

British unions have neither tidy jurisdictions nor exclusive bargaining rights. All the unions in a given area affiliate into larger groups, both for bargaining and other purposes.

Employers' associations

Employers are organized along two lines. The respective central organizations are the Federation of British Industries, which deals with commercial and economic questions, and the British Employers' Confederation, which is involved with labor matters. There are some 1,800 employers' organizations, but only 63 of them are represented in the confederation and are therefore important in collective bargaining. Formally the confederation is organized much like the TUC and has no real power over its members; its actual role in collective bargaining is less than that of the TUC and it never takes part in negotiations or disputes.

Collective bargaining

The pattern of bargaining varies among industries, but generally it is conducted on an industrywide basis between the unions in the industry (all unions having significant membership in the area being represented) and the employers' association or public authority. Usually (though not in engineering, shipbuilding, or most of the poorly organized industries) there is a standing joint body with a written constitution in which bargaining takes place. Where there is no standing body, meetings take place at given intervals or at the request of either party. While bargaining is industrywide in this sense, it is not in the sense that separate contracts are signed for manual and nonmanual workers and the pattern of bargaining does not conform to the generally recognized outlines of an industry. Even where there is a joint body, unions may bargain separately at times with individual employers on some issues. Also, negotiations on such matters as hours and holidays are often conducted on a wider basis than those on wages.

The bindingness of the industrywide agreement also varies. In some cases all is determined by the central agreement and in others regional and local deviations are permitted; in others, only minimum rates are set nationally.

Conciliation and arbitration are often used in disputes, whether over contract interpretations or negotiations (there is no clear distinction between these in Britain). First a strong attempt is made to compromise the issue, then conciliation, and finally arbitration are used often in an attempt to reach a settlement according to previously agreed-upon rules. Local disputes are almost always handled by a prearranged procedure with the agreement that there will be no work stoppage until the procedure has been exhausted; arbitration is used much less here than in national negotiations.

The indefinite duration of contracts reduces the importance of "rounds" of wage increases and pattern bargains. The Amalgamated Engineering Union, because of its size, has been the nearest thing to a wage leader since the war (also because it is widely dispersed geographically and has been relatively prosperous). The effects of its bargains on other negotiations are limited, though.

Contracts

The great majority of contracts do not run for any fixed term, but remain in force until one party gives a termination notice. Contracts are signed at works, district or local, and national levels. Their coverage varies widely occupationally, as well, and may relate to a single craft, several crafts, or all manual workers in an industry. The contents of contracts also vary considerably. Many unwritten practices are considered subject to collective bargaining as well as subjects covered in written agreements. Wages and terms of employment are the most important and sometimes the only subjects of written contracts, while the physical conditions of labor are more often regulated by law than by contract. Union security clauses are seldom written into agreements, but unwritten agreement on the subject is common; the same is true of the seniority rule in hiring and layoffs.

Collective bargaining and disputes legislation

During the war all employers were required to meet rates and conditions bargained or arbitrated in their industries and could be sued for failing to do so. A national arbitration tribunal settled all disputes that could not be solved otherwise and strikes were prohibited. In 1951 this law was succeeded by one setting up an industrial disputes tribunal. Under this law, unsettled disputes