

### **Employer-employee relations**

Employers and employees need to have some system for communicating their views and requirements to each other. Employee-employer relations take place at two main levels:

1. Individual relationships
2. Collective relationships.

An individual's relationship is with their employer and relates to their contract of employment and conditions of work. Sometimes an individual employee may have a dispute with their employer leading to a tribunal case.

### **Trade unions**

Collective relationships typically involve groups of employees and often involve trade unions like Unison and an individual employer or group of employers. The body that represents trade unions in this country at a national level is the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The body that represents employers collectively is the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

In this country the number of disputes is remarkably low when compared with other countries. The vast number of trade unionists have never been on strike.

Trade union representatives help to ensure the smooth running of industry. Wherever people work or meet together, disputes and grievances will occur, and in industry the problems of new technology, complicated payment systems and work that lacks stimulation are bound to create dissatisfaction. Many of these everyday problems are easily dealt with by meetings, discussion and bargaining.

It is the trade union representative of an organisation like Unison who expresses the views of the employees.

### **Collective bargaining**

Collective bargaining involves representatives of employers and employees getting together to discuss and bargain. At one extreme negotiation may just involve two people. This is a very common arrangement - the human resource manager and a representative of each trade union at a place of work will probably have short meetings every week. Most collective bargaining over major issues, however, involves inter-party negotiations. These can range from fairly small groups on each side of the bargaining table to over 20 representatives from management and a similar number from different trade unions. It is important to remember that talk and discussion is the major tool of employment relations.

One of the reasons why we have had such good employment relations in this country is because of the work of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas). The job of Acas is to create harmonious working relationships by encouraging employees to develop best practice in this field and by providing codes of conduct, training and guidelines for employers and employees and their representatives to follow.

The bodies that represent groups of trade unions and employees are:

### **The Trades Union Congress**

Every year delegates from the various unions meet together at the Annual Congress to debate and discuss general union policy. The TUC also has a permanent body of national officials under the leadership of a president.

The TUC puts forward the unions' point of view to the government, the CBI and other major groups, and has a major interest in employment laws, training and conditions at work.

### **The Confederation of British Industry**

This body was set up to provide a national organisation giving the view of employers. The CBI acts as a mouthpiece for the employers to present their opinions and feelings to trade unions, government, the media and other interested parties.

The CBI collects and makes known information about a wide range of matters. Its Industrial Trends survey is published quarterly giving up-to-date information about the state of business. CBI News gives employers up-to-the-minute information on a wide range of business issues. The CBI has a permanent staff involved in collecting statistics, processing information, publishing articles, and dealing with queries from industrialists. The CBI is led by a Director General.