Union Mobilization: A Consideration of the Factors Affecting the Willingness of Union Members to Take Industrial Action

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Abstract

Drawing on mobilization theory, this article seeks to identify the factors that shape the willingness of union members to take industrial action. The study utilized data from a large-scale survey (N = 1,111) carried out in a financial services union during the renegotiation of a collective bargaining contract. The results suggested that individuals were more willing to engage in industrial action when they experienced a sense of injustice or unfairness in the employment relationship and when they held a collectivist orientation to work. Moreover, their propensity to take industrial action was greater when they considered that their union was an effective instrument of power. Workplace representatives were also important, particularly when they were seen as being responsive to their members’ needs in situations of perceived injustice. The implications for mobilization theory and for union strategy are discussed.

1. Introduction

Trade unions are facing a crisis in many industrialized economies (Bryson and Gomez 2005; Fernie and Metcalf 2005; Visser 2002). There has been a sustained and prolonged fall in union density rates across much of the Western world and a corresponding decline in the political and industrial influence of the union movement in general (Gospel and Wood 2003). This has raised concern about the possible impact on the wages and working conditions of employees and led to a growing body of research on the ways in which unions might renew themselves and build a stronger collective bargaining role (Fairbrother and Yates 2003; Frege and Kelly 2004; Turner...