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LABOUR UNIONS IN CANADA

(Prepared in the Economics and Research Branch,
Canada Department of Labour, Ottawa.)

Membership and Organization

Canadian labour unions have grown steadily to their present strength of some 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ million members. This figure represents more than 33 per cent of non-agricultural paid workers and more than 26 per cent of the civilian labour force of the country.⁽¹⁾

Union members are widely dispersed throughout Canada, although they are, of course, concentrated in the most industrialized provinces. Nearly two-thirds of the total membership is in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.⁽²⁾ Of the urban centres, Montreal leads with 299,000 union members, followed by Toronto with 266,000 and Vancouver with 131,100.

Among the industries, the largest numbers of union members are employed in manufacturing, followed by transportation, communication and other utilities, although, as a proportion of its employees belonging to unions, public administration leads the way at 72.1 per cent, followed by construction (70.6 per cent) and forestry (58.5 per cent). Membership strength is lowest in agriculture and in finance, insurance and real estate.⁽³⁾

Union organizations have existed in Canada since the beginning of the nineteenth century but the movement was fragmented until the latter part of that century as a result of several factors. First, the economy was largely agricultural and individualistic in nature. Second, the population was thinly dispersed over a vast territory and transportation and communication systems were only partially developed. Third, the work force was made up of people having significant racial, religious and linguistic differences. Fourth, union activity was hampered by the British common law doctrine that held unions to be conspiracies in restraint of trade.

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- (1) See Table 1, P. 10.
 - (2) See Table 5, P. 14.
 - (3) See Table 6, P. 15.

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