

Trends in contemporary trade union membership

[History](#)



Trade union can broadly be described as collective outfit of workers that looks after their welfare. The concept of 'unions' has given a great stimulus to the employees to fight for their rights. Through large scale membership, the unions are able to generate collective bargaining system against the monopoly of the big corporate houses. In the current times, the new human resource strategy encourages membership to the unions as it helps the management to resolve contentious issues with them on collective basis. TUC or Trade Union Congress of UK represents nearly 58 unions across the nation (TUC, 2011). They are major organizations that understand the needs and requirements of the working people and help provide them with safe working environment and help negotiate better pay and compensation.

Trade unions play major role in the labor market in UK. The statistics of union membership is clear indication of its success as independent bodies that can negotiate successfully for the rights of the working population. BIS, a leading government department, regularly analyses government policies and publishes range of information and data of various public and private organizations to promote transparency. The major aim is to reveal as to how taxpayers' money is spent and whether resources are better used to deliver value for money. BIS' statistics on trade union membership is an important aspect that demonstrates its proactive participation in the welfare of the workers (BIS, 2011).

But the recent fall in membership has emerged as major concern (Table 1; BIS, 2011) for TUC and government. The membership to unions has fallen from 2008 till 2011 showing its inability in negotiating welfare policies for workers in economic slowdown. The trend also highlights the fact that women have shown greater trust on the unions but membership has

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declined for workers for 60 years and above for the above period. The Table 2 (BIS, 2011) is hugely significant and shows that public sector has nearly double the union members (60.9%) as against the private sector employees (39.1%). Nearly 78.6% of members are full time workers, whereas only 21.4% of part time workers are union members. Most distressing is the fact that disabled membership of union is only about 17.5%. Moreover, the table gives credence to the fact that workforce with higher qualifications has more awareness and trust in union whereas non-qualified constitute only 3.7% of union members.

The recent trend in union membership is distressing for the working population because they increasingly describe the reducing power of the unions. The private sector has maintained its exploitive tendencies.

Moreover, the dismally low percentage of under privileged segment of society like people with disability illustrate that they are discriminated and not given opportunity to be part of social action groups like unions. The statistics demonstrate the failure of unions to maintain the trust of the people at large. The declining membership is testament to its ineffective mechanisms that are not able to fight for the causes of people who have been retrenched or have not been given their due rights. Thus, the examination of membership statistics is hugely revealing and indicates the falling popularity and effectiveness of unions which needs to be addressed urgently.

(words: 528)

Reference

BIS or Department of Business Innovation and Skills. (2011). Analysis.

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[uk/the_tuc/tuc-8681-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-8681-f0.cfm)

Appendix 1

Table 1

Trade union density by gender and age group, 2002 to 2011

Per cent, not seasonally adjusted

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

All

16-19

4.9

5.2

3.9

3.3

5.2

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3. 8

4. 4

4. 1

4. 0

3. 1

20-24

13. 5

14. 0

13. 5

13. 1

13. 1

13. 0

12. 2

11. 8

12. 1

11. 4

25-29

22. 0

22. 4

22. 7

21. 8

21. 9

19. 5

20. 2

21. 0

19. 5

18. 2

30 to 34

26. 7

28. 5

26. 8

26. 9

24. 7

25. 1

24. 9

24. 0

22. 5

24. 0

35 to 39

32. 3

32. 5

31. 0

29. 4

29. 0

30. 0

27. 4

27. 5

26. 9

26. 7

40 to 44

35. 9

36. 1

34. 6

35. 0

35. 2

33. 4

33. 2

30. 5

31. 1

29. 4

45 to 49

39. 7

38. 8

39. 9

37. 7

37. 7

37. 0

35. 4

36. 1

34. 1

33. 6

50 to 54

39. 0

39. 8

39. 3

40. 6

39. 9

39. 1

38.4

37.5

37.6

36.2

55 to 59

34.8

35.4

36.3

37.5

36.5

38.5

38.2

38.9

37.0

35.3

60 to 64

28.7

30.5

28.4

27.5

28.4

30.1

28.9

30.2

28.1

29.1

65-69

14. 6

13. 3

8. 8

15. 6

15. 3

12. 9

19. 1

16. 4

13. 6

14. 1

Over 70

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9. 3

8. 0

12. 7

7. 2

13. 5

Male

16 to 19

6. 1

6. 4

5.3

4.0

7.0

4.7

5.4

5.3

4.7

4.7

20 to 24

13.4

13.1

13.4

13.0

13.2

11.8

13.0

12.3

11.0

11.4

25 to 29

20.6

20.8

20.5

18.8

20.1

17.0

17. 1

17. 7

16. 9

15. 0

30 to 34

24. 8

26. 1

25. 0

23. 3

21. 1

21. 6

21. 8

19. 9

18. 2

20. 3

35 to 39

30. 7

32. 2

29. 7

28. 2

27. 4

28. 5

24. 2

24. 2

24. 0

21. 5

40 to 44

37.8

35.8

34.5

33.8

33.8

31.1

31.2

28.0

27.0

26.4

45 to 49

40.3

38.5

41.4

37.7

36.1

35.8

33.1

34.2

31.1

31.8

50 to 54

40.2

41.5

38.4

41.7

39.1

37.9

36.4

35.8

34.9

33.6

55 to 59

36.2

37.7

38.2

38.4

36.1

39.4

38.5

37.2

35.6

32.6

60 to 64

29.5

33.7

30.4

27.8

29.0

31.0

30.7

30. 6
28. 1
28. 1
65 to 69
13. 2
10. 9
10. 2
14. 5
15. 2
9. 5
16. 9
12. 8
10. 6
13. 4
Over 70
*
*
*
*
*
9. 4
7. 4
13. 6
8. 1
17. 9
Female

16 to 19

3. 7

4. 1

2. 7

2. 7

3. 5

3. 1

3. 3

3. 1

3. 3

1. 7

20 to 24

13. 7

15. 0

13. 5

13. 3

13. 0

14. 2

11. 4

11. 3

13. 3

11. 4

25 to 29

23. 5

24. 3

25. 1

25. 1

23. 9

22. 5

23. 7

24. 5

22. 4

21. 9

30 to 34

28. 7

31. 0

28. 8

31. 0

28. 6

29. 0

28. 1

28. 4

27. 4

28. 0

35 to 39

34. 0

32. 7

32. 5

30. 5

30. 6

31. 6

30. 7

31. 1

30. 0

32. 2

40 to 44

34. 1

36. 4

34. 7

36. 2

36. 6

35. 7

35. 3

33. 0

35. 1

32. 4

45 to 49

39. 1

39. 0

38. 4

37. 7

39. 2

38. 0

37. 5

37. 8

36. 9

35. 3

50 to 54

37. 7

38. 3

40. 2

39. 7

40. 7

40. 2

40. 2

39. 1

39. 9

38. 4

55 to 59

33. 4

33. 0

34. 3

36. 7

36. 8

37. 7

37. 9

40. 5

38. 3

37. 9

60 to 64

27. 6

26. 3

25. 5

27. 2

27.5

28.8

26.6

29.6

28.2

30.4

65 to 69

16.1

15.8

7.0

16.8

15.5

16.9

21.8

20.0

16.7

14.9

Over 70

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*

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*

*

9.0

8.9

11.6

5. 8

8. 7

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics. Excludes members of armed forces.

Appendix 2

Table 2

Characteristics of union members and non-members, 2011

Per cent, not seasonally adjusted

Union members

Non-members

All employees

Gender

Male

45.3

52.2

50.7

Female

54.7

47.8

49.3

Sector

Private

39.1

83.5

72.4

Public

60.9

16.5

27.6

Full-time/part-time

Full-time

78.6

70.5

73.2

Part-time

21.4

29.5

26. 8

Age bands

16 to 24

4. 6

16. 4

13. 8

25 to 34

18. 2

24. 1

23. 4

35 to 49

42. 6

34. 7

36. 6

50 plus

34. 5

24. 9

26. 3

Ethnicity

White

92. 0

90. 0

90. 1

Mixed

0. 6

0. 9

0. 8

Asian or Asian British

4. 1

5. 2

5. 1

Black or Black British

2. 4

2. 2

2. 4

Chinese and other ethnic groups

0. 8

1. 4

1. 4

Nationality

UK

95. 6

90. 0

91. 2

Other

4. 4

10. 0

8. 8

Disability

Disabled

17. 5

13. 8

14. 4

Not disabled

82. 5

86. 2

85. 6

Highest qualification

Degree or equivalent

36. 3

27. 0

29. 1

Other higher education

13. 7

9. 0

10. 1

A-level or equivalent

21. 3

24. 7

23. 9

GCSE grades A-C or equivalent

17. 8

23. 4

22. 1

Other qualifications

7. 2

9. 3

8. 9

No qualification

3. 7

6. 7

5. 9

Length of service

Less than one year

5. 5

18. 5

15. 0

One to two years

4. 9

11. 7

10. 2

Two to five years

16. 8

24. 5

23. 2

Five to ten years

23. 6

21. 2

21. 7

Ten to twenty years

26. 6

16. 3

18. 7

Twenty years or more

22. 7

7. 7

11. 2

Workplace size

Less than 50

29. 8

53. 8

47. 4

50 or more

70. 2

46. 2

52. 6

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.