

## UNISON and unions' wider role



### Introduction

UNISON is the biggest trade union in the UK. It has 1.3 million members. It acts on behalf of workers in the public services. Unions have a key role in making sure that employers and employees are fair to each other. If these two groups don't play fair, it can lead to big problems for businesses. For instance, if an employer will not pay fair rates this leads to workers with low morale. These are likely to produce poor output.

### Trades Unions

A trade union is a group of workers who decide to act as one body. They talk to employers as a group. This gives them greater power to make bargains and keep them. Unions have developed a broad range of activities which cover their two main roles. These are to represent workers and to protect them.

### Wider role

Trades unions also work with governments. This is of special meaning to UNISON as the government is the employer in the public services. UNISON both advises on its own and as a member of the TUC. It also sponsors MPs so that they can speak on its behalf. It has helped to bring about a number of rights. These include:

- ▶ Rules that limit working hours.
- ▶ The National Minimum Wage.
- ▶ More, better paid, leave for new Mums and Dads.
- ▶ Laws that mean workers are treated equally.
- ▶ Laws to protect workers from being sacked unfairly.

UNISON has won pledges from the government in power over further key issues.

### Campaigns

UNISON also campaigns on behalf of groups of workers. In the public services, it is trying to remove the 'two tier' pay problem. This is where private sector firms working in the public sector pay workers less. UNISON aims to get rid of the private firms or make sure that pay and conditions are all at the same level. In 2004, it won a case in Liverpool where a group of employees had not been treated fairly. The group won £225,000 in compensation. It is also trying to make the owners or managers of a firm responsible for deaths at work which are the firm's fault.

### Industrial action

When unions and employers cannot agree, workers may then turn to industrial action. This is a last resort. UNISON works to prevent such action. The scale of action ranges from bans (such as on overtime) to all out strikes.

### Conclusion

UNISON acts in the same way as other trades unions. It protects workers; runs campaigns; gains better conditions and promotes improvements.

