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Union Organizing Strategies in the New Economy

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Union membership worldwide has been falling due to structural factors such as smaller public sector, smaller manufacturing sector and fewer large firms. At the same time, the labour market has become more volatile, with worker mobility, shorter job tenure, part time work, flexible work arrangements on the rise. Furthermore, more enlightened management and mobility of capital as well as diversity of workforce and workplace have reduced the benefits of joining unions, impaired union bargaining power and increased the cost of organizing. These developments have adversely affect trade union density worldwide. The paper proposes, in the new economy, a systematic approach to increase union membership.

► **Keywords:** union membership, non-collective bargaining
benefits, quasi union, associate members and
transferable union benefits

I. Introduction

Trade union membership has generally been falling across the industrialised market economies in recent decades. This is due largely to common developments such as a decline in employment in traditionally high-unionisation manufacturing industry and the

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growth of lower-unionisation services employment, and increasing levels of 'atypical' employment(Carley, 2001). Job tenure has become shorter and the labour market more volatile, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics(1997).

There is also an increasingly critical attitude towards trade union membership than before(Berg, 2001). This is especially true among young workers. At the same time, workers are also less keen to join the labour movement (Jarley & Fiorito 1990) and are more interested in non-work benefits.

Employers increasingly use flexible staff arrangements because of workload fluctuations, staff absences, screening for regular positions, and savings on benefits costs; and worker mobility, shorter job tenure, part-time work, flexible work arrangements have all been on the rise(Houseman, 2001). Such arrangements make union membership less meaningful.

At the same time, the notion of employment may change in the future, and most people may not be employed for long by any one employer. In the new economy, there are more temporary jobs, with more and more people working on projects. This has hurt the labour movement, as getting union benefits requires a long gestation period. However, the existing union framework is not adequate to the task of dealing with these changes.

All these developments will continue to erode trade union density unless new ways to attract union members can be found. This paper proposes a systematic approach to increase union membership to counter the decline in trade union membership worldwide. The paper proceeds as follows: The following section discusses the decline in trade union membership across various countries in the world and the reasons underlying the decline. This is followed by a discussion on unions' responses to declining trade union membership and their effectiveness. The next section proposes a systematic approach to increasing trade union membership. Singapore's National Trades Union Congress is offered as an example of a union which has successfully adopted this approach.

II. Worldwide Union Membership Trends

Trade union density has been declining in recent years in many of the world's industrial nations. This trend is observed in many countries around the world, including the US, UK, Canada, Australia, as well as in Europe and East Asia.

Union membership in the US has been falling over the years. As a percentage of

non-agricultural workers, union membership fell from a peak of 33.5 percent in 1954 to 12.3 percent in the year 2000. Even in terms of absolute numbers, union membership has also fallen from a peak of 22.8 million in 1974 to 16.3 million in the year 2000(Hirsch & Macpherson, 2001; Troy, 2001). Private sector union membership also fell to 9,148,000, the lowest level since 1941 (<http://www.publicpurpose.com/lm-unn2000.htm>).

The decline in union membership in the US may be attributed to a number of factors. Structural changes in the workplace and society(Koeller, 1994) have contributed to the decline in union membership. The growth of the share of the workforce of the services industry as consumer demand shifts away from blue-collar manufactured goods to white-collar services has caused union membership to decline because unions are traditionally strong among the blue-collar and weak among the while-collar workers. In recent years, employment growth is attributed disproportionately to small firms, which are less likely to be unionised than large firms(Even & Macpherson, 1990). This impact is compounded by the competitive pressure of low labour cost imports of manufactured goods.

Another contributing factor is the growing labour force participation rate of women, who are concentrated in white-collar jobs and are more likely to work part-time. Such groups are harder to organise because of their more tenuous attachment to the labour force. The lower participation of the labour force that is 55 or older is yet another fact. Union membership has been higher among older workers due to the emphasis by unions on seniority.

The decline in trade union membership has also been attributed to effective managerial opposition. Freeman & Kleiner(1990) argue that management anti-union actions have become increasingly effective, as it is increasingly common for management to hire labour management specialists or consultants to mount aggressive anti-union drives to counter union organising campaigns and representation elections. This is reinforced by proactive management's provision of effective communication channels and employee welfare and participation schemes.

Still others argue that the decline is due to increasing substitution by government for the services and benefits provided by the union, thus reducing workers' reliance on, and the attractiveness of, union membership(Neumann & Rissman, 1984). Government provision of minimum legal requirements of employers in terms of minimum wages, holiday leave, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, social security and health

and safety laws reduces the need for workers to join the union.

Over the last two decades, UK trade union membership has also declined. For instance, 13.3 million people were members of UK trade unions in 1979, and the proportion of employees who were union members stood at 55 percent. But in 1998, union membership, estimated from the Labour Force Survey, was only 7.1 million. The proportion of all employees who were union members was 29.6 percent(<http://www.bized.ac.uk:8080/compfact/tuc/tuc25.htm>). The factors cited for this fall in union membership include a dramatic fall in the number of jobs in manufacturing industries where union density was traditionally high, larger numbers of unemployed people, a fall in traditional full-time employment and an increase in part-time and temporary workers who are less likely to join unions, an increase in the proportion of the workforce employed by small companies where it is often difficult for unions to organise, and hostile legislation (the previous Conservative government introduced laws which make it more difficult for unions to operate and keep their members). Nevertheless, Druker and White(2001) note that there is some evidence of revival in union membership in late 1990s, although the level of union membership is still below those in the 1980s. They attribute the increase to more thorough-going approaches to union recruitment.

In the case of Australia, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics(ABS), in 1992 trade unions covered 39.6 percent of the workforce or 2.5 million workers(Cook, 2000). By 1998, union density had fallen to 28.1 percent or 2.03 million. Even in traditional union strongholds, such as manufacturing and construction, the pattern has been the same. In manufacturing, union membership fell from 44.4 percent to 34.5 percent, and in construction from 42.1 percent to 25.2 percent. Even in the public sector, which has the highest union density(approximately 50 percent), union density is expected to plunge since renewed downsizing and privatisation will eliminate large numbers of public sector jobs(Cook, 2000). Spooner, Innes and Mortimer(2001) cite the following reasons for the declining union membership in Australia: the casualisation of the workforce, better management and the perceptions that the union in Australia is not powerful.

Even in Canada, where union growth was substantial during the period from 1956 to the 1980s, trade union membership has stabilized in the 1990s(Rose, 2001). The surge in union membership from 1965-1980 was associated with the passage of new collective bargaining laws in the public sector. But globalization impeded union expansion in the 1990s. Rose argues that, unless unions change what they do and for whom they do it,

the prospects for sustained union growth in Canada appear dim.

Across many of the countries in Europe, trade unions in recent years have been preoccupied with the problem of declining trade union membership(Carley, 2001). For instance, low trade union density(under 30 percent) was an issue during 2001 in the Netherlands, where the Liberal Party for Freedom and Democracy questioned the high-profile role that trade unions play in many public bodies and in the 'extension' of terms and conditions of collective agreements to cover whole sectors of the economy (Grünell, 2001). In Germany, total union membership declined to 7.77 million in 2000, below the level prior to German unification in 1990. The German federation of trade unions states that, while some public sector unions, such as the Education and Science Union and the Police Union, have successfully limited membership decline, the Construction, Agriculture and Environment Union in particular has experienced a rapid loss of membership(Behrens, 2001).

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions(ICTU), on the other hand, reports that trade union membership in Ireland rose by almost 19,000 or 3.8 percent in 2000(Sheehan, 2001). Nevertheless, union density in Ireland has declined over the year, since overall employment across the economy grew at a more rapid rate of 4.1 percent. Furthermore, Irish union density is much lower than the levels achieved in the 1980s, according to figures from the University College Dublin data series on trade unions in Ireland 1925-99 (Dobbins, 2001). Total membership of Swedish trade unions also declined in 2000 to 79 percent from 84 percent in 1994, with losses recorded among the affiliates of the blue-collar LO confederation, even though the white-collar TCO and the graduate SACO experienced marginal increases(Berg, 2001). Citing recent research by Anders Kjellberg of Lund University and the National Institute for Working Life, the report indicates that unions are failing to attract younger workers, as seen in the large decline in union density among the young - from 62 percent to 45 percent between 1993 and 2000 for all workers aged 16-24, regardless of their gender, region and sector. Since seven out of 10 young employees are found in blue-collar jobs, it is mostly the LO trade unions that have been hit. Another reason cited for decreasing membership rates is the fact that more and more workers choose only to join unemployment insurance funds, and not the trade unions with which the funds have traditionally been associated. (This situation is similar to that in Taiwan. See Pan, 2001.) According to this study, these developments are the result of an increasingly critical attitude to trade union membership than in years past. This attitude

is especially prevalent among young workers, many of whom believe that unions have not successfully represented their interests at the workplaces. This, it is claimed, is most evident in the work environment in both public and private sectors where many of the workers are employed in 'lean' organisations with too few workers suffer from stress and other symptoms, but find it hard to communicate with trade unions on these matters. Trade unions, too, have admitted to having difficulty in representing worker interests at the workplace.

Researchers believe that the decline in trade union membership is caused by the current trend of employing workers on fixed-term contracts(Berg, 2001). Short job tenures make the benefits of joining unions more uncertain. Under such circumstances, workers find it less meaningful to join a union and engage in union work at the workplace.

East Asian countries, too, have seen a decline in union membership. In Japan, union membership fell from 1.252 million in 1983 to 1.121 in 2001(Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare(White Paper on Labour Overseas)). Union membership has also declined in Taiwan due to lack of institutional support and globalization or rapid relocation of Taiwanese industries to China(Pan, 2001). Korean unions saw a substantial reduction in union membership due to massive retrenchment as a result of the severe beating that Korean economy suffered during the East Asian currency crisis, which saw the Korean Won depreciating(Park, 2001). In the case of Hong Kong, although the labour movement has been expanding and labour leaders have gained higher political status and since 1997 have been able to mount effective opposition to employers' attempts to reduce labour costs in some key industries such as aviation, the persistent high unemployment rate in Hong Kong erodes the basis for unionization(Chiu & Levin, 2001).

The above discussion points to the fact that union membership has declined worldwide. The decline is due to three main factors: smaller manufacturing sector, smaller public sector and smaller number of large firms, combined with an increase in part-time jobs, shorter job tenure and rise in the number of service jobs. Besides these structural factors, more enlightened management practices and increasing government substitution have also reduced the reliance on unions. MNCs also reduce union bargaining power as they can shift production to other countries(Hodgkinson & Nyland, 2001).

III. Unions' Response to Declining Union Density

Faced with a hostile environment, the labour movement worldwide has attempted in various ways to increase union membership. One of the focuses has been on union organizing. According to Metcalf(1991), aggregate trade union density is determined by a combination of five factors i.e. economic structure, workforce composition, state policy, management strategy and the recruitment activity of trade unions themselves. It has been argued that the fall in union membership in UK and USA since the 1970s may be explained in terms of inadequate union strategies in recruitment activity.

In the UK, a positive effort was made with the establishment by British Trade Union Congress of an Organizing Academy in 1998 to train a new generation of paid union organizers. This saw a new union workforce being recruited and retained(Heery & Delbridge, 2000). There is also evidence of change and an increased commitment to recruitment across much of the British labour movement, with innovations in organizing methods and selection of targets achieved. However, the level of financial investment in recruitment and the number of specialist organizers remain limited(Heery, Delbridge, & Simpson, 2000). Nevertheless, although both formal and informal union orientation may shape early attitude toward unions and a one-on-one contact and buddy system may be effective in increasing union membership(Clark, 2000), it is observed that union effectiveness is essentially enhanced by innovation and by internal union democracy and reduced by centralized control(Fiorito, Jarley & Delaney, 1995). There are thus two complementary approaches to increasing union membership in the UK: the social partnership approach and the union organizing and recruitment approach(Heery, 2002), and a marrying of the two agendas would therefore link the object of broadening the agenda of representation and extending union influence over the management of the firm with the process of strengthening worker organization and capacity for collective action.

In the case of Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions(ACTU) has announced the allocation of more financial resources to recruiting new members in industries where the workforce is increasing. It also aims to create 'specialist' recruitment teams, upgrade its organising methods and send even more union officials overseas 'to gain experience'. Workers are offered all kinds of incentives and gimmicks, including access to a range of

discounted retail goods and cheap holidays. However, recent ABS figures indicate that this is all to no avail(Cook, 2000). (Why this works for Singapore but not for Australia could be because workers in non-unionised firms in Singapore are provided access to trade union membership via a form of associate membership, which is discussed later in the paper).

One researcher suggests that union membership may be increased by focusing on the female workforce(Berg, 2001). She proposes that, in order to make more young female workers interested in trade union work and thus break the current male dominance in trade union boards, committees etc, more use should be made of gender quotas, special arrangements for women members, and women's meetings, networks and working groups. In this way, the unions might even also attract young male workers' interest by providing more unorthodox forms of trade union work than is often the case.

Bronfenbrenner(1999) noted that throughout the US, unions are running more campaigns, recruiting and training more organizers, and winning more elections and voluntary recognitions. They are also winning them in larger units, and winning them with new workers in new industries. The great American decline in union organizing may have finally bottomed out. She concluded that Unions in the US are learning that, even in the most hostile organizing climate, workers do organize and unions can win, if they are willing to commit to a more aggressive and comprehensive organizing strategy which slowly but steadily builds the union from the bottom up.

However, union organizing tools, including the buddy system, internal union democracy, innovative campaigns, aggressive organizing strategy, investment in full-time organizing staff, may be insufficient to reverse the trend of falling membership. This paper proposes that unions need to do much more, especially in terms of providing incentives for workers to join the unions. The following section presents a method by which unions can use to increase union membership.

IV. The Economics of Joining the Trade Union

Booth(1984) presents a model of union membership where a worker's decision to acquire trade union membership depends on his wage premium plus non-contractual benefits and his probability of being retrenched. The amount of wage premium is

positively related to the probability of retrenchment, as the demand curve for labour has a negative slope. At the same time, effective union strategies can enhance a worker's valuation of non-contractual services and thereby increase union membership. Unions also provide benefits to members in terms of an insurance scheme(Boyer, 1988).

However, reliance on the creation of wage premium is not effective in increasing union membership as firms worldwide face intense competition and the market constraint would limit the amount of wage premium a union can effectively command since the number of employed would fall, while non-contractual services and union benefits such as insurance package alone are not able to reverse the declining union membership trends because these benefits are not substantial owing to job mobility and/or shorter job tenure.

It is proposed that union confederation can take the following steps to increase union membership:

1. Increase the amount of non-collective bargaining benefits.

Non-collective bargaining benefits are provided by unions and not by employers. Hence, unlike wage premiums, an increase in non-collective bargaining benefits will not increase labour costs and has no impact on employment level. Examples of non-collective bargaining benefits(given in the appendix) include:

- a. Leisure-related benefits. Being a union member, workers are entitled to use facilities at various clubs such as swimming clubs, health clubs, golf clubs, including overseas golf clubs at a discount.
- b. Discounts for training courses run by the labour movement, which also provide job counseling, etc.
- c. Discounts or rebates for purchases at departmental stores and supermarkets.
- d. Discounts at childcare centers.
- e. Discounts at medical centers, dental care centers and centers for health screening.
- f. Life insurance coverage, death benefits and scholarships for children.

The exact value in dollar terms of non-collective benefits varies for each worker. If a worker takes part in one training programme, the discount can amount to a few hundred dollars. Obviously, the total value of non-collective bargaining benefits ultimately depends on the lifestyle of the workforce. Hence, it is imperative that the labour movement fully appreciates the aspirations of the various sectors of the labour force: young workers, female workers, mature workers, etc. As female labour force participation has increased

over the years in industrialised countries, getting more female staff into the decision-making body of the labour movement also makes sense as they can help to design the package of non-collective bargaining benefits which will appeal to the female workforce to allow greater usage of the various benefits and hence enhance the value of non-collective bargaining benefits(Berg, 2001).

In order to be effective as an inducement to workers to join the union, the amount of non-collective bargaining benefits provided must be substantial and not merely cosmetic. With such an inducement, unions would not need to rely so much on the wage premium to increase trade union membership.

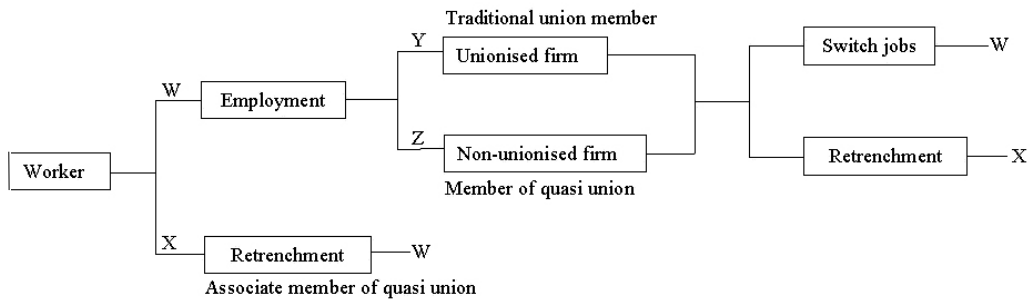
2. Make non-collective bargaining benefits transferable across unions and jobs

As mentioned above, because of job mobility and shorter job tenure, workers do not stay at one workplace for too long. Since workers in general are interested in non-work benefits but are not keen to join the labour movement(Jarley & Fiorito, 1990), if union members lose their union benefits when they quit their job to join another unionised company, they would be less inclined to join the trade union. The union confederation must ensure that non-collective bargaining benefits be transferable across unions so that workers who change jobs can still retain their union benefits.

3. Enable workers in non-unionized firms to join the union

Workers in non-unionised firms may wish to join the union if the non-collective bargaining benefits offered by the union are substantial. But if there is no structure available to cater to this group of workers, the trade union would not be able to exploit this desire to its advantage. It is proposed that the union confederation make it possible for workers in non-unionised firms to join the labour movement, by setting up, say, a quasi union. This will enable a worker to be associated with the labour movement regardless of where he works. It is obvious that members of a quasi union would enjoy only non-collective bargaining benefits and have no access to collective bargaining benefits at the workplace. As Figure 1 shows, with the establishment of the quasi union, each worker is able to be associated with the labour movement either as a member of the quasi union or of the traditional union. In this way, the worker can benefit from the full realization of the non-collective bargaining benefits.

Figure 1. Continuous Union Membership



4. Allow workers who are retrenched or resigned to join the labour movement as members of the quasi union

Workers who are looking for jobs, are retrenched or resign also should be allowed to remain engaged with the labour movement and continue to enjoy non-collective bargaining benefits. In other words, the union confederation should allow them to be associate members of the quasi union. Hence, even school leavers who are looking for jobs can be associate members of the quasi union.

5. Enhance non-collective bargaining benefits by providing lifelong union membership regardless of labour market status (ie, make joining a union no longer like taking up insurance)

Traditionally, joining a union is like taking up insurance. Union dues are to be paid every month, but the benefits that can be realised at the end of the day depends on the worker remaining associated his job for a long period. The formation of a quasi union would enable a worker to remain associated with the labour movement even upon retrenchment or retirement, and consequently be assured over a period of 20 to 30 years of tangible union benefits. This would ensure that benefits outweigh the costs of joining the union. Joining a union would then be no longer like taking up insurance (where a person might get what he has paid for when there is some sort of trouble, but 95 percent of the time there is no trouble) where the benefits are not quite visible or tangible unless one is 'covered' for the entire working life.

6. Use the mass media approach in promoting union membership via non-collective bargaining
- The labour movement can use the mass media approach to inform the labour force of

the nature and extent of non-collective bargaining benefits. The campaign need not be targeted only at big companies. Indeed, the campaign can even target the entire society, including upper level school students, tertiary students, ordinary workforce, unemployed, etc.

7. Conversion of associate membership into ordinary membership

Ichniowski and Zax(1990) find the presence of an association to be a strong predictor of the formation of a bargaining unit. This supports the setting up of quasi union, which can become a source of ordinary union members. The labour movement can convert members of the quasi union into ordinary union members in the following manner:

- (i) If a sufficient number of workers in a particular workplace or company become associate members, the labour movement would have legitimate grounds to start organising the workers from that company. This will set off the normal union organising procedure at the plant level. In this case, the chances of a successful union organising campaign would be high, as many of the workers in the company are already associate members of the labour movement.
- (ii) If the associate members come from various companies within an industry for which there is a traditional union, say, Textile Union, then the Textile Union should provide these members with some sort of industry-specific benefits, such as training specific to the industry which is useful to these members. Such a strategy may induce more workers would join the quasi union, which may lead to sufficient numbers in each company to enable step (i) above to be initiated.
- (iii) If there are many associate members in an industry or sub-industry for which there is no traditional union, then the labour movement should set up a traditional union to look after this sub-group to provide industry-specific benefits.

8. Helping associate members in job search

Associate members are union members who do not have jobs for one reason or another. The labour movement can help them obtain employment by providing information with regard to availability of jobs. The labour movement can work with various government ministries and employers' associations to hold job fairs. More importantly, the labour movement can initiate training programmes to equip associate members with the right skills. Training should also include soft skills such as how to attend a job interview and

also possess correct wage expectations. Once a sufficient number of associate members are employed in a specific non-unionised sector or industry, step 7 can be initiated.

V. Resources Required for the Provision of Non-collective Bargaining Benefits

In most countries, the labour movement is not endowed with many resources. Lack of resources will restrict the ability of the labour movement to provide non-collective bargaining benefits, which include scholarships for children of trade union members, discounts for purchases at departmental stores, recreational facilities, etc. However, the provision of such benefits and facilities is very costly. Unless many of the facilities or land resources are provided free or subsidized by the government, the non-collective bargaining benefits provided will not be substantial. This is where the government can help the labour movement to provide substantial non-collective bargaining benefits.

In order for the government to help the labour movement in providing non-collective bargaining benefits, the objectives of both government and the labour movement cannot be conflicting. Most governments aim to achieve full employment and low inflation. If the aim of the labour movement is to obtain a wage premium to induce union membership, this may run counter to the objective of the government, as a wage premium by definition would reduce employment level. In some cases, it may also result in numerous strikes, which is bad for attracting foreign investment.

On the other hand, if the labour movement focuses on the use of non-collective bargaining benefits to increase union membership, this will not affect the employment level. Indeed, this strategy of using non-collective bargaining benefits to induce workers to join unions may enhance industrial peace and help to attain full employment and reduce inflationary pressure. There is much scope for both government and the labour movement to work together.

VI. The Effectiveness of Non-collective Bargaining in Increasing Union Density: The Labour Movement of Singapore

The labour movement in Singapore is represented by the National Trades Union Congress(NTUC). The NTUC has evolved into a responsible national trade union over the years. This has been possible because of the symbiotic relationship that exists between the NTUC and the ruling party (the People's Action Party, known as the PAP) that has governed Singapore since 1959. The secretary-general of the NTUC is also a key member in the PAP as well as a member of the Singapore government cabinet. Hence, the labour movement in Singapore, which is dominated by the NTUC, has always strongly supported the Singapore government's objectives of nation building and economic development.

NTUC therefore has enjoyed close relations with the government, and as a result Singapore has a harmonious industrial relations climate. With the help of the government, NTUC has set up many co-operatives such as INCOME and FAIRPRICE, which have been very effective and profitable. Moreover, the government has helped NTUC by providing land resources at very affordable rates. This means that NTUC can provide good value in non-collective bargaining benefits. (The list of non-collective bargaining benefits is given in Appendix 1).

Growth of NTUC

During the 1960s, the PAP government worked closely with the NTUC and employers on developing the Singapore economy. At that time, the economy was faced with massive unemployment as a result of the pullout of the British forces. Since it was believed that foreign investment was the best solution to the unemployment problems, after 1960 the government passed a series of legislative measures with the aim of creating a climate conducive to foreign investment. For instance, the Industrial Relations Ordinance of 1960 legislated collective bargaining procedures through compulsory conciliation and arbitration. Strikes and lockouts were prohibited once an industrial dispute was referred to the Industrial Arbitration Court by either party or by the government. The Industrial Relations

(Amendment) Act of 1966 gave greater discretion to employers in the deployment of the work force, and removed decisions on promotions, internal transfer, hiring and dismissals from being subject to negotiation with unions. The Employment Act of 1968 reduced labour costs by limiting the sums payable on bonuses, annual paid leave, retrenchment benefits, retirement benefits and overtime. These legislative measures constituted a form of informal wage restraint, which effectively reduced the bargaining power of the trade union and had the desired dampening effect on wages.

Nevertheless, collective bargaining went on at the plant level. The government did not interfere with wage negotiations unless there was a deadlock between the two parties. In the event of a breakdown of negotiations, either party involved could refer their industrial dispute to the Ministry of Labour for conciliation. Should this fail to resolve it, the dispute could be referred to the Industrial Arbitration Court(IAC) for final settlement.

Table 1 shows the union membership of the National Trades Union Congress(NTUC) for the period from 1964 to 2001. (The NTUC and its affiliates account for more than 99 percent of total trade union membership. Hence the data and discussion that follow are based on the membership of the NTUC.) The number of union members stood at 101,824 in 1964. However, it fell to 85,423 in 1970, a 16 percent reduction in union membership over the 7-year period. The fall in union membership perhaps was due to the general perception that the NTUC was closing too closely with the government and NTUC is employment-driven and one does not need to be a union member to enjoy the benefits of prosperity to which NTUC contributed.

The informal wage restraint policy of the 1960s was effective in contributing to the creation of an investment climate conducive to foreign investment. By 1970, Singapore was experiencing labour shortages, and there were indications of a possible wage explosion. The government, unwilling to allow wages and fringe benefits to rise substantially for fear of retarding industrial growth, attempted to increase the labour supply by encouraging female workers to enter the labour force, and allowing foreign workers to be imported. Despite their efforts, the labour shortage persisted. Trade unions were also fighting for high wage increases as non-unionized firms began to offer higher wages to attract workers.

Faced with a tight labour market and an unwillingness to rely excessively on foreign workers, the government set up the National Wages Council(NWC) in 1972 to regulate wages in Singapore. Structurally, the NWC is a tripartite body consisting of

representatives from organized labour, employers' associations, and the government. The operational role of the NWC is to determine a set of wage guidelines annually to be submitted to the government for implementation. Upon the acceptance of the wage guidelines by the government, they become the basis for collective bargaining. They are also used for the settlement of wage disputes between labour and management referred to the Ministry of Labour for conciliation or to the Industrial Arbitration Court(IAC) for arbitration. Nevertheless, while the IAC's dispute settlements are binding, the NWC

Table 1. NTUC Membership: 1964-2003

Year	Total Membership	Quasi-Union Membership	Membership Excluding Quasi-Union Members
1964	101,824	0	101,824
1965	112,635	0	112,635
1966	104,626	0	104,626
1967	92,930	0	92,930
1968	88,401	0	88,401
1969	88,558	0	88,558
1970	85,423	0	85,423
1971	96,227	0	96,227
1972	142,162	0	142,162
1973	168,090	0	168,090
1974	189,214	0	189,214
1975	196,622	0	196,622
1976	211,956	0	211,956
1977	216,890	0	216,890
1978	226,306	0	226,306
1979	236,628	0	236,628
1980	232,895	0	232,895
1981	211,548	0	211,548
1982	203,077	0	203,077
1983	198,268	0	198,268
1984	186,111	0	186,111
1985	197,320	0	197,320
1986	200,082	0	200,082
1987	203,569	0	203,569
1988	209,051	0	209,051
1989	209,193	0	209,193
1990	211,575	0	211,575
1991	216,291	0	216,291
1992	230,389	7,413	222,976
1993	236,118	9,125	226,993
1994	234,363	8,461	225,902
1995	237,443	11,248	226,195
1996	257,815	31,557	226,258
1997	266,206	36,085	230,121
1998	283,497	48,976	234,521
1999	300,918	65,071	235,847
2000	320,621	88,296	232,325
2001	345,935	112,009	225,378
2002	389,676	n.a.	
2003	417,166	n.a.	

guidelines are not mandatory, and employers and trade unions are permitted to set their own terms with regard to wage increases in collective bargaining.

With the institution of the NWC, industrial relations in Singapore became employment-driven, as unions became increasingly aware of the importance of tripartite cooperation with employers and government to enable an increase in employment opportunities in the economy. Using Meade's (1982) terminology of wage fixing, NWC sets wage levels which maximize employment. Both NWC and IAC ensure that employment is given first priority over wage increase during any recession.

The NWC as an incomes policy approach was very effective in terms of the extent of implementation of the NWC recommendations. For the economy as a whole, the percentage of employees who benefited as a result of the NWC recommendations increased from 55.4 percent in 1972 to 83.5 percent in 1979(Chew, 1996). To a certain extent, workers identified less with NTUC and more with NWC because of its overwhelming role in determining wages from 1972-1987. This might have hurt union membership during this period.

As shown in Table 1, trade union membership rose steadily from 142,162 persons in 1972 to a peak of 236,628 persons in 1979. Hence, the period from 1972-79 was the golden period for NTUC as far as union membership is concerned. Interviews were conducted with many industrial relations officials of the NTUC who were actively involved in organising the union's membership recruitment campaign to determine why union membership soared despite the fact that union members as well as non-members enjoyed substantial pay rise under the operation of NWC.

The rise in union membership during the 1970s may be due to the following reasons: Firstly, during this period, NTUC was very aggressive in recruiting members. At that time, Singapore Industrial Labour Organisation(SILO), one of the most powerful of NTUC's affiliates, organized massive recruitment campaigns, which included house-to-house visits. Hence, union branches under NTUC, which numbered 39 in 1970, rose to 286 in 1977. The second factor was that unionised firms were more likely to implement the NWC guidelines than non-unionised firms, and this was particularly true in the initial years of the NWC(Chew, 1996). Moreover, in the initial years of the NWC, wage increases won by the trade union added to the increases recommended by the NWC, resulting in substantial increases for union members.

During the first half of the 1980s, the Singapore economy continued to exhibit strong

growth. Wages and the CPF contribution rate also grew during this period. However, the substantial rise in labour costs inadvertently led to a loss of competitiveness for the manufacturing sector, causing a recession in 1985. During this period, NTUC membership started to decline steadily. The main contributing factor to this decline was that Mr Phey Yew Kok, who was President of NTUC and one of the few main leaders who launched the massive campaign to recruit union members was charged in court for the embezzlement of union funds. Related to this matter was the fact that two of NTUC's largest affiliates, SILO and Pioneer Industries Employees' Unions(PIEU), which were very successful unions in recruiting union members, were split into nine industrial unions. These two factors brought about the fall in union membership.

The fall in trade union membership in the preceding years led the NTUC to make a conscientious effort to recruit members in the later half of the 1980s. Despite its efforts, total membership increased very slowly. The following factors were responsible. Firstly, during the recession, even though workers may have been motivated to join the trade union in order to gain better retrenchment benefits, the pool of workers declined as a result of retrenchment, causing union membership to decline. As Table 2 shows, while the total number of new union members recruited was 34,054 in 1985, 6,859 workers left the labour movement due to job change, and 12,574 left as a result of retrenchment. The net gain was very marginal, especially in 1989.

Table 2. Changes in NTUC Membership, 1985-99

Year	Total Number Recruited	Number who quitted the union due to				Net Gain
		Resignation	Retrenchment	Other reasons	Total	
1985	34,058	6,859	12,574	3,429	22,862	11,196
1986	19,891	7,658	4,899	4,574	17,131	2,760
1987	25,835	12,622	2,034	7,983	22,639	3,196
1988	30,163	17,780	939	5,962	24,681	5,482
1989	28,729	21,257	1,125	6,205	28,587	142
1990	36,861	24,262	2,768	7,449	34,479	2,382
1991	35,582	22,218	2,566	6,082	30,866	4,716
1992	46,582	24,196	1,407	6,881	32,474	14,098
1993	41,619	24,457	1,960	9,473	35,890	5,729
1994	33,942	22,921	2,440	10,336	35,697	-1,755
1995	41,203	21,435	4,274	12,414	38,123	3,080
1996	59,477	22,680	3,593	12,832	39,105	20,372
1997	50,718	21,115	2,458	18,756	42,329	8,389
1998	54,709	15,923	7,384	14,111	37,418	17,291
1999	54,055	13,527	4,123	18,988	36,638	17,417

Source: NTUC News, Mid-May 1990, p. 9.

Chew(1990) points out, however, that when the labour market is tight, labour turnover is high and hence workers would not want to join the union, as the next workplace may not be unionised. Equally important is the fact that workers could free ride in the sense that they could enjoy the benefits of a employment-driven regime and consequently they opt out of union membership to avoid paying union dues. He states that the only effective way for the NTUC to increase union membership is to offer non-collective bargaining benefits. Workers of unionised firms would still find it useful to join the union, as they are entitled not only to the traditional benefits, but also to the non-collective bargaining benefits which non-union members are not entitled to. Most importantly, all workers, regardless whether their present workplace or future workplace is unionised, would be entitled to enjoy non-collective bargaining benefits as union members. The quasi union (known as the General Branch Union by the NTUC) set up in 1992 by the NTUC is in line with this, as it enables workers in non-unionised firms to join the labour movement. In order for the quasi union to work, non-collective bargaining benefits must be substantial.

Hence since the early 90s, NTUC has adopted the approach of focusing on the provision of non-collective bargaining benefits as one of the main packages to induce workers in unionised firms to join the unions. The same positive discrimination package is also applicable in inducing workers of non-unionised firms to join the union by becoming members of the quasi union.

Initially, the quasi union of the NTUC was not very successful because of insufficient publicity about the purpose and objective of such as union and also because non-collective bargaining benefits were not substantial enough. However, NTUC's hard work paid dividends and the membership has grown since. In 1995, total NTUC union membership exceeded that of 1979 under Phey Yew Kok, an indication of the effectiveness of the quasi union in reaching out to workers. In 1996, the membership of quasi union increased by more than fourfold to 31,557 persons, representing 12 percent of total NTUC union membership. By the end of 2000, the quasi union accounted for 28 percent of total union membership in Singapore(see Table 1).

Two more factors are worth mentioning. The first concerns the impact of the NWC. Since 1988, the influence of the NWC was no longer overwhelming because the NWC refrained from recommending quantitative guidelines, replacing them with qualitative guidelines which are not as assertive as quantitative guidelines. As the NWC is no longer

as important in determining wage changes in the unionized sector as it once was, the diminished role of the NWC in the 1990s made it easier for the NTUC to recruit members.

The second factor is the absence of union rivalry in Singapore. For a labour movement to be strong, there must not be any inter- and intra-union rivalry. If more than one union is trying to induce workers to join unions, individual unions will resort to promising general benefits and good wages without paying due attention to competition and employment. Employment will suffer and the synergy with the government will be lost.

Overall, one could see that NTUC has succeeded in the positive discrimination approach of using non-collective bargaining benefits to attract workers to join the labour movement. With the aid of the quasi union, NTUC has been able to exceed the number of union membership in 1979. Needless to say, while much of the success of the union's membership recruitment drive can be attributed to the quasi union, NTUC's personal services to workers have also contributed to the success of its membership recruitment drive.

However, it should be noted that, excluding the membership of the quasi union, membership of the NTUC is still less than its peak in 1979(see Table 1). The reason for this is probably because of the fact that there has been an increase in the number of small firms, partly owing to downsizing and partly due to the shift from Manufacturing to Services. Since smaller firms are less likely to be unionised than larger firms, the pool of workers from unionised firms is therefore smaller as well; hence, the shrinkage of membership from workers in unionised firms. This is attested to by the fact that the number of small firms in the Manufacturing, Services, and Wholesale and Retail sectors increased by 13 percent, 92 percent and 31 percent respectively in the 1982-97 period. Practically all (more than 99 percent) of the firms in the Services and Wholesale and Retail sectors are small and more than 90 percent of firms in the Manufacturing sector are also small. This attests further to the effectiveness of the use of positive discrimination in inducing an increase in union membership. As mentioned earlier, the Australian Council of Trade Unions also tried to use non-collective bargaining benefits to increase union membership, but with limited success. This could be due to the fact that, in the case of Australia, there does not exist a quasi union to tap the potential for union membership among worker in non-unionised firms.

VII. Policy Implications for Other Countries

It may be argued that the Singapore experience can be applicable to other countries provided the following four conditions hold:

- (1) The labour movement must be able to work closely with the government. In other words, there must be synergy between the unions and government at the macro level. They share the same macro objectives, such as full employment and low inflation. Because of strong government backing, the labour movement in Singapore is able to provide significant non-work benefits.
- (2) Two important institutions, a centralised wage guidance institution and the labour court or arbitration court, such as the NWC and IAC in Singapore, must be pro-employment. In Singapore, the NWC guidelines are aimed at guiding wages to levels which would maximize employment and the IAC aims to settle labour disputes speedily to avoid adverse impact on employment.
- (3) There must be no inter- and intra-union rivalry. Union rivalry in membership drives could lead to unions trying to induce workers to join unions by resorting to promising general benefits and good wages without paying due attention to competition and employment. Employment will suffer and the synergy with the government will be lost.
- (4) Lastly, the labour movement must be able to use non-collective bargaining benefits or non-work benefits to induce workers to join the unions through the creating of a union for workers in non-unionised firms (General Union). The Singapore experience shows that union membership grew significantly after the formation of such a General Union in 1993. In many countries, including Australia and USA, there are many non-work benefits but workers at non-unionised firms cannot join the labour movement because there is no mechanism for them to associate with the labour movement.

VIII. Conclusion

The paper argues that the traditional strongholds of union membership, the large manufacturing sector, large public sector and large firms, have seen their respective share of employment falling in the national economy. As a consequence, union membership worldwide has been falling. The challenges of globalisation and the network economy have eroded labour power considerably, and have placed workers in a vulnerable position for exploitation as management becomes more powerful in sourcing for alternative labour resources worldwide. Under such circumstances, it becomes even more imperative for labour to remain organised. The paper shows that the labour movement can make use of non-collective bargaining benefits to induce workers to be associated with the labour movement. The discussion of the case of Singapore shows that the methods proposed in this paper can increase union membership substantially.

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Appendix: Non-collective Bargaining Benefits

(i) Better security provided through:

Job counselling by industrial relations officers for Quasi Union members

Discount on training courses

Training grants and skills redevelopment programmes

Free insurance coverage

The exact value in dollar terms of this category of benefits is not known. Training grants and skills redevelopment programmes alone, however, are worth at least \$50 a year. If a worker takes part in one training programme, the discount is normally a few hundred dollars.

(ii) Better leisure provided through:

NTUC club branches

Chalets at Pasir Ris and Sentosa Beach Resort

NTUC Lifestyle World-Downtown East Theme Park

Orchid Country Club and Aranda Country Club Facilities

Holiday facilities in Perth and Genting Highlands

Promotional rates at INCOME Fitness Centre

Even if a worker uses only some of these facilities as a member of the Quasi Union, the saving he enjoys is worth at least a few hundred dollars.

(iii) More affordable health/dental care and childcare rebates through:

Rebates at NTUC Childcare

Members' rate at NTUC Denticare

Rebates at NTUC Eldercare

Special health screening packages

Scholarships for members' children

Not all workers are able to benefit from this category of provisions, but if he does use at least one of these entitlements, the saving can be around twenty dollars per item, except in the case of a scholarship, which is worth at least a few hundred dollars.

(iv) Better value for money through:

Rebates at NTUC FairPrice Supermarkets

Free 100 FairPrice shares with purchase of Income Life Policy with a monthly premium of at least \$60

NTUC Link Card bonuses

Discounts at retail outlets