

Working lives essay



Select any ONE U. K. trade union.

Explore their current levels of membership, and services for members and critically examine theoretical analysis for this current position and activity within the Employee Relations literature. Before I begin there are two necessary elements that must be covered differentiated, although greatly related to each other they are differences between the two: Trade Unions can be defined as “ a continuous association of wage earner for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives” (cited Webb & Webb, 1920)¹. Employee Relations can be defined as “ concerned with the relationship between the policies and practices of the organisation and it staff, and the behaviour of work groups. ” (Mullins 2002)The trade union I have chosen to examine is Amicus, the UK’s largest manufacturing, technical ; skilled persons’ union. With over 1. 2 million members in the private & public sectors, a major industrial force since the merger of MSF & AEEU into a single collective body.

A series of mergers began during the late 80’s and early 90’s, as smaller unions feared that they would lose the little power they possessed and larger trade unions continued to absorb smaller ones in the private sector. Through major mergers with the creation of MSF in 1988 and the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) in 1992, Amicus was form in 2002, which included important consolidations such as the Graphical Paper and Media Union (GPMU) (1992) in the printing industry and UNIFI (1999) in the finance sector. The creation of Amicus was not unique as the number of unions affiliated to the TUC declined from 109 in 1980 (representing 12, 172, 000 members) to 76 in 2000 (representing 6, 746, 000). Amicus membership

consists of Full time (members aged 21 or over who normally work 20 hrs or more each week), Part time (members aged 21 or over who normally work less than 20 hrs per week), Young (members aged under 21), Training (members in apprenticeships or full time occupational professional or government training schemes), First Year (Until training period is finished), Student (members in full-time higher or further education), and Retired (Permanently retired or permanently unable to work on medical grounds or excused contributions over 24 months and not working)². The types of services provided by the Amicus have not developed essentially over the year, the greatest reflection of current state of unions can be seen in the benefits they provided for members, which range from discounted holiday travel and insurance to financial advices and services.

Amicus offers a wide range of services to members, from representation through representatives in the workplace and free legal advice to consumer benefits such as reduced rates on mortgages and insurance. Amicus state that they “ support our members’ interests by ensuring they are represented by a dedicated team of research officers and professional experts, not only in the workplace, but also within the UK and European Parliaments”.³ In addition to the massive financial, legal and industrial back up provided by Amicus, members are able to take advantage of a range of specially negotiated benefits and services. Members of Amicus are “ entitled to free legal advice. Representation services cover a range of issues, both inside and outside the workplace.

We can help with personal injury claims, employment matters, wills, conveyancing and many other legal issues. ”³ These are designed to save

you money and ensure that you derive maximum benefit from your union subscriptions. 3 The history of the trade unions stretch far into history, with craftsmen guilds' protecting their members' interest in the medieval market, but it was not until the industrial revolution, in the 19th and 20th century trade unions stretched its power. The Industrial Revolution was a real turning point for Unions, as they substantially increased their member numbers which in-turn enhanced their ' bargaining powers'.

During this period their membership grew and the trade unions' power reached its height with also 12 million members, and even in some cases used their power militantly, like the Nottingham weavers who destroyed threshing machines in the 1830's at a time when unions were outlawed, described as " collective bargaining by riot" by historian Eric Hobshawm. 4 One of the momentous occasions of their decline of trade unions occurred towards the end of the 20th century, by the conservative party lead by the " Iron lady" Margaret Thatcher in 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990 and 1993. Thatcher's government passed a legislation intended to fracture the power of the unions and the change in legislation is one of the main reasons for the trade unions decline. These laws cumulatively, greatly restricted and controlled trade union activity.

This process reversed the historic role of most governments since the 1870s: to protect unions, by legislation, from court judgments that seriously interfered with their functioning in peacetime. When Tony Blair became leader in 1994, he campaigned to drop the longstanding Clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution (of 1918), with its emphasis on ' common ownership' – part of his ' New Labour' project. It was replaced by a weaker

formulation that also embraced ' the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition'. The new weakened power only gave the unions some recognition rights and minimum wage, but has made it very clear that the unions will not return to the legal immunities they had before the Thatcherism period.