

UNISON and unions' wider role



Introduction

Employers and employees must be fair with each other, or this would spell disaster for businesses. An employer unwilling to treat workers properly or pay fair rates creates poor workers with low morale and efficiency. Trade Unions emerged to protect employees in the days of the Industrial Revolution when employers did treat them unfairly.

Trades Unions

A trade union is a collection of workers who agree to negotiate their terms and conditions with employers as a group, rather than as individual employees. This is called collective bargaining. This gives them greater power to make bargains and keep them. Over time, unions developed two main roles: representation and protection. They negotiate with one voice and protect members from unfair practices. UNISON is the UK's biggest trade union with 1.3 million members in the public services. Unions have developed a broad range of activities in support of employees. These include health and safety, equality and issues such as the minimum wage and work life balance.

UNISON's aims and achievements

UNISON aims to act on behalf of all the workers at a location so supports single union agreements. This helps in collective bargaining. One of its current concerns is to remove the two tier labour force. Some private sector businesses contracted to work in the public services are paying lower rates and providing worse conditions than presently in public services. UNISON aims to either remove private contractors from the public services or bring all up to the same pay and conditions. UNISON also advises governments both on its own and as a member of the TUC. It also sponsors MPs. This influence has helped secure:

- ▶ Working Time Regulations
- ▶ National Minimum Wage
- ▶ improved maternity and paternity leave
- ▶ protection against discrimination
- ▶ protection from unfair dismissal.

It also has pledges from the government in power over further key workplace issues.

Campaigns

UNISON also campaigns on behalf of groups of workers or individuals. In 2004 it won compensation of £225,000 for a group of Liverpool workers who had been unfairly dismissed. It has also been campaigning for a corporate manslaughter law making businesses legally responsible for deaths at work.

Industrial action

When all else fails workers may resort to industrial action. This can range from bans such as overtime bans through action short of strike action (such as working to rule) to selective and all out strikes. UNISON works to succeed in negotiations and tries to prevent industrial action.

Conclusion

UNISON represents and protects workers. It runs campaigns; gains better conditions and encourages improvements.

