do not differ by location
in a statistically significant way. After excluding those variables in which we saw
statistically significant variation, we were left with 39 out of 65 variables. This
suggests to us that, broadly speaking, the views of faculty members at the four
universities we selected are similar. Clearly, the reasons why the responses from
participants vary from university to university are important; however, that
analysis is not undertaken here.
Based on the literature on faculty unions in Canada and the broader literature on unions and professional occupations, we developed the following straightforward research hypotheses. The conceptualization of each hypothesis is also included in brackets.

**Hypothesis 1:** Faculty members are satisfied with their union.

(Multidimensional measure of satisfaction)

**Hypothesis 2:** Faculty members are generally pro-union.

(Multidimensional measure of attitudes toward unions)

**Hypothesis 3:** Faculty members are not interested in expanding their links with the labor movement and progressive political parties.

(Graded scheme of involvement)

**Descriptive Statistics**

According to the survey results, faculty members are broadly supportive of the work of their faculty unions, and in fact survey respondents indicated a high level of support for unions in general, at least in the abstract (Tables 1, 2). A majority of respondents indicated they find their union effective at protecting professional standards of academe (60 percent say they are “very effective” or “somewhat effective”) and collegial self-governance (67 percent say they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Pro-Labor Sentiment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to be a union member (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Satisfaction with Faculty Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defending academic freedom (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither effective nor ineffective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not effective at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are “very effective” or “somewhat effective). An even stronger majority approved of their unions’ work in defending academic freedom (71 percent said they are “very effective” or “somewhat effective”) and negotiating improved salaries and benefits (91 percent said their union was “very effective” or “somewhat effective”). The majority (65 percent) also agreed or strongly agreed that labor unions are a positive social force and disagreed (52 percent) that unions have too much power in the society (with 29 percent responding that they were “neutral” on this question). Only 5 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement that “[t]he labour movement is a positive social force.”

This level of pro-union sentiment is much higher than in Canadian society overall. In a major survey of the Canadian electorate in 2011, respondents were asked: “How much confidence do you have in unions?” Six percent answered “a great deal,” and 31 percent said “quite a lot,” while 46 percent responded “not very much” and another 18 percent answered “none” (Fournier et al. 2011). Among union members, support increases to 11 percent “a great deal,” 45 percent “quite a lot,” 36 percent “not very much,” and 8 percent “none at all” (p < .000), but appears somewhat lower than among the faculty members we surveyed.

Faculty members surveyed identified themselves overwhelmingly as being on the “left” on economic issues and as “liberal” on social issues (Table 3).\(^8\) Seventy-eight percent of respondents placed themselves as “very left” or “left” on economic issues and another 11 percent identified as “neutral,” only 8 percent of the respondents placed themselves on the “right.” The results were even more one-sided when respondents were asked about social issues. Fully 95 percent rated themselves as “liberal” on social issues.

Looking once again to the Canadian election study to contextualize our data, it appears that the university faculty we surveyed were slightly to the left of the general public. The 2011 Canadian election study asked respondents where they scored themselves from 0 to 10 on the left right spectrum (with 0 being furthest to the left and 10 being furthest to the right). The CES did not separate social from economic issues. The average score for the general public was 5.04 or virtually dead-center. The average score for union members was 4.69, just to the left of the overall population.\(^9\)

While respondents indicated clear support for unions, that support was certainly qualified in several important ways, indicating a not insignificant level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic issues (%)</th>
<th>Social issues (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very liberal</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very conservative</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of sectionalism among the professoriate. For example, when asked about the degree to which the faculty association should cooperate with other unions on campus or support a pro-union agenda in the broader political sphere, we found a distinct reduction in enthusiasm. Only 47 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement: “I identify my employment interests with other unionized groups on campus.” Looking at Figure 1, we see that the median member wants to see his/her union involved in relevant issues within the university and to lobby the government on postsecondary issues. However, less than a quarter of faculty union members believe their union should engage in political activism on a range of social and economic issues.

By way of comparison, we know from a 2011 survey of members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) that unionized white-collar government workers are more invested in the labor movement and see a broader political function for their union than the faculty members that we surveyed. For instance, in that survey, 57 percent of PSAC members responded that it was “important” or “very important” that their union “engage in political action,” 66 percent thought that it was “important” or “very important” to work to “elect labour-friendly politicians,” and 74 percent felt their union should work at “building alliances with other unions and like-minded organizations” (Environics 2011).

Professional Identity

We suspect that faculty members might be reticent to stand beside other university workers and the broader labor movement because of their strong attachment to a profession/occupation, rather than class-based, identity. Our data (Table 4) show that the overwhelming majority of respondents identify as professionals. Sixty-four percent strongly agree and another 25 percent agree with this statement. However, only 7 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “unions and academics don’t mix.” A strong majority of respondents disagreed (45 percent disagreed and another 25 percent strongly disagreed), thus dealing a blow to the historically popular notion that unionization is incompatible with professionalism (Crain 2004; Hurd 2000; Schlachter 1976).

![Figure 1. Role of the Faculty Association in Political Activism.](image_url)
Overall, professional identity among faculty members does not seem to detract from union consciousness. In fact, Table 5 demonstrates that faculty members who strongly identify as professionals are also the most likely to indicate that they are proud to be union members. That said, union pride among academics should not be overstated. While 59 percent of academics in our survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am proud to be a union member,” members of the PSAC were much more likely to report that they are proud to be union members (84 percent of PSAC workers are “very proud” or “somewhat proud” to be union members) (Environics 2011). One implication that can be drawn from this data is that professors tend to strongly prefer their unions to labor unions in general.

Reconciling unionization and professionalism has not, however, turned faculty associations into militant or class-conscious organizations (Savage and Webber 2013). When asked if “I generally consider faculty interests to be opposed to those of the administration,” survey respondents were split almost down the middle. About 65 percent of faculty members disagreed or were neutral on this issue. This finding suggests that there is a widely held sentiment that faculty and administrators can constructively problem-solve. It further suggests that most faculty members do not see the employer–employee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I identify as a professional (%)</th>
<th>Unions and academics do not mix (%)</th>
<th>I see faculty interests oppositional to the administration’s (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Professional Identity of Faculty Members

Table 5. Examining Union and Professional Identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I identify as a professional</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson chi-square = 77.970. Sig = .000.
relationship as inherently adversarial. This finding is consistent with the literature on unions of professionals, which has found that employees who identify as professionals tend to prefer a non-militant style of union representation (Hurd 2000; Raelin 1989; Schlachter 1976). Faculty, as professionals, tend to see their loyalty as belonging to their discipline, to their students, or to the principles of academic freedom and collegial self-governance (Brown 2003; Savage, Webber, and Butovsky 2012). In some cases, faculty associations pursue unionization precisely to defend self-collegial governance and professional autonomy in the workplace (Penner 1994; Rastin 2000; Savage, Webber, and Butovsky 2012), thus providing more fodder for the idea that professionalism and unionization can be mutually reinforcing.

**Multivariate Analysis**

We conducted a number of regression analyses concerning (a) satisfaction with one’s union and (b) support for labor in the abstract, and (c) support for specific labor actions as the dependent variables. The key rationale for multivariate analysis is to try to zero in on the independent effects of key predictor variables by controlling for other variables that might influence a respondent’s score on a given dependent variable.

**Satisfaction with Union Performance**

We constructed a composite variable based on the addition of the four questions that ask respondents to rate the effectiveness of their union on a range of functions (alpha = .767). These four questions are protecting collegial governance, protecting academic freedom, protecting professional standards of academe, and negotiating improved wages and benefits. None of the demographic variables included in the model (faculty, rank, age, or gender) are a significant predictor of satisfaction with the union (Table 6). A composite variable capturing three variables measuring pro-union sentiment was strongly related to satisfaction with their faculty association. Not surprisingly,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>$r^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B Std. error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>10.081 1.538</td>
<td>.068 1.032</td>
<td>6.555</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>.431 .418</td>
<td>.068 1.032</td>
<td>.303</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.178 .119</td>
<td>.102 1.499</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current rank</td>
<td>-.256 .279</td>
<td>-.063 -.919</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.427 .391</td>
<td>.072 1.093</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>.155 .449</td>
<td>.023 .346</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-union position</td>
<td>.363 .082</td>
<td>.295 4.415</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: satisfaction.
respondents with a pro-union outlook are more likely to have a higher level of satisfaction with the performance of their union.

Support for Labor in General

We used a composite variable based on adding respondents’ answers to the following questions: I consider myself pro-union, I am proud to be a union member, and labor unions are a positive social force (alpha = .786). Looking at Table 7, we see that faculty and age were the only significant demographic predictors of the pro-union variable. Older members scored slightly higher on the pro-union variable. Those members in the social sciences, humanities, and education score about 1.3 points higher on the pro-union variable than those in the other disciplines (scores range from a low of 3 to a high of 15, with the higher score indicating that the respondent is more pro-union). This disciplinary distinction matches other work on the ideological orientation of the Canadian professoriate (Nakhaie and Adam 2008; Nakhaie and Brym 2011), and is consistent with the findings of Savage, Webber, and Butovsky (2012) that faculty support for unionization at Brock University was highest in the faculties of social sciences and education. Gender, rank, and working class background were not significant predictors of pro-labor sentiment.

Discussion and Conclusions

So we can now revisit the hypotheses we presented earlier in the article. Hypothesis 1 (faculty are satisfied with the work their union does for them) is confirmed, particularly for negotiating salary and benefits, somewhat less for protecting collegial governance. Hypothesis 2 (faculty are broadly pro-union) is supported. Hypothesis 3 (faculty want their union to limit their political involvement to matters directly related to postsecondary education) was confirmed.

Our findings about the generally pro-union views held by the faculty at Brock, Lakehead, Laurentian, and Trent universities reveal important distinctions between this group of professors and similar research about university faculty in Canada more generally. Nakhaie and Brym (2011), for example, found that Canadian university faculty as a group tilted to the left politically, but only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>r²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>12.711</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>15.158</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>−1.295</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>−.241</td>
<td>−4.491</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>2.201</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current rank</td>
<td>−.180</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>−.051</td>
<td>−.901</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.326</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>1.742</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable.
slightly, and were quite heterogeneous in their views. This suggests that there are important distinctions to be made between the types of universities (primarily undergraduate vs. medical/doctoral) and between universities in different provinces. American research, for example, demonstrates that support for labor unions is lower among faculty at the larger, more prestigious universities (Goldey et al. 2010). Even within universities, Nakhaie and Brym (1999) found that faculty who are published in elite journals are less likely to be pro-union.

Professors from the universities we sampled are largely supportive of their faculty unions and believe that the improvements to the terms and conditions of work are due to their unions’ efforts. Respondents exhibited strong support for the continuing relevance of unions, and most believe that unions and the labor movement are positive social forces, suggesting that faculty value certain aspects of labor unity. However, as Gindin and Stanford (2006, 382) remind us, “apparent unity never automatically implies active solidarity.” This is certainly the case in the postsecondary education sector, where it is clear from our survey results that support for the labor movement comes with important caveats and does not translate into full solidarity with other unions on campus or to a desire to see faculty unions involved in political affairs beyond the narrow confines of the university sector. One respondent (Faculty Survey 2012) summed up this view when they wrote that their faculty “should not be involved with backing other unions,” especially in “a situation that ha[s] nothing to do with us.”

Swartz and Warkett (2012, 20) correctly note that the “scope of the labour movement’s solidarity is linked to how broad or narrow are the things we are fighting for and against, whether limited to employers and the current terms and conditions of employment or taking on systemic economic or political problems.” However, even when unions are willing and able to practice broader forms of solidarity, Swartz and Warkett argue that sectionalism, economism, and unions’ tendency to separate out the political and economic spheres present three significant obstacles to ensuring that such solidarities are meaningful and sustained. While the challenge of overcoming these obstacles exists in all labor organizations, they are particularly acute in faculty unions, as evidenced by our survey findings, in which respondents responded generally positively to the “economic” functions of unions (like bargaining wage increases), but less positively to political action, especially the variety that extends beyond the narrow confines of postsecondary education. Moreover, sectionalism and economism figure prominently in faculty unions, where divisions between academics on the tenure track and other groups of university workers are stark.

Despite this, unionized faculty members have come a long way in terms of their comfort level with the labor movement at large and its broader notions of solidarity. According to Savage (1994, 57), a survey of unionized Canadian professors in the 1970s revealed that the “great majority were opposed to collective bargaining in principle but thought the particular circumstances of their university justified it.” Even after decades of experience with unionization, former CAUT President Roland Penner predicted in 1994 that faculty unions would never affiliate to labor movement centrals like the Canadian Labour
Congress (Penner 1994, 50). However, just a few years later, he would be proven wrong. In 2001, the National Union of the CAUT was established for the specific purpose of creating an avenue for faculty unions to affiliate to the Congress and its respective provincial federation of labor. As of 2014, twenty-one faculty associations across Canada had joined National Union of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (NUCAUT), including Penner’s own University of Manitoba (NUCAUT 2014).

This is not to suggest that university professors are positioned to lead a labor movement resurgence. For although our study revealed that on the whole university faculty were strongly pro-union, their union consciousness should not be misinterpreted as class consciousness, and their conception of the proper role and function of labor unions differs considerably from what the literature on union renewal offers as effective strategies for reasserting union power. Lévesque, Murray, and Le Queux (2005, 402) argue that coalition-building, community unionism, and union democracy are key to the project of labor movement renewal. However, none of these strategies figure prominently in the politics of the university faculty associations we studied. While some faculty unions in Ontario have made some halting progress in this direction through joining local and provincial labor federations and building ad hoc or temporary cross-campus alliances with students and other campus unions, there remains some reluctance, or even outright opposition, from a large portion of the membership, to become politically engaged in this way. One respondent felt that most of their faculty association’s “money sent to [the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations] OCUFA and [the Canadian Association of University Teachers] CAUT seems wasted on political lobbying,” while another complained that their faculty union “should not be involved with backing other unions to support labour solidarity” (Faculty Survey 2012).

While union leaders clearly need to be sensitive to the ideological and political understandings of their members, they must also actively educate, persuade, and agitate. Recent events in Wisconsin and Michigan, which showed us that right-wing attacks on the very essence of labor unions can emerge quickly and with little warning, demonstrate the importance of member activism and sustained engagement.

Fiorito and Coleman Gallagher’s case study of union renewal at Florida State University (2006) clearly demonstrates the benefits of member engagement and internal organizing. Facing a legislatively imposed decentralization of union representation and bargaining that risked wiping out the bargaining rights of university faculty associations, the United Faculty of Florida’s affiliate at Florida State viewed the right-wing attack as “an opportunity, if not an imperative, to move the union ‘closer to the members’ ” (Fiorito and Coleman Gallagher 2006, 60). Reflecting on the faculty association’s successful campaign to preserve bargaining rights, Lévesque and Murray (2006, 9) argued that it created a “virtuous circle in terms of enhanced militancy and activism on the part of the union membership.” In a similar fashion, mounting austerity in Ontario provides unionized faculty associations in that province with a silver lining
insofar as it may force faculty union leaders to reconnect with members, spur internal organizing, and increase efforts at member education.

Despite the fact that our survey results revealed that very few respondents supported the idea of having faculty associations become involved in election campaigns or broader social struggles that were not directly linked to the postsecondary education sector, local and provincial political struggles, whether rooted in the university sector or not, are clearly interdependent. For example, state-led attacks on collective bargaining rights, the proposed elimination of union security provisions, onerous union disclosure laws, and legislation aimed at undermining unions’ ability to engage in political action all shape the capacity of unions, including faculty associations, to exist and bargain at the local level. In short, by eschewing broader political struggles, the more economistic faculty union functions that university professors do appreciate may be jeopardized.

As Kumar and Schenk (2006, 29) note, unions, in order to be effective, “have to continually take stock of their situation, identify the challenges, and adapt and modify their approaches, strategies and structures.” Faculty unions are no different. On the surface, faculty associations may seem disconnected from some of the more gloomy themes that dominate the literature on organized labor and union renewal. After all, the number of unionized faculty associations is growing, not shrinking, despite the relative dominance of business unionist frames and guild-like mentalities among unions of university professors. Moving from a workplace-centered model of business unionism, wherein improving salaries, benefits, and working conditions are the central concerns of the faculty association, to a broader social unionist perspective, which concerns itself with issues of social justice and economic equality beyond the confines of the university, is strategically important for faculty associations, despite the fact that there seems to be little demand for this direction among the faculty members we surveyed.

Shifting in this direction is strategically important because the clock is running out on traditional guild-like methods for sustaining faculty union power. In the past, some faculty associations survived by cultivating relationships with benevolent senior administrators, often drawn from the ranks of the faculty. This approach to bargaining meant that faculty associations did not need to develop any sort of culture of membership mobilization or political action, secure in the knowledge that if traditional collective bargaining did not produce a contract, an arbitrator would be called upon to deliver a fair and final settlement. Some professionals view arbitration as the best method of resolving disputes precisely because it appeals to their deference to expert knowledge and judgment. However, neoliberal restructuring has worked to undermine this long-standing perception by making it clear that “having the best arguments” is no substitute for concrete bargaining power in the face of an intransigent employer and an unsympathetic taxing public (Savage and Webber 2013). University professors were historically more insulated from the class envy arguments levied at public sector workers more generally, largely because their elevated salary levels were not viewed as the product of unionization, but rather as the result of meeting the stringent educational requirements typically
associated with the academy. However, this line of defense is proving increas-
ingly difficult to maintain amid unprecedented austerity measures in higher 
education (Savage and Webber 2013).

Class envy is a problem, not just between “taxpayers” and faculty unions, but also between faculty unions and contingent, part-time academic workers, or working students. Lack of cooperation between workers’ organizations on a single university campus limits opportunities for coordinated grievances, multi-
union bargaining strategies, and other university-wide campaigns. The same 
logic applies to relationships between faculty associations and student organiza-\tions or other groups with a direct stake in the university. To be sure, such alliances are difficult to maintain in the face of divergent short-term priorities and a lack of trust and institutional infrastructure. However, when done right, sustained campus-wide or campus–community alliances can provide faculty associations with much-needed support in bargaining and in political battles with university administration or the state.

For example, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts 
(PhENOM), a coalition of faculty, students, and community stakeholders 
formed in 2005 to defend and fight for the expansion of state support for public 
higher education in Massachusetts, was able to secure a number of victories, the most impressive of which was a commitment from the governor to work toward eliminating community college tuition (Clawson and Leiblum 2008, 25). The coalition’s success, in part, depended on university faculty and staff’s decision to reject the tendency to view student tuition and financial aid, on one hand, and university labor costs, on the other, as a zero-sum game. Overcoming these sectionalist impulses is extremely difficult, which is why coalitions like PhENOM are rare. However, in the current political climate, these sorts of alliances are increasingly important for both students and university workers.

Some faculty union leaders may read the results of our study with a degree of satisfaction. However, this would be a mistake. For while it would be accurate to interpret from the findings that university professors thought their unions did a good job overall, this view seemingly reflects a specific idea of the role and functions of labor unions as service-delivery organizations, responsible primarily for negotiating and defending workplace entitlements. But as Dan Clawson 
(2013, 29) suggests, “if the purpose of a union is for people to get together, collectively decide what matters to them, and put forward a vision of a different society and different values, then higher education unions are doing a lousy job.”

Complacency, in many ways, is the biggest threat to faculty unions. In the 
words of Clawson (2013, 29), “higher education is being transformed and becoming privatized, and not only are we doing very little to oppose it, but also, most of our members do not understand what’s happening, we have not made connections to our natural allies, and we fail to see that the larger public blames us for decisions others are making.” To be sure, university faculty are well equipped to use their occupational status, cultural capital, and job security to participate fully in the fight against the threats to higher education that Clawson
has identified. What is missing is the political will, organizational capacity, and requisite union education required to transform faculty unions and mobilize faculty members to speak out and participate in the collective actions that would breathe life into Clawson’s prescriptions.

The evidence gathered from our survey confirms that there exists a lack of urgency among university professors to use their unions in a broader social struggle to combat neoliberalism. On one hand, this finding is hardly surprising given the relatively privileged place of university professors within the university hierarchy, their tepid relationship with the broader labor movement, and the “professional” identity of their members. On the other hand, mounting austerity will undoubtedly continue to push faculty unions and their members out of their traditional comfort zones as they confront challenges related to government funding cuts, threats to autonomy, and the growing precarious nature of academic labor. How this process will alter, transform, or consolidate the politics of faculty unions in the long run is an open question, but in the short run there appears to be a monumental mismatch between where professors would like their unions to be and where their unions will need to be in order to preserve the very things their members value in higher education.

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1. Accountability governance refers to bureaucratically derived performance indicators devised by senior administrators to quantify and enhance faculty “productivity.” Its effect is typically the deprofessionalization of faculty and an increase in managerial control.

2. Research on faculty unions tends to focus on organizing drives (Dixon, Tope, and Van Dyke 2008; Rastin 2000; Savage, Webber, and Butovsky 2012), the effects of collective bargaining on university workplaces (Martinello 2009), and the perceptions of faculty about their relationship to their universities (Brown 2003). In assessing the political orientation of university faculty in Canada, Nakhai and Brym (1999, 2011) concluded that professors tilt to the left of the general population, but only slightly, and with substantial variation across universities and faculties within universities. While Nakhai and Brym did ask their respondents how they felt about unions in general, little literature exists that explores the relationship between faculty unions and their own members (Katchanovski, Rothman, and Nevitte 2011) or other groups of university workers. While Anderson and Jones (1998) examined the organizational capacity and political activities of faculty associations in Canada, their study limited participation to the presidents or senior executive officers of Canadian faculty associations. In contrast, our study answers David Camfield’s (2005) call for more empirically grounded research concerning Canadian public sector unions as we focus on members’ assessment of their unions and the labor movement more generally.
3. The literature on the determinants of union satisfaction and support among university faculty and other related professions generally concludes that professionals are pragmatic “bread and butter” unionists who focus their energies on core issues that relate to the terms and conditions of work rather than broader political causes (Fiorito, Gallagher, and Fukami 1988; Jarley, Kuruvilla, and Casteel 1990). To the degree that their unions are successful at improving salaries and working conditions, faculty members will support them. The literature also supports the idea that a pro-union consciousness is not in conflict with professional identity or even antagonism to management, and thus provides more evidence of pragmatism (Gordon, Beauvais, and Ladd 1984). Finally, there is no substantial or consistent evidence of a relationship between demographic factors and union support among university faculty (Ng 1989).


6. As of 2014, the vast majority of university professors in Ontario are union members. In fact, faculty at only three universities, McMaster University, University of Toronto, and the University of Waterloo, remain non-union.

7. As with any survey, one potential limitation is the survey instrument itself and the potential for a range of interpretations by participants of the wording of questions (Goldey et al. 2010). Further, surveys that draw on member responses are limited by the level of knowledge of each union member about her or his own union and its actions (Lévesque, Murray, and Le Queux 2005).

8. By “liberal” on social issues, we mean more critical of traditional social structures and morality, thus, for example, showing greater acceptance for things like abortion rights and same-sex marriage.

9. There is one limitation to our characterization of faculty members as being slightly to the left of the general population and even other union members. About 45 percent of faculty indicated they did not find the “left–right” distinction meaningful. And those respondents who indicated they did not believe in the left–right distinction did answer toward the right on a range of other variables compared with those who did consider the left–right distinction meaningful. We would stress, however, that those respondents who did not accept the left–right distinction were to the right in relative rather than absolute terms.

References


Faculty Survey. 2012. Survey of full-time faculty members at Brock, Nipissing, Lakehead, and Trent universities.


