“A World Apart”: Union Member Residence Patterns and Political Preferences

Amanda Clayton *
University of Washington
Department of Political Science

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I. Introduction

When asked how one gets ahead in the leadership ranks of the union, a former president of the Port of Los Angeles/Long Beach Local and International president of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) responded with the following; “Look these guys all grew up in ’Pedro – they went to San Pedro High or Banning High and all played ball together.”¹ Neighborhood ties among ILWU members affect both the electability of union leaders, as well as reinforce the prevailing political preferences of the rank and file. In this paper, I relate one particular set of preferences – namely, attitudes towards socially progressive issues – to the residence patterns of members of six locals in three unions involved in the transport sector: the ILWU and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in the United States and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in Australia.

¹ This paper is funded by the NSF Project - “Provoking Preferences by Changing Beliefs,” National Science Foundation SES-0717454 (PI – Margaret Levi)
¹ David Arian, past Local 13 and International president, interviewed by author. Harry Bridges Institute, San Pedro, CA. June 29, 2010.
In their examination of democratic theory within trade unions, Margaret Levi et al. (2009) argue that the beliefs espoused by the union’s initial leadership cohort along with the institutional arrangements they instigate have a lasting effect in shaping the preferences of the rank and file and the processes by which new leaders emerge. A secondary institution that reinforces these preferences, I argue, is the continuation of traditional dockworker communities. Living in close proximity creates a forum through which members exchange information and exert social pressure so that the majority demonstrates political preferences that are closely aligned with those deemed most acceptable by the union.

This paper proceeds as follows: Section II reviews the historical tendency of workers to form occupational communities and examines the ILWU, IBT, and the MUA in this regard. Section III further details the three cases, specifically regarding the development of the unions’ political cultures. Section IV defines and measures the dependent variable - the presence of socially and politically progressive beliefs among union members - quantitatively for three locals of the main ILWU case. In Section V, I use Geographic Information System (GIS) software to map the historic residence patterns for four locals and the current residence patterns of seven locals in the three unions. I calculate the statistical significance of these residential clusters and identify spatial outliers. My results indicate that the choice of union members to continue to live in close proximity with each other over time is correlated with the strength of the dominant political and social preferences espoused by the union’s rank and file. I discuss these results in relation to the three respective unions and their locals. Section VI concludes.
II. Occupational Communities and Trade Unions

In the traditional American trade union experience, class has largely been confined to the arena of work and remained separate from the residential community. Arguments explaining the split between residential life and work associations in American political development include rapid postwar industrialization and the subsequent deconcentration of urban city centers, the relatively tolerant and liberal nature of the American political system, a labor force divided along racial lines and the upward mobility made possible by the nation’s economic structure (Engels 1893/1959, Katznelson 1981, and Nelson 2001).

Typically, separate institutions came to dictate appropriate behavior in the respective spheres: unions traditionally became the prevailing organizational structure of the workplace, whereas churches, schools, and clubs came to define that of the residential community. The predominant sentiment among the American workforce was to consider themselves as workers at work and members of a certain race or ethnicity at home. This pattern was reflected spatially as workers seldom settled in communities with explicit ties to their occupation (Katznelson 1981). This can be seen in the case of the Teamsters’ trucking division, the baseline case of this study, in which the highly mobile and solitary nature of the work is also conducive to separate home and residential spheres.

The maritime and longshore industries, in contrast, are largely atypical in this regard, in which members historically have formed residential communities around their occupations. The creation and persistence of dock-working neighborhoods have occurred through several mechanisms. First, the nature of dock work itself is instrumental. The structural positioning of the work, which consists of a small number of fixed and often
isolated locations has fostered the growth of dockworker neighborhoods around the gates of many ports.

Second, recruitment patterns among family members have facilitated the formation of dock-working communities. In the early years of longshore work, men labored collectively under conditions that were often life threatening, making communication and trust vital between workers. Because these ties develop easily among family members, longshoremen often recruited heavily from kinship groups (Kimeldorf 1988). In later years, as unions began to secure major advances in wages and conditions, workers would seek to pass highly coveted longshore jobs to their family members through the sponsorship hiring system. Kinship recruitment also fostered an occupational identity as family ties facilitated anticipatory socialization, in which future dockworkers were conditioned with a strong historical memory of work on the waterfront prior to entering the labor force (Hill 1976, Turnbull 1992).

Third, in the northwest ILWU locals of Seattle and Tacoma, the tendency to form occupational communities was strengthened by original recruitment patterns of longshoremen among loggers and seafarers whose occupation also required that they live in an isolated “word apart”. In the Pacific Northwest, the fairly homogenous population of working men primarily of Scandinavian origin facilitated the ease with which these communities were formed and maintained (Kimeldorf 1988).

Finally, long hours and deviant work schedules in gang shifts commonly caused longshoremen to create an identity around their occupation. Through the mid-20th century, the solidarity and intense loyalty associated with the longshoremen identity coupled with kinship recruitment patterns resulted in an occupational culture that
transcended into the home. Occupational communities then were perpetuated as longshoremen either directly extended social ties from the workplace into leisure or as the local community would display a high density of the occupation, and therefore friendships with neighbors, kin, and schoolmates with dockworker roots were more likely in these neighborhoods (Hill 1976, Katzenelson 1981).

In all of these instances, residential settings may impact individual preferences or behavior. Through local networks of communication with friends and neighbors, the preferences of the majority in a neighborhood can be strengthened, and newcomers who find themselves in the minority can be persuaded or intimidated to join the majority.

The formation of occupational communities outlined above detail the experience of the ILWU and to a great degree the MUA for most of the 20th century. The majority of the longshore industry, however, has not been able to sustain residential communities into the 21st century. The effects of rapid industrialization on the nature of the waterfront, the racial fragmentation of the workforce, and leadership corruption have all led to the gradual demise of these traditional dockworker communities. The Maritime Union of Australia represents such a case, in which a conservative national administration and structural adjustments to the waterfront industry have contributed to the breakup of traditional “wharfie” communities.\(^2\)

The current residence patterns of the three unions in this study represent various levels of the maintenance of occupational communities – the ILWU being the most resilient, the MUA showing moderate levels of residential clustering, and the IBT

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\(^2\) See Turnbull (1992) for a similar discussion on the demise of dockworker communities in Great Britain
exhibiting no clear pattern of clustering by union membership. Subsequent sections of this paper will demonstrate how these residential patterns correlate with the strength and orientation of political preferences espoused by members.

III. Cases: Union Political Culture

The ILWU

The ILWU formed in 1937 when the Pacific Coast district of the International Longshore Association (ILA) split from the AFL, changed its name, and affiliated with the more liberal Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The ILWU’s militancy has been attributed to its radical leftist roots, the solidarity waged in the 1934 strike, the democratic leadership of Harry Bridges and his focus on class solidarity over racial fragmentation (Kimeldorf 1981, Nelson 2001, Levi 2005).

Historically, the ILWU has participated in myriad political protests, ranging from boycotting the German, Italian, and Japanese shipping lines in protest of the emerging Axis Powers to boycotting Chilean cargo after the supposed US involvement in the death of Salvador Allende. More recently, the ILWU engaged in a coast-wide protest calling for the immediate return of US troops from Iraq in 2008. In June 2010, Local 10 in San Francisco refused to unload an Israeli ship to oppose the nation's recent attack on a vessel carrying humanitarian aid to Palestine. The International’s official stance on such issues continues to be among the most radical and leftist among American trade unions.

In the ILWU, the maintenance of a union-controlled hiring hall has been essential to the dissemination of beliefs among members. In all three locals in this study, the hall has remained a stronghold of traditional dockworker culture and has historically has been
a place for workers to come together and socialize while waiting between shifts and in the process are exposed to the beliefs of other members and union material.

**Maritime Union of Australia**

The Maritime Union of Australia is an organization in transition. The precursor to the MUA, the Waterside Workers’ Federation (WWF), was also historically a remarkably militant leftist organization. Original archival data shows that the union routinely lost hundreds of man-hours yearly to political protests and boycotts ranging from hotly debated social justice issues such as refusing to unload South African ships to protest Apartheid to those less commonly taken on by the public, such as strikes against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and Japanese aggression against China. However, the early 1990’s saw a precipitous drop in industrial action for political purposes and the union has very rarely engaged in this type of activity in recent years.³

A large part of this shift can be attributed to the Waterfront Industry Reform Authority (WIRA) in 1989, a three-year reform committed to the “fundamental structural and attitudinal change in the waterfront industry”. One major aspect of WIRA’s success in reducing the power of the union was shifting the structure of hiring and contract negotiations from industry to enterprise employment. Reforms gradually moved MUA members from a collective nationwide contract to individual contracts with each individual shipping company, resulting in over 60 different agreements.

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³ Original work stoppage data collected by author from records kept by Association of Employers of Waterside Labour (AEWL). Noel Butlin Archives: Australia National University.
The Association of Employers of Waterside Labour – which collectively negotiated the hiring of labor with the union – also dissolved during the WIRA era. This not only further solidified the shift to individual contracts, but also allowed individual companies to do all their own recruitment. WIRA mandated an early retirement/redundancy option that resulted in the release of 3000 of the roughly 5500 waterside employees in 1990. To supplement the diminished labor force, the shipping companies actively recruited 1000 new employees. The union claims that following WIRA, many companies attempted to hire people that they thought would not fit in to the traditional “wharfie” culture. Companies recruited women and college students in an explicit attempt to increase company loyalty over association with the union.4

Another huge gain for the shipping companies through WIRA was to remove all dispatch duties from the union. The MUA now only represents steady men who work directly for the shipping companies. The union’s chief function is to negotiate contracts with individual shipping companies as well as deal with arbitration disputes over workers’ wages, conditions, and benefits. An ILWU Local 13 dispatcher revealed the significance of the losses imposed by WIRA to the Australian dockworkers; “when the MUA folks came over here and saw what we still had in this hall, some of these men practically broke into tears.”5

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5 Mike Piazza, current ILWU dispatcher, Local 13, interviewed by author. ILWU Dispatch Hall, Wilmington, CA. June 2, 2010.
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

The type of social commitment entwined in the history of the ILWU and the MUA is in contrast to more typical business unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Historically, the leadership of the IBT fought hard for and was very successful in achieving material gains for its members, but rarely sought to engage the membership in larger issues of the working class. Ties to organized crime and the corrupt and undemocratic nature of the union during the presidency of Jimmy Hoffa from 1957 – 1971 contributed to the lasting organizational culture of bread-and-butter unionism (Levi 2005).

These three unions represent different levels of variation in the dependent variable. Members of the ILWU still actively commit time and money to causes that are outside of their material benefit. The MUA is in a state of change. Its precursor, the WWF, was just as radical and militant as the ILWU, but structural changes in recent years have inflicted severe blows to both the union’s power as well as its organizational culture. And finally, the IBT is a baseline case representing the typical American trade union experience, an organization that historically has not committed itself to issues outside of the interests of its members. Based on the nature of the three unions, the expected correlation between the formation of occupational communities with the strength and orientation of member political preferences is as follows:
Figure 1: Predicted correlation of residential clustering and union member political preferences

IV. Measuring Political Preferences in the ILWU

[Note: I’m still working on this section – Unclear if I should use the survey data from both rounds – if at all (??). This has the advantage of being able to include Local 13, but the disadvantage that the timing of the survey may confound my results. Also, there are still 140 observations from Local 13 that are yet to be coded. Feedback appreciated]

The dependent variable in this study is the aggregate preferences of the union’s rank and file to support politically and socially progressive causes. In this section, I measure the tendency of members to support such actions quantitatively with survey data from the ILWU locals in Seattle, Tacoma and the Long Beach.
This ILWU data comes from two rounds of surveys in a series funded by the NSF Project - “Provoking Preferences by Changing Beliefs”. The surveys ask a total of 536 members from the three locals a series of questions on their perceptions of the union and its activities. From this data, I construct a response variable based on nine questions that aim to capture the members’ attitudes towards the union supporting progressive political action. Each member is given a score based on her response to the following nine questions:

1: Rate your interest in politics
2: Do you try hard to carry union beliefs over into all other dealings in your life?
3: How important is the following union activity: political action? Should the union...
4: Support political parties and candidates with union resources?
5: Donate union resources to social causes?
6: Encourage members to donate to social causes?
7: Encourage members to donate time and/or goods to social causes?
8: Help political prisoners?
9: Close the port for a political protest?

Each of these indicators is coded as a dichotomous variable, with positive responses counting as a “1” and negative responses as a “0”. This measure corresponds to a 0 – 9 scale, which represents how strongly the respondent supports and believes the union should support socially and politically progressive issues. As a composite, the scale created by these indicators follows an extended beta-binomial distribution. The binomial distribution allows for non-linear, bounded integer responses as represented by the 0 – 9 scale. A beta-binomial model relaxes the assumption that individual questions are

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6 “National Science Foundation SES-0717454 (PI – Margaret Levi)
7 The first question is coded as a “1” for “very interested” and “somewhat interested” and “0” for “not very interested” and “not at all interested”. The remaining questions are coded as a “1” for the responses “agree” and “strongly agree” and “0” for “disagree and “strongly disagree”.

correlated, which is highly likely given that each union member will not have the same probability of answering yes/no on a particular question as well as that union members will likely influence each other in choosing responses. The following model then is able to partially account for potential overdispersion in outcomes (see King 1989).

The following rope ladder plot shows the model specifications, their regression coefficients, and 95% confidence intervals (a complete regression table is included in the appendix).

[Note: this is the most recent data analysis. When I included only round 1 data, there was a stronger change in the response variable associated with increased rank in the union]
man, to an A-man and finally to an elected leadership position is associated with increased exposure to the union - through increased allotted hours on the docks, more time with other workers, and more privileges in the form of wages, conditions, and other union benefits (such as voting rights in local and international elections).

The preliminary ILWU survey data also provides a way to quantify the effects of union familial ties on the respondent’s belief set. Respondents with family members in the union are more likely to respond positively to a greater number of questions on the response variable scale introduced earlier. In fact, having a family member in the union is the strongest indicator of scoring highly on the dependent variable scale. This pattern holds while controlling for the respondents’ education, race, gender, income, local, and whether or not they participated in the recent lottery hiring system.

The effect of having a family member in the union is plotted in the figure below. This first difference density plot shows that having an ILWU family member increases
the score on the belief-set scale by almost two categories - so the probability that the respondent will answer positively to an additional two of the nine questions. The mean score for all respondents was answering positively to six questions, so the effect of having a family member in the union raised the average score to eight out of nine – or a 22% increase.

V. Spatial Statistics

In this section, I use the Global Information Systems (GIS) to map the residence patterns of the ILWU and the MUA during their inception in the 1940’s and the current patterns of all three unions. The maps show the percentage of the total number of union members out of the entire membership that live in each city zip code. Given these percentages, the maps identify clusters with values similar in magnitude as well as spatial outliers. Spatial autocorrelations are calculated by the squared distance of the center of one zip code to the center of all other zip codes. The membership of each zip code influences all the other zip codes, but the farther away a region is, the smaller the impact.
Because this distance is squared, the influence drops off quickly and only the zip code’s closest neighbors will exert substantial influence in its computations.

Additionally, the distances between points are calculated by the number of city blocks between them, which is appropriate in urban areas in which union members must commute through city streets to work. Finally, the calculations are standardization by the sum of the membership percentages of all neighboring zip codes. As with calculating the distance between the centers of each zip code, this helps reduce the potential bias associated with the dealing with zip codes of various sizes and populations. The more zip codes a region is surrounded by, the less weight is placed on that region.

Each map shows Local Moran's I values, which produce a Z score, a p-value, and a color code representing the cluster type for each zip code. The Z score and p-value represent the statistical significance of the cluster. A positive Moran’s I value indicates that the feature is surrounded by features with similar values, which are indicated by various shades of red on the maps. A negative Moran’s I value indicates that the feature is surrounded by features with dissimilar values, which are represented by shades of blue. The Z scores and p-values can be interpreted similarly to regression coefficients. The p-values indicate the likelihood that this clustering pattern would happen in a random sample and the Z-score displays the number of standard deviations this value is from an even distribution of union members across all the included regions.

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8 The distance between two points is measured along axes at right angles and then calculated by summing the absolute difference between point coordinates.
9 The zip codes that were not included in the analysis do not have any color. Bodies of water are indicated by light blue.
As a limitation of this study, these patterns only reveal the statistical significance of the spatial autocorrelation without taking into account other neighborhood characteristics which might influence where an individual chooses to live. A further extension of this study would overlay data available at the census track level on variables such as median home value, racial composition, and crime rates onto the zip code data to see if the residence patterns hold. However, comparing ILWU and IBT membership in similar cities to some extent helps control for potential confounding factors.

The data for this project comes from membership lists both current and historic provided by the three respective unions. The ILWU Local 19 (Seattle) 1940 data is from the union’s original membership list. Local 23 (Tacoma) did not leave the ILA to join the ILWU until 1958, so the Tacoma 1940 data is from the original ILA membership list. The 2006 data from all three locals is from the ILWU Dispatcher, the union’s newsletter, and includes both active members as well as retirees in the longshore division. The historic MUA data is also from the original membership for both the Melbourne and Sydney Branches in 1945 and 1949 respectively. The 2009 MUA data is from the current membership list and includes active members in the dockworker division. The Teamster data from Seattle and Long Beach is from the current membership lists for all short haul and long haul truck drivers. This is the first time this original data has been recorded and used for academic purposes.
Results and Discussion

IBT

The following two maps show the current residence patterns of the IBT locals in Seattle and Long Beach. Though there are clusters in the LA/Long Beach Local that are statistically significant, they are dispersed around the greater Long Beach, San Pedro, and Covina area. There is also a slight concentration of workers in Seattle in the Central District, the historically African American neighborhood, but this area is a far distance from the union offices.
IBT Local 848 Member Residence
Long Beach, CA Zip Codes, 2009

Significance Level (Std. Dev.) of Anselin Local Moran's I per Zip Code
-1.65 - 1.65
1.65 - 1.96
1.96 - 2.58
> 2.58

Source: International Longshore and Warehouse Union Dispatcher Records for Members and Retirees, 2006
Total Number of Observations: 1176
IBT Local 174 Residence Pattern
Puget Sound, Washington, Zip Codes, 2009

Source: International Brotherhood of Teamsters Records for Drivers 2009
Total Number of Observations: 974
The following maps show the residence patterns of the Seattle and Tacoma Locals in 1940 and the current patterns in Seattle, Tacoma, and Long Beach. The positive externalities associated with co-location most likely explain the high clustering of dockworker residences in the 1940’s. Long hours of work, the dispatch from the hiring hall, and poor, relatively expensive transport forced workers to reside near their places of work. Dockworkers had to endure high rents and live in tight, cramped quarters near the ports. Currently, however, ILWU members can often earn six-figure annual incomes, which in addition to the ease of transport, allows the majority of workers to live in nearly all neighborhoods in the greater areas of Seattle, Tacoma, and Long Beach. Despite this, the maps indicate that they still choose to live in close proximity to each other, the hiring hall, and their place of work.

In the Seattle area, the longshoremen moved away from the downtown docks to the more isolated area of West Seattle. Indeed, there is no clustering of residences in any other area of the city, despite the fact that their income and the ease of transportation would easily allow them to live elsewhere. The Tacoma Local is the strongest indicator of this trend. Again, the union members clustered around the docks in the 1940’s, but actually moved further away from this area and are currently clustered around the Local’s hiring hall.

Despite the relative enormity of the Long Beach Local, there is still a high clustering of residences around the hiring hall. Bobby Olvera Jr., current vice-president of Local 13, speaks to this trend:
“Look, I’m the exception that proves the rule. I’m the only Local 13 official who did not spend his whole life growing up in ‘Pedro. When my father got elected to the International, I was seven and we moved from here up to San Francisco. Even though I moved back and have been a Local 13 member for the past 20 years, a lot of guys still call me as ‘Frisco. Most of our officials are known either as ‘Pedro guys’ or ‘Wilmington guys’ and count on getting a majority of their support from their locality. We’re extremely close-knit here. The three major freeways (I-405, I-710, and I-110) around the port of Los Angeles create a bubble that not many of the dockworkers tend to get out of”.

ILWU Local 19 Member Density
Puget Sound, Washington, Zip Codes, 1940

Source: International Longshore and Warehouse Union Member List, 1940 -- Total Number of Observations: 941
ILWU Local 19 Member Density
Puget Sound, Washington, Zip Codes, 2006

Source: International Longshore and Warehouse Union Dispatcher Records for Members and Retirees, 2006
Total Number of Observations: 1176
ILWU Local 23 Member Density
Puget Sound, Washington, Zip Codes, 1940

Source: International Longshore and Warehouse Union Membership List, 1940 -- Total Observations: 553
ILWU Local 23 Member Density
Puget Sound, Washington, Zip Codes, 2006

Source: International Longshore and Warehouse Union Dispatcher Records for Members and Retirees, 2006
Total Number of Observations: 1221
ILWU Local 13 Member Residence
Long Beach, CA Zip Codes, 2006

Source: International Longshore and Warehouse Union Dispatcher Records for Members and Retirees, 2006
Total Number of Observations: 7562
MUA

The MUA’s structural transition is reflected in the residence patterns of its members. As in the ILWU cases, both branches had membership that resided primarily around the docks in the 1940’s. The current patterns reveal that the Melbourne Branch members, though somewhat more dispersed, still cluster predominately around the docks in the western part of the city. Historically, the Melbourne Branch was the most militant of the WWF, reporting more man-hours lost to political and social causes than any other branch. The maintenance of residential clustering may indicate a way through which this culture has been maintained. The Sydney Branch’s membership, however, do not reveal a clear trend. Due to the highly commercial nature of the Sydney harbor, the vast majority of the shipping lines go in and out of Botany Bay to the south of the branch’s offices. This in part explains the clustering in the southern suburbs, but does not explain the high percentages of workers dispersed throughout the city.

11 Work stoppage data collected from records kept by Association of Employers of Waterside Labour (AEWL). Noel Butlin Archives: Australia National University
WWF Melbourne Branch Member Density
Melbourne NSW, Post Codes, 1945

Source: Waterfront Workers Federation Membership List 1945 - ANU Archive
Total Number of Observations: 1347
MUA Melbourne Branch Member Density
Melbourne NSW, Post Codes, 2009

Source: Maritime Union of Australia - Melbourne Branch Current Membership List, 2009
Total Number of Observations: 1727
WWF Sydney Branch Member Density
Sydney, NSW, Post Codes, 1949

Significance Level (Std. Dev.) of Anselin Local Moran's I per Zip Code:
-2.58 - -1.96
-1.96 - 2.58
-1.65 - 1.65
> 2.58

Source: Waterfront Workers Federation Membership List 1949 - ANU Archive
Total Number of Observations: 343
The cumulative results of the maps largely confirm the arguments presented in this paper. The variation in the preferences of union members regarding socially and politically progressive issues largely correlate with their tendency to live in tightly bound communities. Teamster’s members living in both Seattle and Long Beach do not appear to cluster in one particular area of their respective cities. In contrast, the membership of the three ILWU locals still live in close proximity to each other, even so far as in the case of Tacoma, to live farther away from their place of work and closer to the hiring hall. The MUA displays mixed results. It appears as though the Melbourne Branch’s rank and file still choose to live in communities where a high percentage of their coworkers do as well, whereas the Sydney Branch’s members are more dispersed throughout the greater Sydney area.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the choice of union members to live in close proximity to each other is an institution that reinforces the aggregate culture of their organization. The three cases in this study, the ILWU and the IBT in the United States and the MUA in Australia, show significant variation in their support for socially and politically progressive causes. The current residence patterns of the rank and file of several locals from these unions indicate that the choice of members to maintain occupational communities is correlated with the strength of the dominant political and social ideals espoused by the union as a whole. I am not arguing that neighborhoods are the sole or even the primary cause of the beliefs espoused by union members, but that either through
being raised in a dockworker community or choosing to move to one, members are exposed to union beliefs well beyond the end of their shifts.

Appendix

Extended Beta-Binomial Model: Coefficient estimates and standard errors

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<th>Coefficients (SE)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Rank in ILWU</td>
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<td>Local 23</td>
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