

**Workplace Industrial Relations in the General Print Sector Covered
by National Bargaining.**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Hertfordshire
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

**The programme of research was carried out in the Department of
Human Resources and Strategy, in the Business School, University of
Hertfordshire.**

October 2007.

Abstract

Set against a background of technological change, national bargaining and union merger, this thesis considers the impact of a changing structural, economic and political climate on the resilience of national pay bargaining within general print, a little documented but important section of the economy. It seeks to examine contemporary workplace industrial relations where, against national trends, national bargaining has been resilient. It is in the light of there being a long association with strong, regulatory unionism within the sector that this study seeks to explore the reality of workplace industrial relations under national bargaining.

There has been a wealth of theoretical and empirical data produced on the background to the wider debate on the declining influence of multi-employer bargaining across the UK economy. However, little work has been committed to the general printing sector that investigates why, in the face of fundamental changes to industrial relations practice, the national agreement for this sector appears to have continued relatively unscathed.

The thesis draws on the experience of twelve branches with respect to the impact of the national agreement; three case studies in general print sector companies located in the South West, Humberside and Anglia regions; and on documentary evidence and participant observation. Analysis of the thesis was informed by classical and contemporary writers on industrial relations. The thesis finds a shift from traditional adversarial approaches to partnership in national agreement negotiations. The thesis reveals that at the workplace level, the chapel structure remains intact with its traditional, hierarchal structure and the accompanying issues of gender segregation and worker exclusion remaining firmly embedded within chapels. Behind this appearance of chapel strength an air of apathy and poor organisation impacts on union activity and local bargaining.

The thesis concludes by critiquing shifts away from traditional bargaining and questions the state of workplace organisation with changes in union structure. Importantly, the thesis presents data on the state of collective bargaining in the sector, and in particular identifies a shift from the traditional adversarial approach to partnership in the national agreement; it also identifies the difference in the image and reality of workplace organisation in the sector where behind the appearance of chapel strength lies an air of apathy and poor organisation that ultimately impacts on chapel activity and local bargaining. Using Kelly's model for union renewal the thesis assesses the level of union activity and considers the likelihood of increased union activity in the workplace in the general print sector

Acknowledgements

To Jill, Hayley, Joanne and James.

Many thanks my family and friends who have supported me throughout this project and special thanks to my supervisors Geraldine Healy and Al Rainnie.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the GPMU Branches who helped me with access to companies for my field work and to those who entered into discussions about my research.

Glossary.

ACAS	Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service
AEEU	Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union
ASLP	Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Printers
BDC	Biennial Delegate Conference
BFMP	British Federation of Master Printers
BPIF	British Printing Industries Federation
CAC	Central Arbitration Committee
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoE	Department of Employment
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ERA	Employment Relations Act
FOC	Father of the Chapel
FMP	Federation of Master Printers and Allied Trades of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland
GMB	General Municipal and Boilermakers Union
GPMU	Graphical Paper and Media Union
HRM	Human Resource Management
HSC	Health and Safety Commission
ISDN	Integrated Services Digital Network
LRD	Labour Research Department
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LTS	London Typographical Society
MD	Managing Director
MIS	Management Information Systems
MOC	Mother of the Chapel
NIRC	National Industrial Relations Court
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers
NATSOPA	National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants
NGA	National Graphical Association
NS	Newspaper Society
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
P&KTF	Printing and Kindred Trades Federation
PETF	Print Education and Training Forum
PIRA	Printing Industries Research Association
SLADE	Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers, Engravers and Process Workers
SOGAT	Society of Graphical and Allied Trades
TA	Typographical Association
T&GWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trade Union Congress
ULF	Union Learning Fund
ULR	Union Learning Representative
WERS	Workplace Employee Relations Survey
WIRS	Workplace Industrial Relations Survey

Contents.

Chapter One Introductory Chapter	pp 1 – 16
Chapter Two Industrial Relations in the UK	pp 17 - 90
Chapter Three Locating General Print in History: an overview of the advance in printing technology.	pp 91 - 115
Chapter Four Literature Review. Industrial Relations and collective bargaining in the General Print Sector.	pp 116 - 146
Chapter Five Research Methods.	pp 147 – 172
Chapter Six The Resilience of National Pay Bargaining and the General Printing Industry’s response to an agenda for change.	pp 173 - 209
Chapter Seven The Case Studies.	pp 210 - 219
Chapter Eight The BPIF Agreement and its Impact on Workplace Organisation.	pp 220 - 264
Chapter Nine Conclusion.	pp 265 - 286

Bibliography

pp 287 – 299

Appendix I Print Questionnaire

Appendix II Map of GPMU Branches

Appendix III Workplace Interview Schedules

Appendix IV Request and Response for Interviews

Chapter One

Introduction.

Title of the Research Programme:

Workplace industrial relations in the general print sector covered by national pay bargaining.

Set against a background of technological change, national bargaining and union merger, this thesis considers the impact of a changing structural, economic and political climate on the resilience of national pay bargaining within this little documented but important section of the economy. The thesis also seeks to examine contemporary workplace industrial relations in the general print sector in the context of a resilient national bargaining framework.

My own personal interest in the scope and impact of the union at work began to develop as a result of being elected to become a full time trade union official in the Hertfordshire and Essex region for the then National Graphical Association in 1988. In taking up this position I experienced the union representative role from an entirely different perspective. As a lithographic machine manager and active trade union member I had been involved in the day to day minutia of chapel life. I gained a wider knowledge of what was happening in the industry in the region through my involvement on the branch committee, and nationally, through the workplace representative training offered by the union and through attending Biennial Delegate Conferences. However, my industrial relations focus up to that point had been parochial. In my new position I quickly became aware that I was now part of a

national structure, albeit that the tradition of branch autonomy within the union was paramount within this structure.

In my new surroundings I had access to a wealth of information on the structure and organisation of the union and was able to appreciate more fully the historical importance of the evolution of the trade and industry. Obviously, I had a professional interest in acquiring as much knowledge as possible of industrial relations in the industry, but this professional interest developed into a personal interest and I began to look at ways to expand my knowledge of industrial relations not just in the printing industry, but in the workplace in general. This thirst for knowledge led to my having some discussions with the national education officer for the union, then the Graphical, Paper and Media Union as the result of an amalgamation with The Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, in 1991, who encouraged me to enrol on the Certificate in Industrial Relations course at Keele University. On completion of the certificate I continued my studies and in 1995 achieved a Masters Degree in Industrial Relations at Keele.

Having developed an interest in research, I undertook some preliminary investigation into the general print sector of the industry in collaboration with Geraldine Healy and Al Rainnie at the University of Hertfordshire. Primarily because of my own background of being involved in the general print sector for most of my working time in the industry, and also as a result of my early research uncovering a lack of literature on industrial relations in general print, I embarked on undertaking this research project into the state of industrial relations in the general print sector. To this end, the aims and objectives of my PhD research are as follows:

Aims:

To assess the impact of a changing structural, economic and political climate on the resilience of national pay bargaining within general print, a little documented but important section of the economy. To examine the relationship between the terms and conditions contained within the national agreement and the reality of workplace experience and any tensions that variance between the two may place on workplace organisation, and to consider the nature of contemporary workplace organisation in the general print sector.

Objectives:

- (i) To situate the concept of national pay bargaining within the wider context of a diminishing reliance on this form of workplace regulation in the private manufacturing sector
- (ii) To examine the importance of the historical basis of workplace industrial relations in general print.
- (iii) To examine how the terms and conditions contained within the national agreement impact on the employees working under the agreement at the workplace level.
- (iv) To explore workplace organisation in the general print sector adopting a case study approach.

- (v) To explore the relevance of union renewal and militancy concepts to understanding workplace organisation in the general print sector.

The emphasis of this project is to examine industrial relations in the general printing sector of the UK printing industry. This examination takes place in the knowledge that there still exists in this sector of the economy a multi-employer national agreement that sets the terms and conditions of employment and procedures for dealing with industrial relations for the sector. This is a phenomenon that bucks the trend in the manufacturing sector in general, where multi-employer bargaining has all but disappeared (see Millward et al 2000: p 221).

The complex and paradoxical industrial relations characteristics of the general print sector, coupled with a scarcity of documentation on the sector, are the main reasons for undertaking this research project. There is a discernable gap in the current literature as to how influential national bargaining is in this important sector of the UK economy. There has been a wealth of theoretical and empirical data produced on the background to the wider debate on the declining influence of multi-employer bargaining across the UK economy. However, little work has been committed to the general printing sector that investigates why, in the face of fundamental changes to industrial relations practice, the national agreement for this sector appears to have continued relatively unscathed.

Trade unionism within the sector has always been characterized as having strong, closed unions that exercised a high degree of autonomy over the management of

labour. The roots of the craft elitism evident in the pre-press and machine rooms can be traced back to the earliest examples of guilds and friendly societies and both the pre-entry and post entry closed shops were strongly associated with the industry. It is in the light of this long association with strong, regulatory unionism within the sector that this study seeks to test the reality of workplace industrial relations under national bargaining against the experience of economic, political, legislative and technological change.

This study seeks to fill the knowledge gaps that exist and explore how workplace organisation is affected by the presence of a national agreement. Therefore the broad aim of my research is to consider the nature of contemporary workplace organisation in the general print sector. This examination will be set within the context of the historical importance of a national pay agreement that determines changes in the contract of employment not only for workers working in federated companies, but also for the vast number of companies who are not British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF) members but who, never-the-less, follow the agreement. The research will draw on concepts of union renewal and militancy and comes at a time when the debate on union renewal in the UK is situated between the parameters of the moderate, partnership approach and the more aggressive organising model for union renewal and the thesis will engage with the literature available on this important debate.

The data gathered from the research will allow the thesis to pull out the level of workplace activity that exists in chapels and whether there is any tendency to engage with the employer on a local basis, outside the confines of the terms contained within

the national agreement, or alternatively whether the national agreement restricts such activity. The data will also allow an assessment of the importance of concepts such as renewal in explaining the day-to-day reality of workplace industrial relations. The renewal literature tends to focus on the public sector this study allows its consideration in a private sector context.

The structure of the thesis is as follows.

Chapter Two

This chapter presents a broad view of the historical development of industrial relations in the UK and in doing so sets the context for industrial relations in the general print sector. The Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys/Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WIRS/ WERS) series has been adopted as the barometer for monitoring the changes in workplace relations and provide ample evidence of the decline in influence of trade unions in UK industrial relations. However, it is clear from the survey results in the series that no new industrial relations system has emerged to replace collective bargaining (see Millward et al, 2000: p 229). In the absence of effective representation workers have to contend with unilateral regulation from their employer in the vast majority of instances. The chapter points to the Webbs' (1921) contention that unions need to be able to respond to change and to this end unions have proved to be adaptable in the face of legislative change.

The chapter highlights how, at the turn of a new century, there is a major shift in emphasis away from the notion of 'free collective bargaining' that had been the hallmark of British industrial relations over the last century. Having survived a period of eighteen years between 1979-1997 where market forces were held up as the

determining factor in the economy, with no place for collective representation, and spurred on by the European model, trade unions appear to have adopted a dual approach to industrial relations in the UK. First, in the context of having to live in a more legalised climate, the unions appear to have turned to the method of legal enactment to achieve their goals. This involves a heavy reliance on the legislation emanating from Europe coupled with presenting the hand of partnership and co-operation in an atmosphere of moderation, where employers and employees can benefit in obtaining clear goals.

This partnership approach is tempered with the more confrontational aspect of the TUC recruiting academy that is preparing dedicated organisers to go into the field and recruit workers into trade unions. The emphasis is on Greenfield sites and on recruiting amongst previously difficult sections of the community i.e. part-time and women workers, and workers from ethnic minorities. This recruitment model is not based on presenting a moderate partnership approach but in utilising the legislation to gain recognition and a return to collective bargaining, albeit under a legislative framework. The organising agenda is being coupled with the recruitment and training of a new breed of union representative, the Union Learning Rep, whose role is to promote the learning and skills agenda in the workplace and encourage workers to embrace a learning culture. Many unions see the development of the learning and skills agenda as being complimentary to their organising strategy and as another tool in the recruitment tool-box.

This dual position clearly shows how the unions are able to adapt to the different methods of trade unionism put forward by the Webbs to suit the political and economic climate in which they have to operate in order to maintain a presence in the world of work. The chapter also reflects on the impact of New Labour on trade unions.

Chapter Three

In mapping out the historical evolution of the printing processes employed in the sector several concepts emerge that influence the structure of the thesis and act as a common thread that links the chapters. The general printing sector remains too diverse and complex to apply any general definition to. Small firms dominate it, with the majority of companies employing fewer than 20 people, and yet this is an important sector to the UK economy in terms of employment and as an export earner. The chapter shows that the industry remains highly competitive and that there has been an unprecedented amount of activity in takeovers and change in ownership among the larger companies in the sector and that today we see a greater foreign presence among the owners than previously experienced.

The development of a strong trade union influence in the workplace from a very early stage in the introduction of printing is an important factor in the advance of workplace organisation and the progression to a union closed shop that was made effective through the craft apprenticeship system. This long tradition of creating craft elitism has had an impact on the gendered structure of the industry with male workers dominating the higher paid craft jobs and women being largely confined to the lower

skilled, lower paid tasks. This gender gap has been maintained even in the face of an increasing pace of technological change.

Chapter Three provides evidence of the advance of technology in the industry, which has had a massive impact on the working practices and job stability. What had been regarded as a well developed, relatively stable industry, which was slow to adapt to change, has suddenly been inundated by innovation in computer and digital technology. This transformation has had the effect of undermining the craft tradition that was prevalent and has led to a deskilling exercise that has resulted in fewer people, possessing different skills and abilities, compared to those who were employed before them. Finally the chapter reflects on the future of the industry.

Chapter Four

This chapter concentrates on industrial relations in the general printing sector and focuses on the resilience of a multi-employer, national agreement that continues to impact on the sector and set the benchmark for terms and conditions of employment for workers in that sector. There is a historical overview of the progression of the national agreement that helps to emphasise the uniqueness of the agreement in comparison to trends away from this model of industrial relations in the wider private manufacturing and private services sector of the UK economy. It is argued that a possible reason for the persistence of the agreement is the structure and dynamics of the sector. General print is dominated by SME's, who operate in niche markets with highly competitive wage and price structures and evidence is submitted to support the claim that this type of market is conducive with multi-employer bargaining. Industrial relations tend to be passive, despite the media hype attributed to printing which tends to mistakenly tie general print in with what was a more volatile newspaper sector.

A central topic for discussion between the negotiating bodies has been that of manpower. The traditional stance of the unions was to restrict and control worker intake through apprenticeship quotas and maintaining closed shops, whereas employers sought concessions from the unions on this issue in return for improved terms and conditions. During the 1980s the emphasis changed and it was the unions who pushed for a more constructive approach for training and up-skilling to address skill shortages and skill gaps. This was a radical departure for the unions but has not yet been met with any great enthusiasm among apathetic employers. Flexibility, productivity and efficiency clauses became very much a part of the discussions since the 1980s. The employers sought concessions from the unions in order to create a more cost efficient competitive business structure; in return, the unions advanced conditions but, more importantly from their point of view, kept some control over the rate of change in the workplace. Work has to a great extent become de-skilled by technological change that in turn has led to a more intensified, stressful environment and the subsequent call for an improved training regime to improve job stability.

The value of this chapter to the thesis is that it helps to put into context the circumstances under which multi-employer bargaining continue to exist in the general print sector. The main objectives of my thesis, to situate the concept of national pay bargaining within the wider context of a diminishing reliance on this form of workplace regulation in the private manufacturing sector; to determine the importance of multi-employer bargaining to the principal actors in the agreement i.e. the trade union and the employers' association; and to examine how the terms and conditions contained within the national agreement impact on the employees working under the

agreement at the workplace level, can only be achieved through understanding the complexities of union organisation in the sector.

Chapter Two will explore how unions generally respond to the changing political and ideological climate in which they have to operate. This has seen the traditional pluralist approach to industrial relations challenged by an ideological swing to a more monetarist focus on workplace relations and a legislative framework that restricts the union ability to challenge managerial authority. The changes introduced by the Conservatives during their eighteen years of power have not been repealed by the incoming Labour administration and the climate in which unions operate remains restricted. Despite this sea of change, the general print sector has managed to maintain its time honoured approach to industrial relations, persevering with the multi-employer bargaining model that had come under fire by the Donovan Commission in the 1960s, and, according to the WERS series, has fallen from grace in contemporary industrial relations. What this means for the industry is that, even in the face of a long series of amalgamations among the print unions, which eventually saw the emergence of the Graphical, Paper and Media Union (GPMU) as the single union for the industry, traditional values have been preserved. There still remains within the sector a gendered, hierarchal structure based on craft and skilled status.

Chapter Five.

This chapter sets out the methodological approach and exploratory frameworks adopted in this thesis that enable a critical examination of national pay bargaining and workplace organisation in the general print sector. This research cannot claim to be disconnected from the author. The literature acknowledges the impact of the researcher on the research process in this study and how participant observation is an

important methodological influence in this research that comes as a result of his active involvement in the industry. Therefore, the emphasis of the thesis is very much on action research with participant observation being complimented by documentary evidence, data gathered from a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews with workers from the sector. The rich data gathered through these sources will build an account of the dynamics of industrial relations in the general print sector ranging over the national, regional and local perspectives.

Layder (1993) introduces the concept of a research map which allows for a multi-layered analysis of the data that reflects the interwoven nature of social organisation. Adopting this approach will provide the platform to building a picture of the state of national pay bargaining and workplace organisation in the general print sector taking account of the important element of the historical evolution of industrial relations in the sector.

An effective analytical framework is required to put into context industrial relations in the workplace and a model developed by Kelly (1996) is adopted for this purpose. Kelly's model addresses both the breadth and depth of union response. He examines the breadth on a bi-polar basis along an axis ranging between militant and moderate responses. The depth of response is measured through multi-dimensional analysis that covers five areas: goals; membership resources; institutional resources; methods; and ideology. The multi-dimensional model to determine the depth of chapel activity and organisation will enable a thorough analysis of the responses to both the questionnaire and interview schedule.

Chapter Six.

This chapter begins the process of presenting the research findings and specifically draws on two sources of information. Firstly, an in-depth analysis of documentary data produced by both the employers' association and the trade union over a twenty year period is undertaken. Secondly, observations from my own experience as an industrial officer of the union provide another rich source of information. This is a very different form of data that compliments the documentary evidence. My participant observation is different in that it is recorded as part of my everyday life as an industrial officer, not as an infrequent participant who comes into a situation solely to gain information for a particular case study. Therefore, in this chapter I make use of information gleaned from documentary evidence that is underpinned by my own unique experience of working fully in the industry.

This chapter concentrates on union activity at the national (macro) level and seeks to identify the significant parties and the processes involved in preserving national pay bargaining in the sector. This investigation takes place within the context of an overall decline in trade union membership and collective bargaining in the UK. Against this backdrop of continuing decline, the research examines the national union strategies to continue to represent the membership in the industry. Important themes emerge from this analysis that include how a union that has traditionally operated a closed shop has coped with the introduction of a recruitment strategy brought about by legislative and technological change in order to combat falling membership. This recruitment strategy involves attempts to improve membership in areas where the union is established but also seeks to target workers in hard to reach areas of employment such as part-time and temporary workers, young people and women workers and those

from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. This process is carried out by the union against a back-drop of the spectre of seeking a merger with another union if structural changes in the organisation of the union and improved membership figures cannot be achieved.

Set within this atmosphere of change the chapter also considers the national union approach to a changing collective bargaining agenda that focuses more on the partnership approach to industrial relations opposed to the traditional adversarial bargaining that has been the norm within the sector. The impact of the new Partnership at Work agreement that puts into practice many of the new provisions of the national agreement is considered. The introduction of the Learning and Skills clause and its potential for the union is also taken into account. The chapter concludes by assessing if any shift in the bargaining position adopted by the national negotiating panel has significant implications for terms and conditions in the workplace, not least the opportunity for employers to enter into local discussions on areas of the agreement such as holiday pay and shift patterns that were previously out of bounds.

Chapter Seven.

This short chapter introduces the companies where the interviews for the case studies were conducted. Chapter 5 has already identified the problems associated with undertaking the case study element of the research and that due to the prevailing circumstances the companies decided upon to conduct the interviews were a non-random selection. In this chapter a description of the geographical location, type of product and employment unit size is provided. The chapter also offers an insight into the nature of the chapel structure within each company with regard to employee status and the gender and ethnic mix of the workforce.

Chapter Eight.

In Chapter Eight the focus of the research shifts from the national perspective to workplace organisation at the local level and tests the assumption that the national agreement held between the GPMU and the BPIF is still considered to be a major influence in respect of those working under that agreement. While the national focus on multi-employer pay bargaining presents the public image of industrial relations in the sector, this section drills down deeper into the operational aspects of the national agreement in order to examine workplace organisation and how employees in the general print sector are responding to the changing environment in which they have to work.

The research methods adopted for this part of the research include an analysis of the responses to a questionnaire distributed to activists attending the union BDC in 2003 and also from data gained from the three case studies. These data will provide much of the information for this part of the thesis, again supported by my own participant observation. The analytical framework developed by Kelly (1996), and adapted to extend the range of union responses is used to analyse the level of union activity at the workplace. The following themes emerge from this part of the research:

The impact of the processes put in place by the union at the national level to improve recruitment and organisation;

whether long established workplace union structures have remained intact or, alternatively, if the changing political and economic climate has put pressure on workers to adapt to a changing working environment;

The extent that second tier bargaining, a crucial element in the national agreement for the GPMU, has been preserved in workplaces today.

The analysis will provide the means to test the argument, raised by Kelly (1996), around the issue of union activists being able to promote an increase in the degree of worker mobilisation and militancy in the face of a sense of injustice, real or perceived, experienced by workers through the actions of the employer. Therefore the research will also investigate the relevance of union renewal and militancy concepts to understanding workplace organisation in the general print sector. The data gathered from the survey carried out among delegates to the union BDC along with evidence from the case study interviews will help me to explore the relevance of union renewal and militancy concepts to understanding workplace organisation in the general print sector.

Chapter Nine.

This is the concluding chapter and pulls together the themes and issues that have emerged from the research at both the national and local levels. The chapter is structured to present a Summary of Findings; the Thesis Structure and Theoretical

Framework; The implications of the research findings; a Reflective view of the approach to the research; and finally suggestions for any future research.

The findings reflect the problems faced by the union at the both the national and local levels to maintain their influence in the industry in the face of falling membership and political and technological change. The national strategies introduced to combat these growing problems are assessed along with the union response to a changing bargaining agenda that involves adopting a partnership approach to ensure the continuation of the national agreement in the general print sector.

Chapter Two

Industrial Relations in the UK.

Introduction.

This chapter puts into context the development of industrial relations in the UK that will help to explain why the general printing sector with its continuing national agreement is so out of step with other sectors in the UK economy. The chapter therefore provides a platform to expand the industrial relations themes that are pertinent to the general print sector. Chapter Three will map out the historical

development of the industry and begin the process of explaining the complexity of the structure of the production process and the corresponding division of labour in general printing within that emerging structure.

In order to understand the development of industrial relations in the general print sector it is important to establish the frame of reference that influences the relationship between employer and employee in the sector. By adopting a wider view, the tensions between the unitarist and pluralist approaches in industrial relations are explored from a starting point that the ultimate aim of a firm, under a system of industrial capitalism, is to maximise profits through a reliance upon the method best suited to exhort or coerce the workers into reaching the desired levels of production or producing a viable service.

Historically, the most dominant method for settling issues over terms and conditions of employment at the workplace has been through a system of joint regulation entered into between management and trade unions. Beatrice Webb identified this system as 'collective bargaining' which is based on "any negotiations in which employees do not negotiate individually, and on their own behalf, but do so through representatives" (Donovan 1968: p8). The main condition for collective bargaining to take place is employer recognition of union representation on behalf of their members (Cully et al 1999: p 102). The changes that have taken place in the economic, political and industrial climate in the UK since 1979 have put much pressure on the system of joint determination and have been accompanied by a corresponding decline in trade union membership and recognition (Cully et al 1999: pp234-244). As a result of this decline the position of trade unions as one of the social partners in this process would appear

to be considerably weakened and the main objective of this chapter is to examine critically the state of trade unionism in the UK today within the context of a diminishing reliance on collective bargaining in the private sector.

The debate on trade unionism currently appears to focus on whether trade unions are in a continuous downward spiral of terminal decline, or, alternatively, if they are in the process of initiating a renewal. The Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS)¹ series of studies becomes a useful tool when examining the contemporary status of trade unions as it has the advantage of presenting survey material ranging over a period from the late 1970s when trade union influence was at its height. The surveys have since periodically reviewed the state of workplace industrial relations mapping the decline in union organisation, collective bargaining and union density over this period and in doing so have become an important source of data for researchers into this subject. The WIRS series is made available to IR students and researchers, and, according to the most recent survey, “has documented and comprehensively monitored the state of employment relations in workplaces in Britain over the past two decades” and provides “an up to date account of the state of employment relations in Britain, together with information on changes that have occurred in the workplace since the last survey was conducted” (see Kersley et al, 2005: p 1)

The WIRS series has been the subject of some criticism. McCarthy (1994) questions the research methodology and whether the survey/interview approach could match the reliability of the well-proven case study method. There is also concern that the main

¹ Since 1994 subsequent editions have been renamed the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) but for the purpose of this chapter I will use WIRS as the generic term for the time series.

focus of the analysis is managerialist, an approach that gives the data a pluralistic emphasis. The accuracy of the 1990 data was questioned in the December 1992 issue of IDS Focus. The report is also critical of the survey's method for gathering data. It claims that its "undifferentiated approach creates a host of problems" and that therefore the "emphasis on the establishment and its failure to distinguish sufficiently between different types of workplace mean that many of its conclusions are questionable" (p 7). The report also notes what appear to be contradictory trends within the data on the presence of collective bargaining. On the one hand they reported the "inexorable decline in collective bargaining" and on the other hand they noted a "profound continuity and resilience in the system" (p 5). IDS attributes this paradox to certain quirks in the WIRS analysis and argues that their interpretation of there being a dramatic fall in recognition and collective bargaining in the public sector ignores the reality that large numbers of employees have been removed from collective bargaining through the setting up of pay review bodies in this sector. IDS claims that "To equate this with de-recognition or the erosion of collective bargaining which has occurred in parts of the private sector is just silly" (p 6). And, turning to the private sector, where WIRS recorded the decline of national agreements and collective bargaining, the report argues that most of the decline was centred in the engineering industry where the national agreement had recently collapsed and that "it looks as though much of the decline in collective bargaining reported by WIRS can be put down to the ending of one national agreement" (p 8).

In the 1999 edition of WIRS the authors' (Cully et al), readily admit that Pluralism has been the guiding motif (p 2) and we are advised that a workplace was defined as having participated in the survey provided a management interview had been

conducted (p 7). Also, the data in the first three surveys was only relevant to companies who had more than 25 employees, ignoring small employers and thus the state of industrial relations for a large section of the economy. True, the 1999 version did try to address these anomalies by including responses from employees and providing a new chapter on small businesses. However, employee participation took the form of a survey only and was undertaken on the assumption that employee relations had superseded industrial relations and that workplace representation was no longer wide ranging enough to provide a viable perspective of workplace industrial relations. The authors also explain that less time was dedicated to issues ranging over union organisation, pay determination and industrial action (p 9). This shift came because, if management had rediscovered the individual, then the focus of the survey would also need to change (p 48).

The main body of my work is to examine workplace industrial relations in the general print sector, a sector which Chapter Three identifies as being dominated by employers employing fewer than twenty employees (p 98) and in which multi-employer bargaining has remained resilient. Therefore another shift in the emphasis of WIRS is the inclusion of a chapter on small business. However, the approach to this area of employment appeared disingenuous on the basis that the data “relied exclusively on the management account” which led to the assertion that “employees in small businesses were less likely to be involved in decision making”, but, paradoxically, more likely to express “high or very high levels of job satisfaction” and concludes that “Further analysis of the employee data may illuminate this apparent paradox – a task we leave to others” (Culley et al, p 273). Stirling (2001) argues that this is a response that seems “particularly inappropriate in this area where the common expectation is of a close and informal relationship but where others have identified a poor quality of

working life” (p 7). The structure of the report is purely economic, merely glossing over any impact that this sector has on workplace industrial relations. It is, however, in the knowledge of these criticisms that survey data is used as a resource for this paper.

It seems logical to examine trade union activity over three distinct periods which represent landmarks in industrial relations: 1968-1979, when unions emerged from a period of membership stagnation during 1948-1968, to reaching their numerical peak of around 13million members in 1979 (see Edwards et al 1998: p25). The second period for examination is 1979 – 1997 that witnessed the election of the first of four consecutive Conservative governments. These successive administrations stood on an election manifesto that advocated a free market philosophy and on a platform of legislative change designed to contain the perceived power of the unions and which, some have argued, was the catalyst for the subsequent path to decline in union membership. Finally, the election of a labour government in 1997 with the hopes of trade unions resting on their commitment to “draw a line under the issue of industrial relations law” and to introduce legislation which “halts, and marginally reverses, the seemingly inexorable tide of anti-union legislation from 1980 to 1993” (Towers, 1999:p 82).

A definition of the role and functions of trade unions.

However, before we begin that examination it might be prudent, in the first analysis, to provide a definition of what Trade Unions are, and how they function. The rationale for including this definition of trade unionism is that it might help the reader to better understand the complexities of collective bargaining if the functions and

aspirations of trade unions are spelt out. McIlroy (1995) claims trade unions are a response to capitalism, formed to redress the imbalance of power that exists between the employer and employee (p 2). The most enduring definition is that provided by the Webbs (1921) who wrote that trade unions are “a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives” (p 1)

Trade union membership can be measured in absolute numbers or by the density of membership i.e. actual membership as a percentage of potential membership (see Bain and Price 1983: p3). The density of union membership is one important determinant in seeking to understand the role and relevance of trade unions in the UK economy. Another important determinant is the level of employer recognition of trade unions in order for free collective bargaining to take place. Bain and Price (1983) argue that:

“Union recognition and union growth are mutually dependant” and that they “combine in a ‘virtuous circle’ of cause and effect in which the more the unions obtain recognition and succeed in participating in job regulation the more they are likely to increase their membership and deepen their participation in job regulation”

(pp18-19).

Brown et al (1998) suggest that, along with their participation in collective bargaining, there are two other main traditional roles of the trade unions; to protect their members’ interests and to provide their members’ with a voice. They go on to claim that there is “considerable empirical evidence suggesting that trade unions are generally very effective in these two roles” (pp10-11). Therefore the stuff of trade unions is about representing the interests of workers but within the limits of being

“secondary organisations whose existence and operation are conditioned by the employing organisations of those represented” (Hyman 1997: p309).

Ackers et al (1996) develop an argument that “unions make and remake themselves in different historical settings in response to detailed changes in the character of the employment relationship” (pp 2-3). The pattern of industrial relations over the period from 1970 to the present is a testament to the sentiment of this statement. The changes that have occurred during this period have seen the unions’ climb to their membership, and arguably, influential, peak by 1979, only to see their position sink in the face of a concerted conservative onslaught between 1979 and 1997. It is perhaps a testament to trade union resilience, and certainly an example of how they are able to remake themselves, that unions still have a presence, albeit reduced, in contemporary employment relations.

This, however, is not a new phenomenon. In the late nineteenth century the Webbs (1897) highlighted a similar situation in their classic study of trade unions, *Industrial Democracy*, where they identified three methods of trade unionism deployed by unions to achieve their aims: Mutual Insurance; Collective Bargaining; and Legal Enactment. The Webbs saw as a corollary to the three methods of trade unionism the existence of three “divergent conceptions of the principle on which wages, hours and other terms of the labor contract ought to be determined” and identified them as “the doctrine of Doctrine of Vested Interest, the Doctrine of Supply and Demand, and the Doctrine of a Living Wage (p 562). They argued that each of these ‘doctrines’ was relevant to a particular period in time when the political and economic climate

determined which was conducive to the aims of the unions and that in “the trade union world the rival assumptions exist side by side, and the actual regulation of industry is a perpetually shifting compromise between them” (p 599).

The method of mutual insurance predominately involved craft trade unions who relied heavily on what Clegg (1976) referred to as the “use of unilateral regulation” (p 30). Unilateral regulation was enforced by the provision of benefits to the select band of members, the most important benefit being out-of-work benefit which was used to “prevent [the member] from accepting employment under stress of starvation, on terms which, in the common judgement of the trade, would be injurious to its interests” (Webb,1897: p 161). Mutual insurance as a method of trade unionism became of declining influence among unions not least because, as Coates and Topham (1988) point out, “in a dynamic economy, with constantly developing technology, the strong point of the craft is liable to be by-passed by technical change” (p 42). This is coupled with the fact that the state now provides benefits, a point taken up by Hyman (1971), who argues “the administration of union friendly benefits has been rendered practically irrelevant with the advent of state welfare provisions” (p 211). One of the last remnants of mutual insurance must be that found in the printing trade union (GPMU) for whom provident benefits continued to play a prominent role and who, until recently, paid an out-of-work benefit to qualifying unemployed members. Unfortunately, in the face of an economic crisis and with a merger with Amicus on the horizon, delegates to the 2003 Biennial Delegate Conference voted to cease provident payments from October 2004.

With the declining dependence on mutual insurance unions turned to collective bargaining and legal enactment as the methods relevant to their purpose. The development of new unionism saw the emergence of industrial and general unions who drew their membership from the ranks of railwaymen, miners and unskilled workers in manufacturing, were expansionist in nature, and who, by contrast, did not place the same emphasis on mutual insurance as their craft counterparts. The Webbs (1897) recognised the ‘trifling part’ that friendly benefits played in those unions’ deliberations and that they were more likely to resort to the methods of collective bargaining or legal enactment (pp 171-172). This was so because unions have an endless list of conditions which they wish to have incorporated in law. The Webbs argued that “the growing participation of wage-earners in political life, and the rising influence of organisations must necessarily bring about an increasing use of the method of Legal Enactment”. The drawback to this method is the considerable length of time it takes to effect changes by law. In contrast, through the method of collective bargaining, trade unions have been able to achieve “not only their whole demands, but also conditions so exceptional that they would never have ventured to embody them in a legislative proposal” (pp 253-255).

Collective bargaining, however, is associated with the strike or the lock-out which the Webbs (1897) acknowledged as a ‘grave drawback’ but who went on to claim this to be “that trial of strength and endurance which lies behind all bargaining” (p 221). Hyman (1997) points to the limitations of collective bargaining claiming that the concept is ‘imprecise and ambiguous’ and that the Webbs “offered no definition but instead a ‘series of examples’” when applying the term to industrial relations. He goes on to cite critics such as Flanders who argued that two major problems of the Webbs’

analysis were the emphasis on ‘market relations’ to the exclusion of ‘managerial relations’ which leads them to ignore the aspect of collective representation which constrains “the manner in which employees are set to work and disciplined by the employer”; and secondly the assumption by the Webbs that “collective bargaining was an infrequent process ... Yet on the contrary, the open-ended and legally unenforceable character of collective agreements in Britain meant that bargaining is a continuous process” (p 316).

Collective bargaining emerged as the most favoured method of unionism in Britain and, as a result of the recommendations of the Whitley Committee in 1917-1918, a system of industrial relations was established that was to span 50 years until the Donovan Commission reported in 1968. Clay (1929) argues that the acceptance of the Whitley reports in the private sector “constituted a public and official recognition of trade unionism and collective bargaining as the basis of industrial relations” (p 154) and that the government’s decision to accede to the pressure of the unions in the public sector confirmed that “it could hardly now refuse to adopt for itself the treatment it prescribed for other employers” (p162). The extension of collective bargaining to local government through a system of Whitley was achieved through the resolve of the members of NALGO whose paper on Whitleyism shows that, during World War II, their fight for a form of Whitleyism was speeded up by the introduction of legislation and a subsequent House of Lords decision “which virtually concluded NALGO’s long struggle for Whitleyism” and resulted in “a framework of collective bargaining established when the National Whitley Council was finally set up in 1943 [which] is substantially what exists today” (NALGO,1978: p 10).

1968 – 1979 The ‘voluntarist’ approach, and a period of consolidation for trade unionism.

In order to fully appreciate the evolution and dynamics of British industrial relations it is important to understand the key role that voluntarism played in workplace relations and how legislation introduced during the post 1997 period weakened the voluntarist principles through attacking the legal framework in which unions operate (see Ewing 1996, p 23). Workplace industrial relations during the period 1945 to 1979 emphasised collective bargaining and the maintenance of what has been described as the voluntarist approach to industrial relations. Clegg (1979) claims that the ‘voluntarist’ approach “rests on two principles: the abstention of the law and the primacy of voluntary collective action” (p 290). A central facet of this approach is the ability of the trade unions to co-ordinate collective action without being sued for instigating a breach of contract. The contract of employment, Wedderburn (1986) argues, “is still largely governed by the ‘common law’ rules of contract law built up by judges” (p5). This is the contract that confers on the employer the power of command and places the employee in a position of subordination, and is perceived in law as being a contract entered into by equals. It was, therefore, against this backdrop that, from the early Victorian era, trade unions began to acquire, by means of agitation and political pressure, a series of negative rights, or immunities, which in effect protected their funds if they organised industrial action “in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute”. This “golden formula” as Wedderburn (1986: p520) described it, was the foundation on which collective bargaining was built.

The ‘voluntarist’ tradition that was to dominate industrial relations thinking supported collective bargaining and left little scope for legal intervention. This development did come under some fire by later commentators. Phelps Brown argued that voluntarism “inhibited the building of a code of law” that would “define rights and repress abuses”

(in Edwards, 1995: p 141). Terry (1995) points to the degree of employer sponsorship that voluntarism requires claiming that, in an environment of technological and organisational restructuring, accompanied by fierce competitive pressures, which tip the bargaining power in favour of the employer, their withdrawal from collective bargaining is made easy by the lack of any legal regulation. He cites the 1980s as an example of “how conditional [union] power was, and how significantly it can be undercut when employers withdraw goodwill” (p 222). Up until the late 1890s collective bargaining had been carried out on an establishment basis but Hyman (1975) informs us that “The traditional institutions of collective bargaining shaped in many industries at the turn of the century and sanctified and extended by the Whitley reports of 1917-8, had the national level as their focus”. He goes on to reveal that a characteristic of national level bargaining was “multi-employer bargaining, above the level of the establishment”. Hyman noted the “The presumption – which naturally reflected the interests of employers, and which union leaders often proved unwilling or unable to contest openly – was that the implementation of district or national agreements would offer little scope for domestic bargaining, and that where the agreements were silent the authority of management would prevail”(p 151).

The notion that industry-wide, multi-employer bargaining kept the unions from the workplace was never realistic. Hyman (1975) provides an insight to the presence of workshop bargaining that has been in existence since Victorian times. The presence of shop stewards could be traced among manual workers in the manufacturing and basic industries, particularly among skilled workers, over this period of time. The drive for ever improved efficiency, and hence profitability, saw management employ a series of measures including payment by results and the scientific management working

methods which in turn assisted in the development and growth of shop-floor bargaining which enhanced the position of shop stewards (p 152). The real test for the maintenance of an effective shop steward movement was full employment. The unofficial shop stewards movement that grew during the First World War, ebbed away during the depression that ensued during the 1920s (ibid). The significant component for shop stewards to expand post World War II was that there was relatively full and stable employment for a long period of time.

The emergence of a fragmented system of bargaining in the plant led to a network of tacit agreements, reached between stewards and management, based upon precedent and compromise, that enabled stewards to attain an autonomous position of influence independent of the control of full time union officials or senior management (Hyman 1979: p151). Through establishing custom and practice stewards were able to negotiate with plant or local management over issues such as overtime and pay arrangements and extended the criteria to issues that included sick pay, redundancy, discipline and dismissal all of which undermined the authority of the industry agreement (Sisson and Brown 1983: p 138). Clegg (1979) argues that “shop stewards gained control of the fragmented bargaining over pay...because they were already in control of such workplace bargaining as there was in engineering, and in some other areas of manufacturing as well” (p 22). He goes on to cite that the inclusion of status quo clauses in collective agreements were “a further move towards the negotiation of working practices...this means that wherever workers object to managerial interference with a practice, or custom, managers must comply with the custom while they try to negotiate a change” (p 29).

McCarthy (1966) touches on the subject of a tight labour market enhancing shop steward influence (p 59). It was the creation of such a market in the skilled areas, through means of apprenticeship quotas, and the maintenance of a closed shop that restricted entry, that enabled stewards to extend their scope for bargaining. The printing industry presents an example of this situation whereby the existence of a pre-entry closed shop and the strict observance of apprenticeship quotas ensured that stewards were always in a strong bargaining position and able to gain concessions due to the scarcity of skilled labour. Darlington (1994) provides a graphic example of this scenario at a Merseyside printing factory during the 1960s and 1970s where not only did the skilled workers keep a tight check on labour intake, but their semi-skilled and un-skilled counterparts mirrored their actions and effectively operated the local branch office as a labour exchange (pp 130-132). During the 1960s and 1970s the closed shop enjoyed a high profile in Britain. Dunn and Gennard (1984) point out that “in the 1960s when managerial hostility to closed shop demands was prevalent...employers were prone to identify the closed shop as the union weapon of tradition” (p 89). However, as Hart (1979) argues “the closed shop has become more prevalent in recent years” and that “its character has altered substantially; most notably, the practice is increasingly enforced through formal agreements between employers and unions. Managers claim to get substantial benefits from these agreements”(p 352).

However, management do not appear to have adopted a clear strategy to achieve their aims, but rather a more pragmatic, opportunistic and ad hoc approach to industrial relations. Edwards et al (1998) claim that “there has been little pressure on UK companies to take their human resources seriously and every reason to be ad hoc and pragmatic in approach” (p 25) (see also Purcell and Sisson, (1983) and Sisson and

Marginson, (1995). Hollinshead et al (1999) argue that management in the UK have been driven by a commitment to high, short term returns on capital which in turn leads to a lack of investment, training and product quality. This is in stark contrast to the initiatives adopted by our European competitors who have placed a priority on long-term investment and training. This situation has been hoisted on UK business by the demands of key city financial institutions steeped in an imperial past. They claim that “Concern has been expressed about the low level and quality of technical and vocational training since the 1960s” (p 61). This apparent failure by management to see training and development as an investment rather than a cost is addressed later in the empirical chapters along with the impact that the ad hoc approach to training displayed by employers in the general print sector has on the stability of the sector.

Fox’s (1966) use of a frame of reference in determining “what sort of organisation is the industrial enterprise” is useful in helping to understand the opposing stances that exist between management and workers in the employment relationship. Fox differentiated between the unitarist and pluralist perspectives that exist in the relationship. Managerial ideology, although inclined to change superficially to suit the contemporary political and economic climate, can best be considered as adopting a unitarist perspective. It is from this perspective that the notion of the manager’s right to control all aspects of work has been derived. Unitarism is associated with the principles of loyalty to the enterprise, a common sense of purpose, with no external interference, thus allowing management to pursue their goals unfettered. Fox likened this notion to that of a team and adds that, in common with this perspective, “team spirit and undivided management authority co-exist to the benefit of all” (pp 92-93).

While the underlying managerial ideology can be described as unitarist, in practice things were somewhat different in the period up to 1979.

It was the development of collective action that gave the worker a buffer against the power of the management and helped to tip the balance away from the employer.

Khan-Freund argued that “the main object of labour law has always been, and we venture to say will always be, to be a countervailing force to counteract the inequality of bargaining power which is inherent in the employment relationship” but goes on to state that “as a power countervailing management trade unions are much more effective than the law ever has been or can ever be” (in Davies and Freeland: 1983, p21). Here, then, we have a system of industrial relations that contrasts sharply with the notion of unitarism outlined earlier. Fox (1966) referred to this as the ‘pluralistic frame of reference’, one that recognises “the right of interest groups to combine and have an effective voice in their own destiny” and by implication “the participation of organized labour in decision making means that managerial prerogatives are thereby curbed” (p70). This is a compelling argument and one that will be tested through the analysis of the evidence gathered for the empirical chapter. The key area for analysis in the thesis is to test the robustness of contemporary workplace organisation within the context of a managerial shift in their approach to industrial relations.

Industry-wide, multi-employer bargaining had been central to determining the terms and conditions of employment across both the public and private sectors and was the guiding light for British industrial relations until the mid-1960s when concern began to grow over the economic crisis that the nation faced and that manifest itself in slow growth, rising inflation and a balance of payments crisis. As a result, the perceived

prevailing system of industrial relations in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s came under much scrutiny. Output and productivity, measured against our industrial competitors, was lagging, and our league position for manufacturing exports dropped below that of Germany, Japan and France (Edwards et al, 1998: p6). Media attention turned to the recorded increase in unofficial and unconstitutional industrial action during the 1960s. Articles such as “What’s wrong with the unions” by Eric Wigam in the Times, and a Daily Mirror article “spotlight on the unions” (in Clegg: 1979: p315) added to public concern and there was rising opinion for an overhaul of UK industrial relations. This led to the appointment of a Royal Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Donovan in 1965 to investigate labour relations and the law (Lewis 1976: p9).

The Donovan Commission’s brief was to recommend ways to reform the system of industrial relations in Britain in view of the perceived dramatic increase in the level of unofficial industrial action at the workplace. England and Weekes (1981) reflected that there was no doubt that it was the unions who were the real target for investigation (p 419). However, this did not prove to be the case, Donovan amassed a wealth of evidence from trade unions; employers’ associations and other interested parties, but was particularly influenced by the contribution of the leading academic, Alan Flanders. The dominance of Flanders’ (1966) contribution is best exemplified by the commission’s wholesale acceptance of his hypothesis that “an out-standing feature of industrial relations over the post war years has been the great upsurge of negotiations between management and shop stewards over pay and a wider range of subjects”. This development had resulted in a system of industrial relations that was now “largely informal, largely fragmented and largely autonomous” (p 552). The acceptance of this analysis led the commission to argue that a “decentralisation of

collective bargaining has taken place under the pressure of full employment which had been almost continuous since 1938” and that as a consequence there “has been a decline in the authority of employers’ associations” (1968: p 20). It was to the employers’ associations, who had lost authority, and the boards of directors, who, Clegg (1979) argues, had not developed “effective personnel policies” (p 316) that Donovan apportioned the responsibility for the failure in industrial relations.

The Donovan recommendations bore great significance on the formulation of public policy in the 1970s. While they contrasted with the Whitley proposals – in as much as they advocated the factory agreement through collective bargaining between the employer and the relevant union(s), with a changed role for employers’ associations – they still adhered to the voluntarist tradition. In the conclusion to the section on the Enforcement of Collective Agreements the Commission noted that “Self-help has always been the response to the absence of “law and order”. In industrial relations “law and order” can be created only by adequate collective bargaining arrangements. We thus reject the proposal to make collective agreements... enforceable at the present time” (1968: pp 136-137). Donovan’s prescriptions were aimed at coping with the breakdown of Whitley type arrangements in the private sector, yet there was a continuance of Whitley in the public sector under relatively stable market conditions. Both systems used forms of collective bargaining to institutionalise conflict, with the back up of arbitration where conflict did occasionally erupt. Hyman (1979) argues that the changes in approach to industrial relations posed by Donovan were to be achieved through the “formalisation and centralisation of collective bargaining at plant or company level” and goes on to recognise that “The priority, Donovan

insisted, was for employers and trade unions together ‘to recognise, define and control the part played by shop stewards in our collective bargaining system’” (p 152).

The thrust of the recommendations were that there should be ‘factory wide agreements’ which would in turn lead to the institutionalisation of the shop stewards, incorporating them into the system. The main concern of managers was to introduce methods to reduce the ability for trade union activity to disrupt production. Purcell and Sisson (1983) claim that this would be dealt with through the introduction “of procedures to institutionalise industrial conflict; and secondly, restricting the scope of collective bargaining and avoiding it all together, if possible, at the point of production”. These measures included “procedures for negotiations, for individual grievances and collective disputes, for consultation, for discipline and dismissal, for health and safety, and so on”. They go on to argue that these procedures “went a long way towards legitimising the decisions of management: the procedures enforced greater consistency on the part of individual managers at the same as time they offered opportunities to explain and justify the decisions taken” (p 103).

Clegg (1979) provides evidence that the change towards a more centralised system began to emerge. He claims “there has been a wide-spread shift away from fragmentation to plant wide and even company agreements over pay” (p 17). Terry (1983) claims that, spurred on by these developments, management introduced pay innovations such as work study and job evaluation in an attempt to reduce “shop floor haggling” and to move to “the committee room bargaining designed to deal with, for example, a company’s entire workforce”. In order to make this transition easier he suggests that management introduced “selective concessions” which covered issues

such as “closed shop and check-off arrangements, and full-time shop steward status with much improved office and communications equipment” and goes on to argue that in “firms with little or no previous history of shop floor organisation, there is evidence that management went further, and encouraged, or even deliberately fostered, the emergence and development of shop steward organisations” (pp 79-81). In a later article Terry (1995) refers to Flanders’ position that management could only regain control through sharing it. The adoption of this argument led to an acceptance by employers, trade unions and the government that there was a legitimate role for shop stewards in the workplace and that they could play an important role in formalising workplace collective bargaining (p 210).

Donovan was not without its critics. Not least, in hindsight, from some of its members and contributors. Turner (1968) felt that the recommendations of the commission tended to be “leading people boldly in the direction they appear to be going anyway” (p 359). Batstone (1988) argues that “it would be wrong to suggest that reformism in British industrial relations followed from the proposals of the Donovan Commission” and that it is “open to question how far management espoused its philosophy” (p2). Others have criticised the private sector emphasis of the inquiry focusing almost predominately on the manual workers in the manufacturing sector. Clegg (1979), a prominent member of the commission, wrote later that the notion of there being two systems of industrial relations confused the issues and that informal rules could be as legitimate as formal rules and that “by itself, writing a rule down does not necessarily formalize it ... the crucial test of the formality of a rule is its authority. If it has been either authorised by the relevant signatures or hallowed by time, then it is a formal rule” (pp233-234).

Collective bargaining continued to be the preferred approach to UK industrial relations, being supported both by public policy and management acquiescence. Management acceptance of the situation was reflected in the establishment and extension of ‘check-off’ arrangements; the extension of the closed shop; and the facilities and provisions they made available to shop stewards in the workplace. This development of shop steward organisation grew to the extent that by 1979 “it was to be found wherever unions operated” and their acceptance as having a legitimate role in the workplace collective bargaining was universal (Terry, 1995: pp 207-210). The 1980 WIRS survey reveals that in 1979 there were around 350,000 shop stewards in the UK workforce (p 80) Continued public support was demonstrated by the creation of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) in 1975 whose wide brief included being “charged with the general duty of promoting the improvement of industrial relations, and in particular of encouraging the extension of collective bargaining and the development, and where necessary, the reform of collective bargaining machinery” (EPA 1975: p2). Brown et al (1995) argue that “In Britain collective bargaining had, until the 1980s, enjoyed official support with successive governments...upholding at least the principle of extending its coverage”(p135) and go on to claim that “it was almost unheard of for employers to withdraw from collective bargaining” (p139).

Trade unions were reconciled with this situation because it provided for them a seat at the throne of power and an input into public policy. This came despite the fact there were ideological issues that this accommodation did not address. Not least the view that the employment relationship is a power relationship and that conflicts of interest

within this relationship are normal. Hyman (1975) argues that there exists “an invisible frontier of control, reducing some of the formal powers of the employer” and his vision of industrial relations is “an unceasing power struggle” (p 26). The pluralist stance was to institutionalise conflict and remove it from the point of production through the use of the status quo. This weakens workers opportunity to maximise their power at the crucial pressure point. However, as McIlroy (1995) argues, “unions settled for a commitment to pragmatic change within capitalism, reform rather than revolution” and goes on to comment that “as a response to capitalism unions change with capitalism, they behave differently at different times but within the limits of capitalism” (pp 48- 50).

Set against this climate of change the 1970s experienced a widespread growth in shop steward organisation across the economy, to the extent that Terry (1995) records that “By the late 1970s such organization and its active representative members (shop stewards, or sometimes ‘staff representatives’ for white-collar unions) were to be found in all workplaces where union had a presence” (p 204). He goes on to explain that “Tens of thousands of shop stewards performed the detailed tasks of recruiting members, participating in workplace committees dealing with such matters as health and safety and job evaluation, representing members in disciplinary and dismissal hearings and, crucially, bargaining with managers over pay and other conditions of employment” (p 304). The main difference in attitude towards shop stewards, presented by both management and unions, was recognition of their strategic position in the workplace, and the contribution they could make to workplace bargaining and representation. Previously, shop stewards had been largely ignored in the hierarchy of union officialdom, but Hyman (1979) recognises this sea-change and records the

emergence of shop steward recognition and the integration of their role into union rule books (p153).

Terry (1995) points to the limitations of this incorporation of shop stewards into workplace relations with management. He alludes to the point that, while management made many concessions in the face of shop steward power and influence, they were less willing to concede over issues of “work organisation, staffing levels, or the speed and intensity of work”, to the extent that “managers continued to resist formalization, being unwilling to concede de jure rights to unions”, a stance that would have important implications in the future (p 211). Hyman (1975), claims that the union response to such initiatives was often ambivalent and yet:

they were also conscious of a common interest with employers in establishing an ‘industrial legality’, in creating order and regularity: partly because union security seemed dependent on some formal accommodation with the power of capital; partly because they had more faith in employer goodwill than membership combativity as a source of improvements in employment conditions; partly because their own control was consolidated by the new machinery.

(p158).

Another weakness identified by Terry (1995) was that shop stewards failed to adopt a holistic company or divisional approach, which meant their focus was predominately sectional. This approach proved to be a disadvantage when management made the case for radical change and restructuring using methods such as multi-skilling or technical innovation (p 223). This point is picked up by Darlington (1994) in his case studies of Merseyside plants. In the ‘Birds Eye’ site there was sectionalism within the factory. He indicates that the sexual division of labour and consequential pay differentials that this created led to a ‘them and us’ relationship among workers at the site that weakened shop floor unity (p 66). He also points to the strategic position held

by workers in the cold store which could have been built upon to create a better bargaining position for the workforce. Instead, the outcome was sectionalist, which proved to be disastrous for the union organisation (p 96). In the case of the printing plant, Darlington (1994) records the strong bargaining position that existed within the plant mainly due to the highly perishable nature of the production of magazines. However, an elitist hierarchy that existed between the different chapels, based on craft and or skill levels, often led to inter-chapel disputes. This position led to a contradiction in the strength of workplace organisation in as much as the chapels' use of a 'strong bargaining relationship' led to them being able to exercise power, but, paradoxically, the sectionalism and working practices that were peculiar to a given chapel handicapped any prospect of shop floor unity (p 144). Hyman (1997) argues that:

By the 1970s, many British unions were de facto loose federations of workplace organizations. At the time this was widely seen as a source of unusual strength as vehicles for the representation of employees interests; in retrospect, it became clear that this strength was bounded and dependant on managerial acquiescence or incompetence
(p313).

The fact that there existed this fragmentation of interests among workers, not only on an inter-union basis (where multi-unionism was present), but also between workers sharing similar goals, appeared oblivious to full time trade union leaders at national and indeed regional level. This possibly reflects the point made by Terry (1995) that "The decentralization of steward organization was also reflected in their often distant relationship with the outside union, in particular unions' full-time officials" (p 209). Flood et al (1996) argue that "bureaucratic full-time officers negatively impact upon both stewards' and members' union orientations to, and participation within, the

union at both workplace and branch level” (p 419). Against this background national unions attempted to deal with industrial relations at a level removed from the workplace, entering into pacts and agreements through the offices of the TUC with governments and employers. This approach to industrial relations throughout the 1970s demonstrated a pluralist perspective, where corporatism and co-operation between the parties could lead to greater productivity and efficiency in the UK economy (see Freeman, 1995: p 522). Voluntarism was still held up as the guiding principle but a distinct challenge to this concept was beginning to emerge. Protective legislation for the individual prior to the 1960s had been sparse. It focused on the narrow issues of the right to be paid in ‘coin of the realm’, matters of health and safety, welfare and the legal protection for women and young persons on hours of work (Lewis, 1976: p 8). Wage councils set minimum wages in areas where collective bargaining was weak. By contrast the 1960s and 1970s saw a wealth of what Hepple (1983) refers to as “employment protection legislation” (p 408), which saw the introduction of certain rights conferred upon the individual. Clegg (1979) argues that the “rising volume of bills and statutes...challenged the principles of the abstention of the law and the primacy of collective bargaining (p 314). The unions, however, did not see this development as a threat to the voluntarist principle, but rather, they saw the development of individual employment protection as, in Hepple’s (1983) words, “a floor of rights upon which collective bargaining may improve” (p 412).

However, this was the thin edge of a wedge that would subsequently be driven to reduce perceived union power and influence (Lewis 1976: p 10). In the wake of the Donovan report the incumbent Labour Party wanted to use legislation to control industrial relations and put their recommendations forward in the form of the

consultative paper “In Place of Strife” which, among other measures, proposed far reaching legislation on industrial action, both official and unofficial. Clegg (1979) refers to these proposals as the “penal clauses, since failure to comply with the orders would render those concerned liable to fines”. He goes on to argue that the consequent furore from the unions, and the realisation that the bill would not receive substantial support from the Labour back benches, led to the proposals being dropped. In return the government received “a solemn and binding undertaking” that the TUC General Council would seek wider powers to deal with unconstitutional strikes and inter-union disputes (p 319).

The 1971 Conservative administration had made an attempt at legal intervention with their Industrial Relations Act, a comprehensive piece of legislation that introduced legally binding collective agreements (unless a disclaimer was inserted) and immunities were granted only to state-registered unions. The Act established the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), and restrictions were placed on the closed shop. In future ballots would be required for the existence of an ‘agency shop’, approved closed shops could only be maintained with the approval of the NIRC. Clegg (1979) is convincing in his argument that the Act failed due to the almost universal degree of non-compliance by unions and management and the failure of the NIRC to enforce its decisions. Lewis (1976) mirrors this opinion, claiming that the “Industrial Relations Act foundered on the rock of union opposition as well as managerial indifference” (p 15).

Incomes policies were another method of legal intervention exploited by successive governments throughout the 1970s to combat rising inflation. Clegg (1979) argues

that “to hold back the rate of increase in money incomes...has been the over-riding objective of British incomes policies” (p 345). An essential ingredient to the success of such a policy is to gain the co-operation of the unions, Robinson (1973) argues, “a union will refuse unless it believes that a number, if not all other trade unions, will exercise some similar restraint. It is a necessary condition therefore that the general agreement of the trade union movement is obtained if a voluntary incomes policy is to stand any chance of success” (p 44). Clegg (1979) writes that the “designers of incomes policies have claimed that their long-run effect would be to raise real wages faster than they would have risen otherwise”. However, the immediate effects of some of the policies caused concern for many shop floor activists and brought the sectional argument back to the fore because, “flat-rate cash increases...may raise the real incomes of the low paid” but bring with them the “consequent compression of differentials” (pp 349-350). As the term of an incomes policy progresses, pressures caused through the imposition of restrictions, and shop floor reaction to those measures, impact to lead to its ultimate demise. There have been instances, i.e. Heath in 1974 and Callaghan in 1979, where not only has the policy expired, but also the government.

In the short-term incomes policies are associated with a low level of pay related strikes, but as the policy reaches the end of its run, the level of strike action over pay is seen to rise. This can be the result of an attempt by unions to implement a catching up policy, which in turn can lead to a pay explosion (Clegg 1979: p 372). The effect of incomes policies on a work force is probably best epitomised by the example of the Social Contract introduced by the Labour Party in 1976. The early indications were that the policy was bearing fruit. Brown (1981) argues that “1976 was the most strike

free year of the decade” (p 90), but by 1979 the policy was in tatters. Figures published in the Employment Gazette showed that strikes had reached unprecedented levels both in working days lost and in the number of workers involved (May 1993, table 2: p 198). The ensuing so called ‘winter of discontent’ of 1978-1979 and the massive media hype attached to the recorded strike activity led ultimately to the downfall of the Callaghan administration and the election of a Conservative government whose central policy plank was that of trade union reform.

The 1970s was therefore a period where industrial relations experienced a marked shift in bargaining emphasis away from the industry-wide, multi-employer model to single employer bargaining, and with it the acceptance of the legitimacy of shop steward involvement in collective bargaining wherever unions had a presence at the work place. With the advantage of hindsight, Brown et al (1995) reflect that “at the time of Donovan it had been possible to speculate that multi-employer agreements might provide the base of a ‘two-tier’ bargaining system, such as has been successful elsewhere in Europe, with industry wide agreements being explicitly supplemented by single employer addition. This has not happened” (p 137). Commenting on the European dimension, Sisson (1987) states:

The larger employers in metalworking and chemicals in France, West Germany, Italy and Sweden, unlike their British counterparts, continue to deal with trade unions through the agency of employers’ organisations. Multi-employer bargaining is preferred to single-employer bargaining not simply because it makes for economies of scale in terms of time, effort and staff to negotiate a single agreement for an entire industry... The irony is that the institution of multi-employer bargaining that trade unions helped to bring about and continue to support is primarily valued by the employers because it helps to neutralise the workplace from trade union activity.

He goes on to argue:

Multi-employer bargaining has not given employers a similar framework of control, which is why it is in decline

(p 13).

However, it should be noted that this shift was almost exclusively peculiar to manual workers in the private, manufacturing sector. There had been criticism that the Donovan analysis had been predominately focused on manufacturing and mostly centred on engineering. This left a gap in the analysis with respect to the public sector where national bargaining remained a prominent feature and where shop steward organisation had not developed to the level of sophistication seen in private manufacturing. Clegg (1979) refers to the “recent origin” of workplace organisation in the public sector, and also provides some evidence of the recent emergence of shop stewards in local government and the National Health Service (pp36-38). This recent origin of shop steward development has witnessed the emergence of a different type of steward when compared to the manual steward in the manufacturing area. Batstone et al (1977) drew the distinction between leader and populist stewards and, in their investigations, found that leader stewards were more likely to emerge on the shop floor and that they performed a representative role. In contrast, staff stewards were more likely to be populists and generally played the role of a delegate. The authors argue, “on the shop floor as compared with the staff side, then, stewards tend to have more contact with management, with relatively more senior manager and with a greater number of managers”, whereas, “populists tended not to impose consistent pressure on management, for they tended to lack bargaining awareness and a sophisticated knowledge of the web of rules and agreements” (p 262).

In the public sector the stewards tended towards the 'populist' model and the corresponding lack of confidence among shop stewards is confirmed by Kessler (1988) who refers to the "the relatively new emerged and fragile steward organisation in local government", an organisation which was reluctant to take on the mantle of an autonomous bargaining unit (p 181). A position supported by Clegg (1979) who provides statistics to show that, compared to manual stewards in manufacturing, the public service manual stewards were more likely to turn to a branch official when faced with a major problem (p 37); and Winchester (1983) who refers to the "assumption that public sector trade unionism was characterised by its greater passivity than was generally found in manufacturing industries" (p 160). What is surprising about this seemingly latent shop steward organisation in the public sector is that it was this very sector that witnessed the greatest unrest during the so-called 'winter of discontent'. Edwards et al (1998) claim that the relatively low level of union activity in the public sector coupled with the limited expertise of the employers "left them quite unprepared for such conflict" (p 35).

Public sector workers by and large relied heavily on pay comparability to set their remuneration. Moves by government to appease powerful public sector groups, such as workers in the coal and electricity industries, by allowing productivity payments during periods of incomes restraint gave other public sector workers the feeling of being left behind. This discontent was fuelled by the allowance of high pay rises to police and fire forces at the end of the 1970s and ultimately led to industrial unrest. Winchester (1983) claims many "Public sector workers had been unfairly treated by incomes policies and had responded with extensive industrial action" (p 170). Therefore, the high level of unrest that ultimately brought the end to the Social

Contract and that was arguably the catalyst for the change in government and political direction came not from the strike prone manufacturing area such as car production or the nationalised energy industries but from the relatively quiescent public sector.

Hyman (1988) records that “While the small unofficial strike was usually defined as the main ‘problem’ of the 1960s, the large official stoppage was not surprisingly so regarded in the 1970s”. He notes the “uneven impact of incomes policies” on strike patterns and particularly the effect on public sector workers where “the weakening of traditional justifications for pay relationships gave many groups a rationale to fight for special treatment. It is plausible to see this as one factor behind the upsurge of pay disputes at the end of the decade”. Hyman goes on to argue that “A common pattern was repeated in a number of different branches of public employment” which culminated in “an official strike, perhaps the first in the union’s history” (pp 207-208). This series of highly visible public sector disputes in the winter of 1978-79 – ‘dubbed the winter of discontent’ – heralded the end of public support for a system of industrial relations consensus.

1979 – 1997 Trade unions face up to changes in the political and economic climate.

In the wake of industrial unrest and economic uncertainty, 1979 saw the election of the first of four consecutive Conservative administrations who, over a period of eighteen years, followed a market driven approach to industrial relations which focused heavily on the individual and had no place for collective bargaining. This change in government saw what Metcalfe (1989) describes as a ‘new’ doctrine which meant that “Consensus is no longer a desirable target...and the government ignores

extant institutions like HSC, ACAS or CRE” (p 17). Hyman (1988) claims that this doctrine was rooted in the early human relations school that sees industrial conflict as a “pathological deviation from the natural harmony of industry, that management is a neutral agency taking rational decisions in the interests of all, while resistance on the part of the workers represents the irrational influence of ‘sentiments’”. Hyman asserts that this “assumption that order and stability are the norm, has extended a profound and continuing influence on the study of social relations in industry” (p 161).

It is arguable that the election of the Thatcher government in 1979 was a watershed for the declining state of trade unionism in the UK. It is true that in the light of the unrest of 1978-9 and the public condemnation of action taken by trade unions that Thatcher came to power promising to curtail the ‘power of the unions’ and restore management prerogative. Metcalf (1989) contrasts two attempts at industrial relations reform between 1968 and 1989. He claims that the Donovan model had not provided a “rational and coherent structure of joint regulation between management and unions”. Metcalf cites Batstone (1984: p 145) who claims that the Donovan attempt fell flat “and that reform was not associated with increased productivity rates. At the minimum [it] has failed to match the aspirations of its promoters and the fears of its radical critics” (p 1). He goes on to contrast this with the reform programme initiated by Thatcher whose methods – “legislation to constrain union power, high unemployment, heightened product market competition and emphasis on numerical and functional flexibility in the labour market - seem to have done the trick”. As a

result, “improved performance flowing from alterations in industrial relations appear, on balance, the consequence of management being firmly in the saddle coupled with yielding unions” (p 27).

Not all commentators have reached the same conclusions as Metcalf. Nolan (1989) is critical of the Thatcher approach to reform and questions its success. He points to the continuing gap in productivity that exists between the UK and her major competitors despite the UK’s lower labour costs and quotes Ray who notes that “British performance since 1982 has been neither outstanding or sufficiently rapid to close - or even influence in any major way - the gap that exists between the level of productivity in Britain and that of most of other major industrial countries” (p84). Nolan goes on to criticise the low level of capital investment that still exists in Britain claiming that “investment in new skills, research and development, and new production techniques has been inadequate” and that the government philosophy of freeing up markets and pricing labour back to work is “essentially a plea for cheap labour intensive industry” and that “this is hardly a recipe for economic dynamism” (p. 91). Dickins and Hall (1995) argue that “what is clear...is that the government’s justification for intervention and legislative change came to rest increasingly on unsubstantiated statements of ideological belief rather than empirical research” (p. 257). McIlroy (1995) claims that there “is no evidence to support neo-classical theories that trade unions suppress growth and productivity” (p 61) and goes on to argue Thatcherism as a “neo-Conservative economic experiment was, in its turn, unsuccessful in stemming economic decline” (p 72).

The Thatcher regime was driven by an adherence to a free market, monetarist doctrine. Unitarists are absorbed in what has been described as ‘marginalist theory’ to the extent that “Contemporary economic theorists tend to explain the wages of labour in similar terms to the prices of commodities, with the individual as the basic unit of analysis, and with market processes as the determinants of relative wages” (Brown and Nolan, 1988: p 339). From this perspective unions are viewed as an imperfection in market, their main objective to raise the level of pay of the members they represent, irrespective of what the market dictates. This creates pay differentials between unionised and non-unionised labour and the situation is further exacerbated by the excess supply of labour in the unionised area being squeezed out and seeking employment in the non-unionised area, depressing wages and widening the gap. From this conundrum Hayek (1980) sees the unions as the “chief cause of the unnecessary big differentials between the best and worst paid workers” and in the extreme “they are the main reason for the decline in the British economy as a whole” (p 358). Public policy would in future reflect this doctrine, and the example would be how the government would act in its role as employer. Freedman and Morris (1989) argue that the Thatcher model of employment practice was to be based on a commitment to free market policies where, “at the most fundamental level, this ideology calls into question the very existence of public service employment”(p 27). The WIRS (Culley et al: 1999) survey reveals the extent to which this strategy was implemented in claiming that by 1998 the only major employers in industry or commerce under state ownership were London Transport and the Post Office (p 222).

The image of 'model employer' set by previous governments was to change dramatically. Decentralisation and deregulation were to be the key elements to breaking down the concept of collective bargaining in the public sector. The governments' sense of achievement in promoting this concept in the public sector is summarised in their Employment for the 1990s White Paper where they claim that:

“Government action to increase competition has already included measures to encourage privatisation, deregulation, the contracting out of public services by competitive tendering, and freer trade. Contracting out provides a very good example of the value of markets in securing jobs for those who can supply services at competitive costs”

(1988: pp 25-26).

The government played down the role of collective bargaining. As if to lead by example the terms of reference of the wages councils were restricted before being abolished by legislation introduced in 1993, with the exception of agriculture. ACAS were relieved of the duty of promoting and extending the scope of collective bargaining. In the public sector measures were taken to lessen the impact of collective bargaining and also to reduce the number of employees first by embarking on a programme of privatisation. Utilities ranging over the telecom, railways, gas, water and electricity industries were returned to the private sector. The highly centralised structure of the Civil Service has been broken down through the introduction of agencies. Corby (1991) argues that “there is a clear trend towards breaking up the unified Civil Service, and that this can be seen in the pay and personnel management arrangements already adopted in agencies”. This move has led to “agency management... increasingly communicating with their staff direct, setting up briefing

groups and quality circles, rather than through trade union representatives” (pp 39-42). An important element in reducing the effect of collective bargaining was the introduction of pay review bodies. The militancy of the teachers led to abandonment of the Burnham Committee that had determined pay through a process of comparability and collective bargaining, with the consequence that pay would be determined by a pay review body. This facility was extended to senior civil servants, doctors, dentists and nurses and IRRR (1991) records that half a million public sector workers are now covered by review bodies (p 4)

This was the new example that the government wanted to depict. It came with the message that “collective organisation is no longer viewed as an appropriate mechanism for protecting workers and achieving industrial stability” (Freedman and Morris, 1989: p 27). This ideology was best exemplified by the expelling of unions from GCHQ in 1984, a clear message that unions no longer figured in this Government’s deliberations. The message was further hammered home by Thatcher holding up as examples of good employers companies such as IBM, Marks and Spencer and John Lewis, all notably ‘union free’ companies (Barriers to Employment: p 18). McIlroy (1995) claims that, as a result of this change in policy, “What is worrying the unions is that the state’s emphasis on union exclusion has found increasing resonance with employers, hostility and de recognition is growing” (p 43).

The governments’ message on industrial relations was backed up by a legislative programme designed to weaken the unions and was based on the premise that union leaders and activists were detached from their members and were leading them into unnecessary and unwelcome industrial unrest. Dickens and Hall (1995) argue that

“Conservative politicians and commentators increasingly came to characterize the statutory immunities as ‘unique privileges’ which put the unions ‘above the law’ – terminology designed to ‘create an impression of unwarranted legal status’” (p 280). Thatcher had been a member of the Heath government in 1971 and had witnessed the failure of the Industrial Relations Act of that year. In contrast, Thatcher adopted a quite different strategy. Lewis (1983) tells us that the Conservatives did not attempt reform by comprehensive legislation, as in the 1971 Act, but by means of a “step by step amendment of earlier statute and case law”. He goes on to record that critics saw the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982 as legislation whose main objective was to “undermine trade unionism and the whole collective system of industrial relations in accordance with an ultra- restrictive strategy”(p 381). Wedderburn (1986), listing the changes enacted by the 1980, 1982 and 1985 Acts, argued that “These measures by themselves amounted to a major withdrawal of legal support from collective bargaining by removing a minimum floor in favour of the support of market forces” (p 70).

This step-by-step approach of amendments to the law narrowed the path of immunity along which the unions could now walk from liability in tort for industrial action. The restrictions included the removal of immunity from secondary action. Wedderburn (1986) argues that “sympathetic or solidarity action, or what many would call the assistance of the weak by the strong, is subjected to tort liability” (p 598). Secondary picketing is outlawed, immunity is only granted to picketing at or near a worker’s own place of work. This is supplemented by a code of practice that restricts the number of pickets to six. This was probably a response to the phenomenon of ‘mass picketing’ that was associated with the strikes of the 1970s, particularly in the mining

industry, a factor that was also given a high profile by the 1980 steel strike. Hartley et al (1983) provide details of workers in the nationalised sector of steel using mass picketing against private steel producers to further their claim (p 35).

Legislation also placed restrictions on the calling of strikes. Immunities would only be extended if a ballot of the workers concerned was held to support the action. This also included action short of a strike, i.e. an overtime ban. By extending the 1982 legislation in 1990, unions were only able to avoid legal liability from unofficial action by providing “notification of unequivocal repudiation by the union, in writing, individually to all members of the union who might be induced to take part in or continue with industrial action and to those who had induced (or were inducing them)” (DoE, 1989: p 6). Under this provision employers would be free to selectively dismiss ‘ringleaders’ of unofficial action and such employees “would be unable to claim unfair dismissal before an industrial tribunal”. Further, immunity would be withdrawn in the event of action being used “to bring pressure on an employer in support of anyone dismissed while taking part in unofficial action” (DoE, 1989: p 8). This list of restrictions is by no means exhaustive. There were many other legislative curtailments including pressure on the maintenance of a closed shop, the emphasis was on narrowing the path for unions to ensure immunity. This loss of immunity was complemented by the ability of judges to introduce their interpretation of civil liabilities to unlawful trade disputes. Wedderburn (1986) claims that, “Most important of all, the 1980s legislation cleared the way to the enforcement of common law liability in tort against the union and its property. This...was the linchpin of its strategy” (p 540).

Defiance of the legislation would lead to contempt proceedings by the court. While there were limits to the initial fines there was no ceiling set for contempt and sequestration of union assets was brought into the equation. Some unions felt the full force of this legislation during the 1980s, i.e. the printing unions at Warrington (1983) and Wapping (1986); and the Seaman's union (1988). All experienced heavy fines and sequestration for contempt of court orders in what became acknowledged as celebrated defeats for the union movement over the issue of recognition and which effectively set the scene for a re-assertion of the managerial prerogative to the right to manage (Kessler and Bayliss, 1995: p 170). The TUC withdrew their support for the printing union in the Messenger dispute at Warrington, partly as a result of a fear of being in contempt of court for supporting unlawful action. This stance proved to be a major turning point for the movement. The TUC would oppose the legislation, but would not indulge in unlawful action. The monumental defeats of the big battalions of the union movement, including that of the miners in 1985, further affected their popularity and confirmed to many a state of ineffectiveness (Kessler and Bayliss, 1995: pp 186-187).

Therefore the period from 1980-1997 was marked by political and legislative change that had a great bearing on the effectiveness of the unions in representing their members. However, these were not the only changes that impacted on union effectiveness. There was a major change in the economic climate that brought with it recession and unprecedented rises in unemployment figures. Unions would have to respond to the changed political and economic pressures that faced them. The evidence appears to be that they did not respond well enough and there was a corresponding continuous decline in membership figures during the entire period of

Conservative administration. The WIRS series that has charted industrial relations over this period is unequivocal in its findings that trade union membership and influence has waned since 1979. McIlroy (1995) emphasises that legislation in isolation was not the reason for the fall in union prominence. He argues that “The break with full employment, the continuing high level of unemployment, the brevity of the late 1980s fall in the number of jobless, the reassertion of high unemployment in the early 1990s this, interacting with industrial and compositional change based on the collapse of manufacturing must be afforded prime importance” (pp 394-395).

In terms of economic growth in the UK, Cully et al (1999), inform us that the economy experienced two full cycles during the 18 year period with both the 1980s and 1990s beginning with severe recessions followed by prolonged periods of growth. However, within these cycles, there have been compositional changes across the economy. Traditional manufacturing jobs were lost and service sector jobs were created, to the extent that by 1998 private service employment had outstripped private manufacturing employment. In 1980 the majority of private sector employees worked in manufacturing. By 1998 this figure had fallen to just 37% (p 221).

Many new enterprises that have entered the economy have been largely the result of inward investment by foreign multi-nationals who bring with them their own notions of how or whether unions should operate in their businesses. Unions have tried to impact on these new enterprises in different ways in order to secure a membership base. In some instances this has led to the procurement of single union deals at the exclusion of other unions who would normally expect to be involved in multi-union representation at the firm. Significant examples of this practice are from Japanese

employers. Ackers et al (1996) claim the Japanese are more likely to be pro-union than their American counterparts, but have a strong impression of the type of unionism that they want, and that in the majority of cases they favour single union deals, particularly with the AEEU in the UK, irrespective of which sector they are operating in, hence the tendency to beauty contests after 'profiling'. They claim "Japanese firms have been the real and symbolic movers behind a more widespread adoption of single unionism, no strike deals, new arbitration agreements, company councils and other forms of management directed at the reform of British industrial relations which have capitalised on union weakness and inter-union competition for declining members" (pp 9-10). Within these new arrangements workers are required to become more flexible in their approach to work and to accept the concept of multi-skilling and the amalgamation of tasks between occupations and functions (p 13).

During this period of Conservative political dominance the stature of the unions came under close scrutiny. Membership figures began to tumble, both absolutely and in terms of density. The WIRS (1992) survey paints the picture of decline in membership over the period from 1980-1990. One area for investigation was to establish what percentage of workplaces had any union members. The survey claims that during the period 1980-1984 there was virtually no change in the overall situation with 73 per cent of workplaces in both years having union members. This picture had changed dramatically by 1990 where, the survey claims, "this proportion had dropped to 64 per cent" and that "the clear picture is of a sizeable decline in the number of workplaces with trade union members between the early 1980s and the end of the decade" and that "all of this decline was in the private sector" (pp 58-60). The commentators go on to argue that, overall, union density has fallen from 58 per cent

in 1984 to 48 per cent in 1990 and that the decline was more marked for manual workers, traditionally more organised than non-manual workers, where density fell from 66 to 53 per cent (pp 60-61).

In order to illustrate the extent of change in workplace relations that has taken place over the period 1980-1998, Millward et al (2000) have produced an analysis of the WIRS series and claim that union presence across all workplaces has dropped from 73% in 1980 to 54% in 1998. Disaggregated figures reveal that between 1980 and 1998, the percentage of workplaces with a union presence in private manufacturing has fallen from 77% to 42%; in private services from 50% to 35%; and in the public sector from 99% to 97% (p 85). Union density across all workplaces has fallen from 65% in 1980 to 36% in 1998. In the private sector union density has fallen from 56% in 1980 to 26% in 1998 compared to a fall from 84% to 57% in the public sector (pp 88-89). McIlroy (1995) claims that the changes in the workforce have led to a situation where in the 1990s the average trade unionist is not factory worker in overalls, but a nurse, a teacher, or a local government worker (p 32). Cully et al (1999) record that this fall in union presence and density has been accompanied by a fall in the number of companies that recognise unions with “the result that by 1998 substantially fewer than half of workplaces with 25 or more employees had recognised unions” a fall from 65% in 1980. They record a similar pattern in the coverage of collective bargaining, claiming its coverage had fallen from 70% of all employees in 1984 to 41% by 1998. The authors claim

the decline was apparent in each of the three sectors of the economy. In the public sector, where pay review bodies replaced joint regulation for some major occupational groups and some derecognition had also occurred, aggregate coverage fell from 80 per cent in 1990 to 63 per cent in 1998. In private manufacturing the fall was slight, from 51 per cent to 46 per cent of

employees. Private services was the sector with the largest proportionate fall: from 33 per cent to 22 per cent.

(pp 238-242).

Millward et al (2000) reflect on union recognition in engineering and metal goods that “showed a particularly sharp fall from 37% to 19% of workplaces having recognized unions, continuing an earlier trend that was accentuated by the collapse of the industry wide negotiating machinery in 1990” They claim that as a result engineering has turned from being the most influential model of collective bargaining in the 1960s and 1970s to having the lowest level of recognition of any industry in 1998 (p 99). Cully et al (1999) point to the gradual demise of multi-employer bargaining over the 1979-1998 period. They claim that where it had affected the pay of some or all of employees in 68% of workplaces in 1980, by 1998 this figure had fallen to 34%. Their evidence shows that the fall was substantial in all three broad sectors of the economy and they go on to claim that “the public sector emerged as the only major sector of the economy where multi-employer bargaining remained common in 1998; 41% of public sector workplaces were affected by it. In the private sector the proportion in 1998 was a mere 4% of workplaces, down from over a quarter in 1980. Private sector employers had effectively abandoned acting jointly to regulate the terms and conditions of employment” (pp 228-229).

In the private sector, the transformation in the composition of the workforce impacted hugely on the union movement. Jobs, and members, were being lost in the traditional heartlands of the manufacturing sector. The expanding private services had always been a difficult area for unions to recruit in and they made no major inroads in this area. The problem was exacerbated by the growth in the employment of part-time and women workers that were also areas of great difficulty for union recruitment (see

Disney et al, 1998: p 17). Ackers et al (1996) refer to the work of Hobsbaum who, in 1984, predicted a crisis for the British Labour Movement as the result of deep social changes which included the diminution of the manual working class, accompanied by an increase in feminisation and ethnic diversity of the labour force with “the upshot...that the relatively homogenous white, male, manual union movement which had emerged from the last was in the process of decomposition” (p 5).

In the hostile climate of the 1980s and 1990s shop stewards faced the prospect of being by-passed in the workplace. Bacon and Storey (1996) claim that in this climate management presented a dual threat to unions in the form of individualisation as opposed to collectivity, and secondly a new collectivism that incorporates initiatives such as team-working and employee involvement which tend to generate “greater commitment and employment identification with the aims of the company” (pp 44-45). The latter was the result of management wishing to introduce Human Resource Management (HRM) practices into the workplace - which Brown et al (1998) refer to as a family of techniques used as a counter to collective bargaining which tend toward the employee as a individual (p 11). The former was a consequence of unions placing a heavy reliance on employer sponsorship to maintain collective bargaining at the workplace. Just as Terry (1995: p 222) had warned, management were more prepared to withdraw their goodwill when faced with economic hardship and spurred on by the political climate. Kessler and Bayliss (1995) concur with Terry and argue that in an environment where markets became more competitive and increasingly more globalised, management began to be more emphatic about controlling the work process and asserting managerial authority (p 102). Unions had been used to

providing a single channel of representation for the workforce. Hyman (1997) argues that

In Britain, the decline in union membership and in the coverage of collective bargaining has meant that the 'single channel' is increasingly one established and dominated by the employer, with no independent representation of workers' interests. A logic of collective representation based on workers' 'spontaneous' will to associate and if necessary deploy their 'industrial muscle' no longer matches the realities of labour markets pervaded by insecurity, a restructured workforce, and a profoundly hostile legal environment

(p. 314).

In the face of such developments in the economy and the hostility presented to union involvement and representation on the terms and conditions of members in the workplace the unions endeavoured to make a response in order to change their fortunes. Voluntarism is at an end (Dickens and Hall, 1995) and, with its demise, came a direct threat to the method of collective bargaining. In the light of these changes unions adopted a variety of strategies. As stated earlier, during the early days of Thatcherism, the unions adopted a strategy of opposition and defiance, which led to monumental defeats for the major protagonists. This was accompanied by the belief that the British workers would see sense and return a Labour government and, when this did not appear apparent, to wait until management strategy fails, neither option presented itself during the period 1979-1997. Bacon and Storey (1996) warn that this strategy was dangerous because any failure to materialise can put management in the ascendancy as unionism 'withers on the vine' (p50).

Therefore, the legislative changes introduced by the successive Conservative administrations served to severely restrict the effectiveness of the trade unions.

Dickens and Hall (1995) record that this "period has seen the final death of

voluntarism, under which the law was essentially an adjunct to an autonomous, self-regulated system of industrial relations” (p 256). Accompanying this ‘ultra-restrictive’ legislative framework there emerged a new style of management which attracted the title ‘macho-management’. Kessler and Baylis (1995) claim that “the macho management policies of many manufacturing companies in the early 1980s were interpreted by some commentators as an employers’ counter-offensive against alleged union excesses in the 1970s” (p 107), but argue that management reacted more to protect profits, which resulted in wholesale redundancies, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

Kessler and Baylis (1995) claim management were greatly assisted in reasserting their authority through some celebrated union defeats inflicted on unions by employers including British Leyland in the early 1980s; accompanied by provincial press de-recognitions and the defeat of the print unions at Wapping in the National Press; the defeat of the miners; and sea farers employed at P&O in Dover (p 170) and argue that such monumental defeats of the big battalions of the labour movement affected their popularity and went as far as confirming to many their state of ineffectiveness (p 187). Therefore, in the light of such developments industrial relations moved away from a pluralist approach towards a more unitarist strategy as management tried to gain control of the work process and assert their managerial authority (p102).

Exponents of this new style of management were Michael Edwards and Ian McGregor brought in to nationalised industries British Leyland and British Steel respectively to reduce losses in what were referred to as lame duck enterprises and who introduced tactics such as: first offer – final offer; going over the heads of shop stewards; communicating directly with their workforce; holding their own ballots; and, in

extreme cases, sacking militant shop stewards i.e. Derek Robinson at British Leyland (see McIlroy 1995: p 110).

These companies were ‘beefed up’ in order to make them attractive to the private sector and eventually sold off. Kessler and Bayliss (1995) provide figures to demonstrate that employment in British Steel fell from 230,000 in the mid – 1970s to just 53,000 in 1990 (p 141). They claim that the privatisation programme was a result of the government’s “inherent dogmatic suspicion and distrust of public enterprise and public expenditure and an equally inherent and dogmatic belief in the superiority of private enterprise” (1995: pp 138-139). McIlroy (1995) reflects that these “new forms of employment celebrated by Thatcherism are not underpinned by economic stability and remain precarious” (p132). The unions found great difficulty in organising resistance to this onslaught. The move away from a commitment to full employment and rising unemployment meant that unions had to deal more and more with redundancies and spent less time on recruitment. They were under-resourced, relying heavily on lay representatives to perform many of their functions at the workplace. This was exacerbated by a more prevalent anti-union stance among employers and public opinion proclaiming a better way to deal with employee relations other than through the unions, which in turn led to low union morale. Union leaders were faced with the combination of members taking enhanced redundancy payments and a general feeling of inevitability and found it almost impossible to stir their members into taking action (Kessler and Bayliss 1995: pp 167-172).

Part of this ‘new’ macho-management philosophy was to reduce the workforce through redundancy programmes and to expect the remaining workforce to become

more flexible in their approach to work. Sisson (1994) argues, “the impression given is that flexibility is everything and the desired state is that management can do and be able to do anything it likes” (p13). McIlroy (1995) recognises the spread of flexibility clauses in workplace agreements which were accompanied by changes in working practices but refers to the WIRS 1992 survey which claimed that only one third of managers recorded changes in working practices and concluded that flexibility bargaining seemed to be a minority, if important, trend. He does point out that the initiatives over change reflect the same dilemmas as experienced with productivity bargaining during the 1960s, which could be summed up as piecemeal, opportunistic attempts at reform rather than the ‘holistic transformative approach urged by theorists’. McIlroy claims that the “approach to change in flexibility is pragmatic and reactive – there is no new vision” and that “Flexibility is a tactical survival plan related to recession, harder markets and changes in the labour force, not a coherent management strategy” (pp 127-132).

The dilemma for the unions was that they faced being marginalized in the areas where they maintained a presence, and where employment, and hence membership, was falling, and were simultaneously failing to make inroads in the new and expanding industries. Ackers et al (1996) provide the example of Cadbury, a company with a long history of collective bargaining with unions, but who introduced an HRM strategy in order to marginalize the unions. They summarise the trend in the UK, claiming that despite some well documented antics of a series of so-called macho management bosses (i.e. Edwards at British Leyland, McGregor at British Steel and Coal, and Shah and Murdoch in Newspapers) and their bitter battles to ‘break the unions’, the undercurrent of activity in UK industrial relations has been the

introduction of HRM. This shift has witnessed the emergence of managerial strategies incorporating quality circles, team briefings and profit sharing, all designed to shift employee relations away from union-management conflict resolution to a non-confrontational participative strategy (p 24). This has been accompanied by a tendency towards the individualisation of contracts. Brown et al (1998) argue that even where unions are still recognised by employers, “the scope for bargaining has narrowed” and that “in particular, collective bargaining over pay has diminished substantially” (p68). Bacon and Storey (1996) claim that there has been a “fracturing of collectivism” caused by both the changing structure of the labour market, and by managerial strategies which cause questions to be raised as to the relevancy of traditional collective arrangements as management move towards individual employee relationships (p 43).

However, despite a loss of influence at the workplace, employers have not abandoned unions universally. Kessler and Bayliss (1995) argue that derecognition was not widespread because managers did not see recognition as an issue. In some instances managers have accepted that unions can become positive partners in seeking solutions to problems and initiating change (p 108). This point is recognised by Brown et al (1998) who “conclude that many employers see net benefits in allowing employees a representative and independent voice in the management of change both because it informs the employers’ actions and also, by contributing a degree of legitimacy to those actions in the eyes of the employees, it can facilitate the process of change” (p 72). This perhaps explains the puzzling thing about WIRS (1999) reported shift in management strategy where the survey appears to indicate that the HRM approach is better implemented in companies that recognise and negotiate with trade unions.

WIRS claims that the “evidence suggests that an active and strong trade union presence is compatible with a broad suite of high commitment management practices” (p 111).

Consistent with this reported shift to an individualist approach WIRS (1999) tells us that 72% of managers would prefer to consult directly with their employees (p88). This position is supported by 14% of union members who apparently feel that they could achieve superior pay settlements on their own! The survey uses a hypothetical approach in questioning employees as to how they would like their terms and conditions of employment settled in an ideal situation. A worker reporting that he would prefer independence in settling his own destiny at work would be an ideal situation, however it was the failure of workers to match the power of employers in the employment relationship that prompted a collective approach and there is nothing in WIRS to suggest that this situation has changed. 77% of employees replied that managers entered into little or no consultation with them over workplace issues (p152). On the issue of pay we are advised that 50% of workers were dealt with unilaterally by management and only 2% were able to individually negotiate their own pay. In the private sector collective bargaining is still numerically the most important method for settling pay (p 106).

The same pattern emerges with regard to disseminating information concerning workplace strategy regarding investment, staffing and financial issues. The survey reviews the situation over the period 1980-1998 and reports that “The patterns identified in previous years remained: information was more commonly provided in the public sector and, within the private sector, in larger workplace and those with

recognised trade unions” (p 232). This is a situation that was identified by Millward (1994) in his review of industrial relations in the wake of the WIRS 3 edition and which prompted him to argue:

Britain is approaching the position where few employees have any mechanism through which they can contribute to the operation of their workplace in a broader context than that of their own job. There is no sign that the shrinkage in the extent of trade union representation is being offset in a growth of other methods of representing non-managerial employees’ interests or views. There has been no spontaneous emergence of an alternative model of employee representation that could channel and attenuate conflict between employers and employees. Nor is there much of the legal regulation that is so extensive in other developed economies to provide a basic floor of employment rights and minimum labour standards.

(p 133)

(see also McIlroy 1995:p 400).

What is clear from the WIRS evidence is that, despite there being over half of workplaces that do not recognise trade unions, still there is no alternative method of representation, consultation or negotiation that has emerged

Therefore the evidence on the presence and influence of unions at the workplace appears mixed. Membership has fallen dramatically, but unions have maintained a presence and density in their traditional, but diminishing areas. Collective bargaining is still a factor in those areas and procedures remain relevant to maintaining good industrial relations (Cully et al, 1999: p 111). However, workplace representatives have declined across the economy. Cully et al (1999) record that there were three in five workplaces with no worker representative, a statistic that mirrors workplaces with no union members (p 95). This situation may reflect the ‘fear’ factor alluded to by Metcalfe (1989) brought about through high levels of unemployment and job insecurity (p 27). Prior to the 1980s trade unions were traditionally associated with an adversarial approach to industrial relations. Militant unions were able to mobilise their

members and enjoyed a single union channel of communication. Since 1980, and in the wake of union decline and loss of influence, some union leaders, along with the TUC, are advocating a moderate approach to industrial relations. This is an approach, which bears the hallmarks of employer sponsorship, peaceful methods of conflict resolution (including third party intervention and binding arbitration), and social partnership and collaboration. Moderation is being preached in response to managements' adoption of HRM techniques that involve the use of direct communication with the employee, flexible methods of working and works councils. It has been indicated that the old style adversarial approach to employment relations are 'destructive and irrelevant' to today's environment and that a new approach is now required (see Kelly 1996). All of these innovations reduce the scope for collective bargaining to be effective and yet Bacon and Storey (1996) quote John Edmonds of the GMB arguing that the soft version of HRM is not necessarily anti-union and "HRM promises a new relationship and some ideas unions can use" (p 55).

The Conservative administrations may wish to claim the lion's share of the credit for the demise of the unions through their legislative programme, but there is evidence that there was a corresponding fall in trade union membership across developed industrial nations. Changes in the workplace composition away from manufacturing towards the service sector and changes in workforce composition with more women, part-time and temporary workers coming into the equation have also played their part. That this phenomenon is not unique to the UK, but is a problem for comparable trade unions in the Western industrialised states, is supported by a report published by the International Labour Office (ILO:1998)) which claims that because of workplace compositional change trade unions are no longer predominately 'blue collar' and

more likely to be found in 'white collar' areas (p 8). The ILO report also argues that globalisation and the opening of markets brings problems for unions whose structures cannot cope with companies or enterprises that cut across national frontiers. (p. 9). The impact of the business cycle has been cited as a reason for the demise of trade unions but this again cannot provide the whole reason for the decline. McIlroy (1995) argues that if this were the main reason for decline then union membership should have grown during the economic upturn during the late 1980s and early 1990s, but this did not materialise (p 387).

More likely, the problems that have beset trade unions over the past twenty years are a combination of those summarised by Waddington and Whitson (1995) who claim that "two major recessions since 1979, dramatic drifts in economic structure, and the impact of neo-liberalism on public policy have had wide-ranging effects on the levels of unionism, the political legitimacy of unions, and the confidence and ability of unions to adjust" (p152). Disney et al (1998) reflect that the decline in unionism has been exacerbated by the unions' failure to make any inroads, or gain recognition, in the new, greenfield sites that have been set-up since the 1980s (p17). They argue that this failure along with their findings that new entrants into the labour market are less likely to join a union combine to create a situation which suggests that the "decline in union membership may be difficult to reverse" (p ii). This is an alarming statement given that the WIRS survey indicates that only 3% of union representatives said that they had received any training in recruitment from their union (p 198). It would seem that under such circumstances the 'virtuous circle' effect alluded to by Bain and Price is now in reverse and has perhaps become more a vicious circle! There is a message for trade unions in this scenario succinctly put by Wickens (1987) who claims "There

is now a recognition that trade unions, like virtually all other organisations, have to earn their membership, not require it” (p 132)

In the light of the developments reported in the WIRS series, there is therefore a wide body of support for the thesis that trade unionism in the UK is in a state of terminal decline. Perhaps the most poignant example of the state of trade unionism in the UK is the recorded number of instances of strike action in the UK. When the Conservatives came to power strikes were at an apparently unacceptable level and were labelled the ‘British disease’. WIRS provides evidence to show that in 1998 the level of officially-recorded strikes was at its lowest level since records were kept. The passage also argues “Conservative governments are widely believed to be major causes of the virtual disappearance of the strike as a feature of British employment relations” (p 245). Towers (1999) casts doubts on whether the strike rate in the UK during the 1970s was as pervasive as reported and points to the fact that “even in the strike prone 1970s, 98 per cent of all employees never experienced a strike over an entire working life” (p 92). The legal requirement to hold a postal ballot of all union members before entering into any form of industrial action has been turned to the advantage of many unions who have universally adopted by the process and this has led to the procedure for handling disputes being more formalised. Edwards et al (1998) claim that unions have been able to turn balloting for industrial action into a positive approach and have been able to use them to demonstrate member support for action (p 18). Therefore, despite the predictions of doom, it is against this backdrop that the oft quoted ‘rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated’ may be a sentiment that is an apt description of the state of trade unionism in the UK today. It could be argued that, despite the ravages of the last twenty years, trade unions are still

active in the economy and continue to make an impact in the workplace, and that a new role is developing for them in a changing political climate.

Survival has been the priority for most active trade unionists and this has been achieved through a series of initiatives over recent years. Some of these initiatives have caused conflict within the trade union movement, for example those unions who have entered into single union agreements with companies at the expense of other relevant unions losing, or being denied recognition. Kessler and Baylis (1995) cite the EETPU as the flagship of the wave of 'new unionism', which typically included in their agreements clauses on single union deals, no strike, pendulum arbitration, full flexibility of labour and single status (p 190-191; see also Wickens (1987) for an account of Nissan). Millward (1994) claims that the take up of these new type agreements was modest and that "Quantitatively the new style agreements did not form the starting point for a 'new industrial relations' in Britain" (pp 126-127). De-recognition did not become the major factor in UK industrial relations that it was first believed it would be. Kessler and Baylis (1995) quote an employers' representative who claims "de-recognition has not taken off because it has not been necessary since the unions do not stand in the way of change" (p 197). This is an argument that is supported by Brown et al (1998: p 68).

Europe has also presented itself as the possible salvation for trade unions. There is no doubt that the social dimension and the concept of social partnership that is firmly established within the European Union (EU) presented to the UK trade unions a possible avenue for revitalisation (see Kessler and Baylis, 1995: pp176-177). From their previous anti-European standpoint British trade unions, through the TUC, took a

positive view about UK involvement in the social agenda that is being adopted across the EU. From a trade union perspective it is the reference contained in social directives to consultation, and the notion of there being two sides to industry that attracted obvious attention. The conduct of industrial relations in Europe is very much dependent on the prevalence of social dialogue and social partnership and the UK government had been at pains to undermine any concept that gave credence to collective issues, and in particular to a social dialogue that provides a role to the trade unions, thus raising their profile. To this end the Conservative administration opted-out of the social chapter at the Maastricht conference in 1993, leaving UK workers bereft of many of the benefits of social directives introduced.

This left the UK in a position of isolation and confrontation on many social issues. However, despite this stand many of the directives were implemented through rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) that takes precedence over the British courts. The 1995 ACAS annual report informs us that the ECJ produced judgements against the UK on their failure to fully implement the 1975 Collective Redundancies Directive, and the 1977 Acquired Rights Directive. The government dealt with these issues through amendments to the relevant sectors in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (1993), but true to form, the government ruled that “in organisations where there are recognised trade unions, the regulations allow employers to choose either to consult with them or with elected representatives of the affected employees; this choice applies in both collective redundancy and transfer of undertaking situations” (ACAS: p 17). The report shows that the government of that time also had to make legislative amendments in relation to equal opportunities issues regarding part-time workers (Employment Protection (Part Time Employees)

Regulations 1995: and on pensions and sex discrimination issues, The Occupational Pension Scheme (Equal /Access to Membership) Amendment Regulations 1995. It would be left to a newly elected Labour administration to implement other directives into UK law after 1997.

Other initiatives adopted by trade unions included entering into mergers to maintain membership stability. Waddington (1999) is quoted in the Labour Research magazine as claiming, “a substantial proportion of merger activity between 1988 and 1995 was purely expansionist, to compensate for declining memberships, and finances (LRD: June,; p 9). There have also been mergers that have been undertaken to achieve some form of industrial unionism and so reduce competition in the workplace between rival unions i.e. the creation of UNISON which brought together 1.5million public sector workers and the merger between SOGAT and the NGA to form the GPMU on the platform of forming one union for the printing, papermaking and allied industries. This type of merger appears to be compatible with the aspirations of the TUC who are calling for a model of trade union structure that would produce a radical restructuring by the year 2010 that reflects industrial sectors being represented by one union.

The LRD article quoted above reflects that recent mergers have “tended to follow industrial logic” (p 9) but that there are serious limitations to achieving this goal. Not least of these limitations is that the top five unions, representing 60% of the TUC membership, cut across many industrial sectors which tends to create “criss-crossing ‘spheres of influence’ which confound any logic” (p 11) and that it is highly unlikely that unions will agree to pass blocks of membership over to another union in order to

form an industrial union. The TUC points to the example set in Ireland, where if 80% of membership wants to switch to another union the transfer can be achieved through the offices of the ITUC. While there is not much chance at the present time of this being replicated in the UK the TUC leader John Monks is quoted as concluding that his “hope is that this generation of trade union leaders can leave the trade union movement better than they found it” (p 11).

Despite this route that trade unions and the TUC appear to be taking, mergers are not the answer to the trade union dilemma. This approach is merely cuddling against the cold in order to, at best, manage decline, or to prevent the organisation slowly bleeding to death. Much more important to their regeneration is the relevance that unions express to their existing and, more essentially, potential members in respect of their being an effective representative and voice at work. This can only happen when they are taken seriously in the workplace. Hyman (1997) points out that trade unions have been less sensitive to the interests of female, black and low paid workers and questions the authenticity of a predominately white, middle aged, male trade union representation appealing to this constituency. He argues, “representatives may need to become more demographically representative if unions are to expand membership and support in areas previously neglected” (p 310). However, the evidence from the WIRS (1999) survey does not support that unions are doing enough in this area. The majority of non-union workers still believe that the unions are weak, only 28% of those questioned believed that unions could make a difference at work (p 212). This is despite the fact that the survey provides clear evidence that unions do make a difference at work in important areas such as pay and conditions of employment,

receiving information, being consulted and receiving off-the job training. Kelly, writing in a LRD (2000) publication, argues “these continuing achievements of trade unions, coupled with the grievances of employees and the persistence of mistrust in the employer, provide the foundations for a recovery of union membership and influence”(January: p 12).

1997 – ‘New Labour’

Perhaps the best chance for any recovery has been presented by recent events. 1997 witnessed the landslide election of a Labour government. This historic victory was followed by a second term with another massive majority in 2001 and a record third term following an election in 2005. As a prospective government Labour had been at pains to present themselves as electable to a UK population that included the middle-classes and the business community, and was actively reducing the trade union voting power on its executive (see Freeman 1995: p 519). In power, the Labour government has tried to maintain employer confidence in its economic strategy. Towers (1999) observed that “the government’s pro-business stance...is markedly different to previous Labour administrations” (p 84).

In Government, Labour has underwritten this stance by promising that industrial relations will not be taken back to pre –1980. Despite their close ties with the labour movement, it has been made clear that much of the existing legislation will remain. This policy decision by Labour stems from a document issued in 1996 which made clear that, “The key elements of trade union legislation of the 1980s – on ballots, picketing and industrial action – will stay” (p 5). The TUC website (2007) comments

on this continuing alignment of labour policy with the previous Conservative policy arguing that,

Since 1997, the Government has made a number of important changes to UK industrial action law. Nevertheless, UK trade unions members have fewer rights to take industrial action than in 1906 when the current system of industrial action law was introduced. Those participating in lawful industrial action remain vulnerable to dismissal and victimisation. UK law on industrial action also places heavy financial and bureaucratic responsibilities on trade unions and fails to reflect economic changes and the restructuring of the labour market.

However, despite this stance, there have been some encouraging signs from the government for trade unions. Trade union recognition has been restored at GCHQ. EU legislation that the Conservatives had delayed on Working Time was brought in under Health and Safety provisions and Labour signed up to the Social Chapter from which the Tories had opted out. Freeman (1995) notes that the “UK adherence to the Social Charter will bring mandated works councils which will offer a new field of influence for unions” and that “Union movements can function effectively with much lower density in a world of elected works councils than in a world of voluntary recognition: a largely non-union work-force may elect union activists to represent it on councils” (pp 532-532).

During labour’s early years in power legislative changes were introduced that saw better maternity and paternity provision, protection for part-time and temporary workers and the establishment of a National Minimum Wage. Labour’s promise to the unions was fairness not favours. Legislation to redress the perceived in-balance in industrial relations was promised. These changes manifest themselves in the Employment Relations Act which it took Labour until spring 2000 to enact. The provisions fell far short of union expectations but the bill did provide for statutory

recognition for trade unions where they can show that they represent the majority of workers in an accepted bargaining unit.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this bill is the right to be accompanied by a trade union official or another 'companion' for disciplinary and grievance issues at work.

Bargaining Report (2000) reminds us that this legislation does not grant full representational rights as it describes the individual merely as a companion and that, while they can address the hearing and confer with the worker, they may not answer on the worker's behalf and "this means that formal hearings could remain difficult and traumatic for many workers if they do not have the confidence to express their views in this setting". However, even where unions are not recognised, workers will be able to insist that they are accompanied by a full-time union official. The report claims "This new right could be particularly important in the context of campaigns for union recognition since it will give unions a legal right to enter workplaces where workers want them to come along to disciplinary or grievance hearings" (March: p 7). An LRD (1999) pamphlet supports that this is an important right for workers and points out that the proposed legislation broadens the definition to workers and not just employees. This means that the rights are extended to agency workers, home-workers, civil servants and those working under nominally self-employed contracts (November: p 22). The legislation therefore has provided to unions the means to obtain compulsory recognition along with rights to collective bargaining, albeit on a legislative rather than voluntary basis but ultimately is balanced between individual and collective rights.

In anticipation of the domestic legislation coming on to the statute books, the TUC set up a training academy in 1998 to recruit and train dedicated organisers whose task it is to promote and encourage union membership and, more importantly, union activity in the workplace at new and Greenfield sites on behalf of the union who engage them from the academy. This approach places an emphasis on rebuilding workplace union structures and membership with the prospect of demanding recognition for collective bargaining over the issues of pay, overtime and holidays in line with the legislation contained in the Employment Relations Act 1999 (see LRD September 2000: pp 10-11). Developing an organising model that builds on the traditional adversarial union approach differs sharply with the more passive partnership approach that unions adopted during the Conservative administration. Kelly (1996) compares the two different approaches and argues that there is little evidence to support that unions promoting a cooperative, consultative approach has any impact on union growth. He claims that the militant model of unionism is more likely to succeed given that it recognises the right to collective action, including the right to strike, and that,

Ultimately it is sustained by the hostility of employers to independent trade unionism and by the antagonistic interests of workers and employers, an antagonism that pervades even ostensibly joint-interest issues such as training and equal opportunities.

(p 102).

There are indications that the slide in trade union membership has slowed and that the granting of union recognition is on the rise (LRD October 2000: p 7). Reports have provided evidence of some employer concessions in this area. LRD (February, 2000) reports the success for the T&GWU at Pricecheck in London after a year-long campaign. A T&G official cites the pending union recognition legislation as one of the factors in gaining a voluntary agreement. In an article in the same publication it is argued that research undertaken by Gall “confirms that the forthcoming legal right to

union recognition has had a huge impact” and goes on to record that “the impending new law is giving unions and their members more confidence about going for recognition; the number of recognition deals has more than doubled from the previous year;...the threat of de-recognition has receded for most workers” (pp11/12).

Some caution about being over enthusiastic regarding the degree of reform that is contained within this legislation is warranted. A major disadvantage presented in the legislation is the exclusion of workers employed in organisations employing fewer than 21 people. The TUC estimate that this will exclude some 5 million workers, or 25% of all employees (Towers, 1999: p 87). There is also the argument that the legislation has been difficult to implement in some instances. Ewing et al (2003) claim that, while there has been a notable increase in voluntary recognition agreements since the introduction of the legislation, with employers ceding recognition where the strength of union membership makes the outcome of a claim inevitable, still “the experience of the first three years of operation of the procedures suggests that this principle may be easier to express than to fully realise in some cases”. This is because a great number of applications for statutory recognition by unions have been “hotly contested” by employers while some employers remain “hotly resistant to trade union organisation” (p 1).

A LRD pamphlet on the ERA (November,1999) points out that there is accompanying procedures for de-recognition within the legislation (pp 16-18) and warns of the dangers of a UK model which has many parallels with comparative legislation in the USA where “the law has not managed to stem the tide of de-unionisation there” (p 4). Both Towers (1999) and Adams (1999) support this argument. Towers claims that a

legislative approach could be contradictory to the partnership approach that is being advocated by both the government and the TUC (p 86). He argues that the right to statutory recognition may not be the panacea that some might expect and that “the link between a workable recognition procedure and a reversal of membership decline is not immediately apparent” and that it is “instructive to observe that periods of major trade union growth in Britain have historically occurred in the absence of statutory recognition procedures”. Towers (1999) warns that “There are even those who argue that a statutory procedure has actually contributed to the weakening of American trade unions given the ability of US employers to use and misuse the law, substantially assisted by favourable judicial decisions and governments which are, at best, unable to institute reform because of the capacity of the system to prevent it” (pp 84/85). Adams supports Towers and argues that “the collective bargaining coverage rate is low and declining in the US because it is very difficult for any union to become certified in the face of determined employer resistance” (1999: p 98). Adams is unconvinced of the ability of statutory recognition to secure ‘universal collective bargaining’ and advocates “a return to the traditional British policy of voluntarism bolstered by government insistence on voluntary recognition in all situations where unions have sufficient support” (pp 98/99), a sentiment that is echoed by Towers (p 91). Adams concludes by warning that “Britain is about to make the same mistake as the USA in 1935. It is preparing, with the declared support of the TUC, to enact into law a certification procedure which is likely to prove in nobody’s interest, least of all the trade union movement” (p 99).

The adversarial tactics used by companies to encourage their workers not to sign up to a union have been reported in many TUC documents as an example as to what we should wish to avoid in the UK. However, Adams warns, “there is also some evidence, though as yet limited, that US law and consultancy firms specialising in selling union avoidance strategies to companies are seeing good business prospects in Britain under a statutory procedure” (p 99). That managers in Britain are likely to take avoidance strategies over recognition is highlighted in a LRD report of a ‘leaked’ Newspaper Society document that gives advice on ways that “unscrupulous employers may seek to avoid recognising unions in the light of the Employment Relations Act” (September 1999: p 5). And yet, despite all the warnings, that the Labour Movement in the UK is geared up for the proposed change is clearly put by the LRD in a Millennium Special edition, which ponders:

2000 A new era?

Now it looks possible that unions will regenerate themselves in a more favourable climate. Union membership looks set to stabilise and unemployment is low. Attitudes to unions are recovering and the new recognition law, due in force later this year, will give impetus to the revived “organising” ethos of modern unions. The big question will be whether this will be sufficient to offset the strangling effect of ever-increasing global competition”

(January, 2000: p 21).

Boyer (1995) records that the “recent annual report issued by the World Bank (1995) may be describing a turning-point from union bashing to union recognition – provided

the unions adapt to the context of the next century. It is possible that trade unions of the Fordist period may indeed become obsolete and therefore decay; but at the same time, new unions could emerge during the decades to come” (p 555). During the Conservative administration where the climate for unions was hostile many unions turned to the concept of social partnership to maintain a presence in industrial relations. Those unions have seen that entering into partnership agreements with employers opens the opportunity to engage with employers in a positive, cooperative manner and is a way of maintaining their influence in the workplace. This partnership approach was continued after Labour came into power legitimised by the launch of the TUC ‘Partnership Institute’ in 2001. Even with the introduction of the organising model that advocated a more adversarial approach to organising, the TUC and many of its affiliates persevered with their partnership approach. Danford et al (2003) report that the TUC claimed to support this approach because partnership is seen as “the most effective approach to improve the working lives of trade union members and an essential element in any strategy to improve organisational performance” (p 18). Fairbrother and Stewart (2003) claim that the TUC Partnership Institute sought to support trade unions in securing partnership agreements through providing “research information on partnership arrangements, training programmes to trade unionists on partnership agreements, and to promote what is seen by the TUC to be best practice on these questions” (p 170)

The partnership approach adopted by the unions coincides with a philosophy which is assumed or embodied within the New Labour approach (legislative and otherwise) where, as Danford et al (2005) claim, “successive Labour governments’ quest for a ‘modernization’ of workplace relations” can lead to a situation where,

partnership is central to a modernizing agenda because it is seen as a means of permanently substituting cooperative relations for class conflict at work. The new cooperative relations are predicated on an extension of employee rights and a commitment by organized labour to work with employers, rather than against them, in the interests of improving organizational performance.

(pp 594-594)

Partnership therefore opens opportunities for the unions to engage with employers on policy issues introduced by the government. One area that appears to provide trade unions with a positive agenda and the opportunity to be pro-active in the industrial relations field is the emerging learning and skills agenda that the Labour government have placed a high priority on. As a result of the Moser report that highlighted the lack of qualifications held by Britain's workforce, seven million adults do not have a NVQ level two accreditation (the equivalent to five good GCSEs), and the gap in basic skills, numeracy, literacy and ICT, meant that our workers were lagging behind our major trade competitors, therefore the government put into action its skills strategy and provided for the unions to play an important role in this strategy. The government have been keen to promote the notion of younger workers to enter the workforce through means of an apprenticeship system and have developed schemes to encourage this strategy. Newly created Learning and Skills Councils have replaced the Training and Enterprise Boards established by the conservatives and have a stronger academic-business emphasis and both employer and trade union representation at the national and local level and are therefore corporatist in design. Evidence of the unions' proactive stance in this agenda can be found in the recent publication "Apprenticeships: a guide for union reps and negotiators" launched jointly by the TUC and the LSC. The booklet claims "The Government has identified Apprenticeships as the key work-based learning pathway, especially for school

leavers. They also provide a platform for progression to higher level skills. Unions should be at the forefront of developing and extending Apprenticeships across the sectors.” (September 2004).

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established and independent trade unions could bid into the fund to set up projects that would promote workplace learning and encourage workers to re-engage in some form of learning, be it vocational or for personal development. An important aspect of this strategy was the development of a new type of union representative, the Union Learning Representative (ULR), who are trained by the respective unions in being able to encourage their colleagues to engage in some form of learning. Their main purpose is to be able to provide confidential information and advice to workers and to signpost them to appropriate learning providers. According to a TUC publication “The Quiet Revolution” (2004) there are as many as 7,500 ULRs in the UK and their main purpose is “to support the learning of members at work [through] promoting the value of learning, offering learning information, providing front-line advice and guidance and negotiating learning with employers” (p 8).

Trade unions have recognised the potential that this programme presents to them and have pushed to be at the forefront of the Lifelong Learning strategy. This has led to training courses that provide for ULRs to be competent in running workplace learning centres where workers can enjoy a blended approach to learning with taught and e-learning facilities being offered. The TUC have established a ‘learning services’ department that works with the government ULF office and helps to administer and in

some cases broker union bids. Regional TUC learning services teams work as support mechanisms for unions involved in the programme. The launch of Learndirect as the government facility to promote e-learning has allowed unions to become involved in promoting this facility to workers and a TUC e-learning hub has emerged with over 100 partners offering e-learning to workers and the community across England.

The importance that the government places on union involvement in their skills strategy is evident not only from the continuance of the ULF which in 2005 goes into the ninth round of bidding and will distribute some fourteen million pounds to unions in this round, but also the decision to make legislative provision for ULRs similar to that provided for shop stewards and health and safety reps. This legislation allows for reasonable time off during working hours for ULRs to undergo training and to carry out their duties. This entitlement has been incorporated into the ACAS code of practice 3 (2003) “time off for trade union duties and activities”. The Quiet Revolution (2004) carries a Quote from the government minister for Skills and Vocational Education where he argues

Union Learning representatives now have a statutory right to reasonable time off with pay to carry out their duties and undergo training for the job. This is a significant step forward. Evaluation has shown that learning reps make a valuable impact on raising the in training and development among both workers and employers. The new rights for these learning specialists will help reinforce this role, boost their numbers and enable them to open up new learning opportunities to many thousands of workers who need them

Trade unions have bought into this agenda in a major way and have employed project workers to promote and engage members, families and friends into the learning agenda. There is no doubt that many unions see this development as part of a wider organising and recruitment strategy and as a proactive agenda that presents a positive message to existing and potential members. From the union perspective this form of employer engagement requires a participative approach that offers social partnership where, as Liz Smith of the TUC, writes “Trade unions are uniquely placed to create a supportive framework for learning and skills training in pursuit of career progression and personal development” (p 33). Danford et al (2003) warn that the “partnership approach runs the severe risk of inducing passivity among the rank and file and dependence of union activists on employers’ good will. Partnership agreements tend to be driven by the employers’ agendas and the prospects for engaging in [the]...’new politics of production’ are diminished as a result” (p 168).

This partnership approach contrasts sharply with the adversarial organising model. Heery (2000) recognises that although both approaches are often presented as alternative models for revitalising unions in the workplace, occasionally there can be a fusion of these two apparently contrasting approaches in some union strategies and cites the TUC approach as an example of this duality (p 21). It is this duality of approach by the unions that creates an atmosphere of anticipation as to whether they can capitalise in the climate of political change.

Conclusion.

Given the changes that have taken place in the economic, political and industrial climate in the UK since 1979 it is perhaps a testament to trade union resilience that they have survived in the economy and continue to fight to maintain and improve the conditions of peoples' working lives. The WIRS series has provided ample evidence of the decline in influence of trade unions in the UK industrial relations. However, it is clear from the survey results that no new industrial relations system has emerged to replace collective bargaining. In the absence of representation workers have to contend with unilateral regulation from their employer in the vast majority of instances. Unions have proved to be adaptable in the face of legislative change. This is evident in the way they have turned ballots for industrial action to a positive effect. Where they have overwhelmingly failed is to capture the hearts and minds of workers who are new to work and those who have taken up employment in green field sites. There are signs that the 'penny has dropped' and that unions are turning their attention to those areas. The TUC has started a training academy for organisers who are being trained to develop membership in low membership areas and the affiliated unions are taking them on. The new Labour government will not deliver on all the areas that unions' would like – but they have taken a more positive approach to the EU and, while they will not take us back to the industrial relations of the 1970s, neither will they take us back to the vagaries of the previous Conservative administrations. It is therefore in the light of such developments that it may be too early to write off trade unions as a force in modern industrial relations.

Therefore we enter a new century experiencing a major shift in emphasis away from the notion of ‘free collective bargaining’ that had been the hall-mark of British industrial relations over the last century. After surviving a period of eighteen years between 1979-1997 where market forces were held up as the determining factor in the economy, with no place for collective representation, and spurred on by the European model, trade unions appear to have adopted a dual approach. First, in the context of having to live in a more legalised climate, the unions appear to have turned to the method of legal enactment to achieve their goals. This involves a heavy reliance on the legislation emanating from Europe coupled with presenting the hand of partnership and co-operation in an atmosphere of moderation, where employers and employees can benefit in obtaining clear goals. Deery (1995) points to the Australian model where the “trade union movement has successfully developed more collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships with management ...Essentially, the Australian union approach has been to moderate its rent-seeking behaviour in favour of efficiency enhancement and wealth creation”; and goes on to claim that “There is evidence to suggest that collaborative relationships of this kind do not necessarily damage the commitment or loyalty of union members”. Deery suggests, “trade unions do have the capacity to create a system of industrial jurisprudence at the workplace which enables employee rights to be established and enforced. They do, however, require state support” (pp 540-541). This approach is now being adopted and there is some evidence of the partnership approach having an impact in the UK. An LRD (1999) article provides examples of partnership in companies spanning such diverse areas as engineering at Rolls Royce and British Aerospace; in banking at Barclay sand NatWest, and retailing at Tesco, Kingfisher and Boots (September: pp 11-13). However, Danford et al (2005) “offer a warning to those trade unions who

may be tempted to embrace employers' overtures to partnership in that they could risk incorporation in management and both alienating and further weakening

their rank-and-file base" (p 616) Nonetheless, partnership appears to remain as a feature of trade union activity. In a recent union publication an article on the merits of the partnership approach are extolled. The article refers to a particular company in the finance sector's exemplary partnership system that involves consultation with the union at an early stage, a process that the HR director claims gets a better result. The article claims that consultation 'is ingrained at all levels' and is 'the cornerstone of the relationship' (Unite (Amicus): The Activist, 2007: pp 28-29).

This partnership approach is tempered with the more confrontational aspect of the TUC recruiting academy that is preparing dedicated organisers to go into the field and recruit workers into trade unions. The emphasis is on Greenfield sites and on recruiting amongst previously difficult sections of the community i.e. part-time and women workers, and workers from ethnic minorities. The recruitment is not based on presenting a moderate partnership approach but in utilising the legislation to gain recognition and a return to collective bargaining, albeit under a legislative framework. The organising agenda and the recruitment and training of a new breed of union representative is also being expanded into the development of the Union Learning Rep whose role is to promote the learning and skills agenda in the workplace and encourage workers to embrace a learning culture. Many unions see this development as working in partnership with their organising strategy and is another tool in the recruitment tool-box. This dual position clearly shows how the unions are able to adapt the different methods of trade unionism put forward by the Webbs to suit the

political and economic climate in which they have to operate in order to maintain a presence in the world of work.

Key issues are identified from this chapter that will inform the analysis of the field work for this thesis. In particular the different approaches adopted by trade unions in order to continue to represent their members' interests in the face of technological, political and economic change will be relevant to understanding the nature and results of the field work undertaken. These different union approaches are shown to have what appear to be conflicting strategies that manifest themselves in the form of partnership arrangements that offer cooperation and consultation at one end of the spectrum; to that of following an aggressive, adversarial organising model to improve membership recruitment at the other extreme.

The impact of this apparently dichotomous approach by unions to address issues that emerge either through new employment legislation or as a result of a dynamic employer agenda influenced by technological and structural change will inform the research context and findings. The policy decisions made by the GPMU to face up to the challenges of falling membership and its potential loss of influence in the general printing sector will be analysed within the overarching context of contemporary trade union behaviour set out in this chapter.

Finally, the chapter also reveals the apparent opposing trend in the collective bargaining in print to the national trends. This apparent contradiction is investigated by posing questions, vis-à-vis why multi-employer collective bargaining remains

resilient in the General Print Sector when all the evidence supports that this form of collective bargaining is in decline in UK industrial relations? Does the continuation of national multi-employer bargaining in the sector create or hinder the circumstances in which workplace organisation can be conducive to union renewal?

Chapter Three.

Locating General Print in History: an overview of the advance in printing technology.

Introduction.

A key area for research in this thesis is the investigation into the nature and resilience of collective bargaining in the general print sector at both the national and workplace level. The aims and objectives of the research are set out in the introductory chapter and the purpose of this chapter is to help the reader to understand how the long established structure and historical development of printing technologies has played an important role in the complexities of workplace organisation and collective bargaining within the sector. Printing has made a major contribution to the enlightenment of people across the world through the production of the printed word. The general printing sector has been an important contributor to the UK economy in terms of employment and as an export earner. This chapter seeks to examine the dynamics of the general print sector in the UK, looking at its definition and structure and also the advance of technological change and how this impacts on the industry.

It is argued in this chapter that the changes that have occurred as a result of the dynamic transformation in printing technology have propelled what had been, despite the diverse nature of the sector, a relatively clearly defined printing operation towards one that has been subsumed into a wider information technology and communications

field and that those clearly defined tasks within the operation have become blurred in this new environment. If Moran (1964) was correct when he found that the industrial revolution had passed over the printing industry with no great effect (p 5), then, conversely, the information technology revolution has made a decisive impact. Since the 1920s print as an information provider has had to compete with the advance of radio and television technology and printing can no longer be acknowledged as a monopolistic provider of information and knowledge. However, the new technology of the late 20th and early 21st century has changed the industry and with it has brought major implications for both the employers and the workers in terms of investment, the manufacturing process, job stability and the skills required to produce the finished material. Print's impact on the future needs of society may be assured in the short term, but a major question mark must hang heavily over the long term position as the computer age progresses along the information highway unabated.

The Structure of the General Printing Sector.

Historically, print had been associated with a long period of relative stability in comparison to other manufacturing industries. From the mid 15th century to the mid 20th century innovation was slow to make an impact on the working practices and technology involved in producing printed information. Within this stable environment there emerged clear production units in the manufacturing process. Demarcation lines based on craft and skills were clearly drawn between the departments and within them. Child (1967), reflecting on the development of the printing process, notes that from the introduction of the printing process “each craftsman concentrated his energies on a narrow field of work” (p 15). He claimed that from the outset printing “consisted of two basic processes which remained practically unchanged in the

following four centuries”. Child identified these processes as composing and presswork and goes on to identify the semi and unskilled work involved in assembling the printed work into books (p 20). Gennard (1990) refers to these production areas as the five main departments: “composing, process and foundry; machine room; finishing; warehouse and despatch; and office and general management” (p 2).

The composing, or pre-press area, was where all the origination of copy was prepared for printing. The process and foundry areas emerged during the late 19th century and the early part of the 20th century when the then new technology provided the means to produce high volume printed material on rotary as opposed to flat bed machines and the production of printing cylinders instead of printing formes² were required. There are four main processes of printing in the general print sector with the most dominant process for over 400 years being letterpress. This process uses moveable ‘type or blocks to produce the image to be printed, which stands out on a raised surface’ (ibid. p 2). Letterpress was superseded by lithography during the second half of the 20th century and is a process which involves the use of a ‘plate on which the printing and non-printing are on the same level but the latter is kept damp and free from ink’ (ibid. p 2). Both letterpress and lithography could be performed on sheet-fed or rotary machinery using pre-cut sheets of paper or from a continuous reel or ‘web’ of paper. Web printing required rotary machinery and the letterpress process involved producing electrotypes or stereotypes in the process and foundry areas of the pre-press.

² Forme is the technical term for type matter and blocks assembled into pages and locked up in a metal chase ready for printing.

Photogravure, or gravure, is a printing process which uses cylinders on to which the image is etched and is nearly always a rotary process, using a continuous 'web' of paper. The cylinders are prepared in the process area of the pre-press department. This technology is challenged by 'web-offset', which uses the same printing process as conventional lithography. A Printing Industries Research Association (PIRA) document informs us that gravure is a mature technology that has not changed in principle since it was introduced at the turn of the century. The article goes on to claim that "Gravure's strengths are the high speed and pagination of the press... consistency of reproduction through the run... and the variable cut-off that heat-set webs cannot achieve (Birkenshaw et al, 1999: p 101). The final process used in the general print sector is flexography, which is commonly used in the packaging industry and in stationery manufacture. This is a versatile process that can be used to apply print to practically any material that can be fed continuously by a web. Birkenshaw et al (1999) claim that the simple design ensures consistency comparable with litho but that it is "also cost effective and undergoing enormous technical developments to improve reproduction quality" and that the flexibility of the process now offers "in-line press configurations of many units suitable for printing materials ranging from films to 600gsm board (pp 96-97).

The finishing and despatch departments required workers with experience in the tasks of folding printed sheets, counting, collating, gathering, stitching, binding, trimming, packing and despatch. Gennard and Bain (1995) claim that within these departments "a large proportion of this work was done by hand by semi-skilled or un-skilled workers, most of whom were women" (p 5). Warehousing accounted for not only storing finished goods before despatch but also cutting paper for use in the printing

process. Gennard and Bain (1995) go on to argue that the advance of new technology in the finishing area saw the introduction of more automated equipment which eventually led to a situation where “greater mechanisation brought a decline in employment as jobs which had previously required manual handling were eliminated” (p 28).

The Office and general management division of the printing process is where the bureaucracy of the process is managed. From estimating the cost of the job to ordering raw materials required, overseeing work in progress and to matters of payroll, raising invoices and paying bills. Traditionally these were separate tasks performed by individuals within the department but increasingly they have come to be integrated into the process through the introduction of computer systems and Management Information Systems (MIS). An article in PrintWeek claims that “MIS systems will both control the production and administration of a print business, and provide the software framework for online trading” (March 2000: p 38).

Defining the General Print Sector.

If it is true that a thirst for knowledge and information is key to human society, then, for almost 600 years, the predominant method of disseminating this information has been through the printed word. Print is generally believed to have been introduced to the Western World by Gutenberg around 1436, and was brought to, and expanded, in Britain by William Caxton from 1476, and his assistant William de Worde, who continued to publish and print books after Caxton’s death in 1491. De Worde, who is accredited with publishing over 800 titles, is best known for his publications of The Golden Legend and two of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (Printing 2000: p 5). The argument that print held an unmatched authority as the means of communication is

supported by the Printing 2000 claims that, “For 500 years, printing has served the business, educational and social life of the world’s nations, and until the 1920s and the birth of radio broadcasting, reigned supreme as the only permanent, authoritative communication” (p 8).

Traditional printing methods have faced many challenges since the 1920s in the form of television, electronic news and the micro-processor, but, as we enter the twenty-first century the printing industry faces challenges from, not only the internet, but also the advance of a new technology that is creating a digitalized, high-tech process that requires fewer people possessing different skills from those traditional workers hold. However, despite such challenges, Marsh (2000), in an article in the Financial Times, argues that “Even with the rapid growth in the use of the internet and other electronic means to carry information, people continue to learn about what is happening around them through reading the printed word” (May 18, p 1).

The printing industry today is still a major contributor to the UK economy. A Keynote (2000) publication reports that the “UK printing industry comes within the larger category of printing and publishing” and that this category is the UK’s fifth largest industry with a total turnover in 1999 of £24.68bn, of which printing accounted for £12.08bn (p 5). A more recent Keynote report (2005) claims that both the “UK printing market and the industry that supports it...play important roles in the UK economy. The printing market is important because...the industry is significant as it continues to be a net contributor to the UK balance of payments. Despite all its problems, the UK printing industry brings in several hundred million pounds a year from overseas sources”. The 2004 strategic plan for the printing industry claims that

in 2002 the printing industry had around 190,000 employees working in approximately 12,000 firms. The document further claims that the value of sales in the printing industry had risen to £14.1 billion and that the industry generated approximately 1.4% of the UK Gross Domestic Product with an approximate Gross Value Added of £6.9 billion. With a net capital expenditure of approximately £701 million, the industry made a positive contribution to the UK trade balance of £438 million (p 1).

The UK printing industry comprises of a newspaper sector and the diverse and complex general printing sector which is the main focus of this thesis. It is the very complex and diverse nature of general print that makes any broad or general definition of the sector difficult. Rainnie (1989) concurs that general print “is a diverse and far from homogenous sector” and quotes Delafons who noted that the industry “is composed of such a conglomeration of producing units, varying so much in size, in kinds of output, in methods and processes, in efficiency and quality, in structure, in organisation, in ownership and grouping, as to make almost any generalisation no more than narrowly applicable at best” (p 100). This is a sector that encompasses Magazine and Periodical Production; Advertising Literature; Books, Brochures, Children’s Books and Leaflets; Packaging; Business Cards and Stationery; Programs and Tickets; Printed Labels; Business Forms; Security Printing; Diaries and Calendars; and Postcards and Greetings Cards. David Ross, Economic Advisor to the BPIF, claims that despite printing having such a prominent position in the UK economy, it is one of the least documented. This, he claims, is partly because it has never been seen as a glamorous industry and partly because of its fragmented nature. And yet, Ross goes on to claim, printing is an industry which “serves all sectors of the

economy including public authorities, financial services, publishers, distributive services and the manufacturing industry” and that “there is virtually no business that does not need a printer” (quoted in Keynote, 2000: p 2).

A BPIF (1999) publication argues that the “structure of the UK printing industry reflects the diversity of its products and fragmented nature of its market with less than 20 printing companies employing more than 500 people and only around 550 employing between 50 and 499 people. These companies tend to specialise in a narrow range of products in national and international markets. There is a vast army of small firms, more than 12,000, which usually are general printers catering for a local market”. The table below, taken from this publication, provides a breakdown of the BPIF membership that reflects this range in company size:

Company size	Total
0-9	1017
10-24	751
25-49	307
50-99	142
100-149	55
150-249	29
250-499	24
500 plus	8
not classified	8

Source: British Printing Industries Federation



[[INDUSTRY INFOFILE](#)] [[Information file](#)]

It is the perpetuity of the small printer, employing 10 or fewer people, and who relies largely on the local market, supplying to an array of local businesses an almost bespoke service, that is most striking in the structure of the industry. Rainnie (1989) points out that this “great variation in the type of work...[tends] to perpetuate the existence of the small jobbing printer” and quotes Sadler and Barry who argue that such printers “tend to operate in a confined sphere. Primarily it is the local market which is concentrated upon which ‘means a small average size order, and this in turn implies that the local printer is often handling jobs that the larger regional or national concern would not find attractive. The smaller firm is, therefore, to some extent protected from competition from its bigger rivals’” Rainnie goes on to highlight the growth in small business in the sector indicating that it swelled from 4,309 establishments in 1968 to 7,613 establishments in 1979 (pp 100 -101). We know, from the industry strategic plan published in 2004, that the pattern of growth in small businesses has remained constant to represent 12,000 establishments today (p 1). This type of growth has to be put into perspective. Rainnie points out that while small businesses have been growing in number the overall working population in the general print sector has fallen from 212,716 in 1968 to 187,762 in 1979. The BPIF and Printing 2000 both put today’s working population at 170,000.

An interesting development that occurred during this expansion of small firms in the sector was the emergence of two new entrants to the market in the form of in-plant printing and instant print shops that could potentially compete directly with the small general printer. Gennard (1990) claims that these new entrants to the industry thrived on the growth of ‘miniature printing’ which developed outside of the mainstream general printing sector. In-plant printing found its base in local authorities,

nationalised industries, banks and insurance companies (p 12). The instant print shop emerged on the high street. Rainnie (1989) refers to a PISWP report which estimated that there were in 1983 some 1,500 in-plants and 1,800 franchise outlets providing instant print facilities and argues that this growth that began in the 1970s, gained momentum because “the unions conspicuously failed to react to the large scale introduction of small offset presses”. This was mainly because “they were not viewed as proper printing”. He goes on to claim that both employers and trade unions approached the rise of these new commodities with ambivalence and that the “slowness of traditional printers and unions to react to these new innovations allowed the rise of both in plant printing and the high street instant print shops” (pp 107-108). Gennard (1990) puts this ambivalence on the part of employers and unions down to the fact that in the early days of their emergence the threat they posed to traditional printers was “hidden whilst the conventional printing industry experienced over-full employment”. However this situation changed from 1989 onwards when the general trade began to experience greater competition from foreign printers in both the UK and export markets in an increasingly international market due to the “limitations on the import and export of print products which had existed forty years previously [being] removed” (p 12). Today, in-plant printing is still playing a major role in market and, according to an article in Print Week, many are moving away from low quality mono or black and spot colour work to full four colour process work. The article records this move by in-plants in local authorities, insurance companies and university print facilities (19 May, 2000: pp 37-38).

At the other end of the scale there has been a marked change in the ownership of larger printing companies. Keynote Market Report 2000 points to the “considerable

amount of takeover activity in the industry” (p 1) and go on to record that “since mid-1998, the printing industry has probably changed more than it has in the previous five years. A massive restructuring has been going on involving disposals, acquisitions and substantial changes in ownership. The most notable feature is the rise in foreign ownership” (p 47). The report points out that the major players in the take-over activity are North American and Irish based, with some activity from French book producer Chevrillon Phillipe Industrie. Irish companies involved in taking over UK companies include Jefferson Smurfit, Adare, Clondalkin, James Crean and Kelvinside (p 17). As a result of this flurry of activity “Famous names such as Watmoughs, BPC, Field packaging, Sidlaw, Wace, Tinsley Robor, Cox and Wyman and Liberfabrica, and a part of Ferguson have all been bought by foreign companies”(p 17). Reasons for this increase in take over activity are reported to be due to printing firms being “poorly rated by UK financial institutions, which has helped to weaken their share price and therefore enable foreign companies to move in and buy them at a reasonable price” (Keynote 2000: p 6).

A Labour Market Survey report indicates that for printing and service activities related to printing there were 197,700 employed in this sector at December 1999 of whom 134,300 were full-time male employees; 3,800 were part-time male employees; 51,000 were full-time female employees; and 8,600 were part-time female employees. As indicated earlier, both the BPIF and Printing 2000 claim that 170,000 of these workers are employed in the general print sector. These statistics show that the printing industry is still dominated by male full-time employment, a phenomenon that has changed little over its history despite the technology changes that have been introduced to the industry. Printing 2000 notes that historically women in the industry

were usually found in the low grade jobs in the finishing departments of firms, but claims that “Today women are rightly climbing to every level of printing management” and further claims that “Modern computerised machinery represents no barrier to female skills and women are finding their place in sophisticated production roles” (p 37).

Unfortunately, these claims are not borne out by the statistics on employment in the general printing industry. The BPIF (November, 2005) figures for Modern Apprenticeship and Trainee intake into the industry record that only 8% of recruits are female, the figures also reveal that of the current cohort of trainees only one is from an ethnic minority and that the overwhelming majority of trainees (98%) are White British (source: BPIF Training, London) . BPIF Training has become an important training provider for the industry in recent years accessing government funds to deliver training programmes that cover Work Based Learning and Apprenticeships along with their more traditional training role of offering management courses to members. The disaggregated trainee figures indicate that the make-up of the workforce is continuing to reflect a white, male majority. There is little support from the evidence of a local survey undertaken in printing firms located the Herts and Essex area (see Healy et al 2002 pp12-13). This survey, undertaken in late 1998, produced scant evidence of women employed in the skilled areas of production and found that their employment was generally confined to the finishing departments and in administration. Such findings are in line with the research undertaken some sixteen years earlier by Webster who claims the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU) Women and Technology Studies survey (1982) confirmed that women “in printing and publishing were concentrated in labour intensive office and unskilled production operations” (1996: p 71). Webster later argues that generally, “There still appears to

be a remarkable degree of stability in the sexual division of labour, with women remaining concentrated very heavily in clerical occupations, secretarial occupations, personal service occupations and other low grade occupations” (p 107).

The Changing Technology and the Dynamic of Print.

The historical aspect of the development of general printing.

In coming to an understanding of the technological advance and dynamics of the general printing trade it is important, in the first instance, to consider the historical and social background of the industry. Until recently the printing industry had been characterised by its highly stable nature and the establishment of clearly defined production units. This stability was reflected by long periods during which technological change was not experienced - to the extent that Printing 2000 records that “until the turn of the 19th century there was no substantial technical progress in the way printing was carried out” (p 6). Eventually there emerged clearly defined production units that employed highly skilled craftsmen who jealously maintained and guarded their craft. Webster (1996) reflects on the male domination of craft work and argues “In craft work, men’s jobs have come to be defined as ‘skilled’ because workers in these jobs have historically organised strongly in defence of their interests and have striven particularly hard to restrict entry (by young workers, or by women workers, or by those not following the apprenticeship route) to their line of work” (p 48). From early times printing craftsmen came to achieve journeymen status through being apprenticed to the trade for a seven-year period and sought to maintain their standard of living through restricting the number of apprentices brought into the trade, following the practice that had been initiated through State control over the printing

process (see Musson, 1954: p 8). According to an article in *Printing 2000*, the 16th and 17th century printer “would have been one of the best educated, intelligent and influential artisans in his community” (p5).

A brief examination of the history of the printing industry reflects the continuity that was present in the trade. Moran (1964) points to the involvement of Gutenberg, who developed the use of moveable type that was moulded to a constant height and where those pieces of type were locked on a flat surface and “placed under a flat plane known as a platen”. This was used to produce a printed sheet from a wooden press whose design was based on a wine or cheese press (pp 2-3). This became the model for printing that was dominant from its introduction to England by William Caxton in 1476 until the manufacture of the first all-iron press by Earl Stanhope in 1798. This was to become known as the letterpress method of printing which saw the raised typeface, which was made in negative relief, transfer the image onto paper. Wooden presses were replaced by iron presses, and in 1814 a steam driven press built by Friedrich Koenig was used to print the *Times* in London, but the process and methodology remained constant. Musson (1954) argues that “throughout the period up to 1850, we have to deal with hand compositors, still carrying on their trade in a fashion centuries old, steeped in craft Guild traditions and comparatively untouched by any ‘industrial revolution’ in their art” (p 18). Rainnie (1989) makes reference to the snail’s pace which, until recently, the printing industry has responded to change (p 107) and goes on to argue that “even in the mid-1970s,...the most common form of press in small printers was the Heidelberg Platen, hardly a new innovation – indeed William Caxton would not have much difficulty in recognising the method of working” (p 109).

The main change to the printing process during this long period of evolution was the division of the tasks in the process. Originally printing had been confined to being undertaken in the great Abbeys of the main towns of England: Westminster in London; St. Albans; and York. Wide circulation was not required as the level of illiteracy was high and printed work was highly controlled by the State through orders of the Star Council to ensure that nothing of a seditious nature was printed (see Musson, 1954: p 2). During this period the journeyman printer would not only set the type in preparation for printing, but would also produce the printed sheet on the press. As the state controls were relaxed and literacy improved, the printed word became more in demand and the process was speeded up through the introduction of more sophisticated presses. However, this was a long process of change. Moran (1964) reflects that “printing consisted essentially of a series of skilled handicrafts and continued to be so until the middle of the nineteenth century” (p1). It was over this period of time that compositors, whose main task was to set and correct the type, became distinct from machine operators, or managers as they were known, whose task was to produce the printed sheets and bookbinders who finished the printed work. Musson (1954) claims that even by 1850 there was little differentiation between the tasks in the provinces but that “in the more highly developed metropolitan trade specialization developed and compositors, pressmen, and machinemen became distinct”. (p 18). Bundock (1959) refers to the separate operation of finishing as a ‘craft’ that can be traced back to “1780 and for some time previously” (p 2). Child (1967) makes reference to the endeavours of bookbinders in 1782 where their early attempts at collective bargaining brought about a reduction in the working week (p

62). However, there is little documentation on early bookbinders or how they carried out their trade.

From the mid -1850s to the late 1950s the composing area was the boiler house of the printing shop. All the originating copy, irrespective of the form in which it was presented, had to be set and corrected in this area. This process had to be undertaken by hand, placing individual letters of type into a composing stick to complete each line of copy and then locking the completed lines in a printing forme to produce a page ready for printing. Compositors had to not only be able to set the type accurately, but also had to have the skill to justify a page of type and to be able to impose the pages in order for them to finish in the right order. Compositors regarded themselves as the elite of the industry. The first innovation to enter the compositors' world was the introduction of mechanical type-setting. David Bruce in New York built the first successful mechanical type-casting machine in 1838. In 1886 Ottmar Mergenthaler invented the linotype machine. The introduction of mechanical type-setting saw the emergence of volume type-setting that was revolutionary in the newspaper (linotype) and book reproduction (monotype) sectors, but hand type-setting was still being taught and used up to the late 1960s.

The composing and printing rooms continued to be male dominated 'craft' areas. Women began to show a presence in the industry from around 1850 but were confined to the bookbinding area. Cockburn (1983) records that their numbers in this area rose from 3,500 in 1851 to 14,200 in 1891 and that "they often did skilled work, but their skill did not win them the earnings that a craftsman could command." Cockburn goes on to register the appalling pay and conditions that the women suffered and that their

tasks of folding finished sheets and collating were referred to as 'women's work' and that it was only when automation came into the binderies to cope with mass production that rows over demarcation arose. In contrast, she claims that in "printing proper" (referring to composing and machine minding), "no more than one in a hundred was a woman" (p 23). Cockburn points to the example of women being drafted into the ranks of the 'craftsman' during the World Wars but even here their efforts were undermined by the men bringing their retired colleagues back to the trade, despite a dilutee agreement which ensured that women were the first to be dismissed on the premise that "jobs for our boys and women to keep home for them" ensured that few females remained to work at craft jobs after the end of hostilities" (p 37). This is a situation that has not changed much today!

Letterpress remained the dominant method of print until the 1960s when it began to be usurped by the lithographic process. Lithography was invented by Aloysius Senefelder in 1798 and "opened the way for more printed illustrations" to be incorporated into publications (Printing 2000: p 6). Original lithographic printing was cumbersome and time consuming. It involved the use of an image being etched onto lithographic stones made from limestone and was restricted to supplementing printed work with illustration. All the text had to be originated in the composing area. It was the development of the photographic process and the ability to prepare film in negative and positive form in order to produce a printing plate that could incorporate both text and illustration, and which could reproduce a better quality colour print, that brought lithography into its own.

In the same way that lithography usurped letterpress printing in the sheet-fed area of printing the same pattern was followed in the reel-fed or 'web' area of printing. As volume demand grew and illustration and colour became more popular the 'Gravure' method of printing emerged as the dominant choice for long run magazine, periodical and brochure work. Gravure used an engraved cylinder to produce copy but was still essentially a letterpress process in that the image was transferred directly from the cylinder to the paper, in this case a continuous reel. Web-offset was a lithographic process which used exactly the same printing method as its sheet-fed model, but, like gravure, was capable of delivering folded copy ready for stitching and binding, cutting out the need for the folding stage in the finishing department. Eventually 'Webs' were designed which could provide in-line finishing further eroding the need for large finishing departments. Lithographic web-offset printing is now the dominant form of volume printing in the UK and can be found across the whole spectrum of production from newspapers, magazines, periodicals and journals.

Type still had to be set by compositors but instead of preparing the text for printing by letterpress, they produced a proof on paper that was camera-ready copy. A new skill emerged in the form of the lithographic planner, whose task it was to plan the page incorporating text and illustration and to impose the pages. Camera operators supplemented the planners along with workers who possessed skills in colour separation and plate making. This process created a new origination area with precisely the same high profile as the composing area. It was the introduction of the photo-typesetter during the early 1960s that allowed workers in this new origination area to cut their links with the traditional composing area and to process work in its entirety through outputting copy direct to film that paved the way for lithography to

confine letterpress printing to the annals of history and become the dominant process for printing in the general printing sector. A PIRA (1999) publication supports that “the dominant printing technology today is offset lithography” (Birkenshaw et al, p 33).

The emergence of the new technology and its impact on general printing.

Gennard (1986) puts the 'time gap' in technical innovation in pre-press into context when he records that, where hand and mechanical composition dominated for 400 years and 50 years respectively, photocomposition only dominated for 15 years. This short-lived innovation has been superseded by computer technology, which is impacting on the industry almost on a daily basis (p127). During the period 1970 to 1990 there emerged the trade reproduction house whose task was to service the printing trade. This separation of the task from the printer to trade house was mainly due to the expense involved in equipping a 'repro' department and that the cost could be more effectively spread if one repro house serviced several printing companies. The repro houses performed all the pre-press tasks up to final film and could supply the litho plate for the printer to produce the finished product. Some printers retained the plate making function themselves in order to avoid 'down time' if a plate was defective. Some large printers, for example in magazine production, had their own repro departments, but given that the general structure of the industry was made up of small enterprises, it made sense to outsource the pre-press to a repro house. Digitisation has created a problem for the skilled workers employed in repro houses as computer based technology has transferred all the manual tasks to screen. Birkenesaw et al (1999) point out that

“Digital technology is the major driver for change across the industry. It is forcing change from a traditional, craft-based approach toward a controlled, manufacturing-based one. Digitization has revolutionized prepress. Desktop publishing allowed publishers to handle many elements of graphic design and preparation themselves on relatively low-cost equipment without the craft

skills previously needed. Boundaries between design and production have disappeared, typesetters have declined and repro houses are changing”

The article goes on to argue that “Printing is moving away from being a well defined industry in its own right to one that is part of a wider communications industry... These changes mean that print no longer holds a monopolistic position for the production of permanent published records” (pp 34-35).

The clearly defined areas of production that had existed, where copy was set in pre-press, printed in the machine room, and finished in the bindery are beginning to become somewhat blurred. Gennard (1986) argues, “Computer technology application to the printing industry is removing boundaries between previously separated tasks” (p 127). There has been greater automation and computerisation to the press and post press areas. The printing process is now mainly controlled through computer setting of ink coverage and registration. In a PIRA projection on the technical developments in print over the next five years Birkenshaw et al (1999) argue that the “most significant development in conventional printing processes is the application of automation and control. All press control systems are now computer systems of some sort” (p 61). In post press computer logic has been introduced to automated folding and stitching and trimming equipment and to guillotines, but in neither area to the extent of that experienced in pre-press.

It is now clear that the introduction of computer technology, such as desk top publishing, has allowed the origination of material for printing to be generated outside of the general printing sphere of influence and can now be produced by the publishing houses, or indeed by the originating author. Pre-press is the area that has been most affected by the advance of computer technology, to the extent that it is now the most

computerised area of print. A Print Week article claims that by the 1990s, “as the desk-top publishing revolution zoomed towards professional quality output, page layout was being done in-house by both designers and printers” (12 May 2000: p 37) This ability to produce copy externally is further enhanced by the dynamics of telecommunication. The introduction of the integrated services digital network (ISDN) by telecom companies means that work originated on desk top publishing equipment such as Apple Mac’s can be transmitted down a telephone line to the printer who has been chosen to produce the order. The digitization of the process is now so advanced that it is possible to eliminate the film output stage and laser print the required copy directly to plate, a system known as computer to plate (CtP) technology. The computerisation is undermining analogue reproduction and film is due to play a much lesser role in the printing process.

It is PIRA’s reference to printing as no longer holding a monopolistic position for the production of permanent records that can be seen as having the greatest impact on the industry. Printing has always been a method for the mass production of information i.e. a book being identically reproduced many thousands of times. The advance of digital technology brings with it the opportunity to provide variable, customised literature which threatens the stability of many small printers. Large format printers who produce magazines and periodicals by volume (PIRA refer to this as the print and distribute model 1999: p 57) face no threat from this concept in the short term.

Birkenshaw et al (1999) claim that “Digital printing spans the gap between desktop computer printing and ‘traditional’ printing. As such, it consumerizes the printing process, shifting the emphasis from output to content” (p 57). Digitisation has already transformed the direct mail sector of the industry. Ink-jet technology means that

information can now be personalised. However, this technology is limited to producing high speed labelling and addressing applications which means the personalisation is restricted to sending the same mail shot individually addressed (see Birkenshaw et al: 1999, P 108).

The main challenge to conventional lithographic printing is coming via digitisation in the form of not only direct image printing where the printed area is laser printed direct to a cylinder on the press for volume reproduction, but also from variable image digital printing where each printed copy can be completely different from the previous. This technology is possible due to the advance of digital printing where the data is stored and outputted through a computer to a digital print engine. This is a system that requires no long periods of make-ready time as in conventional printing; does not use the inks or chemicals associated with conventional printing; and is a clean user-friendly system. The operation is essentially computer driven and requires only one operator. The advance of this type of technology takes print out of its monopolistic environment and merges it into the wider definition of communications and information technology. An article in Print Week by John Davies refers to a new report from PIRA which anticipates the rapid expansion of digital print over the next five years. The report claims that digital print is not replacing offset printing “but will co-exist by creating new markets, typically jobs with run lengths of less than 1,000”. This is due to the faster turnaround times presented by digital print which can be as little as 24 hours compared to typical litho times of 48 hours (May, 2000: p16).

At present digital printing is offering only limited competition to conventional print, and is concentrated in the small run area of the industry, due to the prohibitive costs

required to invest. However, computer technology is having an impact on conventional printing in other ways. Management Information Systems (MIS) are beginning to be introduced to press rooms which bring with them workflow management. These systems will provide spectral measurement to colour management ensuring quick make ready and consistent quality of reproduction. Simon Eccles, writing in Print Week, argues that where MIS was originally confined to costing, estimating and production controlling “Boundaries are beginning to blur between business administration and new intelligent workflow management systems for pre-press and digital printing”. Eccles claims that “the future is now” and that the system would involve the setting up of a link between the printer and a customer, probably using a PDF (portable document format) file, which would have a digital job ticket attached. The job ticket would carry instructions which:

“would be picked up by a production planning system, which reads the job’s requirements and priorities and allocates to it pre-press, print and finishing resources. After scheduling these, it will then pass the job to the start of an appropriate production pipeline which will apply colour management, trapping and imposition...for conventional presses...the job set-up and run-length instructions are added to a list which pops up on the control desk’s monitor when the job is due to go on the machine. Similar instructions would be passed to finishing systems where computer controls are appropriate”

(March, 2000: p 38).

The PIRA forecast supports Eccles’ claim that MIS use will improve business performance and predicts that: “MIS will develop beyond internal company use as the communication hub” (Birkenshaw et al,1999: p 71).

Conclusion

In mapping out the historical evolution of the printing processes employed in the sector several concepts have emerged that will influence the structure of the thesis and will act as a common thread that links the chapters. The general printing sector

remains too diverse and complex to apply any general definition to. Small firms dominate it with the majority of companies employing fewer than 20 people, and yet this is an important sector to the UK economy in terms of employment and as an export earner. The industry remains highly competitive and there has been an unprecedented amount of activity in takeovers and change in ownership among the larger companies in the sector and today we see a greater foreign presence among the owners than previously experienced.

The development of a strong trade union influence in the workplace from a very early stage in the introduction of printing is an important factor in the advance of workplace organisation and the progression to a union closed shop that was made effective through the craft apprenticeship system. This long tradition of creating craft elitism has had an impact on the gendered structure of the industry with male workers dominating the higher paid craft jobs and women being largely confined to the lower skilled, lower paid tasks. This gender gap has been maintained even in the face of an increasing pace of technological change.

The advance of technology in the industry has had a massive impact on the working practices and job stability. What had been regarded as a well developed, relatively stable industry, which was slow to adapt to change, has suddenly been inundated by innovation in computer and digital technology. This transformation has had the effect of undermining the craft tradition that was prevalent and has led to a deskilling exercise that has resulted in fewer people, possessing different skills and abilities, compared to those who were employed before them. Expert opinion forecasts life for the industry in the short term but anticipates that the technical revolution will

subsume printing within the wider communications and information technology field, and eventually to lose its superiority as the major provider of information along with its unique identity.

Chapter Four.

Literature Review.

Industrial Relations and collective bargaining in the General Print Sector.

Introduction.

Printed on the dust cover of Child's (1967) study of industrial relations in the UK printing industry are the words:

In printing, more than most other industries, to understand the present problems requires a knowledge of the past. Tradition and precedent always play a strong part in craft union ideology, and the printers' unions have become a byword for their close control of the use of labour.

This passage reflects the sentiments of this chapter, which aims to show how the historical development of multi-employer national bargaining has shaped contemporary patterns of joint regulation in the general print sector. Chapter Two has mapped the progression of industrial relations in the UK, and the methods that trade unions adopt to maintain their influence in the workplace and remain relevant to workers. Such an analysis helps explain why the changing content of bargaining issues has become a central tenet to the continuity of the agreement. The significance of this study lies in the enduring commitment to national, multi-employer bargaining in the general print sector of the printing industry as a means for resolving industrial relations issues in that sector. It places the phenomenon of national bargaining within the wider context of a diminishing reliance of this method of industrial relations in the manufacturing sector of the UK economy, particularly in the face of an adverse

economic and political climate that has prevailed throughout the 1980s – 1990s. The dynamic characteristic of the agreement is illustrated through a commentary on the infrequent disputes that have interrupted the fluency of the agreement and how a dispute in the early 1990s brought to prominence the issues of flexibility and training to the national agreement.

The historical focus of this chapter will go some way to explaining the contemporary structure and dynamics of the sector and the importance of multi-employer bargaining to key actors in general print. Central to this are the issues that become the focus of bargaining; and how concessions can help, on the one hand, to smooth the path for change for employers, while on the other, help maintain some control in the workplace for union members affected by the changes. The chapter introduces the key actors in national bargaining and assesses the historical development of joint regulation during the post-war period. Against this historical backcloth, the skirmishing over the content and survival of joint regulation are considered.

Context - The parties to national bargaining.

The printing industry today continues to be a major contributor to the UK economy and the nature, size and structure of the general printing sector has already been explained in detail in the historical review. A distinguishing feature of industrial relations in the general printing sector is the role played by both the trade union and the employers' association in maintaining a comprehensive national agreement covering an array of issues including minimum pay for grade rates, the length of the working week, overtime and shift premia, holidays and holiday pay, sick pay, a disputes and grievance procedure and training for the sector. This is one of the last

remaining examples of multi-employer collective bargaining that exists in the private, manufacturing sector and the agreement is reviewed annually by the Graphical Paper and Media Union (GPMU), representing workers interests, and the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF), representing the employers.

The influential WIRS/WERS survey series have depicted the move away from multi-employer pay bargaining in the UK economy (see Culley et al, 1999: pp 187-188).

However, despite this growing trend, the BPIF continues to be a major participant in industrial relations in the general printing sector. The BPIF is a national organisation representing companies in printing, typesetting, plate-making and bookbinding. The member companies control the management of the organisation and, while industrial relations are seen to be their primary role, the federation also acts in the capacity of a commercial trade association³. The history of employer federation in general printing reveals a resilient pattern of tradition within the industry. Howe (1950) traces the origins of the Federation of Master Printers and Allied Trades of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (FMP) back to its inception in 1901 and records that the then federations' function was to co-ordinate the activities of the many local organisations that were then in existence (pp 1-5). The federation, later to become known as the British Federation of Master Printers (BFMP), changed its name again in 1974 to the BPIF, a move that Gennard (1990) claims was designed to reflect the emphasis of the organisation away from a master-servant relationship to the more politically acceptable management-employee status (p 16).

³ For a commentary on the dual role of Employers' Associations see Sisson (1983); and Salamon (1998)

Until 1980 the BPIF and the Newspaper Society (NS) negotiated jointly with the print unions in a multi-employer forum for the industry⁴. A dispute over the introduction of the thirty-seven and a half hour week in 1980 had led to the temporary ending of the agreements. Gennard (1990), (in his history of the National Graphical Association (NGA)) records that the “BPIF’s attempt to lock out the NGA was a fiasco”. The BPIF member companies could not match the solidarity shown by union members and “by the end of 1980 the vast majority of NGA members, who worked under the BPIF agreement, were covered by interim deals which met the union’s claim” (p 412). The NS had not shown the same disunity. Gennard (1990) argues that, “unlike the BPIF, the Newspaper Society was not in disarray”. He claims that their lock-out had been more effective and that they had been able to continue production with the aid of non-union personnel. This ability was “a lesson that was not forgotten by NS members when they set about implementing new technology in the mid-1980s” (p 415). After the 1980 dispute the NS carried out separate negotiations with the unions, but ultimately ended their national agreement with the NUJ in 1987 (Smith and Morton, 1990: p 107) and with NGA/SOGAT in 1991 (Smith and Morton, 1993: p 107).

The lead given by the NS in adopting policies of union exclusion culminating in the ending of collective agreements has not been followed in the general printing sector.

Despite the strain that the BPIF agreement has been under in recent times both sides

⁴ Traditionally, the craft unions were recognised as being able to wield a high degree of unilateral power over employers. Hobsbawm argues “the whole point of the classical craft union was to keep the trade, and entry to the trade, restricted – quite apart from the actuarial arguments for excluding those less healthy or qualified workers who would merely drain the union funds while weakening bargaining strength in other ways (1964: p 323). Clegg et al noted that, early in the 19th century, “printers had developed their methods of control beyond the capacity of most other crafts” and had, via the chapel organisation, “mobilized shop solidarity” (1964: p 10). Howe traces the early beginnings of multi-employer bargaining in the industry and records that in a response to the disparate claims for advances in terms and conditions from the individual print unions it was agreed in 1920 that a conference should take place between the Employer’s Federation and a union delegation representing all unions under the banner of the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation (P&KTF). While this forum was itself fraught with difficulties it non-the-less set the pattern for future agreements (p 76).

have persevered to maintain the agreement. This is possibly a reflection of the differences in the dynamism of the two sectors. The concentration of ownership in the newspaper sector and the homogenous character of the product are in clear contrast to the general print sector that is dominated by small employer units producing a diverse range of products. These differences made for differing approaches in dealing with 'the union issue'. The large groups in newspaper production had the ability to buy out the terms and conditions of skilled union members, by way of enhanced redundancy payments, and to replace them with a lower paid alternative workforce (see Smith and Morton, 1990: pp 114-115). Conversely, in the general trade, with its pervasiveness of small employers and diverse product base, the trend has been more towards the marginalisation of union influence through the national agreement and that, outside of newspapers, "union exclusion would remain the exception" (Smith and Morton, 1990: p 120).

Historically, the printing industry had been characterised by its high number of unions representing a variety of craft, skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled workers. Until 1973 those print unions acted in concert affiliating to the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation (P&KTF) and, as recorded by Gennard and Bain (1995), in 1955 16 unions with a total membership of 320,525 were affiliated, with membership peaking at 405,793 in 1971. The authors go on to provide a definition of the P&KTF's role, arguing:

[it's] aim was unity of action amongst its affiliated unions, to obtain uniform working conditions in different sectors of the industry, to prevent the occurrence of strikes and in the event of disputes arising to encourage their settlement by peaceful means, to establish a central fund for mutual assistance and to conduct research and inquiry work

(p 343).

The cumbersome machinery of the P&KTF restricted its ability to deliver its aims, not least the issue that “affiliated unions jealously guarded their autonomy”. The federation did negotiate nationally on the issues of the working week, holidays and apprentice pay rates, and did have binding arbitration rights over inter-union disputes i.e. demarcation lines, but “Wages...were always viewed as a matter of autonomous concern to the individual unions” (Gennard, 1990: pp 253-254) and, as a result, any improvement in pay had to be ratified by a ballot vote of each individual union.

What had begun to concentrate the minds of activists in the unions was the dramatic change in technology that was beginning to impact on the industry, blurring what had previously been clear demarcation lines. The slow pace of change in the industry referred to in Chapter Three (see pp 104 and 109) was being superseded by a rapid influx of new and faster technology and the most influential development of change was the advance of the lithographic printing process. The introduction of photocomposition and the advance of camera technology meant that type and image could be shot directly to film and the faster ‘make-ready’ times experienced in litho printing made the process more cost effective compared to the somewhat cumbersome letterpress process.

The changes in technology began to blur the demarcation lines between the different printing crafts and inter-union disputes began to erupt over issues of whose job it was. One method of addressing this issue was to begin to amalgamate the craft unions to prevent inter-union conflict. Gennard (1990) cites a London Typographical Society (LTS) report in 1956 that states:

But there can be little doubt that these problems can and must be solved given the goodwill for it is becoming increasingly evident that the only hope of

avoiding inter-union clashes and disputes on lines of demarcation is by some form of amalgamation of the present craft societies.

(p 85)

Linked to these technological changes was the problem that London was beginning to lose its place as a major printing centre with work beginning to flow to the provinces. This placed pressure on London print workers who wanted to 'follow the job' as they had to transfer to a different society to obtain work – a society who were just as protective of jobs as the one they were leaving (see Gennard, 1990, p 93). However, it was 1964 before the first of these amalgamations took place. The London Typographical Society (LTS) and the Typographical Association (TA), the two major letterpress unions in England and Wales agreed to merge to form the NGA and by 1968 all five letterpress unions had merged, not through any sense of union solidarity or for the greater good of the movement, more out of self-interest. Gennard (1990: p 99) records how a Stereotypers' delegate to the 1967 delegate conference succinctly put it:

There has been talk through the years that the stereotyper will always be here: there will always be stereotypers. This was the cry I heard when I was young. But everyone must know now that the future of our trade is in jeopardy, to say the least of it, with all the new techniques, the processes, the materials and all the rest of it that have overtaken us, especially offset printing, we cannot do anything else in all reason but to marry ourselves to a more powerful organisation.

One by one the craft unions joined the NGA, including the lithographers union the Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Printers (ASLP) in 1969, until only two craft unions remained outside of the NGA, the Society of Lithographic Designers and

Engravers (SLADE) and Scottish Typographical Association (STA). Running parallel to this process was the formation of SOGAT through the merging of semi-skilled and un-skilled workers' unions. The STA took the critical decision to spurn the NGA and to join forces with SOGAT presenting to them the opportunity to have 'craft' workers in their organisation. 1982 was a critical year for trade unions in the sector.

NATSOPA joined SOGAT to create SOGAT 1982 and SLADE joined the NGA, creating NGA 1982. Two unions, rather than the 16 that had been in existence in 1950, now represented workers in the industry. 1991 saw the merger of NGA and SOGAT to form the GPMU. Again, this was a merger based on survival with the NGA General Secretary warning conference delegates in 1990 that the failure to amalgamate would mean "the ability to do what we exist for – protect our members employment and enhance their wages and conditions – will inevitably commence a sharp and unstoppable decline" (Telford, 2001).

Industrial relations in the general print sector – 'the dark days of the past'.

There is an imagery of industrial relations in the general printing industry that portrays a battle that is constantly taking place over control of the workplace. Francis presents a recent example of this type of perception in her leader column in Printweek (17th November 2000), where she postulates that the GPMU is required to modernize its approach 'in an industry with a long history of poor industrial relations' where many 'managers are of an age group who remember all too well the dark days of the past'. She goes on to argue that the GPMU needs to 'adjust its mindset to the present and future realities of today's industry' (p 20). These comments were immediately

refuted by the GPMU General Secretary, Tony Dubbins, who retorted that such remarks were ‘utter rubbish’ and enquired as to the source of her knowledge ‘as all of our records, including government records, suggest that this has not been the case for many years’. Dubbins goes on to express his point of view that the GPMU

Is willing and able to work in partnership with progressive employers and that this is the way forward for our industry, and the GPMU is, as always, willing to play its part in ensuring the industry, companies and GPMU members, have a positive outlook for the future and work towards the goals of profitability, efficiency and job security, while at the same time safeguarding our members’ terms and conditions in a sensible and constructive way

(Printweek, 8th December, 2000: p 19).

This type of exchange is indicative of the perception of a hostile relationship that exists between management and union in the typical printing establishment, and yet the scant evidence that is available on this matter does not appear to support this position. The only recorded all out strike across the printing sector took place in 1959⁵. Roe and Telford (2004) remark on the uniqueness of this strike situation across the sector, arguing that, in a dispute where “on 20 June [1959] 120,000 printing workers ceased work; 4000 printers and 1000 newspaper offices were affected. The strike was to last six weeks and *a large part of the union membership engaged in strike action for the first time*” (p 164: my emphasis). Gennard (1990), in his account of the dispute, sums up the reactions of both sides declaring:

The 1959 strike had been a traumatic experience for both sides. There was a feeling that the situation should not be allowed to arise again. Many on both sides thought, in retrospect, that the dispute had been a self inflicted wound since in the final analysis both sides had to settle their differences round the table... There had been little effort to close the gap between the two sides and tempers at times were high. Both the unions and employers realized that, now the dispute was over, they must continue to live

⁵ Detailed accounts of this dispute can be found in Child (1967), Gennard (1990) and Gennard and Bain (1995)

together and there was little purpose in laying the blame for what had gone before. A fresh start was needed.

(pp 385-386)

Gennard (1990) turns his attention to the issue that, between 1968-1989, the NGA were involved in a series of disputes over the introduction of new technology into the industry but makes the distinction that “the bulk of these disputes were in the newspaper field and some of them, particularly the Messenger and Wapping disputes, were the focus of heavy media attention” (p 468)⁶. It is therefore important, in the first instance, to understand the structure of the printing sector, of which the general printing trade forms a part. Gennard (1990), (in his history of the NGA) argues that the media attention attributed to the newspaper unrest “created the impression in the minds of the general public that the NGA is predominately a newspaper union”, but provides statistics to show that this was far from true and that in fact only 8% of the total membership of the NGA was employed in newspaper production (ibid). Elger and Simpson (1994) reiterate this distinction arguing their “research on the trade union side confirmed that the newspaper and general printing sectors were seen to be quite distinct and that management – and trade union – approaches in the two sectors were markedly different”. The writers go on to highlight the extent of change that the industry has undergone between the 1970s and the 1990s and how, in contrast to the newspaper sector, “considerable change had been achieved in printing without major confrontations with the unions” (p 11). Therefore it would appear that a distinction must be drawn between industrial relations in the newspaper and general print sectors.

⁶ For an account of the significance of the Wapping dispute to the print unions see P. Bain in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* (1998: pp 73-105). He argues, “The dispute’s effects were also acutely felt by SOGAT and the NGA. The exodus of national newspapers from Fleet Street quickened and the workforce fell from 30,000 to 15,000 between 1985 and 1990...It is difficult to exaggerate the dispute’s significance for the unions, but it also showed the employer’s iron determination.”. Bain also makes the point that “The need for a single print union was also underlined by the events, and renewed SOGAT-NGA talks led to the formation of the GPMU in 1991” (p 101).

Not only is there a distinction in the approach to industrial relations between the newspaper and general printing sectors, one can also detect a discernable difference in how industrial relations is managed in general printing compared to trends in private sector manufacturing. Set within the context of the prominence of a national agreement for the industry it could be argued that the preferred methods of dealing with industrial relations in general print flies in the face of convention. According to Millward et al (2000), multi-employer bargaining in the manufacturing sector became almost a rarity, and had all but disappeared in private services (p 221). This demise in multi-employer bargaining has coincided with the adverse climate, both economic and political, that has prevailed and impinged upon industrial relations during the 1980s - 1990s.

The Conservatives came to power in 1979 claiming that, with unemployment standing at one million, 'Britain wasn't working' under a Labour administration and put the blame full square on the overbearing power of the trade unions. Hutton records the incoming Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher's disdain of the unions including their association with collective bargaining, corporatism and Keynesian economics. Hutton (1996) claims that the Conservatives had adopted an initiative that embraced the *laissez-faire* philosophy of the New Right and that "This 'monetarist' philosophy neatly dovetailed with the long-standing prejudices of the Conservative right, because it presented a heaven-sent justification for the crusade against all collectivism" (p 69). The author argues that, in her quest to change the existing state of affairs, Mrs. Thatcher

was aided not only by her visceral conviction that British corporatism had had its day and that trade unions were malevolent but also by the revival and representation of classical economics' description of how a capitalist

economy should be managed. Her own prejudices were the spur; popular disaffection with the trade unions gave her a political base; and New Right economics provided the compass for a ruthless campaign against trade union power which, fifteen years later, has transformed the British labour market

(p 89)

This transformation saw unemployment rise to unprecedented post war highs.

Edwards et al (1995) record that, while unemployment rose in all OECD countries, “What marked Britain out was a particularly rapid increase between 1979 and 1983” a situation which saw British unemployment peak at 3.2 million workers by 1986. The authors go on to highlight the boom bust experience of the UK economy over the 1980s-1990s and the ensuing sense of job insecurity for many workers (p 8). The authors also argue the “divisions between those in good jobs and those in bad jobs or with no jobs at all have widened” (p 2). Accompanying this transformation was the issue of trade union de-recognition by employers. Millward et al (2000) reveal that “Recognition in the private sector fell progressively from 50 per cent in 1980 to 25 per cent in 1998” (p 97). Within these statistics there is evidence of large scale de-recognition in the national and provincial newspaper and the publishing sectors (see Claydon 1989, and Smith and Morton 1993) and yet this is a scenario that was not replicated by employers in the general print sector. The National Agreement has survived this economic and political turmoil and is still setting the benchmark for the industry today.

The resilience of national bargaining in the general print sector may well be a reflection of the structural composition of the industry. The findings of an ACAS (1988) report supports the argument that “industries which have a highly competitive market, which are composed of a large number of small companies each with a small market share, which are labour intensive or which are geographically concentrated

will, other things being equal, tend to have multi-employer bargaining”(p 33). To a great extent the general print sector falls into this category. Rainnie (1989) reminds us that “printers tend to operate in a confined sphere” and that “a marked feature of the industry is its large numbers of small family firms” (p 100). It is against this background that the advantages of a national agreement in the sector can be seen. The ACAS criteria of multi-employer bargaining creating a degree of wage stability within a “highly competitive product market, where “each company’s ability to pass on wage increases through price increases is limited” (p 25), fits well. ACAS also make the point that small companies prefer this arrangement “because they usually lack the resources to obtain information on pay in comparable firms and to design their own pay structures” (p 26). Further, the national agreement brings to federated employers the operation of a disputes procedure. In 1983, Sisson claimed that “the handling of disputes continues to be highly valued by the member-firms” and goes on to claim that “the industries in which the largest proportion of member-firms reported an increase in the use of procedure are paper and printing” (1983: p 128). More recently, Arrowsmith et al claim (2000) “The national framework was valued by most small firms firstly to save themselves the trouble of bargaining, and secondly because the annual pay increase was a cash award linked to national scales which were normally well below actual rates” (p 21).

The question arises as to whom the ‘BPIF’ agreement impacts upon? There are many companies who are not in membership of the BPIF. Many of the larger organisations have followed the trend of withdrawing from multi-employer bargaining and prefer to deal with their own industrial relations in-house. This has certainly been the case at St. Ives and the British Printing Corporation (BPC) before their amalgamation with

Watmoughs to form Polestar. However, the GPMU would argue that none of these companies have agreements at local level that are inferior to BPIF terms and conditions.

The union's executive council report for the 1997 conference makes the point that "BPC is not a member of the BPIF but in many instances their Agreements run parallel with the terms and conditions of the BPIF" (1997: p 10). The 1999 executive report noted the St.Ives Group had implemented BPIF wage awards over many years, though not a member (1999: p 9). Watmoughs, prior to their amalgamation with BPC to form Polestar, were not a federated company, but followed the provisions of the agreement at their sites. It is also the case that there are a large number of small companies not in BPIF membership who follow the agreement and where their employees are balloted on the negotiated terms because their company are considered to be working under the umbrella of the agreement. This scenario of maintaining market comparability for terms and conditions of employment is a situation referred to by Arrowsmith and Sisson (1999) who make the case that even where multi-employer bargaining has ceased to exist, as in engineering, it does not appear to follow that the level of settlement at local level is much different to comparable competitors and they detect an inclination for employers in a sector to "continue to move like ships in a convoy" where there are "broad similarities of practice" (1999: p 63).

The resilience of the national agreement since 1979

Despite the adverse prevailing economic and political climate and, in the aftermath of the dispute that took place in 1980 over the reduction in the working week, and the subsequent resurrection of the national agreement in 1981, the 'BPIF' agreement provided a relatively undisturbed formula for the terms and conditions of employment in the general printing sector over the next ten years. This period saw rises in pay and longer holidays for workers. Gennard and Bain (1995) record that over the period 1981-1991 the minimum earnings guarantee in the provinces had risen by 101% and by 100% in London (p 474). The continuation of the agreement was not without pain for the unions. The NGA "accepted full flexibility of labour in the origination and machine departments and arrangements to enable full cooperation at national, branch and local level in changes necessary to achieve increased output and lower unit costs through the most effective use of people, material and machines" (Gennard, 1990: p 417). For their part, SOGAT "made concessions in the deployment of their members designed to improve efficiency and productivity". They also accepted "the ending of demarcation lines between warehouse, bookbinding, print finishing, stationery, carton converting and printing departments" (Gennard and Bain, 1995: pp 475-476). From a management point of view, Bennington (1993), at a BPIF conference, argued "the national agreements since 1980 have achieved acceptable agreements for the industry and have made progress on productivity and efficiency" (p4).

The signs of strain on the agreement began to appear after 1991. 1992 saw the agreement only narrowly carried by the membership of the newly formed GPMU. The GPMU figures for the ballot show 26,532 in favour with 21,715 against, a majority of only 4,817 (GPMU Circular 85/92). The main problems to emerge in the implementation of this agreement were that the new money increase was to be

introduced in two stages in April and August, as opposed to the established custom of being paid in April, and that many companies were indicating that they were not in a position to pay anything, despite the settlement. The GPMU responded to the threat of non-payment by circulating its membership employed in 'BPIF' companies arguing that the low monetary element of the settlement reflected the 'current economic circumstances of the industry and should therefore enable even the smallest companies to pay' (Circular 105/92). In the light of this and the narrow majority of the ballot in favour, the union recommended taking ballots for industrial action in companies who indicated that they were not prepared to meet the increase. To this end the union issued sample ballot papers for limited industrial action, short of a strike, and for strike action, to its branches. Examples of companies yielding to this ploy were to be found at the Martins Group, Garnet Dickson, Hardy Business Forms and W.C. Cowells (see Telford, 1995: p 31).

It was against the troubled background of the 1992 settlement that the BPIF undertook to review their industrial relations policy. A Review document (IR93/01) setting out the federation's 'Industrial Relations Strategic Objectives' for the next five years supported the retention of a national agreement, recommending an annual review, but brought into play the issue of a company's ability to pay any agreed increase in pay. Other objectives were laid down in a BPIF press statement (21/1/93) which argued that "Widening differentials in pay between skilled and unskilled employees, making shift and overtime working more cost effective, and formulating a new job grading structure based on the application of skills are identified as our prime goals" (p 1). For their part, the GPMU were formulating their claim for the 1993/1994 period. The adopted approach was a departure from the normal practice of presenting a 'shopping

list' of items, some of which could be offset against any concessions by the BPIF. In this pay round the GPMU settled on three items, a sixth week of holiday, a substantial wage increase and pro-rata terms and conditions for part-time and casual workers in the industry. A press statement laying out the details of the claim, along with evidence purported to support the viability of their claim was issued just prior to the initial meeting of the respective negotiating panels in February 1993. The GPMU made it clear that they expected the BPIF to deliver on all three counts.

Talks between the parties eventually broke down with the GPMU then adopting an aggressive approach by taking their claim to individual employers in an attempt to reach a house agreement. The claim from the GPMU to individual companies was for a class 1 increase of £8.03 per week, £7.47 for class 2 and £7.12 for class 3; a minimum earnings guarantee of £162.80; along with the provision of an extra day's holiday in 1994; and an agreement on terms and conditions for part-time and temporary workers. The union targeted groups of companies where ballots for industrial action were to be held in support of the claim. Targeted companies were also to include non-federated companies such as the St. Ives Group, a move intended to stop federated companies resigning their membership. In response, the BPIF advised their members that talks had broken down and they were now free "to make their own arrangements as to what (if any) award to make to their employees" (IRS, 331: p 6). They issued a booklet to members, 'After national bargaining – guidance notes to member companies', and provided support, advice and negotiating assistance from their regional offices to member companies. The breakthrough for the GPMU came with a settlement at the Lawson Marden Group, a major player in the BPIF, where an agreement was reached which saw a new money increase of £6.50 for class

1 with proportionate increases for class 2 and class 3 workers, an extra day's holiday from 1994, and pro-rata terms for part-time and temporary workers. This agreement set the benchmark for the GPMU campaign and chapels were urged to push for this level of settlement.

The GPMU claimed great success in this campaign. They issued a series of newsletters listing the companies who had signed an agreement that matched the Lawson Marsden deal and also released the profit margins and the salaries of directors of companies who were refusing to reach a settlement. By the summer of 1993 the GPMU were claiming an 85% success rate for their members covered by the 'BPIF' agreement. In his review of the dispute Gall (1994) concurs that the campaign was to a great extent a success for the GPMU. In his assessment of the campaign he accepts that "the GPMU does appear to have won the propaganda war and the battle on the ground although not necessarily hands down" (p 18). Gall suggests that employers took the threat of industrial action seriously, to the extent that:

Given the success of the campaign and the far fewer cases of industrial action than ballots, it is fairly clear that many employers were convinced that the union had the membership support to conduct effective industrial action.

(1994: p 20)

Any hopes that the GPMU leadership had of reaching an agreement for 1993/1994 with the BPIF were scotched by the very success of the campaign. It would have been impractical to have resumed negotiations that might have reached a settlement that fell short of the increase that had been achieved in so many of the companies that had conceded to pressure.

As a result of the 1993 dispute the whole future of national pay bargaining in the general print sector was called into question. The BPIF launched yet another consultation exercise with its members in an attempt to discover if national pay bargaining was what they really wanted for the industry. IRS reported on the fears that were held for the long term prospects of national bargaining in the industry. The report provides details of the consultation exercise, reporting that the survey had been conducted amidst a climate of doubt that had been cast by a review group “comprised of mainly chief executives of BPIF companies” who had come to the conclusion that “It is unlikely that BPIF industrial relations objectives can be delivered by national bargaining” (544, 1993: p 7). Despite the strong anti-national bargaining lobby that was evident in some quarters of the BPIF,⁷ exploratory talks between the parties to discuss the resumption of an agreement for 1994/1995 took place in October 1993. The talks were held in the knowledge that the GPMU General Secretary had threatened that if the BPIF were not prepared to continue pay bargaining the GPMU would pull out of all national agreements, including disputes procedures and health and safety agreements, and declared that “if the BPIF do opt out, then next year’s campaign will make this year’s look like a picnic” (IRS, 554: p7). A Printweek article in November 1993 makes reference to what appeared to be “a dramatic U-turn in favour of returning to national wage negotiations” by the BPIF for the 1994-1995 period. The article claims a joint statement declared that “Whilst a number of difficulties still remain, both the BPIF and the GPMU representatives believe that there are sufficient grounds to commence national negotiations in 1994” (5 November

⁷ There was an abundance of reports of statements made by leading executives such as BPIF President Nick Hutton’s claim that “enthusiasm [among members] for the national agreement is lower than ever before” (Printweek 1 October 1993), and Bembrose Managing Director Graham Bennington, who “felt it was very unlikely that national pay bargaining would survive in the long term (Printweek, 5 November, 1993).

1993: p 3). The return to national pay talks was confirmed through a joint press release issued on the 18th November 1993.

The agreement that was struck for the 1994-1995 period was seen in some quarters as the bare minimum that was required to get a national agreement back on track. A low monetary increase of £5.00 for class 1 workers, reducing down to £4.33 for class 3 workers was set. This represented a 2.8% increase on the minimum rates with machine and photo-composition extras increasing by the same amount. The agreement also included for the first time ‘a commitment to full cost recovery at company level, where practicable’. Gall (1994) comments that, in order to reach a settlement, there had to be agreement on three main areas between the parties in that:

The 1994 agreement must not disturb the position established by the 1993 company-level negotiations i.e. there was to be no catching up clauses for workers at firms who did not pay the union claim, there will be cash only payments and a joint commitment to make any settlement self-financing through the removal of all demarcation leading to full flexibility

(p 26)

The eventual settlement was only marginally accepted by the BPIF member companies. This position was also true for the GPMU members. Circular 62/94 reveals the very low poll, which produced a vote in favour by a mere 2,877 votes. Gall (1994) alludes to the point that the GPMU may not have capitalized on their success in the 1993 dispute. He claims the BPIF felt the GPMU approach to the 1994 talks presented the impression that the GPMU “clearly needed a return to national negotiations badly and are prepared to make substantial movements to our position” (p 27). Writing in the GPMU Journal the General Secretary reflected on the success of the 1993 campaign, but also reminded members that an unfortunate one in five of the membership covered by the BPIF agreement did not receive the full benefits of the campaign. He therefore welcomed the return to national bargaining arguing “the

stability provided by the national agreement is of enormous benefit to our members”. He goes on to stress that the agreement sets minimum terms and conditions and does not preclude any branch or chapel entering into local bargaining in order to improve such terms and conditions so that, for workers, they “match the skills which they possess and the profits they help to produce. That has always been the case, and long may it remain so” (May 1994: p 4).

Despite the doubts and fears that had been cast, and the accusation from some sections of the GPMU membership that the union had capitulated in order to get an agreement back in place, the 1994 settlement paved the way for constructive discussions to take place for a 1995-1996 agreement. Writing in the GPMU Journal the General Secretary reiterated the union leadership’s commitment to national agreements arguing that “they provide a level playing field for employers and employees in the industry, and they also provide a mechanism whereby change can be introduced into the industry with the minimum of fuss” (March 1995: p 4). An offer was recommended for acceptance by the executive council for the 1995-1996 period. It included a class 1 increase of £6.70, representing a 3.65% increase on minimum rates, which at the time was ahead of inflation. The offer would establish a new class 1 minimum earning of £190.17. The extra day’s holiday would be incorporated into the agreement from October 1997. From the employers’ point of view the offer was again subject to full cost recovery through improvements in productivity and efficiency at house level. The GPMU membership carried the proposal by a majority of 10,574 votes in another unspectacular voting return with only 26,280 votes returned (GPMU Circular 59/95). The national agreement remains in force, the 2000-2001 agreement saw a new money increase along with the inclusion of a national sick

pay scheme for the first time. More recently, the agreements for the 2001-2004 periods have provided new money increases, improvements in the sick pay scheme and agreement on parental leave has been agreed by a ballot of the members covered by the agreement (see GPMU Ballot Paper: March 2001).

The collective bargaining issues – giving up sacred cows

The concessions won by the union side through national bargaining were not gained without some sacred cows being given up by the unions, particularly those representing skilled workers. During the post war period from 1946-1960 the industry experienced remarkable expansion, Gennard (1990) argues that paper and print production witnessed an expansion of 18% as opposed to 8% for all manufacturing (p 11). As a result of this expansion managers claimed that the restrictive apprenticeship quotas imposed on the industry by the unions put pressure on prices and hence competitiveness causing work to be sent abroad. From the union viewpoint, “the apprenticeship quotas were used to ensure that the demand for labour exceeded its supply” (Gennard, 1990: p 453, see also Gennard and Bain 1995: p 501). During this period of expansion the unions were seeking a reduction in the working week from 45 hours to 40 hours per week and an increase in holiday entitlement from one week to two weeks. Howe (1950) records that the unions at that time justified their claim on the premise that “all the benefits of increased production due to new methods and faster running machinery should not be passed on to the consumer, but that some material improvement in the conditions of the workers in the industry should be made” (p 205). The unions won a phased reduction in the working week, eventually getting it down to 40 hours by 1959 and an extra week’s holiday, but in return they eventually made concessions on labour intake and apprentice quotas.

Ministerial interventions and courts of inquiry into the industry characterized the period from 1946-1967. As a result of the recommendations of the courts of inquiry there were improvements in apprentice intake that would eventually ease manpower shortages. This ongoing concession was a situation that Child (1967) saw as pleasing the employers, as this approach “clearly demonstrated that less rigid union attitudes to labour supply, indicated in the 1950 settlement, was persisting” (p 342). Gennard (1990) claims that during the period 1948-66 national wage negotiations “were characterized by wages increases being traded by unions in return for increases in the labour supply, including apprentices” but goes on to argue that the unions always feared “that if entry into the industry was not limited then in times of recession a disproportionate number of members would be claiming the union’s unemployment benefit” (p 453). It was the resilience of the pre-entry closed shop in the skilled (or craft) areas that was the focus of the employers in the 1950s and 1960s, an area that they considered to be regulated to the point of making the industry uncompetitive. However, during the 1970s the entire production side of the sector was dominated by closed shops, pre-entry for the skilled workers and post-entry for the semi and unskilled. Darlington (1994) refers to this phenomenon in his case study of a Merseyside print factory arguing that, during the 1960s and 1970s, not only did the skilled workers keep a tight check on labour intake, their semi-skilled and un-skilled counterparts acted accordingly, and effectively operated the local union branch office as a labour exchange (pp 103-132).

The debate over manning levels and worker intake remained prominent until the beginning of the 1980s from when the emphasis on training and apprentice intake has witnessed an ironical about face. Over the period since 1981 there has been a constant call from the union side for government intervention to force employers to adopt a

training agenda to address the skill shortages that are evident in the sector. Gennard (1990) points to the great lengths the NGA went to in attempting to keep training on the agenda during the 1980s and into the 1990s. As part of their negotiations with the BPIF the unions were able to secure a joint approach to training that encompassed not only apprentice intake, but also adult recruits to the industry, re-training and up-skilling for existing employees (pp 456-461, see also Gennard and Bain, 1995: pp 504-505). This was a radical departure from the customary approach to apprenticeship intake and industry training. It was a view that reflected the technological change that has transformed the industry and continues to do so. This advance in technology made the unions representing skilled workers realize that their members could be lost to the industry if adult training was not introduced. The sweeping changes made it highly unlikely that a worker with a specific skill would be able to expect a job for life carrying out that specific task and that retraining and upskilling of adult members would be a necessity. The calls for changes in training policy were prompted by the fact that, due to the fall in intake of young people to the industry printing colleges were closing down their facilities or were under threat of closure. Such developments were partly due to the fact that training in the 1980s and 1990s had become largely unregulated in line with the ideology of the conservative administration, a situation reflected on by a Labour Research (2000) article on the state of training in the manufacturing sector claiming that, even today, “Britain’s continuing system of “voluntarism” in workplace training provision has meant that training and apprenticeship opportunities are piecemeal with no compulsion to provide anything. As a result even employers that did provide training slashed their recruitment budgets during lean times and failed to restart them as the economy picked up’ (p 22).

This newly adopted approach to training from the print unions is evident from motions passed at the NGA biennial delegate conference (1990) where a motion from the Three Shires Branch called on the executive council to “review its policies towards the encouragement and co-ordination of existing training resources. This must include support for local printing colleges and pressure on employers and suppliers to develop training and re-training policies to maximize opportunities for young entrants and existing members” (p 199). This approach to training contradicts what had been the prevailing attitude prior to the 1980s when, despite the demands of the non-craft unions, the unions representing skilled workers refused to accept any progression of adults through promotion (Gennard 1990: pp 453-458). Today training is very much a bargaining issue on the BPIF agreement agenda but it is being pushed from the union side. The executive council report to the 1999 BDC refers to a survey undertaken of 500 print or print related companies that highlights the skills shortages and skill gaps that have become evident in general print due to a lack of commitment to training and comments that “the findings indicate there is some reluctance in the printing industry to recruit and train new staff” (p 15). The reluctance of employers to become involved in training is further highlighted by a statement from the BPIF in a Print Week (November, 2000) article claiming “their proposals for a printing industry Skills Action Fund has been met with “hardly any response – we have been deluged with apathy”. The article goes on to argue that “a voluntary approach to training has failed to deliver the number of skilled people the industry needs” and that employers have failed to respond to requests for their views on training (p 4). As part of the 2001-2002 discussions on the BPIF agreement the union and employers’ association have made a commitment to approach the government with a view to introducing a training levy into the sector to promote training for the industry.

The problems that the unions faced over manpower issues were compounded by the inclusion of flexibility and productivity and efficiency clauses introduced by employers and requiring the unions to make concessions in return for gains in the terms and conditions. The flexibility issue was raised in 1981 when the agreement was resurrected after the 1980 dispute. The NGA delegate conference received a report on the revised agreement that accepted flexibility for skilled workers across all disciplines within departments and made provision for addressing new manning levels on the basis of technological advancement on the proviso that no member would be made redundant as a result of these clauses (NGA BDC, 1982: p 14). This acceptance of flexibility and efficiency has been extended by subsequent agreements and through the amalgamations of the unions to a situation where the issue is now addressed by a clause inserted in the agreement that allows flexibility across and between all departments.⁸

This clause is complemented by the full recovery clause first inserted in the 1994 agreement and which today states that “the parties agree, that where practicable, additional costs arising from the 2004 national settlement will be recovered in full by efficiency and productivity improvements at company level. Such improvements can

⁸ The clause in the agreement now reads:

- (a) The parties to this agreement place great importance on the training of GPMU members to enable them to acquire the new skills to work flexibly.
- (b) Subject to suitable training and the necessary health and safety requirements, full flexibility of working between all occupations and the elimination of demarcation lines is accepted.

To this end management and chapels will agree arrangements to achieve these objectives including full flexibility and where appropriate establish arrangements for the necessary training and retraining of GPMU members.

In accordance with the above, GPMU members may subsequently be called upon to carry out any of the duties within and between Craft and Classes I to III and transfer between machines, equipment and departments.

be wide-ranging in scope” (settlement ballot paper, 2004). The cost recovery clause has been the subject of some debate at conferences. At the 1997 BDC a composite motion was moved instructing the negotiating panel to have the clause struck from the agreement. The General Secretary made the case that the agreement would be in danger of being destroyed because the BPIF would not continue unless it was part of the agreement. The mover claimed that the clause allows the managers to attack the core terms and conditions of the agreement in the name of efficiency and productivity. In reply the General Secretary made it clear that the clause was not to be used in this manner and that there had been ample correspondence with the membership but he was happy to reiterate that “such items as core money, temporary transfers, balancing of time, overtime rates, shift rates are not items that should be discussed as a contribution towards the National Agreement cost recovery clauses” (1997: p 101). Newsome (2000) reflects on this move to a more flexible approach to work in her study of Graphical unions on an international basis that includes the UK, and claims that “based on a desire to ensure continued company survival, the concern of the respective graphical trade unions in the study was not to reject out of hand shifts towards increasingly flexible forms of working. Alternatively the aim was to ensure that moves towards increased flexibility were negotiated and as a result remained within the best interests of the members” (p 509). It would appear from the foregoing evidence that this is an accurate reflection of the bargaining position adopted by the GPMU and its constituent unions prior to amalgamation in order to secure advances in the terms and conditions for their members working under the national agreement. Through technological advancement equipment has been simplified and, from the employers’ point of view, requires fewer less skilled people to perform the tasks. This impacts on the workforce through there being fewer people to perform the tasks,

which in turn leads to an intensification of work. Newsome (2000) refers to the very clear message that came across from respondents to her study that there had been an “increase in workplace pressure and a corresponding intensification of the work process” (p 513). Newsome claims that many workers are responding to this intensified pressure on an individual basis rather than through the traditional collective approach and that one aspect of coping with the stress is seeking extra training which she emphasizes should be on the union agenda to ensure “a wider collective response to the real causes of work intensification and stress” (p 515). Newsome argues that there is still a ‘community of interest and identity’ among print workers, particularly in the craft areas, which allows traditional channels of representation to prevail and resist employer attempts to dilute trade unionism in the sector” (p 516). To a certain extent this is a situation that was found to exist in a survey undertaken by Healy, Telford and Rainnie (2004) in the Herts and Essex region where it became evident that, despite the conditions on flexibility contained within the national agreement, there was little flexibility of workers between departments, but there was evidence of flexibility within departments. This was more to do with management not pushing the issue, despite the existence of weak chapel structures at many of the companies surveyed. Lack of chapel activity was highlighted through the findings in Healy, Telford and Rainnie’s local survey where the typical response to ‘why did you become Mother/Father of the Chapel (M/FOC)?’ was that no-one else would do the job.

It is important to make the point that, from the trade union perspective, the issues of training and worker flexibility are intrinsically linked. Keep and Rainbird (1995) argue that the traditional organisational systems developed by UK trade unions, along occupational lines creating separate bargaining units for different classes of workers,

led to “structures [that] impose constraints on occupational mobility and, in particular, limit the possibilities for semi-skilled and un-skilled workers to upgrade their jobs” and that consequently “moves towards increased flexibility and multi-skilling may be perceived as a threat to the spheres of influence of different trade unions and bring them into conflict with each other”. The authors claim that one logical resolution to this dilemma is for unions to merge in order avoid conflict between competing unions (pp 532-533), a situation that the NGA and SOGAT faced and a solution they adopted. Keep and Rainbird (1995) go on to refer to the paradox that, in facing a hostile political climate, “the formal exclusion of trade union interest from training bodies has coincided with unions’ increased interest in, and awareness of, training as a bargaining issue” and that one reason for the adoption of this policy is that, because of their restricted position “the generally weakened bargaining position of unions mean that bargaining strength is no longer sufficient to increase members’ pay and status. Strategies towards training therefore supplement wage bargaining” (pp 535-537). The flexibility clause inserted in the ‘BPIF’ agreement is subject to training and health and safety regulation, ensuring that skill levels are maintained, and is supplemented by the union keeping training on the bargaining agenda in an economic and political climate that makes the use of a social rather than material agenda significant in maintaining the profile of the union in the workplace.

Conclusion.

This chapter has concentrated on industrial relations in the general printing sector and has focused on the resilience of a multi-employer, national agreement that continues to impact on the sector and set the benchmark for terms and conditions of employment for workers in that sector. There is a historical overview of the progression of the national agreement that helps to emphasise the uniqueness of the

agreement in comparison to trends away from this model of industrial relations in the wider private manufacturing and private services sector of the UK economy. It is argued that a possible reason for the persistence of the agreement is the structure and dynamics of the sector. General print is dominated by SME's, who operate in niche markets with highly competitive wage and price structures and evidence is submitted to support the claim that this type of market is conducive with multi-employer bargaining. Industrial relations tend to be passive, despite the media hype attributed to printing which tends to mistakenly tie general print in with what was a more volatile newspaper sector.

A central topic for discussion between the negotiating bodies has been that of manpower. The traditional stance of the unions was to restrict and control worker intake through apprenticeship quotas and maintaining closed shops, whereas employers sought concessions from the unions on this issue in return for improved terms and conditions. During the 1980s the emphasis changed and it was the unions who pushed for a more constructive approach for training and up-skilling to address skill shortages and skill gaps. This was a radical departure for the unions but has not yet been met with any great enthusiasm among apathetic employers. Flexibility, productivity and efficiency clauses became very much a part of the discussions since the 1980s. The employers sought concessions from the unions in order to create a more cost efficient competitive business structure; in return, the unions advanced conditions but, more importantly from their point of view, kept some control over the rate of change in the workplace. Work has to a great extent become de-skilled by technological change that in turn has led to a more intensified, stressful environment and the subsequent call for an improved training regime to improve job stability.

The value of this chapter to the thesis is that it helps to put into context the circumstances under which multi-employer bargaining continues to exist in the general print sector. The main objectives of my thesis, to situate the concept of national pay bargaining within the wider context of a diminishing reliance on this form of workplace regulation in the private manufacturing sector; to determine the importance of multi-employer bargaining to the principal actors in the agreement i.e. the trade union and the employers' association; and to examine how the terms and conditions contained within the national agreement impact on the employees working under the agreement at the workplace level, can only be achieved through understanding the complexities of union organisation in the sector. Chapter Two has explored how unions generally respond to the changing political and ideological climate in which they have to operate. This has seen the traditional pluralist approach to industrial relations challenged by an ideological swing to a more monetarist focus on workplace relations and a legislative framework that restricts the union ability to challenge managerial authority. The changes introduced by the conservatives during their eighteen years of power have not been repealed by the incoming labour administration and the climate in which unions operate remains restricted. Despite this sea of change, the general print sector has managed to maintain its time honoured approach to industrial relations, persevering with the multi-employer bargaining model that had come under fire by the Donovan Commission in the 1960s, and, according to the WERS series, has fallen from grace in contemporary industrial relations. What this means for the industry is that, even in the face of a long series of amalgamations among the print unions, which eventually saw the emergence of the GPMU as the single union for the industry, traditional values have been preserved.

There still remains within the sector a gendered, hierarchal structure based on craft and skilled status.

Chapter Five.

Research Methods.

Introduction.

This chapter addresses the methodological approach and exploratory frameworks adopted in this thesis that enable a critical examination of national pay bargaining and workplace organisation in the general print sector. The chapter also reflects the trials and tribulations of an inexperienced researcher's attempts to harness and make sense of multiple forms of data in order to be able to enter the debate on the state of collective bargaining and workplace organisation in the general print sector. The central focus of the research is situated in the workplace and therefore explores workplace organisation from a 'at the coal-face' perspective. The emphasis is very much on action research which Carr and Kemmis (1986) define as being:

simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out

(p: 162).

Adopting the action research approach brings to the research a rare trade union perspective through my participant involvement as a full time union official working in the sector. However, the structural and institutional elements that are at play through the presence of a national organisation (who, as a partner to a multi-employer

national agreement, interacts and impacts on local activity) are catered for, along with the important aspect of historical context.

Methodological influences.

I have chosen to use a multi-method approach for my thesis. The methods include documentary evidence, data gathered from a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with workers from the sector, and participant observation. The rich data gathered through these sources will build an account of the dynamics of industrial relations in the general print sector ranging over the national, regional and local perspectives. My own participant observation as a worker in the industry, formally as a printer and latterly as a full time trade union officer dealing with industrial relations in the sector, will compliment and inform the findings.

It is through my intimate association with the industry that the methodology adopted in this research is of a qualitative nature, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim is “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p 17). In particular, the authors point to the process of ‘theory building’, as opposed to a process of ‘theory testing’ that quantitative research establishes, and the qualities of developing a “qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (p 24). While the documentary evidence and survey results will address the aims and objectives of my thesis at the

national and regional levels respectively, the interviews, supplemented by my own interaction in the sector will help to develop case studies that will provide an insight to workplace organisation in the workplace. McCarthy (1994), in supporting qualitative research, argues that contemporary industrial relations research ‘cries out for a case study approach’ (p 321); an approach that he claims is lacking in the quantitative emphasis on industrial relations research, where “imaginative insights, with practical implications will not be achieved” by engaging purely in macro-survey research (p 315). Yin (1994) considers the case study approach to be useful where “a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p 9) Yin goes on to define the case study as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomena within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p 13) and therefore, case studies are a useful way of looking at the world around us.

A problem that can arise when adopting the case study approach is the dilemma over objectivity and subjectivity. Those being interviewed are providing their own interpretation of events which makes the nature of the response subjective. This is an issue that was addressed by Weber in the works he produced in the early twentieth century where he was attempting to alleviate the criticism aimed at social science research from the natural science investigators. Weber wanted to determine that the methodological approach required in social science enquiry differed from that used in the natural sciences. Weber asserted that social science investigation was about the study of social action and that empirical study alone did not capture the dynamics of

this phenomenon. Weber (1969) argued that “the quality of a ‘social-economic’ is not something it possesses objectively. It is rather conditioned by the orientation of our cognitive interest, as it arises from the specific cultural significance which we attribute to the particular event in a given case” (p 64). Weber (1978) claimed that the discipline required the concept of ‘interpretive understanding’ which addressed issues such as human judgement and the notion of motive which helped to achieve “something which is never attainable in the natural sciences, namely the subjective understanding of the action of the component individuals” and that “subjective understanding is a specific characteristic of sociological knowledge” (p 15). More recently, Kitay and Callus (1998) claim that the case study approach “reflects the multidisciplinary character of industrial relations research” and that “industrial relations deals not simply with “objective” facts but with values and perceptions and therefore requires methods that are able to access a range of information sources and to assist in making sense of the subjective elements of social and economic life” (p 101)

Layder (1993) brings a wider dimension to this debate through discussing the complimentary qualities of middle range theory where the focus is more towards theory-testing, and grounded theory (p112). He introduces a form of half-way house between the quantitative and qualitative approaches reflecting what he refers to as a ‘realist’ approach that allows the researcher “to preserve a ‘scientific’ attitude towards social analysis at the same time as recognising the importance of actors’ meanings and in some way incorporating them into the research” (p.16). Layder also notes the importance of recognising the macro-micro divide in research, where the macro level

addresses structural or institutional elements while the micro level concerns itself with the interaction and behavioural elements of social organisation (p 7). Layder argues that the “division between quantitative and qualitative analysis has tended to parallel the macro-micro division” but insists that there is an organic link between the macro-micro elements and produces a research map that helps to identify the layered or stratified nature of a social setting. Layder’s ‘research map’(see below) identifies the five elements of self; situated activity; setting; context; and history (p 8) that he claims allows for a multi-layered analysis of the data that reflects the interwoven nature of social organisation (p 71).

	Research element	Research focus
HISTORY	CONTEXT	Macro social forms (e.g. class, gender, Ethnic relations)
	SETTING	Immediate environment of social activity (schools, family, factory)
	SITUATED ACTIVITY	Dynamics of face-to –face interaction
	SELF	Biographical experience and social involvements

Figure 1.1 Research map: an outline

This research is directed at the local level of activity; at what is happening on the shop floor; at what is often referred to as the micro level of a social setting; yet within the overarching context of there being a national, or macro perspective, that impacts on

local activity. Much of the data gathered in this project is derived from the workers in the sector and reflects their perceptions of life at work. Therefore Layder's concept of incorporating the actor's thoughts and impressions is put at the heart of the research. Also, the documents drawn on and their texts are important negotiated principles or negotiated forms of reality, and the influence that the national agreement has on workplace organisation and the workers' terms and conditions cannot be ignored so the structural and institutional impact must also be catered for in this research. Given that Layder's map 'is designed to facilitate research which works across the macro-micro division' (p102) it will be used as a methodological resource ensuring that an exploration of the nature of workplace activity is not taken in isolation but that the bigger picture is taken into consideration.

An important element of Layder's (1993) research map, that has a significant impact on this research, is the historical dimension that the author claims "represents the temporal dimension through which all the other elements move" (p 101). This historical emphasis on social activity is very much in accord with Marxist philosophy that espouses a 'materialist' perspective where the reality of human economic needs to sustain their very existence produces a process of 'historical materialism'. This approach was at odds with the 'idealist' perspective of Hegel who, up till Marx's intervention, had been an influential philosopher who had argued that the objective reality of human existence lay in the concept of thoughts and ideas which Hegel believed acted as causes in historical development. Marx (1977) claimed that Hegel's thesis merely served to abstract the understanding of human existence and ignored the crucial empirical aspect of human economic activity and it is this process that determines historical development. Marx (1977) wrote,

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, which is the real foundation on top of which arises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. It is not the consciousness of men, therefore, that determines their existence, but instead their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression of the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

(pp 22-24).

Layder (1993) distinguishes between the different time scales that might need to be considered when involving a historical dimension to social study. He claims that often the case study approach “by its very nature require[s] a more limited form of historical analysis” and that focusing on “contemporary activities and short term processes would mean that long term investigation of origins would rarely be required” (p 174). The focus of my research is partly centred on the micro detail of workplace organisation and the historical dimension of this perspective might necessarily be narrow due to the fact that, in Layder’s words “The micro world of everyday behaviour is indeed dynamic and processual in so far as it involves a multiplicity of human beings continually interpreting and reinterpreting the meanings of each other’s behaviour, and cooperating or coming into conflict on this basis” (pp 175-176). However, the macro element must not be discarded as the structural and institutional elements of the sector play a major role in creating the environment in which the micro activity takes place. Layder, recognising this interplay, notes that the micro and macro elements are “intertwined and mutually dependent on each other.

While routine encounters produce their own emergent properties, they are also directly involved in the reproduction of the institutional forms which provide their backdrop, and have been fashioned through a historical process” (p 176).

Making use of Layder’s map will provide the platform to building a picture of the state of national pay bargaining and workplace organisation in the general print sector taking account of the important element of the historical evolution of industrial relations in the sector. However, the analysis of the data needs to be set within the context of collective bargaining in the private sector. The literature review identifies several strands of union involvement in collective bargaining within the UK economy. Set in this context, and in order to determine whether chapel responses reflect this level of involvement and to what degree, it is important to use an effective analytical framework to disseminate the data collected. Many models are available, but the model that appears to be best suited at this juncture is that developed by Kelly (1996). Kelly’s model is designed to reflect union responses across a militant – moderate axis and can be adapted for my purpose. His model addresses both the breadth and depth of union response. He examines the breadth on a bi-polar basis along an axis ranging between militant and moderate responses. The depth of response is measured through multi-dimensional analysis that covers five areas: goals; membership resources; institutional resources; methods; and ideology (see table below).

Table 3.1 Components of union militancy and moderation

Component	Militancy	Moderation
Goals	Ambitious demands (scale and scope) with few concessions	Moderate demands with some or many Concessions (Accommodation)
Membership Resources	Strong reliance on mobilization of union membership	Strong reliance on employers, third parties or law

Institutional Resources	Reliance on collective bargaining and/or unilateral regulation	(Demobilization) Willingness to Experiment with/support non-bargaining Institutions (Subordination)
Methods	Frequent threat or use of industrial action	Infrequent threat or use of industrial action (Quiescence)
Ideology	Ideology of conflicting interests	Ideology of partnership (Incorporation)

Kelly argues that his bi-polar approach is sufficient and rules out the option to include a pragmatic category as unhelpful (p 79). However, for my analysis, I would alter the axis parameters to reflect a militant – active perspective, and I feel that the introduction of a third category would be helpful and I would therefore expand the axis to accommodate a category allowing for a passive response which my experience suggests may be more relevant to my analysis than the pragmatic element noted by Kelly (see table below). This approach is compatible with that adopted in the questionnaire and for the interview schedule. The multi-dimensional model to determine the depth of chapel activity and organisation will enable a thorough analysis of the responses to both the questionnaire and interview schedule.

Table 3.2 Modified to include Passive Category.

Component	Militancy	Moderation	Passive
Goals	Ambitious demands (scale and scope) with few concessions	Moderate demands with some or many Concessions (Accommodation)	Low expectations, even Under the umbrella of Collective Bargaining
Membership Resources	Strong reliance on mobilization of union membership	Strong reliance on employers, third parties or law (Demobilization)	Lack of workplace Organisation leads to a reliance on employers third parties or law
Institutional Resources	Reliance on collective bargaining and/or unilateral regulation	Willingness to Experiment with/support non-bargaining Institutions (Subordination)	Reliance on employer to implement terms agreed in national collective bargaining
Methods	Frequent threat or use of industrial action	Infrequent threat or use of industrial action (Quiescence)	acquiescence
Ideology	Ideology of conflicting interests	Ideology of partnership (Incorporation)	disengagement

The Role of the Researcher.

This research cannot claim to be disconnected from the author. The literature acknowledges the relevance of the researcher and some reflexivity of the impact of the researcher on the research process is particularly appropriate in this study. Therefore, participant observation is an important methodological influence in this research and comes as a result of my active involvement in the industry. Burgess (1984) claims that participant observation allows the “social scientist to interpret the meanings and experiences of social actors, a task that can only be achieved through participation with the individuals involved”. This level of participation comes as a result of my involvement in the printing industry where I have spent all my working life. Initially I was a lithographic machine manager producing a wide range of printed products in a variety of locations including Scotland, Australia, Wales and England. I have been active in the union at different levels over most of my working life. At first I held various lay positions including chapel clerk and chairman, deputy FOC and FOC, I was a member of my branch committee continuously from 1980 and was chairman of that committee from 1984-1988. I was a TUC delegate in 1986 and 1987 and have been a delegate to every NGA/GPMU Biennial Delegate Conference since 1982. In 1988 I was elected as a full time branch official of the NGA (now GPMU), working in the East of England for sixteen years. In 2004 I took on the role of managing the GPMU national life long learning project and was responsible for developing the union strategy in this area. In 2006 my role within Amicus changed and I became the lifelong learning project manager for Amicus with a focus on all of the industrial sectors that Amicus organises in, but still involved in the GPM Sector. Therefore my extensive experience of nearly forty years in the industry, along with

my role as an active participant in the general print sector provides an important aspect to the methodology adopted in this project.

It was studying for my Masters Degree that increased and stimulated my interest in these early observations on local union activity. This early research cast a new light on how I viewed the degree of union inactivity in the workplace, and led to my taking a wider interest in workplace organisation and the notion that apathy was helping to reduce the impact of union influence at the local level. This was a scenario that was being reflected at branch level where branch committee and branch meeting activity was becoming moribund. Originally I was elected to the branch committee but in subsequent terms was not challenged and I continued in my place unopposed. My experience of branch committee attendance was that it became increasingly difficult to attract new members and in some years places went unoccupied. I stood for election in the branch officer ballot against one other candidate. In recent years it has not been a unique experience to have to abandon branch and committee meetings due to their not having the required quorum.

My duties as a full time branch officer have involved me in dealing with a whole range of union issues, working with lay representatives in the East of England region. My involvement as an industrial officer meant that I acted as a negotiator, representing the interests of the members across the bargaining agenda. This negotiator role offered to me a unique opportunity to develop an understanding of both national and local bargaining issues and provided an insight to workplace organisation in the region. My industrial relations role also provided me with the means to monitor the level of branch and chapel activity, and to make some

provisional comparisons on the levels of union activity and workplace organisation through my contact with other branch and national officers. Therefore much of the research findings have been drawn from my participant observation of events in the sector. It is also the case, as will be seen, that my role both helped and hindered the research process.

The research

The dilemma of declining membership facing unions generally, and their attempts to address this problem, is addressed in the literature review and is a dilemma that is mirrored in the GPMU. With membership figures dwindling, and faced with the prospect of declining chapel organisation and a consequent reduction in chapel power, the rejuvenation of workplace organisation is a crucial factor if the GPMU is to continue to be relevant to its existing and potential membership. Along with a literature review, there is a chapter that maps the historical evolution of the industry and how its traditions have been embedded and moulded to suit changing technology and working practices, and sets the macro perspective of the industry. The historical review also reflects the local history that is incorporated as a thread running through the self and situated activity of chapel organisation. The incorporation of the local historical dimension helps to address the notions of power and control that are inherent in the working relationship. Layder (1993) elaborates on this point arguing that the researcher “should be aware of forms of power and control relations that operate ‘behind the scenes’ of the observable interactions of everyday life” where “Some forms of power and control are built into the settings and contexts of activity, like work or occupational organization” (p 170).

Being aware of such ‘behind the scenes’ activity is not always easy for the researcher. However, it is through my involvement as an industrial relations practitioner that many of the issues that I have encountered in that role have developed my interest in workplace organisation and helped to determine what the research topic should be. The printing industry has a long tradition of accommodating a strong union presence where worker power, through the establishment of closed shops (both pre and post entry), was the perceived norm within the industry. The encroachment on that autonomy through the introduction of legislation by the conservative administrations throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, coupled with a continuing fall in manufacturing output, has had an impact on workplace organisation within the general print sector. Yet, despite the adverse effects that these changes have had on workplace organisation, printing has not abandoned its structural features, and unlike many other sectors, has persevered with a system of multi-employer national pay bargaining

This current research project is designed to examine workplace organisation and how it is influenced by the presence of a national agreement and builds on the platform of the earlier work I had undertaken on this subject for my MA dissertation (1995), and research presented to a BUIRA conference in 2001 by Healy, Telford and Rainnie (later published in *Employee Relations*: 2004). I had completed some tentative work on the merits of national bargaining in the general print sector, examining issues regarding the level of support for this form of agreement among employers and whether the terms and conditions contained within the agreement were generally complied with at workplace level. Healy, Telford and Rainnie (2004) took this subject

to a more detailed level looking at the workplace reality of national bargaining, paying special regard to the issues of flexibility, work intensification, workplace training and equal opportunities. Both research pieces were carried out in the Hertfordshire and Essex region of the South-East of England. Although a small sample, the make-up of printing companies in this area were representative of the national picture in that small companies, offering a complex and diverse range of products, dominated the region. The surveyed region is also a strong economic performer, close to London, and there appeared to be very low labour mobility in the region, despite the attraction of the London market.

My present research expands on earlier data I had gathered for my MA dissertation, and aims to test those conclusions on a wider geographical basis. The distinctive feature of my work is that my data is inclusive and reflects the views of workers and managers, not just union activists, on the issues of national collective bargaining, working practices and union organisation within the selected case study companies. This approach allows me to dig beneath the surface of previous work that has concentrated on a management - activist viewpoint. Given my involvement as a full time union official working in the sector, much of the research agenda is influenced by my experience of workplace organisation in the area where I operate and the unique access to workplaces that my role extends to me. However, it is this involvement and some preconceived ideas about the structure and effectiveness of workplace organisation that hampers any attempt at a purely grounded theory approach to the research. Grounded theory, as Layder (1993) points out, “tends to encourage the researcher to focus on the ‘close up’ features of social interaction and, in this sense, neglects the seemingly more remote aspects of the setting and context”.

Layder insists the researcher “must be being aware of, and incorporate, the existence and operation of structural phenomena in order to be sensitive to their implications for emerging theoretical ideas and concepts” (p 55). Taking this wider perspective on board I have utilised Layder’s ‘realist’, or exploratory grounded theory approach to research to guide this project, therefore this thesis adopts a multi-faceted approach to method (1993: p7), drawing on:

- (a) extensive documentary material;
- (b) a survey of union activists from different branches;
- (c) three geographically distinct case studies
- (d) participant observation.

Participant observation has already been discussed within the context of the role of the researcher (p 154), each of the other research methods adopted in this thesis will be considered in turn.

Documentary evidence

Documentary evidence will form an important part of the analysis, providing data on the national perspective on industrial relations in the sector along with developing the under-pinning knowledge, context and background to the research. Formal documentation will be drawn on for this study including extracts and supporting evidence from:

NGA/GPMU Biennial Delegate Conference Reports

NGA/GPMU Executive Council Reports

NGA/GPMU Official Circulars

NGA/GPMU Journal Reports and Branch Newsletters

GPMU Instrument of Transfer of Engagements of GPMU to Amicus

GPMU/BPIF National Agreement

BPIF A World Class Printing Industry

BPIF Print 21: coming of age?

BPIF/Amicus GPM Sector Partnership Agreement and Code of Practice

Ahlstrand (1990) has pointed out that “Formal documents...do not tell the whole story. As with any industrial-relations initiatives some of the more important observations that can be made never reach the point of formal recording in either trade union or management documents” (p 71). Yet Townley (1990) argues that texts are important since they provide guides for action and presents information which prompts the need for decisions and solutions. Healy (1997), entering the debate from an industrial relations perspective, goes one stage further. She argues that where texts are the outcome of collective decision making through negotiation or consultation, they become “important ...in the practice of IR” (p 209). In addressing Ahlstrand’s point, the strength in the use of formal documentary evidence to my research is supplemented through my exploitation of my position as a full-time branch officer in the GPMU. Being an actor in the daily trials and tribulations of working in the sector places me in the role of an active participant observer and provides me with unique access to many of the un-recorded meetings, both where there are no minutes and where documents are only available to participants, that take place during negotiations, although my remit is much wider than the general print sector and includes newspaper production, paper-making and other areas of the industry not covered by the ‘BPIF’ agreement.

A problem did arise over access to the documentary evidence during the later stages of the research. This issue came about partly due to my changing role within the union

from 2004 and partly as a result of the GPMU's merger with Amicus. As an industrial officer based in a regional office, I had almost unlimited access to documents relating to the union's involvement in the national agreement. When I took up my new position in 2004 I moved to the union training centre in Leicestershire where access to documentation was more restricted although I was still able to visit regional offices. However, as a result of the merger, GPMU offices began to close and much of the documentation was put into storage and access then became extremely difficult and I had to rely on the documents that I had in my own possession and some assistance from former GPMU colleagues in providing what they had available.

The questionnaire.

The rationale for introducing the survey was to enable a wider geographical comparison to be made on the issues surrounding national pay bargaining and to present a regional focus to the study. The rich data that was gathered from our earlier survey carried out in the Hertfordshire and Essex Region provided an excellent platform from which to inform the interview element of our investigations into workplace organisation in that region. It was as a result of this success that I decided to put a great deal of time into designing a questionnaire that would help establish the degree of compliance with the terms and conditions of the national agreement at the workplace; the effectiveness of trade union organisation; and working practices (see Appendix I). The target audience for the survey was to be at least one company from each of the branches in England and Wales. This approach was designed to contribute towards the macro aspect of the research, addressing the structural and institutional elements of life at work in the general print sector, and allows for a deeper analysis than the 1995 study, which was limited by the structure of the union at that time and my role. By way of example, one of the restrictions that I encountered in 1995 with

the responses to that particular questionnaire was that, during my investigations, although the GPMU had been formed, the branches were still independent at that time, and as I was working in a former NGA branch I had little or no access to former SOGAT opinion. This situation led me to comment at the time that, “inexperience of the tasks undertaken by former SOGAT members meant that benchmark jobs were relevant to the former NGA area” (Telford, 1995: p 17). There was no such restriction in the current research, the amalgamation of the branches throughout the union is now complete and integration means that the research should have a more holistic conceptualization. However, it should be noted that in practice there are still companies where the amalgamation has not been effected at chapel level and in some instances there remain two chapels based on former SOGAT, NGA divisions. Some issues raised by the Webbs (1932) in their analysis of what went wrong with their postal survey when gathering data for the History of Trade Unionism and Industrial Democracy are relevant at this point. With the advantage of hindsight they recognized the “blank wall of self-complacency” that led to a less than favourable return to their enquiries and how respondents would be guarded with their response to certain questions (pp 68-72).

I had intended for this questionnaire to be widely distributed among union activists at the GPMU Biennial Delegate Conference held June 2001. Delegations from all the branches that comprise the GPMU attended the conference and I had anticipated that activists attending the conference would be only too willing to participate in the survey. However I experienced some difficulties in distributing and collecting the questionnaire. Initially the response was good with branch officials agreeing to distribute the questionnaire among their delegates. The problems arose when the

conference began to debate some fundamental issues relating to the future financial viability of the union. This led to splinter group meetings during and after the conference leaving little time to attempt to gather completed questionnaires, and deflected activists' attention away from the survey. Also, there were a limited number of branches who, for different reasons, did not have among their delegations anyone working under the BPIF agreement which meant there would be no response from that branch.

My original target was to collect a response from each of the 23 of the 24 full time English and Welsh branches attending the conference, with the aspiration to get two responses from some of the geographically bigger branches. I did not include my own Herts and Essex branch in this exercise as the chapels had already been surveyed in our earlier research. In reality only 13 responses were secured from this exercise (covering 11 branches) which was just under half my original target response. In order to improve this response the decision was made to forward questionnaires to the missing branches with the view to a chapel response being secured. Again, this information was not forthcoming and I acknowledge that the response to the questionnaire was disappointing. Some considerable thought was given as to whether these data should actually be discounted and excluded from the thesis. It would have been easy to have simply abandoned this aspect of the research and to rely on the other sources of information. The arguments developed in the thesis were not heavily reliant on data from the questionnaire. The research adopted a multi method approach where none of the research methods could be assessed in isolation. Rather, each of the methods are intrinsically linked so that a multi-layered perspective of collective bargaining in the sector could be presented.

In weighing up whether or not to include this data in the research consideration was given to the fact that the original response target was not intended to be high. At the BDC 69 questionnaires were distributed, 3 to each of the 23 branches, and it was anticipated that a response would be gained from every branch, with two responses from 14 of the larger branches leading to an anticipated total of 38 responses. On this basis, from the questionnaires returned I achieved a response rate of 34% covering 48% of the Branches in England and Wales. It was therefore felt that despite the acknowledged limitations, the returns from the questionnaire were still valuable in that they provided a starting point to make some initial comparisons with the earlier findings from the Herts and Essex Survey and to begin building a profile of companies working under the BPIF agreement (see table below). Importantly, returns were received from a wide geographical spread (see map in appendix II).

Summary of Questionnaires distributed / collected Branch	Questionnaires		
	Distributed	Expected	Returned
Cumbria	3	1	0
North East of England	3	2	1
Leeds and Central Yorkshire	3	2	2
West Yorkshire	3	1	1
North Lancashire	3	1	0
The Wolds	3	1	1
Greater Manchester	3	2	0
South Yorkshire	3	1	0
Central Midlands	3	2	1
Merseyside, Central Lancashire And North Wales	3	2	0
Birmingham and West Midlands	3	2	0
Leicester and Est Midlands	3	1	1

Ouse Valley	3	1	0
Anglia	3	2	0
Norwich and North Anglia	3	2	1
Hertfordshire and Essex	Not requested		
South Wales and Shires	3	2	1
Home Counties West	3	1	0
Chiltern and Thames Valley	3	1	0
Greater London Region	3	2	0
Kent	3	2	0
Mid Southern	3	2	2
Wessex	3	1	1
South West	3	2	1
Total	69	36	13

The questionnaire addressed several issues including size of workforce, gender and ethnic mix, density of union membership, perceived level of union activity, compliance with the terms of the national agreement and attitude to flexible working. All of these issues link back to the literature in the early chapters of my thesis. The impact of the size and diversity of workplaces, along with the elitist hierarchal structures that have developed over time in the general print sector has been discussed at length in Chapters three and four. The continuing decline of collective bargaining in the UK economy in general and in national, multi-employer bargaining in particular has been examined in Chapter Two using the WIRS series as a tool for gauging the level of decline. The importance of the terms and conditions incorporated in the GPMU/BPIF national agreement has been expressed in Chapter Four. The questionnaire was designed to draw responses from characters in the industry on how they perceived the issues in relation to their own workplace.

The Case Studies

In order to address the Webbs' point, and to achieve the objectives of the thesis, the questionnaire is not the only research method to be relied upon in this project.

Following the approach of Edwards and Scullion (1982) the questionnaire would become a “means of supplementing more formal approaches and not as a source of ‘hard’ data which can be treated independently of our other investigations” (p 295). I therefore decided to use a case study approach in order to effectively ‘dig deeper’ and to gain first hand knowledge of the impact that the national agreement has on workers in the industry. Batstone, Ferner and Terry (1983) believe that there had to be a “negotiation of order approach” to their research. This approach would “highlight the processes by which accommodation between conflicting priorities is achieved” (p 13). Batstone et al used two tools in their research, documentary sources and unstructured interviews with key participants. This is a similar model to the approach employed in this project, but supplemented by the survey. The case study will involve interviewing both workers and management at distinct geographical areas, away from the Herts and Essex region in order to establish the reality of workplace industrial relations under the regulation of a national agreement.

A core aspect of the data collection was the interviews. The emergent case studies were used to gain local information on workplace organisation and how the national agreement impacts on this organisation. The studies took place at three companies based in the South West, Humberside and East Anglia and involved undertaking seventeen interviews in total, five in the South West, seven in Humberside and five in East Anglia. The interviews were taped and took place in the workplace. Prior arrangements were made with the company through the offices of the local branch and the interviews were conducted in a room provided by the management using an agreed time-table. The interviews were conducted with members of management,

union workplace activists and workers and informed the case studies by providing a range of views across the workforce.

This approach to conducting the interviews also allowed for a good geographical spread, reflecting a national perspective. I had to rely on making good use of my contacts in these areas to ensure access, an issue that had not been without its problems. There were always going to be difficulties associated with the choice of company given that I am a full time union officer. Fears surrounding an element of prying into company affairs or gaining inside information on the strengths and weaknesses of an employer have to be allayed and employers may not always appreciate the value of research. However, the mix of companies became available and, more importantly, the workers approached, and this includes activists and passive members, should present a fairly comprehensive analysis.

The case studies involved two large and one small company to reflect the diversity in size of employer unit in the industry. It was not possible to select the case study companies by function because of the considerable operational variation of the general print sector, however, those companies that co-operated represent a fair reflection of that diversity. The workplace representative and a manager at each site were interviewed. More importantly, in order to gain an insight as to how members view union organisation and representation, a sample of members from each department were also interviewed. This interview format allowed me to gather relevant evidence on company policy with regard to pay determination; disciplinary and grievance handling; equal opportunities; and company rules and how these important policies are formulated and implemented. Interviews with employees from

all departments enabled me to look for evidence of workplace organisation, including perceptions of activism. I also explored member awareness of the of the national agreement and how it impacts on the chapel from a 'grass roots' perspective, through registering the responses of the wider workforce rather than merely relying on the chapel representative's response. These interviews allowed a consideration of the gender order in the case study firms and to inform and develop our understanding of the resilience of gender segregation in the industry and build on earlier work. This approach gave a more in depth source of data for analysis. The research approach will be influenced by grounded theories and therefore will be open to themes emerging during the course of the fieldwork. The researcher who comes to the research with a strong trade union orientation will obviously influence the methodology. The research will benefit from the researcher's extensive knowledge of the industry, its language and its customs.

Although a potentially difficult part of the research, I made tentative approaches to sister branches regarding appropriate companies who might co-operate in this project and received positive responses in the Humberside, South West and East Anglia areas. The use of semi-structured interviews, as time did not permit the luxury of interviewing everyone in the company, ensured that data was gathered from a representative sample across all departments. I have drawn up a schedule of questions for management and workers (see appendix III). Bryman And Bell (2003) argue that the interview "is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research" and claim that using a semi-structured approach to the interviews affords a degree of flexibility through using a fairly general list of topics in the interview schedule. This approach allows for the interview to go off at tangents and can capture the

interviewee's point of view and provides to the interviewer license to pursue topics and issues raised by the interviewee. However, in the main, the same questions using similar wording will be used in every interview. (pp 341-343)

Organising the case studies proved to be far from straight forward and determining which companies the interviews would take place in was a dilemma for the field work element of the research. Tentative approaches to colleagues in other branches appeared to provide reasonable responses to my requests for contacts in companies and eventually I drew up a list of potential candidates. As the process of arranging the interviews at prospective companies developed it became clear the anticipated co-operation was not forthcoming. In many cases the contact provided was the name of a director at a company and it was left to me to write to the contact asking for their co-operation in my fieldwork. In the majority of cases I received no response to my correspondence. One company did reply, stating that due to the sensitive nature of their work they did not feel they could accommodate me (see letters in appendix IV).

This disappointing response to my request demanded a rethink of how I would approach companies to allow access. I felt that the best results would be achieved through an introduction from a branch officer, rather than taking what was in effect a cold calling approach. The disadvantages of adopting this strategy are that the companies would be selected by branch officers and there would be the natural inclination to approach companies where a good relationship existed and that this might reflect a union bias within the companies. Also, it is more than likely that the branch officers are going to select a company that they consider to be well organised and compliant with the conditions of the GPMU/BPIF agreement. Finally, having

companies hand picked negates the aspect of having random responses from a list of correspondents. The major advantage of the chosen approach is that open access to interviewees and a geographical spread is assured through selecting the regions in which contact was initiated. A detailed description of the companies engaged in the case studies can be found at Chapter Seven.

Having determined the companies where the interviews were to be undertaken it was decided to tape record and transcribe all of the interviews rather than simply to rely on taking notes during the interview. I undertook all of the transcribing myself. This was partly to do with the cost factor involved in employing professional transcribers, but also took account of the advice offered by Bryman and Bell (2003) who claim that

researchers are frequently interested not just in *what* people say but also in the *way* they say it. If this aspect is to be fully interwoven into an analysis, it is necessary for a complete account of a series of exchanges in an interview to be available

Being able to return to the tapes and understand the emphasis that was being made over a particular point was invaluable in the analysis of this data. The authors point out that the procedure for tape-recording and transcribing interviews is time consuming, a point that I, with my limited typing skills can verify, but they also identify several advantages of adopting this method one of which is the fact that recording and transcribing an interview “helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews” (p 353). I found this element of the procedure particularly relevant. It was during the transcriptions that I became aware of how much detail might have been lost if I had relied on note and memory to record the data.

Transcribing the data helped me to ascertain that certain predetermined themes that had been influenced by my earlier research were emerging from this research. Fielding (1993) suggests that transcribing helps “guide your analysis and quite possibly reveal lines of analysis you had not thought of” (p 146). In addressing this point, from my own perspective, I remained open to taking into account any relevant sub themes that emerged from the interviews. Having completed the transcription I repeatedly interrogated the data for evidence relevant to the thematic organisation of my research. Notes from my field diary that I kept during the field work helped in the analysis of my data. The diary was useful in recording the physical environment of the companies being used in the case studies.

Chapter Six.

The Resilience of National Pay Bargaining and the General Printing Industry's response to an agenda for change.

Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the themes that have emerged from the research and their relevance to the aims and objectives of the thesis. The Research Methods chapter has already explained the multi-faceted approach to the research (pp 160-171). This chapter specifically draws two sources of information. Firstly, an in-depth analysis of documentary data produced by both the employers' association and the trade union over a twenty year period is undertaken. Secondly, observations from my own experience as an industrial officer of the union provide another rich source of information. This is a very different form of data that compliments the documentary evidence. My participant observation is different in that it is recorded as part of my everyday life as an industrial officer, not as a infrequent participant who comes into a situation solely to gain information for a particular case study. Therefore, in this chapter I make use of information gleaned from documentary evidence that is underpinned by my own unique experience of working fully in the industry.

The research methods chapter explains the influence of Layder's map as a methodological approach to the research (pp 150-151). This research into industrial relations in the general print sector reflects both the national and local response to collective bargaining and therefore, in Layder's terms, explores the macro – micro divide (p 150) and it is within the context of this macro-micro divide that the map becomes a useful resource for developing the structure of the research findings,

making sure that the elements of self, situated activity, setting and context are interwoven into the emerging arguments.

Layder places great emphasis on the significance of history to understanding concepts of social organisation (pp 151-152), and the importance of the historical basis of workplace industrial relations in general print has been expressed in Chapter Three, where national bargaining evolved almost as a result of a workplace organisation that had its roots in the early establishment of the closed shop among the craft workers. The historical aspect of workplace industrial relations in general print is further addressed in the Chapter Four where the literature review traces the development of the union movement in the sector and the impact of this dynamic on the shape and content of the national agreement.

Contemporary research needs to be set against the complexity of the printing industry. Relatively speaking, the printing industry overall has experienced good industrial relations with many of the disputes being confined to short skirmishes particularly in the newspaper sector where the product is more perishable. Richardson (2003) notes the extent of these disputes in Fleet Street, particularly between renowned newspaper barons like Murdoch and Maxwell where workers on the title not in dispute were encouraged to produce more copies in order to put pressure on the recalcitrant employer to settle. This was a common tactic in national newspaper production, whereas in the general print sector the only recorded national strike occurred in 1959. Roe and Telford (2004) highlight the significance of this dispute claiming that, although the print unions (and there were many of them in these times) could claim a victory over the employers, in the long term it was the emergent employers' agenda for change in the industry that was the resilient and decisive factor in this dispute. It is

against the backdrop of there being a distinct process for industrial relations within the general print sector, and the machinations that form part of the ongoing process of collective bargaining in the sector, that determines the focus of this chapter of my thesis.

This chapter concentrates on union activity at the national (macro) level and seeks to identify the significant parties and the processes involved in preserving national pay bargaining. An examination of the national leadership strategy to preserve the union's position in the industry will also be a focus of this chapter. The series of amalgamations that eventually brought about the creation of the Graphical Paper and Media Union (GPMU) as the single union for the industry in 1991 has been examined in Chapter Four (pp 121-123). This pressure to merge in order to preserve effective representation for members and union survival in the industry has since led to the GPMU members agreeing in a ballot to merge with Amicus in November 2004 and the impact of this initiative is considered within the overall context of the changing environment in which the union has had to operate.

The chapter will also consider the national union response to an agenda for change that is driven by the contemporary political climate. Chapter Two provides an insight into the different responses that unions might adopt to maintain their representative influence in a changing political environment; and introduces the concepts of mutual insurance, collective bargaining and legal enactment as methods adopted by unions over a period of time to remain effective and relevant to their membership. For much of the twentieth century trade unions clung to what has been described as the voluntarist approach to industrial relations where the law was seen to have a limited role in collective bargaining. The relevance of these concepts to this thesis becomes

apparent as the research focuses on the GPMU reaction to change that in a sense reflects a dichotomy in approach. This dichotomy is expressed in a union response that encapsulates their determination to adhere to their traditional pluralist approach to industrial relations through persevering with national pay bargaining while at the same time trying to work within a changing legislative framework that represents increased state interference in industrial relations.

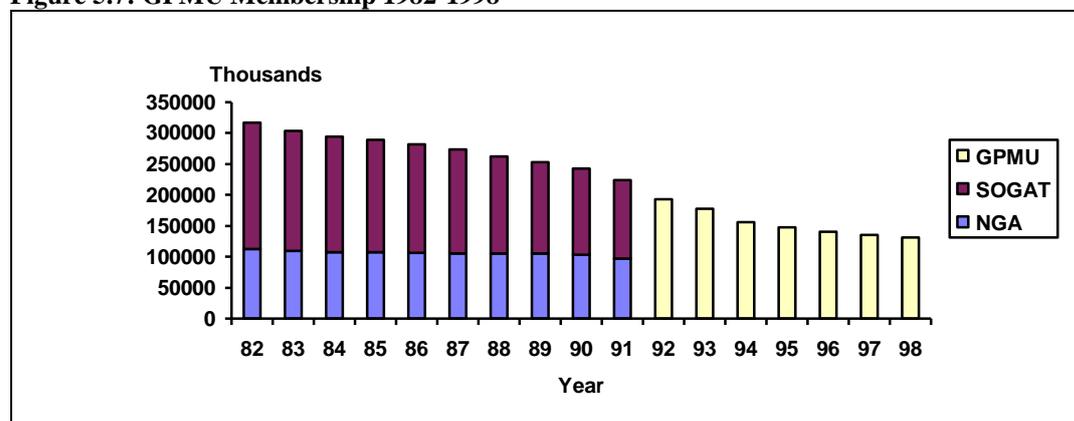
A central aim of this chapter is to determine the importance of multi-employer bargaining to the principal actors in the agreement i.e. the trade union and the employers' association. This investigation takes place within the context of an overall decline in trade union membership in the UK. An important theme to emerge from the research is strategies adopted by the union to preserve their position in the industry. One such strategy is the introduction of an organising culture to the structure of the union through the engagement of specialist recruiting staff trained by the TUC organising academy. These new organisers are expected to work with the branch officers to recruit members to the union across a wide spectrum including green field sites and through recruiting non union members in sites where the union is already established. This exercise involves attempting to engage with groups that have been identified as hard to reach for the union including women, young workers, and workers from black and ethnic minorities. Many of the potential membership are employed in low skilled jobs or are in temporary employment. This process is set within the context of recent political and technological influences that have had a significant impact on the structure and representative nature of the printing trade unions.

The GPMU strategy to maintain their influence in the industry, and preserve national collective bargaining.

A key theme of this thesis is the continuing commitment of the trade union and employers' association to national, multi-employer pay bargaining. From the trade union perspective, in order to participate in the collective bargaining process it is essential that they are seen as being representative of the workforce and speak on their behalf. The problems that all UK unions have faced over recent years, falling membership numbers and recruitment difficulties, have impacted on the ability of the GPMU to continue as a sovereign union and to be the voice at work for the membership. In the face of this dilemma of falling membership, this section looks at the strategies that the GPMU adopted to improve membership figures and whether the decisions were sufficient not only to retain existing members, but also to impact on new and hard to reach workers in the industry.

The general print sector has always been seen as an area for high union density. Roe (2001: pp 195-196) in his work on the sector, records a) the continuous fall in the absolute number of GPMU members over time (table 5.7) and b) membership density levels among companies that work under the national agreement (table 5.8).

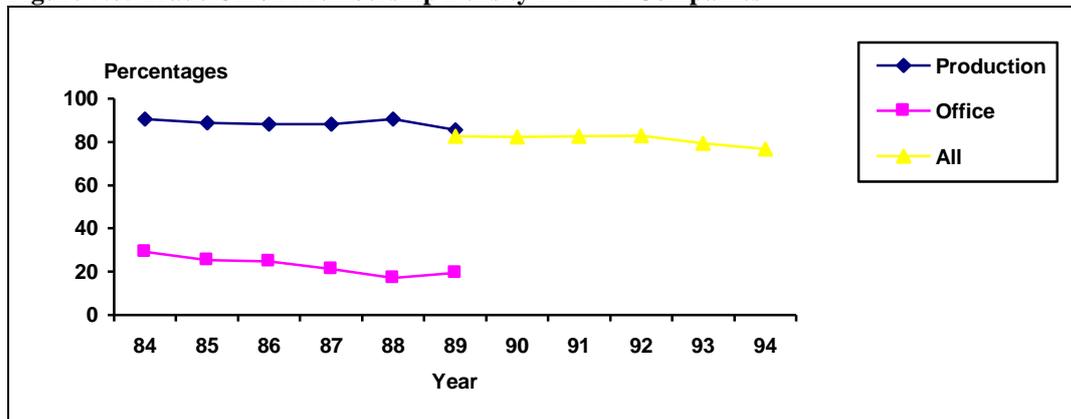
Figure 5.7: GPMU Membership 1982-1998



Source: GPMU

Table 5.8 shows a steady decline, with little evidence that this was offset by the merger of the NGA and SOGAT in 1991. This is further evidenced in table 1: p 183 which provides an analysis by gender from the years 1998-2002.

Figure 5.8: Trade Union Membership Density in BPIF Companies



Source: BPIF Labour Force Inquiry 1989 and Manpower Survey 1994

Note: Production and Office figures are for full-time employees

Table 5.8 is illuminating as it demonstrates the partial impact of union recruitment. Membership remains concentrated in the production areas. There is little evidence of a real breakthrough in organising office workers, traditionally seen as more hard to reach.

This analysis is largely based on documentary evidence supplemented by my own observations and experiences and is taken in the light of successive delegate conferences since 1999 being warned by the unions' auditors of the perilous financial state of the union. In continuing this pessimistic theme, the auditor reported to delegates to the 2001 conference that the union had not achieved an operating surplus over the previous four years. It was pointed out that long term investments such as property were being sold off to meet operating costs and the damage this would do the long term future of the union. In summarising his report, the auditor warned that "I am...concerned that unless the losses being made on the normal operating position of

the union are stemmed or reversed then this union will run out of liquid funds and will be unable to pay its way as debts fall...I am concerned that by the time we get to 2003 if results do not improve the general fund may at that time be rapidly running out of usable assets” (pp 73-74)

One of the strategies adopted by the GPMU in an attempt to reverse falling membership trends was to introduce an intensive membership recruitment and retention policy. A major feature of this strategy was to become involved in the newly created Union Organising Academy introduced in 1998 by the TUC, and designed to train dedicated organisers to recruit members in new and expanding areas of work and to increase union density where unions were already established (see Chapter Two pp 77-78). The GPMU experience has to be seen in the context of the need for this trade union to introduce a recruitment strategy to an industry that was dominated by the closed shop and where workers had traditionally been queuing to join and were often refused entry to the ranks of the union, and the current TUC initiatives adopted on union organising that opened the door of the unions to all. Tony Burke, GPMU Deputy General Secretary, chaired the TUC ‘New Unionism’ programme that launched the Organising Academy and represented the GPMU in the Organising Academy chairing the organising committee.

Some measure of success in the TUC approach to recruitment and organisation is contained in a survey undertaken by Heery et al (2003) at the Cardiff Business School which claims “that the 161 organisers who had been through the training had between them recruited nearly 40,000 new members” (pp 3- 9). The TUC website claims that,

“the academy and its graduates, have played a key role in shifting attitudes within the trade union movement” (New Unionism). Waddington (2003), on the other hand, highlights the plight of unions in the UK, where membership density remains weak even in the traditional heartlands of union organisation. The author claims that the TUC approach to organising has been influenced by similar approaches undertaken in the USA and Australia and concentrates on addressing the weaknesses that time and financial constraints, accompanied by the decentralization of collective bargaining, have forced on shop stewards and full time officers.

Waddington (2003) questions the level of success that the TUC strategy has generated, pointing out that unions still have a lot of work to do in engaging with under-represented groups such as women, young workers and ethnic minorities. He points out that the organising strategy results “suggest that sponsoring unions tend to employ the trainees for deepening in partially organised sectors” and as a result “No major non-union company has yet succumbed and granted recognition under pressure from activities associated with the organising model”, and concludes that “unions have yet to shed the pattern of male dominance that continues to inform activity at all levels, and have failed to address the interests of young workers. Only when marked progress in these areas has been achieved will unions be able to extend organisation ...on the basis of high rates of membership participation” (pp 238-244)

Available evidence appears to support Waddington’s position. Union membership figures are showing little sign of recovery. According to WERS (2005), workplaces

with no union members have climbed to almost two thirds of all workplaces, up to 64 per cent from 57 per cent in 1998, with the private sector currently demonstrating an even higher 77 per cent figure. Crucially, the WERS data shows that in only eight per cent of private sector workforces employing more than ten people is union density above 50 per cent (pp 12-13), the benchmark for unions to begin recognition proceedings. Statistics released by the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), the body responsible for adjudicating on trade union claims for employer recognition for collective bargaining purposes, show that the level of activity for new recognition deals has been low. In the CAC Annual Report (2005) a cumulative chart reveals that during the lifetime of the legislation there have been a total 444 cases for recognition submitted by unions. The total figure for 2004-05 was 83 applications. In 2004 a TUC publication reported that “This year’s Trade Union Trends Recognition Survey 2003 recorded 166 new recognition deals, half the number recorded the year before and around a third of the 2001 survey”.

With specific regard to the GPMU, the Executive Council Report (2003) informs us that between 2001 and 2003 the union secured over one hundred recognition agreements across the whole sector, unfortunately there is no breakdown in these figures for general print. Predominately, these agreements were secured on a voluntary basis without the need to make a claim to the CAC. The report does provide an example of the union winning recognition and collective bargaining rights for members employed at John Brown/Derry Printers using the CAC procedures. However, there is also reference in the report to the difficulties in progressing such a claim through the CAC and that in a small number of instances the union had been

forced into conducting a ballot among members to expedite the claim only to lose the ballot due to “a high level of anti-union activity on the part of the employer”. The report also refers to the plight of members employed in companies with less than twenty one workers in the bargaining unit who are excluded from the legislation. This barrier has the potential to impact on a high proportion of GPMU members with eighty five per cent of members being employed in Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs). With regard to the success of the organising model adopted by the union, the report claims that between October 2000 and September 2001, of the seventy-two recognition agreements secured, organisers were only directly involved in some twenty-seven cases or forty per cent. However, in the following year organisers were directly involved in twenty-nine out of the forty-two agreements secured, almost seventy per cent. The fall in the number of agreements in the second year is attributed to the fact that “many of the ‘easier’ campaigns has already been won within the first year of the Fairness at Work Legislation” (pp 14-16)

Therefore, despite the apparent lack of progress in organising among TUC affiliates, the GPMU nationally has remained at the forefront of employing organisers to recruit new members in Greenfield sites along with trying to recapture lost membership in existing companies where recognition is held. The latter is in response to the lost facility of the closed shop, another legislative change that the union has had to face (See Chapter 2: p 54). Unfortunately the organising policy that was adopted by delegates at the 1999 BDC was not universally implemented across all the GPMU branches. Despite the delegates to the 2001 BDC reaffirming the organising and recruitment strategy as the number one priority for the GPMU (2003: EC Report, p

16), the autonomous characteristic of the branches within the GPMU structure, and the financial autonomy that goes with it, meant that branches are free to engage in the policy or to defer if they so choose. Under the national policy, the branch and national union split the organiser employment costs equally, with national finances meeting NI and pension contributions, supply of a car and mobile phone. The branch is responsible for mileage and out of pocket expenses. Branches that have bought into the policy have reported varying degrees of success in the recruitment field but the coverage is patchy and not all areas have equal access to the services of an organiser. The branch breakdown provided in the Annual Report and Financial Statement, September 2003 shows that only one branch increased its membership over the 2002-2003 period, and this particular branch did not employ an organiser and the actual gain was minimal (pp 44-45)

The impetus behind the GPMU organising strategy followed that of the TUC in response to the legislation brought in by the Labour government that gives rights to union recognition where membership justifies it. However, the evidence suggests that the action has not stemmed the membership losses. The most recent figures available are reproduced in Table 1 below and indicate that the GPMU membership has fallen consistently over the period 1998 – 2002 and that the working membership has dropped from 131,052 in 1998 to 103,242 in 2002.

Table 1.

Working Members	September 2002	September 2001	September 2000	September 1999	September 1998
Male	85,401	94,693	100,336	105,182	108,461
Female	17,841	20,159	21,084	22,219	22,591
Total	103,242	114,852	121,420	127,401	131,052

Source: GPMU Annual Report and Accounts, September 2002.

From the above evidence it would appear that the measures taken by the union at the national level to stem membership losses and to engage with potential members in areas where the union is already active have not had the desired effect. This, in part, might be due to the devolved nature of the structure of the union, where national policies have not cascaded down to the branch and chapel level. Indeed, the General Secretary commented on the failure of the union organising strategy to impact on all regions of the union, claiming,

We could...have tried to organise our way out of the membership decline because, while blue collar jobs are in decline, there are tens of thousands of unorganised white collar workers in our industry. But, sadly, we have not been able to convince all our branches to support BDC policy on organising blue collar, let alone white collar workers. And, despite some notable successes that prove it can be done, we no longer have the financial resources to make a significant breakthrough in this area.

(BDC Report 2003: p 40)

In the light of this continuous pattern of falling membership and the consequent effect of the GPMU being unable to continue as a sovereign trade union, the 2003 conference took the decision to instruct the executive council to seek out a merger

with another union on the best terms for the GPMU. This is a very different form of merger for the print union. Previous mergers have been consistent with the policy of creating one union for the industry. This merger is more in line with the findings of Waddington (2003) who claims that falling membership and the consequent financial crisis that ensues makes union merger the preferred method of union restructuring (p 224).

In January 2004 the GPMU membership were presented with a consultative ballot to determine which union, Amicus or the Transport and General Workers Union, the GPMU should begin merger talks with. The GPMU magazine records that the membership were given “the chance to choose between two very good prospective partners offering the GPMU merger terms that were not massively dissimilar”. The article goes on to report that the membership agreed in that ballot vote by an overwhelming majority of those returning their ballot paper to support the recommendations of the executive council to begin merger talks with Amicus the giant general union formed by the merger of AEEU and MSF (Direct: June 2004, p 2). The result of this ballot was published in the union magazine and revealed that seventy-three per cent of the members opted for Amicus with a thirty-eight per cent ballot return (Direct: March 2004, p 3). This consultative ballot was followed by a second decisive vote in favour of a merger with Amicus with 86% of the 31,000 members who returned their ballot paper voting in favour (Official Notice published in GPMU Direct, August 2004). This decision meant that under the Instrument of the Transfer of Engagements of the GPMU into Amicus, an autonomous graphical paper and media sector would be established within Amicus for up to five years after the

merger date. This arrangement would enable the existing GPMU structure to continue undisturbed and heralded the transfer of just under 100,000 working members to Amicus on 1st November 2004, a far cry from the heady heights of P&KTF membership that peaked at 405,793 in 1971 (see Chapter Four p 120).

The national response to an agenda for change, and the maintenance of national collective bargaining.

At the national level, and even in the wake of the GPMU merging with Amicus in November 2004, industrial relations in the general print sector still centres on the continuing existence of a multi-employer agreement. The significant parties to this collective bargaining process are the BPIF on the employers' side and the GPMU representing the workers. The national agreement is reviewed annually between panels made up of GPMU national officers and executive council members, and officers and employer representatives of the BPIF. At the conclusion of the discussions both parties have the agreed changes ratified by their membership, the GPMU by ballot of members working under the agreement, the employers through report back to regional membership meetings. The national agreement has traditionally set the minimum terms and conditions of employment as well as setting out procedures for disciplinary and grievance matters. The 2005 – 2006 agreement has affected the working conditions of around 30,000 GPMU members working in the general printing sector.

The literature review has already highlighted the continual downward spiral of collective bargaining in the UK economy (see Chapter Two pp 57-60) and early evidence from the latest WERS (2005) series confirms that this is still the case with all forms of collective bargaining continuing to decline in the private sector (p 20),

and yet the parties to the printing agreement continue to perpetuate this type of bargaining for the industry. The importance of Fox's frame of reference in helping to understand the management approach to industrial relations along a unitarist – pluralist axis has been raised in chapter 3: p 31. Kessler and Purcell (2003) revisit the concept of a frame of reference for understanding the management style in their approach to industrial relations. The authors point to a dichotomy in approach to the concepts of collectivism and individualism across the unitarist – pluralist axis, where unitarism corresponds with individualism and pluralism corresponds with collectivism, and contend that rather than being mutually exclusive concepts, they can instead be seen as being “distinct but related dimensions of the employment relationship”, and therefore complimentary. Viewed from this perspective the authors offer a refined frame of reference model that encapsulates the different management approaches to the concepts of individualism and collectivism (pp 315-317). Within this frame of reference, or management ‘style matrix’, it is argued that management approaches have polarised between two distinct styles, “one based on a sophisticated consultative style revolving around high-commitment practices in a co-operative union environment and the other related to a sophisticated human relations style also reflecting high-commitment practices but in a non-union context” (p 334). This section will examine the approach to collective bargaining adopted by the parties to the agreement and whether the contemporary style can still be seen as a form of adversarial collective bargaining or if there is more of a shift towards a sophisticated consultative approach to the agreement.

The national agreement is determined at the national level but ultimately impacts on workplace industrial relations. Given the declining state of industry wide collective

bargaining in the private sector of the UK economy, the question arises as to why it remains so popular within the general printing sector. On the employers side this might be due to the make up of the general printing industry. A recent document produced by stakeholders in the industry confirms that the industry continues to consist of a vast number of small firms and informs us that of the twelve thousand printing companies in the UK only about six hundred firms employ more than fifty people (strategic plan for the UK printing industry, 2004, p 3). This emphasis on small employment units puts pressure on the viability of employing full time personnel experts and leads to a greater reliance on organisations like the BPIF. Indeed, the BPIF have scored a major coup in recruiting Polestar, the UK's largest employer for print, to their ranks as a full participating member in 2002. A BPIF press release (2002) welcomes Polestar's decision to join the association as a full participating member after more than twenty years absence. In explaining the group's decision to join the BPIF, the Polestar Chief Executive commented:

“We have seen the leadership role that the BPIF is now playing in shaping the future of the industry and Polestar wants to be part of the process. The industry is evolving rapidly and we believe that collective leadership will be important in determining the prosperity of the sector”

The BPIF Chief Executive is keen to emphasise in the press release that “In order to be representative we need to be involved with all companies, large and small” (ibid), however, the addition of Polestar to membership adds weight to a BPIF board that is more representative of the smaller employers who currently dominate.

With the national agreement still intact, small employers are able to settle their pay reviews without having to be involved in lengthy negotiating rounds that they are ill equipped to engage in. Roe (2001) expresses the view that industrial relations issues are the main reason companies join the BPIF and they expect the federation 'to help deal with the unions, to share information, and to act as a pressure group' (p 144).

Printing World (1995) supports the view that the smaller companies were more likely to be in favour of a national agreement as they lack the resources that the larger companies have to conduct their own wage negotiations (p 8). Similarly, on the trade union side, the prospect of having to enter into separate negotiations each year for all the diverse companies in the industry is a daunting task, and expensive in terms of time and resources as the 1993 dispute proved (see Telford, 1995). Therefore the luxury of settling a pay round for the industry at the national level remains the preferred option. Yet this approach to industrial relations appears to be against the national trend. Milward et al (2000) provide an analysis of the declining influence of employer's associations across the UK economy. The authors argue that, in "1980 they [employer's associations] were the most cited source of external advice, whereas, by 1998, they were the least cited of the six main categories cited" (p 73). The WERS (1999) survey records the diminished importance of employer's associations in industrial relations during the 1980s with a corresponding fall in membership from "22 per cent of workplaces in 1984 to 13 per cent in 1994". The commentators go on to report a "modest recovery, with 18 per cent of workplace reporting membership in 1998". However, they go on to comment that "the recovery was complete among the largest workplace with 500 or more employees, among whom membership levels in 1998 returned to the level of 1994" (p 228), and Polestar's decision to join the BPIF would fall into the latter category.

Documentary analysis that was drawn from national union communiqués and literature produced by both the GPMU and BPIF to promote national collaboration on industrial relations indicates a continuing commitment to collective bargaining from both sides of the industry through national agreements. In 1993, when discussions broke down and the national agreement was being tested to the limit the GPMU remained resolute that continuing with the agreement was “in the best interests, not simply of our members but for the whole industry” (BDC Report, 1993:p 78). Confirmation of the union commitment to national bargaining is provided in successive BDC reports, the 2001 report on the BPIF agreement to the BDC argues that the national agreement “remains one of the most important national agreements in the UK manufacturing sector” (p 8) In his address to the BDC (2001) the General Secretary commented that,

The GPMU has been uniquely successful in maintaining our national agreements. They provide the industry with stability, a safety net for employment conditions, improvements in efficiency and productivity and the ability to engage employers and Government in addressing the issues that are important to our industry

(p 42)

On the employer’s side, positive comments on the continuation of the agreement emerge. In 2004 the chair of the BPIF negotiating panel reported that,

in view of the tough trading conditions in the industry an agreed national settlement will continue to provide the stability that the industry requires
(BPIF News 2004)

Similarly in 2005 the chair recorded that,

This was an extremely tough set of negotiations for both parties given the industry’s ability to pay. This settlement should provide a platform for the industry to meet its future challenges

This statement was supported by the GPMU AGS who claimed,

The negotiations this year were difficult to say the least. However both sides recognise the importance in securing a pay agreement acceptable to Amicus members and the industry in general

(BPIF News 2005)

However, the analysis of the documents reveals that a continuing commitment to national bargaining is now being expressed through the parties to the agreement attempting to identify and address the problems facing the industry through a process of cooperation and partnership. In a BPIF (2004) press release both sides commented on the encouraging progress that has been made in cooperation on issues ranging over employment, training and legislative issues. A GPMU spokesperson commented that,

“progress to date has been positive, whilst at the same time discussions have identified a number of challenges facing the industry. It is also clear the partnership approach opens new opportunities to address these challenges together”.

Similarly, a BPIF representative commented that

“We are making good progress so far. Some contentious issues have been discussed and there are no sacred cows. We have taken time to understand the issues each side has and the reasons behind these. It is through better understanding that you start to be able to think about possible solutions and the changes that need to be made”.

An early example of a partnership approach to industrial relations in the sector emerged when the key stakeholders commissioned in-depth research through a consultancy (Graphic Futures) using funding from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The survey was match-funded by the industry and the work was overseen by a steering committee made up of key partners in the industry including BPIF, GPMU, Printing Industry Research Association (PIRA), and three major employers. The research led to the publication in 2001 of a document titled ‘Print 21: coming of age?’ that represented a study into the competitiveness of the printing industry. The study focused on the importance of the industry to the UK economy and

the challenges that the industry faced through the rapid development of new technology, particularly from IT and digital technology.

The Print 21 study challenged the perception that printing was a 'mature' industry and that like other similar 'old economy' sectors, such as textiles, was doomed to decline. It argued that the challenge for the industry was to take advantage of the opportunities introduced by new technology that will encourage a shift from "a manufacturing to a service orientation within the industry" that develops a new dynamism to the sector where "as a result, a sector which might be considered mature is in reality an adolescent in terms of opportunities for future development (p 1). The strengths and weaknesses in the industry were identified and seven key aims and actions were put forward as essential to the future of the industry. The main areas for action focused on improving productivity and efficiency; improving the industry's quality of management; strengthening the education and training infrastructure of the industry; and improving the external image of the industry. Print 21 was therefore a unitary paradigm and sought a shift away from the traditional collectivist approach in the printing industry. Indeed it heralded a commitment to an HRM approach to industrial relations that was strongly associated with the conservative period of government, 1979 – 1997, that has already been referred to in the literature review (see pp 60-61).

This partnership approach adopted by the union challenges the pluralist attitude to industrial relations that has been central to the GPMU doctrine and their adherence to adversarial collective bargaining through a national agreement. Kessler and Purcell (2003) questioned if social, political and economic factors had brought about an attitudinal change among the actors involved in UK industrial relations, and whether

this meant there had been a shift away from certain types of collectivism. One of the alternatives suggested by Kessler and Purcell was a partnership approach (pp313-314) and the change in attitude displayed by the GPMU negotiators appears to show their acceptance of this shift in the emphasis of the national agreement. It is at this juncture that the GPMU moves in two directions by presenting a potentially dichotomous approach to industrial relations. On the one hand they are preparing to enter into a partnership agreement that represents a shift to a more collaborative approach to management while at the same time they are pressing ahead with their organising strategy that is built on a traditional adversarial approach to industrial relations.

In keeping with this apparent partial change in emphasis to industrial relations from the union side, the response to the Print 21 challenges saw the introduction of a partnership approach between the GPMU and the BPIF to address the problems facing the industry. Along with other key players in the industry a 'Three Pillars' strategy was developed as a means to forge a coherent mechanism to improve the competitiveness and profitability of the industry with the vision to create a world class printing sector within the UK economy. This strategic approach would allow the actions dictated by the Print 21 report to be grouped under three distinct headings: (1) productivity and competitiveness; (2) training; (3) representation and partnership. Each of these 'pillars' is to be headed by separate organisations who would prioritise the actions within their sphere of influence. The organisations responsible for the three pillars would be: Vision in Print – Productivity and Competitiveness; Print Education and Training Forum (PETF) – Skills; and the BPIF, together with other industry organisations – Representation and Partnership. These organisations would report back to a central steering committee comprised of employers' organisations,

GPMU, PETF, and PIRA. A key factor for the GPMU involvement in this strategy was that there was a continuing commitment to collective bargaining, although it also promotes and endorses partnership working in the industry. The importance of this development to the thesis is that the issues that are explored in the case studies fit with the priorities identified in the three pillars strategy.

In 2004 the first Strategic Plan was produced by the organisations and accepted by the industry as a working document. A major outcome to emerge from the Representation and Partnership ‘pillar’ of the industry strategic plan was the creation of the BPIF/GPMU Partnership at Work Initiative. Work on this initiative began in November 2003 and was again funded by the DTI. The guiding principle of the initiative is to “improve the industry’s productivity and working environment through a new partnership between employers and unions at national level” (p 15). A Printweek article (18th Dec. 2003) provided an insight to the positive approach to partnership adopted by both sides of the industry, commenting that:

BPIF chair of the Employers’ Panel Stephen Clark said he was confident that both sides could work together to find a “workable solution” that would bring benefits to employers and employees.

GPMU national officer Chris Harding said: “I am optimistic that in the months ahead in a non-confrontational environment both parties will have an open and positive discussion on a whole range of issues.”

The language was framed in terms of consensus. However, underlying this was the recognition that within these proposals, there was the potential for conflict.

Indeed the above quotations appear to signal ‘warnings’ in the use of phrases such as ‘both sides could work together’ and ‘non-confrontational environment’

These phrases imply that the reverse is also possible.

The timing of the discussions was relevant to the approach as we see in the following quotations, again drawn from the Printweek (18th Dec. 2003) article :

BPIF strategic partnerships director Andrew Brown said that although the success of the initiative depended on reconciling complex issues there were factors in its favour.

“We have got time to do it, we are not meeting head-on in a dispute, we have the funding and an independent chairman with no axe to grind,” said Brown.

The issues were not raised at a time of dispute therefore it was suggested that differences would be easier to reconcile. Further, that mediation through an independent chairman would enable differences to be reconciled. Again, a shift away from traditional collective bargaining.

An important element of this public commitment to partnership was the acceptance that the existing national agreement was in need of revision and modernisation in order for the industry to face challenges that it was experiencing on issues such as increased competition from new media and the growing trend of sourcing print orders overseas; responding to a changing political agenda in relation to new employment legislation and government policies on the work-life balance that would impact on people working in the industry; and, critically, issues relating to skills development in the industry. From the employer’s perspective, the revision of the national agreement was being seen as being a vehicle for producing an alternative method of workplace regulation in the long term. Speaking at the 2003 BPIF Annual General Meeting, the federation’s Chief Executive told delegates that finding an alternative to the national agreement was their “biggest challenge of all”. He spoke of the Partnership at Work

initiative, that the BPIF had entered into with the full cooperation of the GPMU, being a “major new project” that would not replace the National Agreement in the short term, “but in the long term it must” (Printweek. 2nd July, 2003). There is little sign of dissent from the union side to these remarks. Indeed, the Assistant General Secretary commented in a 2005 GPMU press release promoting membership acceptance of Partnership at Work that:

"The proposed Partnership At Work Agreement and Code of Practice will take the industry forward for the future and protect the National Agreement, which provides the bedrock of industrial relations within the printing industry...The proposed Partnership At Work Agreement is forward looking and takes into account best practice, current and future legislation, learning & skills, modernised and improved working arrangements and other wide ranging issues that are important to Amicus members working in the printing industry”

The Partnership at work initiative established a joint review panel between senior executive members of the BPIF and national GPMU representatives under the chairmanship of Frank Burchill, Emeritus Professor of Industrial Relations, Keele University. The final result of the work of this panel was the production of a consultation paper on the establishment of a new, modernised National Agreement for the industry. The document tells us that the key purpose of the initiative is to produce a revised agreement in line with the twelve key objectives that the joint review body had determined to be significant to both employers and employees. These objectives are:

- increasing dialogue and cooperation between employers, employees and employee representatives
- Building effective partnership between the BPIF and Amicus GPM Sector that recognises and seeks to address their mutual and separate needs

- Improving productivity and profitability
- Reducing excessive overtime working
- Ensuring fairness of treatment in the workplace
- Protecting the health and welfare of employees
- Assisting employees to adapt to changes affecting their employment
- Enabling employee representatives to represent their members effectively and to acquire the skills they need to work in partnership with employers
- Providing a means for resolving disputes and differences
- Ensuring implementation of workplace legislation and / or good employment practice
- Enabling effective recruitment and development of people
- Simplifying and modernising the National Agreement

(Partnership Agreement, 2005: p 6).

The Partnership at Work process is a new concept for the parties to the national agreement and has the potential to change the emphasis of the collective bargaining process away from that of establishing minimum standards for terms and conditions of employment to introducing best practice for the sector. This change in emphasis could be achieved as a result of the introduction of a Code of Practice that is to be appended to the national agreement that 'seeks to set out best practice in conditions of employment and people management, rather than minimum entitlements'. This would seem to be a radical departure from the long established traditional collective bargaining procedures and could undermine the ability of the union to provide a safety net below which members could not fall through setting minimum standards for the industry.

The code purports to reflect the views of both the BPIF and GPMU that ‘companies and chapels must work together to achieve the highest possible standards of employment relations’. The main purpose of the Code of Practice is to ‘supplement the National Agreement by setting out the standards that the parties consider all BPIF member companies should be seeking in these areas’. Future reviews of the Code of Practice will become the responsibility of a joint BPIF/Amicus GPM Sector Partnership Committee (National Agreement and Code of Practice: p 59).

The question arises as to what the change in emphasis towards partnership means for collective bargaining within the sector? Set within the context of this new partnership approach, the maintenance of a national agreement appears to remain at the heart of industrial relations for the sector, despite its continuation being subject to extreme pressure over recent years (see Chapter Four pp 131-134). Regardless of this persistent tension, in 2005 the national agreement has managed to survive another year. This was once again a very difficult set of negotiations. Tony Burke, Assistant General Secretary, speaking at the East of England Branch Annual General Meeting on 19th March 2005, told attendees of the tight mandate that the BPIF had been working to and of their initial refusal to offer a pay increase that even matched inflation. Talks had broken down but eventually the chair of the BPIF negotiating team asked to resume talks as they had secured a new mandate. It became apparent the new mandate was reached through discussion with the regional chairs of the BPIF and that two had agreed to present a new, improved offer, and five had abstained! The new offer of £7.50 per week to the minimum class 1 rate (a percentage increase of 3.02%, fractionally above inflation) was agreed and put to a ballot of the membership.

The AGS reported that the abstention issue was being viewed as a potential problem by the union leaders because it might lead to many small employers attempting to opt out of paying the increase. In order to avoid this scenario, branch officers would visit BPIF companies in their region and ensure that members had received the increase. A list of member companies in each region would be made available by the union.

There remain issues within the agreement for members working in the sector. The full cost recovery clause, with its spectre of claw-back, is retained firmly at the heart of the agreement. Also, the GPMU negotiation team have agreed to local negotiations to take place on issues such as call money and holiday pay premiums. Call money, an extra paid by companies to bring someone in on overtime without appropriate prior notice, and is paid over and above the overtime rate, has long been an issue with BPIF employers. In the agreement call money is automatically paid for Sunday working at the rate of one hour at double time irrespective of prior notice. The money tends to be paid mostly in the larger, well organised companies, with smaller employers having been able to absorb this element of overtime into new agreements or to have banished it all together. The holiday premium in the agreement is calculated on the average of the thirteen weeks prior to the holiday being taken. Small employers have long argued that this system creates staff shortages as workers tend to take their holidays during peak working times when average pay is higher. The BPIF would support their members negotiating a change in this practice to using an average of the previous year P60.

All of these issues were spelt out at a series of meetings held around the country during July and August 2005 where Tony Burke (AGS) presented the structure of the

new national agreement to branch officers and activists. I attended the meeting arranged for London and South East of England on the 17th August 2005. The AGS spelt out in great detail what he referred to as a 'root and branch review of the national bargaining framework' that was the culmination of '15 months of hard slog' leading to fifteen of the provisions being revised, seven new provisions to be included in the new agreement, eleven remaining unchanged and four of the existing provisions deleted. The details of the changes are listed in the Partnership at Work document as follows:

Provisions that have been revised:

- Dignity at Work
- Full cost recovery
- Flexibility of labour
- Recording of times
- Cancer screening
- Balancing of time
- Machine classifications
- Time off for trade union duties and activities
- Part time/temporary/agency workers
- Call money
- Reductions in business transfers
- Preparation for retirement
- Pensions
- Sick pay
- Holiday pay calculation

Provisions that are new to the National Agreement:

- Flexible working patterns
- Learning and skills
- Working time
- Privacy at work
- Voluntary recognition procedure
- Partnership
- Partnership committee

Provisions that remain unchanged in the new National Agreement:

- Honouring of agreements
- Efficiency and productivity

- Manning levels
- Changes in working practices
- Integrated pressrooms
- Disputes procedures
- Bereavement leave
- Notice
- Period of agreement
- Wage rates
- Hours and holidays

Provisions removed from the National Agreement:

- Demarcation
- Access to CCTV evidence
- Single European market
- Joint review body

The AGS made clear reference to the inclusion of the code of practice, a new aspect of the national agreement that deals with ‘best practice rather than minimum entitlements’ which is a major shift away from the accepted position within the union membership that the agreement was a minimum terms framework agreement. The new provisions would address issues such as flexible working patterns, included to deal with the continuing move by companies to twenty-four – seven coverage that existing agreements on shift working did not deal with; working time and the confusion that workers face around the provisions of the EU Working Time Directive, new procedures will allow for a derogation from the working time regulations by collective agreement; privacy at work; a voluntary recognition procedure; partnership and the establishment of a partnership committee to monitor and review the success of the new agreement; and learning and skills. Potentially, there were areas for contention within the provisions of the proposed agreement. The clauses on full cost recovery and flexible working have been the cause of heated debate at BDCs but are retained in this document. However, the atmosphere at the meeting I attended to hear the AGS’ presentation was surprisingly calm. The comments made by the few

delegates who took the trouble to make a contribution were generally supportive. There were some points of clarification raised but there appeared to be a sense of resignation that the revised agreement as described by the AGS would come into being.

Of all the new provisions introduced to the national agreement it is the establishment of a clause on learning and skills that breaks new ground. Improving the skills of workers in the industry has been a long term objective of the union (see Chapter 4, pp 139-140). Therefore, the inclusion of the learning and skills clause brings a new and important perspective to the national agreement. The GPMU has been concerned at the low level of skills among its members and motions to the union conferences have reflected this concern. The union has been making the case that employers are reluctant to engage in a structured training plan that addresses the skills gaps that exist in the industry. This is a view that is consistent with the findings of the WERS (1999) workplace industrial relations survey where it is argued that the picture of training provision across the UK economy reflects a “very clear divide” in access to training, where “less than half of craft workers, operatives and assembly workers and those in routine, unskilled jobs received any training at all” (p 149). The union are able to point to the high age profile of the sector (the average age of workers in the sector is 48) and that unless the training issues are addressed then maintaining a highly skilled and motivated workforce will become more and more difficult.

The onslaught of new technology has changed the face of the industry and many new skills have had to be developed. However, this appears to have been approached in an unstructured manner with much of the training being delivered by equipment

suppliers on a very short induction to the new technology. I have experienced examples where, with the introduction of new technology for pre-press equipment, hand picked members of the department are sent off to Belgium or even in one case Colorado in the United States, to be given manufacturers' training on the equipment, then returning to the department and passing this new knowledge to their colleagues. In an attempt to address this unstructured training agenda, the union has been pushing at the national level for the introduction of a recognised training programme that provides proper, accredited training for workers. Part of the ongoing negotiations with the employers has been the pressure to establish a training levy in the industry, set as a percentage of the payroll and used to train new recruits to the industry as well as up-skilling existing employees to ensure their future in a rapidly changing environment.

On the employers side there appeared to be a tacit agreement that a training levy would be beneficial to the sector. Discussions have been on-going with the Department for Education and Skills as the union side have been attempting to encourage the government to introduce a statutory levy for the sector if they cannot reach agreement with the BPIF. This approach fits well with the government's own Skills Strategy where they have set an ambitious agenda for the skills base in the UK to match the best in the world. However, the concept of entering into tri-partite discussions on industrial relations issues could almost be seen as a return to corporatism on a micro, sectoral basis that has more in common with 1970s than recent times.

There were stages during 2002 where it appeared that agreement could be reached only to be thwarted by the employer side's inability to deliver. The BPIF's failure to

gain member support for the introduction of a training levy led to a situation where the GPMU withdrew its support for all of the Print 21 initiatives. Printweek (16 August 2002) reported that the GPMU had withdrawn their support “more in sorrow than anger” and that their decision to withdraw support had been driven by the employer’s association’s failure to recommend the introduction of a levy in the sector. However, in the end, an agreement was reached between the parties to introduce a voluntary training levy in the sector as part of the Partnership at Work agreement. Agreement was largely due to the real threat of government imposing a training levy on the sector if voluntary arrangements fail to succeed, the employers agreed to establishing a voluntary training levy amounting to 0.5% of payroll, exclusive of employer pension and national insurance contributions. The Partnership at Work agreement that was eventually ratified by both parties in November 2005 “confirms that Government will act to introduce statutory measures in relation to compulsory employer contributions if these provisions do not generate sufficient investment in training and development” (BPIF/ GPM Sector Partnership Agreement: p 16)

The important aspect of the learning and skills clause in the agreement is that it recognises the union involvement in the learning and skills agenda and the development of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in the workplace will raise awareness and promote the learning and skills agenda among worker colleagues and to encourage them to become engaged in a learning culture. Ideally this will be achieved in the larger establishments through the introduction of learning agreements that engage the employer in not only issues around workforce development but also takes into account personal development. Workplace Learning Agreements will address issues such as facility time for ULRs and space for them to undertake their

duties. New legislation introduced in 2003 provides ULRs with reasonable paid time off for training and for carrying out their duties where they are members of an independent trade union recognised by their employer. The rights are incorporated in the ACAS code of Practice – Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities, and allow provision for the training of new ULRs and outlines the duties that they would require reasonable time off to undertake including training and or learning needs analysis, providing information advice and guidance, arranging training or learning and promoting the value of training and learning. The code also refers to an unpaid right for workers to have access to their ULR. (ACAS Code of Practice 3: 2004, pp 6 - 8).

Amicus, as a union, and the GPMU sector in particular, have fully embraced the concept of lifelong learning that is implicit in the learning and skills agenda and have also linked this programme to the organising strategy that is already embedded in the union's activities. In order to promote and extend the lifelong learning culture within the sector the GPMU, before its merger with Amicus, submitted a bid to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Union Learning Fund (ULF). This fund was established in 1998 to help and encourage unions to work towards getting their members, and workers in general, into accessing some kind of learning that will drive up the skills base of the UK workforce. The recruitment, training and development of ULRs is seen as central to this agenda and the government are prepared to fund union activity in this area. Because of the autonomous nature of the GPMU structure the process for bidding in to the ULF was for individual branches to prepare bids and to have them signed off centrally through the national union. This led to a piecemeal approach to the learning and skills agenda by the union with branches interested in the

agenda submitting bids and others having no involvement whatsoever. For example the Leeds and Central Yorkshire, Central Midlands, Wessex, South West, Greater London Region and CMS (Clerical, Managerial and Supervisors) branches were all involved in bidding for money from the ULF from the outset of the establishment of the fund. The Norwich and North Anglia, Herts and Essex, Ouse Valley, Birmingham and West Midlands branches followed suite. This meant that members working in ten of the GPMU branches had some access to lifelong learning provision funded by the ULF, but the members in the remaining fourteen GPMU branches were denied any access.

In an attempt to address this situation, and following a steer from the ULF team, it was agreed by the branches of the GPMU that the bid into the 2004-2006 round of funding would be a national bid that would see all members of the union benefit from the funding available. The national GPMU - ULF bid involved recruiting a team of eight project workers overseen by a project manager, dedicated to developing a infrastructure that will support ULRs in the workplace. The project workers would be based in regions roughly aligned to the government regional development areas and would be supported by the branch officers in that region. Progress has been made in recruiting and training ULRs, and there has been learning agreements entered into with prominent employer groups such as Polestar, De la Rue and Trinity Mirror Group and the clause on training in the national agreement underpins the learning and skills agenda for the sector. These learning agreements can be seen as a form of partnership working where the chapel and company will work together to develop a learning culture in the workplace.

The inclusion of the learning and skills clause in the national agreement is therefore an important breakthrough for the union. However, the review of the national agreement is comprehensive and is presented as a partnership agreement and code of practice that is contained within a 106 page document. Prior to the partnership review the terms set by the national agreement were a minimum, or safety-net, below which no worker could fall. A fundamental feature of that agreement is second tier bargaining where issues like house rates and shift allowances could be negotiated over and above those determined by the agreement. However, in the case of terms and conditions surrounding issues such as holiday premiums, call money and machine extras, these were set and were excluded from further negotiation. The emphasis of the new agreement focuses on best practice rather than minimum entitlements and will open these issues to the vagaries of local bargaining. As a result of this review the recommendations of the GPMU negotiating panel for the membership to accept the changes represents a major shift in the emphasis of the national agreement. The recommendations of the review were subsequently put to a ballot of the membership after an exhaustive round of meetings with branch officers and activists to gain support for the new agreement and resulted in a vote in favour of the Partnership at Work agreement. There appeared to be little dissent from those attending the briefings. At the meeting I attended in London there was little debate around the changes featured in the proposals to amend the agreement. This apparent apathy to the proposals is reflected in the table below, an extract from the report from Popularis, the official scrutineer for the ballot, that reveals an unspectacular response with only a 21% return rate. It would appear from this postal ballot result that the enthusiasm expressed by the national union for a revised national agreement is not reflected in the workplace.

YES	4244	71%
NO	1713	29%
Spoilt ballot papers	61	
Total ballot papers received	6018	21%
Total ballot papers dispatched	29108	

Conclusion.

This section has reviewed the approach to multi-employer bargaining through the national agreement adopted by the GPMU at the national level. The shift in the bargaining position adopted by the national negotiating panel has significant implications for terms and conditions in the workplace, not least the opportunity for employers to enter into local discussions on areas of the agreement such as holiday pay and shift patterns that were previously out of bounds. The literature review in Chapter Four has identified the resistance put up by the union to major changes in the structure of the agreement and the fight to maintain the element of second tier bargaining to build on and enhance the minimum terms achieved through the agreement. That part of the literature review also reflects on the resistance of activists to the inclusion of elements such as the cost recovery clause which they claim allows employers to reduce hard won conditions of employment. The union’s decision to embrace the Partnership at Work agreement is important as it indicates that they are prepared to accept change to maintain the continuation of the national agreement despite the resistance of the activists to dilute the national agreement. This new approach to industrial relations by the GPMU was emphasised by Tony Burke (AGS) who claimed in a BPIF Press Release (28/10/2005) that:

“The new Partnership at Work deal will move industrial relations in the industry into the 21st century. This new, modernised agreement takes into account the technical and economic changes that have occurred in recent years” that will mean “ that the industry can discuss a wide range of issues

including productivity, competitiveness, new legislation, as well as social and technical issues in a different way”

While it has been acknowledged in the literature that this is not new for the union and that ‘sacred cows’ have been conceded in the past, this appears to represent a major shift in the national union position. The implications of these decisions will only be revealed as time progresses and the bargaining issues within the national agreement are addressed. In part one of the literature review the Webb’s provided insights into the differing approaches that trade unions adopt to cope with the changing technical, economic and legislative environment in which they must operate. This shift in position by the GPMU on the way collective bargaining is addressed represents a change in the bargaining approach that embraces the new technological and legislative environment that they now face. While this change in approach to collective bargaining from the national union perspective may be seen as an example of a trade union remaking themselves as a response to different characteristics in history or in the employer (see Ackers et al in Chapter Two p 23), the shift in position also brings into question whether unions are able to follow Kelly’s (1999) mobilisation model and actively engage the membership in any form of resistance from below to the management’s agenda.

Taking into account such developments, the research will use data gathered from the case studies to ascertain whether workplace organisation is well placed in contemporary industrial relations to take up the challenge of asserting the union prerogative in the workplace. This appraisal will take into account the aims and objectives of my thesis including exploring the local bargaining context, and the interaction between formal and informal bargaining and the effects on different

groups of workers, and the relevance of union renewal and militancy concepts to understanding workplace organisation in the general print sector.

Chapter Seven.

The Case Studies.

As previously explained in the research methods chapter, the process of determining which companies to approach and engage with for the field work was not as easy a task as originally contemplated. Companies were reluctant to respond to written requests and eventually it was decided to use colleague branch officers to make the arrangements to visit companies in their region and make the initial introduction to the company. This ultimately was a non-random approach to the field work that led to

the following companies being decided upon to conduct the interviews (pseudonyms have been applied to protect the identity of the companies involved):

Packco, South West England

This is a long established South West of England based company and the interview process began with an introduction by the branch secretary to the Operations Director who gave a short presentation on the operational structure of the company. This presentation provided much of the background information as to how the organisation currently operated. The company history shows that this was originally a part of a major printing employer in the region, producing a wide range of printed products using litho, letterpress and gravure technology. Today the focus of production has changed to exclusively producing packaging using gravure as the only printing process. The tendency to long service was a feature in the workforce. All of the interviewees had been employed with the company for several years. Of those interviewed, the member with the least service had been with the company for thirteen years and had come to the company as a result of the closure of another gravure printer in the area. There had been a fall in the demand for gravure printing in recent years and fewer opportunities to move to other jobs might be a factor in determining why employees chose to stay with their existing employer. Despite a recent mini revival of investment in gravure printing in the UK since 2000 with two new plants opening in the Yorkshire and Merseyside areas, this investment has come at the expense of older, less productive factories closing, one of these situated in the South West Region.

The FOC of the assistants' chapel, who had nearly forty years of service with the company recalled that the original company had once operated over three different sites spread around the local vicinity. The FOC explained the existing site was the sole survivor, but that *"the main one was down town, then there was this place and St. Ann's over in Brislington...we did a lot of food packaging, there must have been, oh about...fifty machines in here altogether"*. The production manager, who had been with the company for thirty-five years since leaving school, recalled that the long established printing company *"grew and grew, and at one time I believe the total workforce numbered about six thousand people located in various places"*. The manager described the divisions between the skilled workers engaged in the different printing processes and how each section perceived each other, where,

lithographers were perceived as the most skilled, by some people (by themselves mainly I think), well it had a little bit more scientific base as opposed to lettersquash, as it used to be disparagingly known, and the gravure wasn't particularly highly thought of at one time even by the letterpress, although they were closely aligned to each other, the workforce was taken from the same chapel, but the letterpress people used to look down on the gravure. It was a bit like Ronny Barker and all that crowd, you know I look down on him but I look up to him

The manager went on to reflect on the changes that he had seen since his early days at the company where *"with competition [and] new technology everything was condensed and...some people say we produce maybe as much work now with our small unit compared to what we used to produce all those years ago with many factories dotted around and employee numbers multiplied many times... I've seen many changes"*.

The company has been involved in several changes in ownership over recent years and is now one of three sites currently owned by a North American based multi-

national packaging group. Access for the research interviews was arranged through the local branch where a good relationship exists between branch and company. The chapels in this particular company have a high profile in the local branch, consistently providing committee members and two former employees are now full time officials, one at national level and one at branch level.

At the time of the interview the company employed 135 people on the South West site with the highest proportion engaged in production (source: company presentation on production structure). The workforce can be generally summed up as long serving, ageing and predominately male. The ethnicity is predominately white European. The company recognises the GPMU, where membership is over 90% with some managers retaining their membership, and are party to the BPIF/GPMU national agreement. There are two chapels in the production area, one for the craft/skilled workers and one for the semi-skilled/ low skilled workers. Both chapel representatives indicated that there were no plans to merge the workforce into a single chapel structure. The FOC of the assistants' chapel said that it...

... has been mentioned in the past...but my members don't want it. Because they're afraid of losing their jobs, obviously, because they're not skilled, some are semi-skilled, but when it all comes down to losing you're job...

The deputy FOC of the printers' chapel responded in a similar vein claiming that,

the step towards one chapel for the company has been considered on a number of occasions but the assistants chapel don't seem to have the continuity in their FOCs, or their leadership and they seem to have lots of changes in ideals and the way to go forward and so and so forth, and also it's a bit like the national scene when there was the sort of NGA, SOGAT merger there's a bit of difference in each chapel's assets so consequently

it's been looked at and considered and it probably will at some point in the future...but not now

The company has recently started to use temporary and agency workers to meet production demands but there was little or no sign of the assistants' chapel attempting to recruit them into the union.

The company currently has four presses available for production, 2 eight colour, one nine colour and one ten colour. All four presses produce cartons on a 24 hour a day basis from Sunday night through to Saturday lunch. The plant has an annual capacity to produce 4 billion cartons per year or 18 million cartons per 24 hour shift (source: company presentation on production structure). At the time of the interviews there were plans to upgrade the presses so that the new configuration would be one eight colour press and three ten colour presses. Work had already begun to improve the factory to accommodate the investment. At present the machinery can only cope with spot colours the new configuration will allow for full photographic image reproduction. The site Operations Director commented that the company had recently invested heavily in a carton manufacturing site in the former Eastern Bloc, where their target market would be China and the former Soviet Union.

The company handout on production structure explains that there are four grades of production employee, number 1 printer, number 2 printer, number 2a printer and print assistant (for a description of the division of labour in the printing production areas see (Chapter Three: pp 92-95). The print assistants cover work in the reel handling department, clamp trucks, pre-make ready and quality assurance department. The company claim to put great store in their approach to environmental health and safety and in their employee handbook states that "our goal is to protect and promote the

EH&S of our employees and the communities where we operate”. The factory in the South West is subject to the strict scrutiny relevant to those involved in the food packaging industry, there seems a strange irony here given the printed product has to carry a health warning advising that the contents of the package might kill you! The company claim to have a training program which encompasses the areas of Environmental Health and Safety and new technology. A National Vocational Qualification programme was introduced in 2001 that included the introduction of a modern apprentice, along with routine training i.e. first aid. This approach, and through being a technology leader, allows the company to focus on being a low cost producer while maintaining the highest quality standards.

Printco, East Anglia

This was a small local printing company employing 27 people based in the East Anglia region. Traditionally, small printers have been stereotyped as being shambolic, back street organisations, cramped for space and lacking any serious investment. However, the environment in this company struck me as being reasonably modern and orderly despite being spread over three floors that did pose some problems for production. The FOC commented on the lay out of the factory agreeing that *“it is strange yeah because obviously some work goes up and then has to come back down again but we obviously haven’t got the space down here”*. The premises were well positioned in a main street in the centre of town offering reasonable access to customers.

The Managing Director (MD) described the company as *“commercial printers who do anything from magazines, brochures, greetings cards to letterheads and pads, anything like that, we print on paper by sheet-fed litho”*, with a customer base that

included “*advertising agencies, some big companies – ... and several card publishers*”. He went on to reflect what it was like running a general printers in the area where he claimed the climate was “*Tough, competitive, very cut-throat, a little frustrating but, we’re in it*”. Competition was fierce because printers from outside the area were poaching what was deemed to be local work. This process was made easier by the improved technology in the industry. The director explained that the company was a BPIF member and had been trading “*in its modern form, since 1945 when it became ... Ltd. But it goes back over 100 years, so it’s well established*”

The union membership was 100% in the production area and the directors of the company retained their union membership. There was one union member in the admin area, a recent recruit according to the FOC. There were no workers from an ethnic minority group and the work was mostly undertaken by male workers with women being confined to the bindery and admin areas of production. An issue that did emerge during the interview with the woman employed in the bindery was that she felt the department was being run down through a policy of non-replacement of staff with the result that work was being sent out to local finishing companies. The printing process was litho and the pre-press and machine room worked a double day shift system with the post press remaining on day work. The staff all had long service with little evidence of staff turnover. Ostensibly, the technology employed in the company was rather dated, pre-press still using traditional plate making methods and there is no intention to move to advanced systems such as computer-to-plate technology in the near future. The company had initiated an investment programme that involved introducing a newer press to replace the aging one that was in production, albeit that

the investment came in the form of removing an old five colour press and replacing it with a newer four colour press, therefore reducing capacity.

Unfortunately the company faced trading difficulties in the summer of 2004 and ceased trading, making all the staff redundant. At the time of the interviews there was no indication that the company was experiencing any financial difficulties and the management and staff gave the impression that the company was trading robustly in what is a very tight market place.

Flexico, Humberside.

The company was a long established family business and was initially a small organisation. The original owners were involved in engineering and manufactured printing machines for the industry. In the early part of the twentieth century the company branched out into printing and continued to both manufacture machinery and produce printed matter but eventually turned its full attention to the printing and sold off the engineering side. There have been changes in ownership one in 1995 when the *Flexico* Group was established. More recently, the company was the product of a management buy-out that took place in 2000 when the parent company sold off its specialist print division. However, a family member of the original company remains on the management board. During his interview the FOC, who had nearly forty years service with the company explained that as a result of the first change in ownership the company moved from their small premises to a large industrial estate commenting that “ *there was probably one hundred people worked there at one time, there’s over two hundred now, the company’s become very big*”.

In its present form the company claims to be a £60m business that has three production sites in locations in England and in total employs over 900 people (source: Corporate Profile). At its peak the Humberside site employed around 270 people but there were a number of redundancies as a result of the management buy-out and, in its current format, the site has around 200 employees. In March 2004 the GPMU magazine reported that the company had been acquired by the US printing corporation Appleton based in Wisconsin which employs some 2600 people in the US but who have no other significant operations in the UK or Europe. The union reported that the company have pledged that it will be business as usual with no changes to existing terms and conditions of employment. (GPMU Direct, 2004: p 5).

The management buy-out has generated issues other than redundancy. The reduction in staffing coincided with a change in the established shift working pattern. The workforce had been happy with the 13 hour extended day shift pattern that had been in place for many years. This system operated over a six day period and involved workers turning in two shifts in one week followed by four shifts the following week. The new management introduced a double day-shift system that has been unpopular with the chapel but the management were able to use the Working Time Legislation to revert to the double-day system. One interviewee expressed her dislike of the double day shift system and claimed that *“the majority of people hate them, they don’t like them and it’s all because they wanted us to have 20 minutes break”*. This worker felt that,

everybody would rather go back to the old shifts because we used to work 13 hours a day non stop but physically you used to have a break at the end of the reel changing and I think it comes to a point where you can’t eat on the shop floor so you have to have your break, but they said 13

hours was too long to work but they expect you to work it on overtime when your opposite's off on holiday and stuff.

The interviewee reflected *“That was the biggest issue, we should have stuck together more”*

Today the Humberside site is involved primarily in the flexography printing process and, in the main, produces security products such as tickets for Rail Companies, Parking Site tickets and security tape for the Banking industry. There is a small rotary division that produces stationery products such as restaurant order pads. According to the manager this is a very lucrative product line where the company had

very much cornered the market and it was very good bread and butter for us until some years ago when the French actually cottoned on and started to challenge, we did go through a sticky patch but we've seemed to have bounced back. It's a cash cow, there's no two ways about it, it's a reliable source of income is the Rotary department, you can predict pretty confidently year on year what you're doing in there.

The company has an international focus producing specialist parking ticket products for the European, Canadian and American markets.

There is a single chapel structure within the company with the FOC being supported by a small committee. However, there remain clear divisions between the departments.

Conclusion.

This chapter informs the reader on the structure of the companies chosen for the case study element of the field work for this research. The information contained in the chapter explains the geographical spread that the case study companies provide. The chapter also helps the reader to appreciate the complexities of the industry through

identifying the different company structures and workforce composition in the case study companies. The case studies reflected large, medium and small enterprises, they specialised in different modes of production and were in different geographical parts of England. Despite these differences, they shared common industrial relations features. They were poorly organised and demonstrated a non-confrontational approach to management.

In Chapter Eight the focus of the thesis shifts from the national perspective of collective bargaining in the general print sector to examining local workplace organisation. In particular the chapter examines how workers are responding to a changing workplace environment brought on by advances in technology, political and economic change. The data contained in this chapter sets the scene for examining the themes that have emerged from the research with regard to workplace organisation at the local level, particularly around the issues of local workplace organisation, bargaining, and recruitment and organisation.

Chapter Eight.

The BPIF Agreement and its Impact on Workplace Organisation.

This chapter reflects on the power base that developed as a result of an autonomous branch structure that historically emerged within the ranks of the constituent unions. This reflection helps to put into context the print unions' preference for maintaining multi-employer, national pay bargaining, despite its fall from prominence in UK mainstream industrial relations. The focus for this chapter shifts from the national perspective to workplace organisation at the local level and tests the assumption that the national agreement held between the GPMU and the BPIF is still considered to be a major influence in respect of those working under that agreement.

The evidence so far appears to support the position that the bargaining partners remain determined to persevere with some form of national collective bargaining despite a decline in this form of industrial relations in the UK economy. This national focus on multi-employer pay bargaining presents the public image of industrial relations in the sector. This section will now drill down deeper into the operational aspects of the national agreement in order to examine workplace organisation and how employees in the general print sector are responding to the changing environment in which they have to work. An analysis of the responses to the questionnaire and of data gained from the three case studies identified in the research methods chapter (Chapter Five pp 162-172) will provide much of the information for this part of the thesis, supported by my own participant observation. The analytical framework developed by Kelly (1996), and adapted to extend the range of union responses as

described in the research methods chapter (Chapter Five pp 154-155), will be useful in helping to assess the level of union activity at the workplace.

The analysis of the above data will help to evaluate the following themes that emerge from the research:

The impact of the processes put in place by the union at the national level to improve recruitment and organisation;

To determine whether long established workplace union structures have remained intact or, alternatively, if the changing political and economic climate has put pressure on workers to adapt to a changing working environment;

The extent that second tier bargaining, a crucial element in the national agreement for the GPMU, has been preserved in workplaces today.

The analysis will provide the means to test the argument, raised by Kelly that has already been explored in the Chapter Two (p 78), around the issue of union activists being able to promote an increase in the degree of worker mobilisation and militancy in the face of a sense of injustice, real or perceived, experienced by workers through

the actions of the employer. Therefore the research will also investigate the relevance of union renewal and militancy concepts to understanding workplace organisation in the general print sector. The data gathered from the survey carried out among delegates to the union BDC along with evidence from the case study interviews will help me to explore the relevance of union renewal and militancy concepts to understanding workplace organisation in the general print sector.

Concepts of Union power in the context of the GPMU Branch structure, and local autonomy

However, before this evaluation of workplace structure and organisation is developed it will be useful to put into context the local perspectives of Branch and chapel structures and where the power in those structures sits. Historically, the UK printing industry has been characterised as having a high density of trade union membership and a corresponding high degree of workplace autonomy for workers in that industry. This is the industry that had been the bastion of the closed shop, both pre and post-entry, allowing, over a long period of time, working practices to develop that have been jealously guarded to protect those fortunate enough to work in this environment. Through this system print workers have created an elitist hierarchy between chapels based on craft and skill levels.

A well organised and active chapel was the bedrock of maintaining and extending the terms and conditions of the national agreement locally. The formal bargaining that delivered the framework agreement at the national level gave way to the informal secondary bargaining in the chapel that established the 'house' terms and conditions.

Traditionally, national pay bargaining was carried out in the sector under the clear understanding that any agreement settled minimum terms and conditions of employment and that chapels were free to enter into local negotiations to improve on these minimums where they could. The ability to secure local improvements was underpinned by strong workplace organisation and the closed shop.

This autonomous workplace structure provided chapels with a strong bargaining position and they were able to exercise power. However, this also created sectionalism and developed working practices that were peculiar to a given chapel (see Chapter Two, p 40). Kelly (1999) notes the general lack of discussion on the aspect of power in the industrial relations literature and that the issue is treated in a matter of fact or taken for granted manner which underestimates the importance of the concept (pp 9-10). In the context of general print, power lay in the hands of the chapel as a result of the highly devolved nature of the union structure in the industry. The branches in the craft areas of the sector were largely financially independent from the national structure and were able to exercise a high degree of local autonomy. In the former NGA the branches retained 21% of national union subscriptions collected and maintained their own sustainability through an additional local subscription. It was this local fund that determined the level of officers and staff in any particular branch, along with salaries etc., overseen by a local branch committee who set the level of local subscription and developed branch rules.

Similarly, the chapels in the local branches mirrored the branch structure with F/MOC at the head of the organisation supported by a chapel committee who developed the chapel rules. As with the national structure, branch and chapel rules were passed at a delegate conference. This structure was designed to ensure a 'bottom-up' approach to union governance, sometimes described as a pyramid effect, with the national executive council endorsing branch and chapel procedures. However, Child (1967) recorded that "the branch could ignore the advice [of the central executive] and go ahead with its campaign requiring the adequacy of local funds to maintain the men if they had to be withdrawn". Similarly, Child argued that the chapel "usually enjoyed a certain autonomy agreeing on working rules... These varied so much from one shop to another that a general rule would not have been enforceable" (p 143).

Evidence that this form of financial autonomy prevailed until the merger with Amicus can be found in the Instrument of the Transfer of Engagements of the GPMU to Amicus (2004) where, in appendix C, the format for a separate branch ballot is set out to ensure that the local branch funds can be transferred to Amicus. This procedure was required because, in order to merge successfully, the GPMU branches would need to accept the system of central funding that prevailed in Amicus and legally, the national union had no jurisdiction over local funds. This autonomy over work rules led to chapel sectionalism and often saw the chapel power directed at other workers rather than pitted against an employer. More recently, changes in technology have challenged what were clearly defined demarcation lines and, according to Darlington (1994), chapel sectionalism handicapped any prospect of shop-floor unity that would be required to oppose the impact of the new technology (p 144). This point is also emphasised by Hyman (1995) who claims that, "methods of job control pursued

within traditional trade union practice commonly involved the defence of inherited restrictions on occupational entry or the construction of new demarcations between internal and external labour markets” (p 112).

New technology that has been introduced into the industry at a relentless pace presents a challenge to the traditional union structure in the sector (see Chapter 3, pp: 109-113). This is particularly the case in the pre-press area and has led to a large proportion of origination work going back “in-house” to publishing companies encouraging the spread of a graphics industry that is largely non-unionised and remains an area in which the union finds it difficult to recruit. This is partly due to the path that many of the workers now take into the industry where full time training is provided in a college and new starters do not get the union induction that was automatic during the apprenticeship era. The GPMU Executive Report (2003) claims “The publishing sector in all forms is difficult to organise. Some problems include high turnover of staff; the younger age profile of the workforce who have little knowledge of trade unions and where collective bargaining hardly exists”. The Executive Report notes that “Technological developments, notably the production of pages for output to CtP [Computer to Plate] by publishers has seen more magazines being produced in house and transmitted to printers” The report argues that “Recruitment and organisation in the electronic/new media area continues to be difficult” but that the efforts of the union to recruit and organise would continue along the lines of the 2002 pilot campaign that was introduced to this important area of the sector and that had brought a response that was “encouraging enough to continue with the project” (p 29).

Publishing companies such as McMillan and Reed Elsevier Group now operate on a global scale and the UK sites have become an area that the union has clearly identified as a recruitment target. A Union News circular (December 2006) reported on a campaign launched with McMillan claiming that:

“Amicus was approached last year by employees at the Swansea site who wanted the same rights to negotiate terms and conditions as employees at other Macmillan sites. This campaign was not an easy one for our members as Macmillan's management had initially refused meetings to discuss the wishes of our members working at the site.”

Dedicated organisers were allocated to this area and some measure of success comes in the form of a statutory recognition agreement granted by the Central Arbitration Committee at McMillan in Swansea in November 2006 after an eighteen month campaign.

Evidence that this campaign is ongoing can be found in the communiqués issued by the union, most recently with the announcement of a campaign launched at Reed Elsevier Group where, according to Union News (January 2007), “the campaign is to win back collective bargaining rights for employees after the company de-recognised the union in 1993” and goes on to declare that:

“There are growing numbers of publishing and media staff joining Amicus. They have told us in a recent survey that employees should be treated fairly and with respect. The company now negotiates with the NUI on pay and working conditions. It is only right that non-journalist staff enjoy the same rights at work.”

The changes in technology have been exacerbated by legislative changes that were initially tested in the early 1970s (Industrial Relations Act 1971 and ‘In Place of Strife’ (1976) and those introduced by the Conservative administrations between 1979 and 1997 (see Chapter Two, pp 52-54), and not repealed by the incoming Labour

administration that has held office since (see Millward et al, 2000: p 235). These changes have led to the outlawing of the closed shop and the total restriction of solidarity action through secondary action that have reduced the union's ability to engage with employers. It has been argued that it is a combination of such workplace restructuring and the changing economic and political climate that signals "the end of trade unionism in the unquestioned image of the male manual manufacturing worker" and has led to a membership crisis for this "narrowly based *type* of trade unionism" and that such unions face the challenge of addressing the needs of a new membership whose needs have been suppressed or ignored by the traditional trade union agenda" (Hyman, 1995: pp 112-113).

In today's changing political and economic climate, with the legislative outlawing of the closed shop, Waddington's argument on trade union activity and organisation, and the failure to expand membership into new and developing areas of the industry (see Chapter 6, pp 179-180), may be very poignant in the case of the general print sector. This chapter of the research will draw on an analysis of the data gathered from the questionnaire and case studies, underpinned by my own participant observation and focus on workplace organisation in the sector in order to examine the structure and the power of the chapel. The case has been made in the literature review that unions have had to respond to changing political perspectives across a spectrum that spans the pluralist and unitarist axis of industrial relations and this section now attempts to make a 'grassroots' assessment of worker response to change.

The workforce structure in three case studies.

Our earlier research into the sector, carried out in the Hertfordshire and Essex region, identified a number of themes and detected the continuing trend of a hierarchal craft or skill based structure that was male dominated. As indicated in Chapter Six, the GPMU at the national level introduced policies that were designed to stem the loss of membership and expand its influence into hitherto unorganised areas. As part of that strategy the GPMU undertook a recruitment campaign during the late 1990s referred to as the ‘3Rs’ strategy (recruitment, retention and re-organisation). This exercise involved branches undertaking a membership mapping exercise to provide accurate information on the level of GPMU membership in companies where the union was already recognised. This mapping exercise, referred to as in-fill, was intended to be applied across the whole company, not just in the production areas, with the information being used to identify potential membership targets and to begin the process of re-organisation in chapels and improving levels of membership through the process of recruitment and retention (Healy et al, 2004: p 554). Despite the emphasis of the 3Rs strategy being on not only consolidating membership in the production areas, but also extending membership to formally non-traditional areas, the research did not provide any clear evidence of the union making inroads into recruitment in under-represented groups. Membership remained predominately centred in the production areas with the craft and skilled tasks continuing to be areas of male domination. Indeed “the interviews revealed an entrenched acceptance of the gendered *status quo*” and painted a picture of a sector that offered “little or no promotion/career development...few apprentices and no female apprentices” (Healy et al, 2002: p18).

The responses from the interviewees in my current research confirmed that this situation was not confined to one region. Skilled, or craft, workers were concentrated in the pre-press and press areas of production and there was a clear hierarchal structure with men dominating the skilled jobs and women being mostly confined to semi-skilled and unskilled jobs in the post press and clerical areas. The FOC of the assistant's chapel at Packco revealed that there were

“about six girls covering the four shifts” and that their main duties involved “manual work, taking off on the front on the belts, mostly. They’re quite restricted in what they do because they can’t run about with them there reels because they’re too heavy, but yeah, got the same job week in week out sort of thing.

Whereas,

As for the other people in the chapel we generally like to move around and do different jobs... You put on reels on the machines. Pre make ready which is making up the units to go in, and also washing up after the jobs and there’s taking off on the belts”

A skilled worker from Packco responded that the women in the production area were

All assistants. Other than QC which is separate, but it’s still an assistants job, but, you know, better side of it

The manager at the same company responded that the women in the production area were

“obviously assistants, I say obviously, I shouldn’t say obviously at all, but they are assistants, and they do most of the jobs that the men do, but I think that some of them haven’t been trained up to do one or two of the jobs out there, the slightly heavier jobs, but I’m sure that with proper training they would be able to do it”

The ‘obviously’ was perhaps a Freudian slip by the manager that indicated what the role of women in the department was considered to be. The FOC at Flexico did point out that there were some women working in the typesetting area but that mostly women tended to work

“on the presses as print machine assistants. What we’ve done is, when a job goes up we’ve always said to the company, whether it’s male or

female, we've got to be honest, we've got girls doing jobs that fella's would do, you know in the old days, we've no problem with that"

There was some evidence of women progressing to better skilled jobs. An interview at Packco revealed that some women in the assistant's chapel had transferred into the Quality Control Department. However, this work was still classed as un-skilled and the women remained in the assistants' chapel. The interviewee from this department described the workers in the Quality Control Department as a self-supporting little group who cover their own absence and overtime requirements and that they were

"gradually training people up on the shop floor to come in, but management can be very slow sometimes...but we're gradually doing it" .

Only in one company, Flexico, did a woman hold a skilled job and in her interview she explained that she had started as an assistant in the post press area but had attended a part-time college course in graphic design outside of working hours. The interviewee was grateful for the financial support she received from the company but pointed out that she was given no time off to undertake the training. The course required eight hours work a week on top of the long shift patterns she was expected to put in as a machine assistant. After four years of study she eventually achieved a Higher National Diploma in graphic design and was rewarded with a job in the origination department, when one became available and she was successfully interviewed!

Conversely, men seem to have a different experience of receiving training. A male printer in Flexico who was interviewed volunteered that he had been a beneficiary of re-training in order to allow him to transfer from the print production area to pre-press. He claimed to have

“worked in every department in the factory, printing wise, and about two years ago, the guy who was making the plates in the pre-press department was coming up for retirement and was looking for someone to replace him and I thought it was something different, I’d been a press man for 15 years so I fancied a change. A job came up and I applied for it and I got the job and I’ve been doing it for the last 2 years”

This transfer represented a move from one craft area to another but the training was delivered in house and in company time.

However, when discussing opportunities for lower skilled workers a different response emerged. When discussing progression routes and training for lower skilled workers interviewees rarely claimed that training and development was a feature in their company. The Deputy FOC at Packco commented:

No, no. I mean , in theory, what shall I say, like a number three, an assistant, could make it up to a number one, but in reality they won’t ever do it, you know, because we’ve got enough printers basically to do the, skilled people to do the job. But within their sphere there’s lots of jobs they can do that abides with their chapel policy and our chapel

policy...Obviously there's a number three rate and there's the skilled section at number two and number one rate.

In the case of temporary workers, one of Waddington's vulnerable groups, an interviewee at Flexico claimed that

“there is a pecking order, they[the management] might class a woman who is a temporary worker on £5 an hour, she's got no chance because they're never going to tell her anything because they don't see her as important. If you get some guy in as a printer because they're short of printers then they might spend a bit more time with him and to me that's pretty crap. The management might turn round and say well we don't have the time, the resources, the money and staff available to go through this with every single person they take on especially if they get 12 people to come in to do holiday cover for three months as they are doing at the moment”

The FOC of the assistant's chapel in the Packco chapel made clear the social processes that are being played out in the workplace with regard to the prevailing hierarchal structures through the reference to temporary staff not being approached to join the union. Within the hierarchal structure, assistants are restricted from progressing to higher paid jobs by the chapel system, and in turn the assistants are restricting the temporary workers from being offered permanent positions in their chapel. This situation became clear from the response that temporary workers were not part of the chapel, however,

“they are allowed to come to our meetings...I think it’s only fair to let them know what’s happening, but...they’re not allowed to vote on anything, just attend”.

With regard to the temps terms and conditions the FOC went on to comment that,

“there’s a different wage level on that, obviously”.

Not only was the workforce across the three sites male dominated, there was also a negligible presence of any workers from black or ethnic minorities. While there is no suggestion that the predominately white workforce comes as a result of any direct policy, equally there was no evidence that measures were in place to widen recruitment in order to attract workers from black and ethnic minorities. I recently attended a meeting where a GPMU organiser was concerned that there were no F/MOCs from an ethnic minority background in the Greater Manchester region. Interviewees in Packco and Flexico both expressed an opinion that workers from black and ethnic minorities *“just don’t seem to come into the industry”*. A interviewee from Printco claimed that the lack of black or ethnic minority workers was not the result of any policy, the company would advertise by placing the vacancy with the union and *“I’ve never seen a black person come for a job here I don’t think”*. Placing vacancies with the local union branch was a practice that protected the closed shop in the sector with the branch office maintaining a list of all vacancies in the region and acting as a recruitment agency. Although this practice was rendered ineffective by

legislation designed to restrict the closed shop, many companies continue to notify branches of vacancies and recruit in this manner. This has the effect of narrowing the pool of workers who apply for vacancies in the sector, making it more difficult for black and ethnic workers to enter the industry and is therefore a form of indirect discrimination.

The responses offered by the interviewees mirror the responses that we recorded in our earlier research carried out in the Hertfordshire and Essex region and reflect a great deal of reluctance among chapel members to alter the *status quo* that exists in the industry. Despite the formation of the GPMU as a single representative union for workers in the industry, chapels continue to be built on a departmental basis. This is a scenario that not only restricts the progression to better paid work for women but also makes it very difficult for minority groups to establish themselves in the workplace hierarchy. The example of managers turning to branch offices to fill vacancies echoes their compliance with the existing workplace structures. This continuing maintenance of a discrete hierarchal structure coupled with the negative approach to the organisation of what are seen as peripheral workers by the chapels makes any form of recruitment strategy complex. The continuation of a hierarchal structure in the workplace is at odds with the philosophy of the national agreement which opposes all form of discrimination and clearly states under the heading Dignity at Work that:

Every employee has a right to be treated with respect and dignity. The parties are committed to providing a working environment that offers equal treatment and equal opportunities for all and takes account of the

relevant Codes of Practice. The BPIF and GPMU have produced joint guidelines which are available to the industry.

(BFIF/GPMU2000: (3), p 2)

The principle of equal opportunities has been continued in the newly introduced Partnership at Work agreement which now states,

The parties to this agreement are committed to the development of positive policies to promote equal opportunities in employment regardless of workers' age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, creed, colour, race or ethnic origins. This principle will apply in respect of all conditions of work

(2005: p 11).

These examples of marginalising workers serve to demonstrate how the effort of the national union to improve the membership base through putting in place an organising model have had only partial success and appears to be undermined by the workplace activists. It is against this back-drop of a somewhat intransigent approach to any form of integration of the workforce that workplace organisation within the context of national pay bargaining is now examined.

The impact of the terms and conditions in the National Agreement in the workplace.

Our earlier research in the Hertfordshire and Essex region involved the use of a postal survey followed up by a series of interviews with FOC/MOCs employed in printing companies in the region. From this research it became clear from both the survey responses and the FOC/MOCs interviews that there was a lucid understanding of the detail contained in the agreement and how this impacted on their chapel. Overall, the study determined that there was a high degree of compliance with the national agreement with regards to pay, working hours and holiday entitlement. However, some variation in the determination of pay was uncovered with the element of second tier bargaining becoming almost extinct other than the suggestion of a more secretive form of individual bargaining that was not unrelated to the rise in skill shortages. This form of individual bargaining takes place at the appointment stage of employment and then, subsequent pay increases are determined by the terms set in the national agreement. The pressure created by skill shortages has led employers to embark on an exercise of 'poaching' their labour from other firms. The research refers to the concern expressed in a recent study on competitiveness in the UK printing industry whose findings indicated that "printing is facing a serious 'skills squeeze'. The paper also quotes the GPMU General Secretary on this subject, who argued that "poaching is a major problem for the industry, but is the inevitable outcome of the current situation. It also pushes up wages rates which may be good for our individual members, but is certainly not good for the industry as a whole". The Hertfordshire and Essex study indicates that this individual form of bargaining is more likely to affect pay structures than second tier bargaining (see Healy et al, 2004).

The current research is designed to test the findings of the earlier project on a wider geographical basis. The survey returns from the conference were intended to present a comparison with the survey carried out in the Eastern region. The returns from this particular exercise were small and therefore it is not possible to apply any in-depth analysis to the data, nor to make broad generalizations on representativeness.

However, the sample is indicative and the data gathered from the questionnaires reveals that the terms and conditions set by the agreement are generally complied with in regard to pay, length of the working week, holidays and overtime premia. Indeed, all thirteen respondents reported that they received the annual BPIF/GPMU increase (see Table 2). Union organisation was high with the majority of respondents recording membership between 100% and 75%. This was not dissimilar from the Herts /Essex survey, but chapel organisation appeared to be better with eight chapels recording that they met on a quarterly basis, one chapel met monthly, with four indicating that they had a less frequent arrangement (see Table 2).

The chapel meetings appeared to cover a wide range of issues including shift pattern changes and attempts to reduce shift premiums, cost recovery under the provision of the agreement, lack of work and job stability.

Table 2.

Compliance with National Agreement				
	Yes	No	D/K	Total
BPIF/GPMU Award	13	0	0	13
	37.5 hours	36 hours	35 hours	Total

Working week	11	1	1	13
	5 Weeks +1 day	More	Less	Total
Holiday entitlement	11	2	0	13
	BPIF Terms	Better	Less	
Overtime Rates	9	3	1	13
Chapel Organisation				
	100-75%	75-50%	Less than 50%	Total
Union density	10	2	1	13
	Monthly	Quarterly	Other	Total
Chapel Meetings	1	8	4	13

If we turn to the responses gained through the interviews in the case studies a similar pattern to that of the questionnaire emerges. All the interviewees from the case studies, including those from management, were well aware of the existence of a national agreement and that its main function was to set the terms and conditions of employment for the sector. The HR Manager at Flexico, who was relatively new to the sector, commented that her understanding of the national agreement was improving and gave a cautious approval to the national agreement where:

“in some respects I do I think it’s good for issues such as pay and having a procedure for the industry to follow and I think it’s a nice tool to refer back to, so in that respect I think it makes life a bit easier, but I think I would prefer a bit more of a free rein, I think”

The Managing Director at Printco agreed with the statement that the national agreement helped to create a level playing field in the sector and indicated that the agreement

“...helps us. I wouldn’t like to do the internal negotiations every year, we’ve got enough to worry about really”

Printco is one of an army of small employers in the sector with a total staff of around twenty five and this response from the managing director corresponds with the views represented in the literature review as to why companies, particularly Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) follow the national agreement . The comments also correspond with the comments in Printing World that small companies follow national agreements because they lack the time and resources to settle their own terms and conditions of employment (see Chapter Four: p 188).

None of the workers in the participating companies experienced any major difficulty in enjoying the annual increase agreed in the review of the agreement. At the Packco site a chapel rep remarked that, while the company was a major player in the BPIF, with the HR director a member of the BPIF board,

“when it comes to national agreements, we have house agreements, so although the BPIF sets the standard, it’s not necessarily what’s employed here fully”.

The chapel rep went on to comment that, despite this apparent independence from the bargaining structure,

“in recent years it’s [the national agreement] virtually always been followed, the only, the main difference is that if it were 3% as a national pay award, here it would be on works pay...it wouldn’t be a cash figure or on day rate or anything like that”.

However, despite what at first appears to be an enhancement on the agreed increase, the agreement sets the minimum cash payment but is also expressed as a percentage of the minimum rate on the ballot paper, the chapel rep remarked that

“I know you incorporate within the national agreement machine extras, but what we’ve not done here for a long time now is to talk about machine extras as a separate issue”

Therefore the 3% represents the agreed cash increase plus the machine extras. From my own experience as an industrial officer working in the East of England I am aware

of many companies paying the national award without applying any of the extras catered for under the agreement. Many chapels had 'sold' the right to machine extras in their house agreement or settled for a percentage increase that it was claimed included extras. I believe that this is a situation that partially arose from the complicated formula that is used to calculate machine extras. The formula is expressed in detail of the national agreement (2000: p 12, clause D ii) and sets out the system for calculating the extras on a points basis. Many chapel representatives were content to accept a percentage increase based on the existing rate rather than calculate the machine extra irrespective of the possibility of the extras producing a higher rate. There were no discernable differences to the responses from the case studies regarding the implementation of the terms of the national agreement. What makes this observation all the more interesting is that neither the numbers of employees in the company, the geographical spread or the diversity of the markets that the case study companies were involved in made any impact on the implementation of the conditions contained in the national agreement. This is a situation that is reflected in the responses to the questionnaire where Table 2 illustrates a high degree of compliance from the chapels that responded.

The findings from the case studies and the survey regarding compliance with the national agreement are endorsed by a recent survey undertaken by a BPIF/GPMU and assisted by the research company Vision 21 as part of the Partnership at Work Initiative. The survey was distributed among both employers and employees. The report on the returns recognizes that the response (2,093 employer questionnaires were sent out with 437 or 20.8% returned and 33,607 employee questionnaires sent out with 2500 or 7.4% returned) "was slightly less than hoped for, [but] the results

have been confirmed as representative and statistically valid". The survey showed that the majority of employees work between 35 and 44 hours per week (according to 81% of employees and 91% of employers). The most common overtime rates paid to employees complied with the terms of the agreement where week days and Saturdays attracted time and a half and time and a half initially then double time respectively. Sundays were paid at double time and Bank Holidays attracted double time plus time off in lieu. Call money appeared to be paid in only a minority of workplaces (32%) and the machine classification element of the agreement (machine extras) had little impact in the determination of rates of pay with only 40% of employers responding that they did not use the machine classification clause but they did increase machine extra rates applicable to the national agreement (Strategic Partnerships, 2005).

Chapel relationship with management

If we turn to consider how the workers perceive their chapels' approach to management, Table 3 (below) shows the respondents reaction to the survey. Using the model developed by Kelly (1996) it is possible to see that the majority felt that their chapel adopted an active approach to management, only one felt they were militant and three took the passive approach. Kelly argued that the revitalization in workplace organisation depended on the approach adopted by the membership along an axis ranging between militancy and moderation. Where a particular group of workers fell along this axis could be assessed from establishing their response to a criteria that centered on goals, membership resources, institutional resources and methods. In Chapter Five (p 155) I adapted Kelly's bi-polar model for the purpose of my research to include a third category that reflected a passive approach to workplace organisation

and this category is reflected in the questionnaire responses. The chapels generally have a good understanding of the detail of the national agreement, but interestingly, four of the ‘active’ respondents indicated their knowledge of that issue was only fair. On the issue of flexibility there was a mixed response, similar to that received from the previous study by Healy et al (2004). There appeared to be an acceptance of the need to work flexibly and workers were generally prepared to comply with this facility. The only dissenters were the ‘militant’ chapel and one of the ‘active’ chapels. From earlier work we had found a reluctance to be flexible between departments and to a certain extent this was reflected in our current data. However, it must be borne in mind that these responses are self-assessing and there might be a different picture emerging from the qualitative interviews, which will allow probing and checking understanding.

Table 3.

		Militant	Active	Passive	Total
How would you describe your chapel approach to management?		1	9	3	13
Are GPMU members required to work flexibly?	D/K	0	0	0	00
	Y	1	8	3	12
	N	0	1	0	01
	Total	1	9	3	13
Are GPMU members willing to work flexibly?	D/K	0	0	1	01
	Y	0	8	2	10
	N	1	1	0	02
	Total	1	9	3	13
Do GPMU members work flexibly within departments?	D/K	0	1	0	01
	Y	1	8	3	12
	N	0	0	0	00
	Total	1	9	3	13
Do GPMU members work flexibly between departments?	D/K	0	0	1	01
	Y	1	5	2	08
	N	0	4	0	04
	Total	1	9	3	13

How do you assess your knowledge of the detail of the national agreement?	D/K	0	1	0	01
VG = Very Good	VG	1	3	1	05
FG = Fairly Good	FG	0	1	1	02
F = Fair	F	0	4	1	05
	Total	1	9	3	13

Flexibility.

Full flexible working has become an important aspect of the national agreement where the relevant clause provides

subject to suitable training and health and safety requirement, full flexibility of working between all occupations and the elimination of demarcation lines (GPMU/BPIF Agreement, 2003).

This was a radical departure from the old traditional craft demarcation lines that existed in the industry. However the evidence from our earlier research in the Hertfordshire and Essex region found little evidence of the provision being fully utilised. Flexibility within departments had become the norm, but when it came to working across departments there was little movement. This reluctance to utilise flexibility came from management as well as chapels, to the extent that Healy et al (2004) recorded one FOC commenting that “there’s some agreement...to say that we’re quite willing to be taught to make plates etc, or learn the pre-press side of it. But it didn’t happen”. The research claimed that this was a situation that was repeated at other firms and went on to label the employers ‘reluctant flexibilisers’ where employers still viewed training as a cost rather than an investment. An FOC responded, “the cost of training people in two different departments is a waste of money...it’s two lots of training, they’d rather have people in the same department, there’s lots of flexibility within departments” (p 559).

From a broader geographical perspective, the evidence gathered from the more recent survey suggests that the flexibility clause has had an impact on working practices in the workplace. From the responses received, all but one of the respondents agreed that they were required to work flexibly in the workplace. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that members were willing to work flexibly and that they implemented flexible working within departments. When considering flexible working across departments thirty-three per cent claimed this was not a feature in their workplace, however the majority of respondents agreed that there was full flexibility in their workplace (see Table 3).

The results from this survey were broadly in line with the findings from the Hertfordshire and Essex research. In order to get a more detailed response to the extent of flexibility within workplaces the issue was raised with the interviewees in the case studies within the context of the clause contained in the national agreement. Here, a more disparate response was found with flexibility clearly being addressed in the larger companies but not to the extent of the facilities afforded by the agreement. Whereas in the case of the smaller employer flexibility appeared to be more in line with the provision of the agreement. For example the FOC in Flexico claimed that while there was flexibility within departments, with machine printers working across different presses, there was no call for them to work outside the department:

“what we’ve found there is that the printers do the presses, pre-press do origination, there’s nobody moves out that way or into the warehouse”

The FOC also remarked that the lack of interdepartmental flexibility was more to do with management not asking than the chapel refusing to cooperate. This situation was confirmed by an interviewee working in the semi-skilled area who commented:

I'm involved in magnetics, and one of the reasons is I've done that many jobs so I've been flexible. With running this department now, our aim is to make every one of the operators we've got to be flexible and move on all the machines...our point of view is that it gives us flexibility whenever we've got pressure on one machine, to run it on both, overtime or shifts, extended shifts or whatever, like there's more flexibility and most of the operators are quite keen to move round, it's a job variation and more they get to know

However, this level of flexibility was just within his department and the respondent confirmed that a printer would not be asked to work in the department.

Mostly shop floor do move round, the printers especially because they're running pretty similar set ups so most of them do move round I couldn't go and run a press even though I probably could...because I've had no training on it basically. You know, Graham has said to me a few times in the past that if I was younger he would have had me trained up on a press but my age goes against me on that but, there is an opportunity there, there's one at the moment, they're after someone to run the flexi machine with Peter and I know one of the lads under me, he applied for it but what they actually want is someone with knowledge already, they don't want to spend their time training

The point about recruiting skilled staff rather than using company resources to either train or retrain was similar to the findings in our earlier, local research and was reiterated by the FOC who commented on both the lack of apprentices in the firm and training in general

We've always pushed for them [apprentices] but what the company say is we can get them man-made, we don't have to train anybody, we can just get somebody, but we've always pushed for apprentices.

The HR manager at Flexico supported the view that there was a reluctance to get people to work flexibly. She gave an example where,

We did have an instance, but to be honest it was where we wanted the warehouse to do another warehouse function or warehouse duty, but because they hadn't done it previously they didn't see it as their duty to do it, but I think that was more about because there is a new manager in the area and it was more about where the land lies and how far they can push it rather than I really don't want to do it, so I think they did try down that route. I can see problems ahead with it

The manager at Packco agreed that there was flexibility within departments where

Flexibility on presses is not a problem, we need to do, obviously training carried out, if the people involved are trained they go on the presses it's not a problem. Sometimes we feel that, perhaps if the job we want done is not a printers job as such, sometimes we think is it a waste of time getting a skilled printer to do that even though at the moment he's hanging about doing nothing. So should we let him do that or should we send him somewhere else to do something that is more relevant to his skills which may not be pressing but still perhaps needs to be done, so sometimes that's eh, I think that's our responsibility as management whether he should be doing that

From these examples taken from the interviews carried out with the larger employers it can be seen that the degree of flexibility implemented in the companies is restricted, with most of the flexible working taking place within rather than across departments. The restrictions are not necessarily as a result of any rule imposed by chapels but more a tacit understanding between both sides that people will work within their own department. The approach by management to recruit skilled workers rather than retrain is very much in keeping with the poaching argument that has been raised earlier.

However, when we turn to the smaller employer a different situation arises. The respondents in this company appeared to accept a much higher involvement in flexibility within the company. The managing director at Printco was keen to impress that the staff were very flexible and would help out in other departments when the company was busy. He stressed that the facility to implement retraining assisted staff

to move into other departments and provided an example where one employee was now working in the origination department, but that he had,

started of on the presses as a machine assistant and then on the guillotine, so if there's any cutting to be done and there's no-one else, say someone's on holiday, then he's got to cover, then he'll get on the guillotine.

The MD also referred to a situation where,

we've got machine minders that can plate make because we've trained them. If they're here at nine o'clock at night and need a plate, then they're not going to say we're gonna wait until eight o'clock in the morning for a platemaker to come in

He claimed that this level of flexibility would not create any resentment from the workforce but that,

I think you'd have to be a little careful that you didn't just put some-one in that department at night just to save on overtime, I think that would get resentment

The FOC at Printco agreed that the chapel adopted a very flexible approach to work.

He provided the example of

a lad we've got here with us at the moment, I mean he's usually an assistant but he'll come if we're busy or if someone's on holiday, that's the idea that he comes up and fills in...I mean, I've gone down and assisted on the machine if I've not had a lot to do and they're busy down there and someone's off or on holiday...I mean everyone in the machine room, we're down to two machines again now, the new one's just coming in... but when we used to have three or four machines everyone could sort of run everything. I mean the guillotine operator sort of goes up upstairs and works the guillotine up there and they are two separate departments, and I go on the guillotine if Dave's on holiday or if Kenny's on holiday upstairs or I'll assist on the machine so... most people can sort of do something else

One interviewee at Printco, a machine printer, did suggest there was a limit to the level of flexibility. When asked if there was a problem with flexibility in the company he claimed

I don't think there are many people, if any, who have got a problem with flexibility...not a problem what-so-ever. I mean obviously a bindery operative couldn't come down and work on a machine, other than to assist perhaps, which perhaps is part and parcel of his remit, but I think if it's a all hands to the pump situation...perhaps people away sick in another department, and you can go and assist them by the physical labouring side rather than the running of the machine side, I think most people would do that. I mean I have been asked just to assist on the Muhler, just to load the hoppers up because they're short staffed and they've got a lot of work coming through and obviously customers need to be satisfied, so while you keep that in the back of you're mind I don't see no problems with it

Therefore even in the small employer, where some training did take place to allow workers to progress into better skilled jobs, there were limits to the degree of flexibility that was expected. What did emerge from the responses is the reliance on a different type of flexibility in the workplace that is more in line with the 'organisational flexibility' referred to by Gennard et al (2000). This method of flexibility involved the use of practices such as outsourcing work and employing temporary workers to meet fluctuation demands for a product. Many of the respondents made reference to the falling numbers of full time employees in their respective companies and the increased use of such measures to meet demand. The National Agreement regulates the terms and conditions and use of part-time and temporary workers and puts in place a system for consultation on the use of such workers with workplace representatives.

The woman interviewed at Printco who worked in the bindery claimed that

the job has changed so much... really, I wish it was how it used to be when you used to do gluing and finishing, how it should be, but now its basically done on machinery. We do a tremendous amount of packing and they send a lot, too much work out, too much. So I spend a lot of time doing nothing

She commented on the changes that had taken place in her role at work, where the department had been run down in terms of staff, particularly women, leading to a situation where

There used to be a lot more of us but they never replace them when they leave, they never replace them, not since I've been here...

I do some work sometimes down in the warehouse, to pack, I do go down there sometimes but they haven't asked us to work on the printing machines or anything like that

The interviewee from the bindery in the small company made a clear reference to the practice of outsourcing work and the impact this has had on the numbers employed in the department. The FOC of the machine assistant's chapel in Packco indicated that the new technology that was being introduced to the company was having an impact on chapel numbers where

as for taking more people on, I don't think that's going to happen any more. Because we've only took 4 people on in the last, oh, god knows how many years, got to be 12 or 15 years cause we're losing people all the time because machinery.

The FOC also spoke of the impact that temporary workers were having in his department where

we've got 4 machines, we're actually manned up for 3, full time workers, but this last couple of years we've been running this fourth machine and having temps in. The printers have been working all the time and we've been working all the time as well to keep this machine going and temps have been in here a number of years and we've got nine people on contracts at the moment, but it's only short term contracts... Originally it was four, but now we got nine... they're actually on the end of a phone... and they might not know till Friday what they're going to work the following week, but they love it, you know they come in, and they're just like regulars, they come in and they know everybody and everybody gets on quite well... and they've just been renewed, but they've only got two months because there was talk of a machine going out the door, at the end of the day it is only going to be a three machine factory so we gotta keep our jobs for what we do require... the temps would go.

From the evidence gathered from interviews a complex picture of the level of flexibility emerges. Worker flexibility appears to take place within departments but there are restrictions to any form of wider inter-departmental flexibility. In the case of the small employer there appeared to be a higher level of flexibility across the workforce. However, there were still barriers to some of the skilled work. The lack of training by management has some bearing on this situation along with a reluctance to alter the *status quo* from either side. In the case of organisational flexibility, chapels appear prepared to enter into discussions with management over the use of other resources and it is to the level of negotiation that takes place at the workplace that I now turn.

Second Tier Bargaining.

For the GPMU membership, the guiding principle of the national agreement has always been that it sets the minimum terms and conditions for the industry. Second tier bargaining was always a prominent feature of the agreement and chapels were free to negotiate 'house' terms over and above those set at the national level. Second tier bargaining was a system where the chapel would negotiate local terms and conditions over and above the minimum terms established by the national agreement. This local bargaining would normally have been done on a chapel basis and would include what was termed as the house rate. In the machine rooms this would represent an amount paid over and above the machine rates established in the agreement. Other areas that were open to local discussions were shift premiums where several chapels have been able to improve on the twenty per cent double day rate and twenty five per cent night rate established in the agreement. In the branch where I was the branch officer the typical double day shift rate ranged between twenty-five and thirty three

per cent and night shift was between thirty-three and fifty per cent. If a chapel could not resolve the issue at workplace level then the procedure was to enter a failure to agree and pass the matter up to the branch full time officials, and eventually to national level through the disputes procedure.

As recently as 1994 the GPMU General Secretary was reiterating that the terms set by the national agreement were minimums and did not preclude any branch or chapel from entering into local bargaining in order to improve such terms and conditions so that, for workers, they “they match the skills that they possess and the profits they help to make. That has always been the case and long may it remain so” (GPMU Journal, May 1994). However, when workplace organisation in the industry is examined this element of workplace autonomy has all but disappeared. Indeed the employers felt secure enough to state that the pay increases set by the agreement are no longer a minimum but represent the maximum increase. I found little evidence of second tier bargaining in my research (1995) and quoted Bennington of the BPIF’s claim that the “national agreement has become THE agreement for the industry” (p 41).

The lack of any form of local bargaining became clear from the comments of both managers and workplace representatives in the interviews. When asked if the chapel ever come in and ask for extras over and above the BPIF settlement, the manager at Packo responded,

Historically they have in the past, but in recent times I don't think they have...as far as I'm aware the company picks up the recommended agreement, you know with the BPIF, and as I say in the recent past it's not been any more than that. Obviously I think when there's been changes in shift pattern etc. things have been agreed then, but this would be outside of the annual agreement if you like.

The FOC at Flexico reflected that

We used to get house money, we used to go in after, but we haven't had it for a long, long time... We try, but we never get anywhere.

When asked how long it had been since the chapel had negotiated a house rise he commented this had not happened

Since the take over..., I think it was 1994

Similarly, the FOC at Printco commented that local bargaining was something that the chapel,

have done in the past, haven't done for the past couple of years but like the house rate or whatever, try and get the same increase on that as well, although its not a lot, sometimes pence but you know you try and keep it going every year...I think I did ask last year and didn't get it but again I do try, I always give it a go, you know

The responses from the interviewees make it clear that the impact of second tier bargaining in the workplace has all but disappeared and that the increase in pay determined by the national agreement has become a maximum rather than the minimum. From the responses in the interviews I did not get the sense that there had been to any extent a struggle to maintain the element of second tier bargaining. There seemed to be a general acceptance of the situation among those interviewed. The question that arises from this situation is what changes have occurred both within the agreement and the workplace that have allowed this dramatic fall in workplace bargaining? The following analysis of the issues of cost recovery and the state of workplace organisation will help to provide an insight to this dilemma.

The Impact of the Cost Recovery Clause in the National Agreement on Second Tier Bargaining.

A major factor that could contribute to the reduction in second tier bargaining is the introduction of cost recovery clauses⁹. Today's F/MOCs are more involved in justifying the increase set by the agreement and defending existing terms than they are trying to improve the terms of the agreement. Hyman (1995) points to the changed circumstances within which bargaining takes place in recent times. He makes the case that the concession bargaining that became prevalent during the 1960s and had produced an almost continuous stream of real improvements in workers terms and conditions, as well as addressing new issues that included "working conditions, organisation of production, division of labour, career development", was not as effective in the current tight economic and political climate. This change meant that the margins that companies had within which to grant improvements were diminishing to the extent that, "Economic stringency puts in question the whole consolidated post war mode of union representation" (pp 113-115). Despite Hyman's observation, in 1995 I found little evidence of cost recovery impacting on local agreements. However, our more recent research (Healy et al 2004) and Telford (2001) have found that chapels are now being drawn into such discussions.

⁹ Clause 4 (c) of the GPMU/BPIF Agreement states: **Full cost recovery:** The parties agree, that where practicable, additional costs arising from the 2002 national settlement will be recovered in full by efficiency and productivity improvements at company level. Such improvements can be wide ranging in scope.

Improvements will be agreed between managements and chapels and implemented. Where agreement on efficiency and productivity improvements cannot be reached, the matter will be referred to the industry's disputes and differences procedure.

It is not intended that this clause will affect normal practice for the implementation of the wage award on the due date of 24 April or on the domestic settlement dates where these differ from 24 April in accordance with existing written house agreements to this effect.

The cost recovery issue has been raised at GPMU conferences. In 1997 the General Secretary had to speak against a motion to remove the clause. The mover claimed that managers were attacking the very core of terms and conditions in the name of efficiency. The GS reiterated that “such terms as core money, temporary transfers, balancing of time, overtime rates, shift rates are not items that should be discussed as a contribution towards National Agreement cost recovery Clauses” (Telford, 2001). At the 2001 BDC a motion from the Greater London Region Branch called for the removal of the clause from future agreements. The mover of the motion argued that the clause was an instrument used by managers to undermine members’ terms and conditions and claimed the clause was like a “carbuncle on the BPIF agreement and it needs to be cut out”. It was then argued that “the clause should be replaced by an efficiency and productivity clause that would not be abused or misinterpreted by employers”.

The Greater London Region delegation had refused to agree to the Executive Council’s request to remit their motion and as a result the Executive opposed the motion. The Executive argued that they “are not under any illusion. Without the cost recovery clause in the agreement there will be no agreement”. It was conceded by the Executive that “there have been difficulties in respect of the cost recovery clause” but that “those difficulties were, in essence...[where] we have been sucked into discussions taking place based on the claim for cost recovery on the increase but actually talking about reducing our members’ terms and conditions; about reducing overtime premium, shift premium, reduction in holiday entitlement, increased hours and other issues not related to efficiency and productivity”. It was then reiterated that

there had been several communications explaining to branches and chapels what discussions can take place under cost recovery and that the BPIF had been told “very firmly” what could be discussed under cost recovery. Despite the Executive’s claim that the national agreement “was of paramount importance to the interests of our membership” and that conference “should not put in jeopardy that agreement by futile gestures concerning the cost recovery clause” (GPMU, BDC, 2001: pp 53-54), the motion was carried by delegates

As a consequence of the conference decision to instruct the union negotiating panel to remove the cost recovery clause from the national agreement, the General Secretary called a special meeting of branches and M/FOCs representing BPIF companies in order to reach an agreement to leave the clause in the agreement. The General Secretary made the case that this would be necessary because the cost recovery clause had become a fundamental issue for the BPIF. At this meeting, which I attended in my capacity as branch secretary, the GS argued that there was absolutely no prospect of securing an agreement without the clause. Chapel representatives were presented with the scenario that there would have to be a major dispute with the employers to remove the clause and reluctantly agreed that the panel should proceed to reach an agreement with the clause in tact. Such developments are consistent with the arguments made by Roe and Telford (2004) that the employers’ agenda for changes in working practices were the more resilient outcome of the 1959 print strike, not because employers were strategic in their approach, but more that they continued to be pragmatic and opportunistic when the circumstances allowed.

The cost recovery clause coupled with the clause on flexibility provides employers with the perfect opportunity to stave off advances for pay awards over and above the agreed increase. In my role as branch officer I have had to deal with companies attempting to reduce core terms and conditions as representing cost recovery and many local discussions on pay begin with employers attempting to erode hard won advances that chapels were able to secure in better times. In the 2003/2004 pay round there were extensive negotiations at one company where, in order to get the minimum increase, the chapel were being asked to make concessions to sick pay. This was rejected and the issue was referred through the disputes procedure to national level representation where the company ultimately conceded to pay without the offensive clauses (East of England Branch Committee Minutes, May 2003). Engaging in such a protracted process just to retain existing terms and conditions reduces the capacity to bargain locally for improvements. However, the chapel adopting this stance does point to the importance of putting up some resistance to the management's agenda, rather than just rolling over.

Chapel Organisation.

The situation described above where the disputes procedure had to be invoked to prevent management gaining an advantage over the chapel through a clause such as cost recovery, raises the issue of the role of the branch and the chapel. Chapels' need to call upon the assistance of branch full time officials and the restriction on local bargaining ultimately impacts on the organisational strength of chapels. It would appear that the lack of workplace organisation is a major issue for trade unions generally. Labour Research (October, 2003) cites TUC research that endorses the position that "there is a strong case for saying that the revival of trade unionism

depends on the revival of workplace organisation”. The problem for trade unions in this case is the disturbing analysis is “that while 83% of employees in unionised workplaces say there is an on-site rep, only one in five report they have frequent contact with a rep” (p 15). Terry (2003) contends that the elements of structural change in the UK economy and changes in managerial attitudes and priorities lead to a situation where participative interaction with members is restricted by management to the extent that “managerial pressures for continuous production reduce the scope and time for workplace meetings” and that in a context of union activity relying heavily on managerial support, “managerial action (or inaction) is as important as union behaviour in shaping the extent and expression of workplace activity”. This lack of support is expressed through the decline in resources such as time and facilities offered to stewards (pp 264-271).

The lack of activists (or activism) at workplace level in the general print sector was an issue in our earlier research (Healy et al 2004) where it became apparent that chapel activity was moribund and in none of the companies interviewed did the chapels have a proper process to elect their representatives. This is a situation that was mirrored in my research. Although many companies have long serving representatives, in the majority of cases it was found that they were generally “willing horses” prepared to do the job in the absence of anybody coming in to take over. One interviewee explained his process of becoming FOC as

I think that I was Deputy and then the chap left, or I think he stood down but then he left not long after and I just, it was a normal case of who wants to do it and every ones hands went like that so I said I'll step up

and Tim who I work with said he'll be deputy for me so, and that's over 10 years ago now so I've been doing it a while!

From my own experience, in many companies we have representatives who do little more than act as 'post-boxes', prepared to circulate correspondence and pass issues on to the branch. Using the terminology 'willing horses' and 'post-boxes' is not meant to be derogatory, the union is thankful for the role these members play and the important contact that is kept with the union, along with maintaining the image that the union is still present and active in the workplace, even if, in some cases, it is little more than a thinly veiled image. In such situations the accepted classification of an activist must be revisited. In the literature review Batstone's distinction between leader and populist representatives was presented (see pp 45-46). In today's chapel structure many M/FOCs tend to adopt the delegate approach and must be seen as being more of a populist than a leader.

By way of an example of this decline in workplace activity an interviewee in my current research declared

I don't think there's a backbone in the chapel now to make it effective, originally go back years as a Chapel, they were quite powerful and I think we've lost a lot of the power we had partly from the tightening of the rules and regulations that the government have introduced and partly because of the Chapel itself

Despite the legislative outlawing of the closed shop, as the printing industry knew it (particularly the pre-entry closed shop that was prevalent in the craft areas), union membership remains high in the industry, the problem for the union is succinctly put

by Healy et al (2004) who argued that, despite high union density in the industry, accompanied by the “relatively high proportion of *de facto* closed shops evident in the study, this level of organisation is not translated into chapel activity” (p 554). This is a finding that is confirmed by my recent research where chapel activity is being examined on a wider geographical front. The three companies accessed in my fieldwork all evidenced high levels of union membership. In all cases the GPMU was the only union recognised by the company. On this front unions were successful, however, the underlying problem of union sectionalism was still evident in workplaces. Despite there being a single chapel structure in two of the companies visited, sectional interests still dominated the working practices with little flexibility between departments. As one interviewee, reflecting on the unskilled members of the chapel, put it

To be honest I don't think a lot of them are very union orientated, it weren't so bad before when it used to be NGA and SOGAT, that was more benefit for us really. It would have been better for us to go back. Unfortunately the majority here are the machine assistants, and they're the part timers or the women that's working for pocket money so they'll put their hand up for anything really and half the time they out number[us]

It is this jaundiced view of women and part-time workers that perpetuates the craft, hence male, structure in the workplace and restricts the opportunity for progression for semi and low skilled workers in the sector. This type of macho stance by the chapels promoted the image of a strong union presence that appears to continue to hold sway with the management despite this apparent lack of chapel organisation. The closed shop may have ended but the remnants of its influence still remain.

Management will still discuss issues with the resident FOC. An interviewee reflected that:

It's still very much union orientated in here and the management and the directors will still listen, they are sort of, they try to crush them or get the upper hand on them but they have stuck to it and its still very much a union shop

One interviewee was apparently unaware that it was no longer a pre-condition of employment to belong to a union commenting:

“The membership is high here because we've got to be in a union, I imagine if there were a choice, most people would opt out”

This comment from a chapel member suggesting that membership is still compulsory is interesting given that the ability to maintain a closed shop was outlawed through Conservative legislation during the 1980s (see Chapter Two, p 54). The literature review identified that the closed shop was a highly effective tool for maintaining control in the workplace for the print unions. The review argues that the phenomenon had spread across all groups of workers and was at its most effective during the 1970s with the intake of labour being tightly controlled by the local branches ensuring high union membership (Chapter Four, pp 137-138). However, as is made clear Chapter Six, the union more recently has been faced with the dilemma of falling membership that has been exacerbated by the introduction of new technology and the falling manufacturing base in the UK generally. This situation has led to the union introducing measures to preserve and increase its membership that include launching membership drives to improve membership where recognition already exists, a clear sign that the closed shop is no longer universally in existence (see pp 179-181)

The underlying issue of chapel inactivity is illustrated through the lack of chapel meetings. In my research none of the chapels called regular meetings. An AGM was the most common meeting where representatives were 'elected', usually by accepting the standing rep to continue unopposed. As one interviewee put it

We have chapel meetings but they are very few. People are reluctant to give us the time for any chapel meetings. If it's in their [management's] favour they'll maybe give us quarter of an hour at the shift change over, that's about it really...I think the last one was the AGM and I think we only get about half an hour

Problems associated with shift patterns and home commitments were offered as reasons for poor attendances at meetings and the lack of meetings in general. Mostly chapel meetings were called when an issue arose, a finding echoed by our earlier research (Healy et al 2004). A chapel member in a small company suggested the chapel meetings at his firm were held

very rarely. I think there should be to get the general feeling, hear your problems. No we don't have chapel meetings very often, only when a serious problem arises and that doesn't happen very often

Kelly (1999), in his theory on worker mobilization, makes the case that for militancy amongst workers to emerge the employer must act in a manner that creates the perception of injustice among workers, and the workers must put the blame for this

perceived injustice at the door of the employer. This sense of grievance is developed by a small group of activists into issues that can then become the manifestation of worker unrest ultimately leading to militancy. Kelly (1996) claims that “the membership’s ‘willingness to act’ is the necessary foundation for effective trade unionism” but the problem for this theory in my research is that the low level of activists and activity means that the issues do not appear to present themselves in a manner that would lead to any form of unrest. None of the union interviewees reflected any sense of injustice in their responses. In fact, where issues could be seen to present the possibility for chapel reaction, for instance the introduction of new machinery or technology that in the past would have been the subject of detailed local bargaining, the members interviewed appeared to accept this as part of management prerogative. At one company the chapel rep interviewed stated that:

We tend to have a very open approach, if we have a new computer system on the presses, if we have additional print units, or we have a different type of finishing system, we got full tech quality control systems now, things like that, we don't worry about that at any one time. What comes as a change, if it's a new machine or a change of machine – what's the machine rates, we don't do that, we tend to cover it all under one umbrella.

From a management perspective, the lack of any form of negotiation over the introduction of new equipment is exposed by the response of a company director who argued that the chapel accepted the introduction of new technology on the basis that:

they're all keen to take it as it safeguards their future. They see that if the company doesn't progress and invest then it will just fall behind so they recognise that they're doing it for their benefit.

This management response might reflect the perception of the competitive market faced by the employer. This particular employer was keen to impress that the staff were keen to cooperate with the company plans even though they

had no direct involvement in the decision making, a point emphasised by his comment:

With this being such a big investment I don't think anybody at chapel level was involved in the decision to buy, but after the decision to buy had been made then members were involved with their ideas. I've been heavily involved with the machine foreman over who we think should get to run it, what should we do, ideas.

Kelly (1996) claims that through using his analytical framework it would be possible to assess the breadth and depth of trade union activity in the workplace. I indicated that there would be a need to extend the axis of action beyond the militant-active spectrum to include a passive chapel response. I believe that the comments made by chapel representatives and management justifies this adjustment and allows us to accept that in the absence of power or any sense of injustice, and without the motivating issues to inspire union activity, members in many cases are accepting changes that in the past would not have gone unchallenged. This lack of chapel response, to achieve their goals in Kelly's analytical framework, is highlighted by the following response from a chapel member:

So of course the actual shop floor chapel who sit in if there's a dispute or a disagreement over something, will sit in there and they'll all say something but whether or not they are prepared to do anything about it is a different thing. So I would say things like health and safety or trade union things, a lot of good intent there but not many people are prepared to go the extra mile to say like this isn't right, let's do something about it. Whether or not that's because the government previously changed the legislation so that if push comes the shove the trade unions have no power, I don't know.

The following comment from a chapel rep reflects the reluctance of the chapel to become involved in disagreements and risk losing existing terms and conditions:

I would have to say on terms and conditions, which have been progressively achieved over a long number of years, are very good here, so consequently there aren't many people who would want to put themselves out on a limb and risk the terms and conditions they enjoy. That's not to say that there aren't a lot of people who have strong verbal viewpoints about whether it be health and safety, whether it be about holiday shutdowns or whatever, hours of work or, you know, all sorts of issues. I suppose you would probably have to define it as middle of the road really.

The above situation might reflect the assertions of Hyman (1995) who hypothesises that in face of hard times trade unions have had to adjust how they respond to the management agenda. The union response to such a dilemma is to present a dichotomy of approach, on the one hand trying to preserve their industrial influence, while at the same time developing a collaborative approach with employers and government in an attempt to influence the wider industrial and political agenda.

Examples of unions adopting this process of looking both ways simultaneously can be seen where, on the one hand they adopt measures such as enlisting dedicated organisers to maintain an adversarial stance and whose role is to promote traditional trade union organisation through building a network of activists around issues that workers face in their workplace. This style of unionism is contrasted by the partnership approach that many unions are turning to. Here the desire is to emulate the social partnership model more common in continental Europe, where the agenda is geared towards working together and concentrates more on the macro-economic and political stage. A clear indication of partnership at work comes with the development of the learning and skills agenda that is being set by the Labour government where unions are invited to work in partnership with employers and training providers to

improve the skills of the workforce. A new type of union rep, the Union Learning Rep, has emerged through this process and their role is to promote the learning and skills agenda in the workplace. An example of this approach within the general print sector can be found in the exercise that the GPMU has undertaken with the BPIF to modernise the National Agreement and to re-package it as the Partnership Agreement and Code of Practice. Within this revamped agreement is the Partnership at Work clause that focuses on learning and skills in the workplace and recognises the role of the Union Learning Rep in promoting and advancing training and skills development in the workplace. And yet the GPMU continues with its organising strategy based on the model developed by the TUC Organising Academy where organisers develop shop floor activism through identifying issues and building organisation in the traditional manner.

In their chapter on the role and activities of worker representatives, Cully et al (1999) argue that “while management may shape or constrain the activities of worker representatives, much of the variation is to do with the strength and depth of union organisation at the workplace. Where union representatives were elected rather than volunteering, where they had been trained in their role, and crucially, where they spent more hours per week on their activities, their role was more significant” (p 213). Evidence that chapels are failing to operate on a representative basis, where M/FOCs regularly take up local issues such as disciplinary and grievance issues, can be found in the mounting work load that full time officers find in performing individual representation. This is an area of work that is expected to grow for officers as a result of recent legislation that gives workers in unrecognised offices the right to be accompanied by a person of their choice at disciplinary or grievance hearings.

However the increased workload in many instances is coming from recognised offices with incumbent chapel representatives. In the East of England GPMU branch the issue prompted an article in the branch magazine reporting on the level of individual representation carried out in the branch (Branch Newsletter February 2004).

It is a situation that is echoed by branch officers in other areas of the GPMU who reflect on the lack of active chapel organisation and the consequent call on their time to undertake issues that would normally be associated with areas that lay representatives could deal with. In a conversation I had with one branch officer it was indicated that the branch had managed to get their committee to support the proposal that all chapels in the branch should elect an F/MOC, Health and Safety representative and Union Learner rep and to assist the chapel in their organisation the branch would donate £2 per chapel member to a chapel fund, provided they follow the branch recommendations. Some might argue that this is merely bribery to get chapel representatives, but it has the merit of being innovative and might encourage would be activists to become engaged.

Conclusion.

The focus of this chapter shifts from the national perspective on collective bargaining in the general print sector to workplace organisation at the local level. In particular,

this change in focus facilitates the research drilling down deeper into the operational aspects of the national agreement in order to assess how workers are responding to a changing workplace environment brought on by technological, political and economic change. In doing so the chapter tests the assumption that the national agreement held between the GPMU and the BPIF is still considered to be a major influence on the terms and conditions and workplace practices of those working under that agreement.

The chapter identifies that the chapel remains central within the workplace structure, with its resilient hierarchal structure built on craft or skill status. Within this structure there remains a strong element of gender segregation with women mostly being found employed in the lower skilled or clerical areas. The low presence of black and minority ethnic workers is also clear from the findings. Workers from these groups tend to be employed mainly in part time or temporary peripheral jobs and there is little evidence of any attempt to recruit them into the union or integrate them into the chapel structure. The introduction of full flexibility of labour across all departments is negated by the chapel structure and the reluctance of management to disturb the *status quo*.

The issue of where bargaining power sits in the workplace is raised in this chapter. However the argument is developed that the opportunity for the chapel to push management into second tier bargaining and improve local terms and conditions over and above those determined by the national agreement has diminished. This is in part due to the introduction of clauses into the national agreement such as full flexibility and cost recovery that change the landscape of local bargaining, allowing the employer engage with the chapel to claw back gains previously conceded to chapel

demands. The lack of second tier bargaining also comes as a result of poor chapel organisation. Despite the membership in the production areas remaining relatively high, giving the outward appearance of a strong workplace organisation, there is evidence of poor local representation. This is reflected in a situation where chapel democracy is weak with little or no leadership and compounded by a lack of organised meetings to discuss issues within companies. Against this background of passivity and quiescence it is difficult to ascertain how any rejuvenation of workplace activity or militancy can emerge.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion.

This conclusion commences with a review of the thesis as a whole. The next section provides a more detailed analysis of the implications of my research for the actors in the general print sector. Following that, I examine the theoretical framework that I adopted in my research which leads into a section where I reflect more generally on the research as a whole. The penultimate section examines the contribution that I believe this thesis makes to knowledge and I conclude with a section examining possible directions for future research.

Thesis review.

This thesis has set out to assess the impact of a changing structural, economic and political climate on the resilience of national pay bargaining within general print, a little documented but important section of the economy. The thesis also seeks to examine the relationship between the terms and conditions contained within the national agreement and the reality of workplace experience and any tensions that variance between the two may place on workplace organisation; and to consider the nature of contemporary workplace organisation in the general print sector. In order to make this assessment, clear objectives were set out in the introductory chapter of the thesis. These objectives have been addressed and the following strands have emerged as a result of carrying out the field work element of the research and undertaking a comprehensive literature review into UK industrial relations in general and industrial relations in the general print sector in particular.

An exploration of the diminishing reliance on national pay bargaining within private sector manufacturing revealed the all but total disappearance of multi-employer collective bargaining from UK industrial relations. Chapter two presents a comprehensive literature review that details the dynamics of industrial relations in the UK and how unions have had to adapt in response to a changing technological, political and economic climate. The chapter reflects on a period of consensus, where a system of voluntarism prevailed and trade unions were participants in drafting the industrial landscape. This consensus was broken and a new, more legislative approach to controlling the unions' influence on the industrial agenda was introduced by the Conservatives between 1979 and 1997, and that has continued to a great extent under the Labour administration since 1997. It was in this new environment that the unions have had to adapt to remain relevant to their membership. The traditional tactic of taking industrial action against employers, and in the course of following this strategy defying the law, led to monumental defeats for the union movement including the printing trade unions who suffered sequestration for their involvement at the Messenger Press in Warrington and at News International in Wapping.

Faced with a loss of credibility and a falling membership the unions have had to adopt different methods to address their problems. On the one hand the unions have looked to Europe and the model of social partnership that is prevalent in many of the partner countries as a way of maintaining their influence in industrial relations. European directives have given the unions a means of promoting and safeguarding workers' rights. On the other hand the unions have also engaged in an organising and recruitment strategy that has been coordinated by the TUC that promotes a more traditional, adversarial approach to addressing workplace issues. This dichotomous

approach to engaging in industrial relations was followed by the GPMU. The union tried to retain its independence through promoting an intensive recruitment, retention and re-organisation programme while at the same time maintained a national agreement with the employers that introduced the concept of partnership to the proceedings.

This reflective review helps contextualise the environment in which the national agreement for the general print sector has had to exist and provides the starting point for undertaking an analysis of why, given all the evidence of its demise, multi-employer collective bargaining has remained resilient in the sector.

History therefore plays an important role in the structure of the thesis. Layder (1993) stresses the importance of an historical dimension in social research and this aspect is interwoven throughout the thesis. History is also important to our understanding of the development of the hierarchical structure of the chapel based on a craft or skill basis that to a great extent still exists in the sector today. The case is made in chapter three that it is through the stability of an industry that was not initially subject to great technological change that national bargaining evolved almost as a result of a workplace organisation that had its roots in the early establishment of the closed shop among the craft workers. It was upon this early structural development that the national agreement evolved and the chapter four provides details of the dynamics of collective bargaining in the general print sector where eventually concession bargaining gave way to a partnership approach that threatens the concept of traditional collective bargaining in the sector.

Examining the impact of the terms and conditions agreed within the national agreement on the workforce was a clear objective of the thesis. From this perspective it became apparent that the threat to traditional bargaining comes in the form of clauses included in the agreement such as flexibility and cost recovery. These clauses create a reduced opportunity for local workplace bargaining aimed at improving terms and conditions over and above the minimums established by the national agreement. The resilience of the employers' agenda is referred to in chapter six along with their assertions that second tier bargaining is no longer a feature of the agreement. Second tier bargaining was a fundamental feature of the national agreement and was an important element in maintaining the power of the chapel. The findings from the case studies, underpinned my own experiences, reveal a major shift in the democracy of the chapel. There are clear signs that the chapel structure is not as robust as previously experienced. This is partly as a result of the loss of the closed shop but also comes through apathy among chapel members who no longer appear to address workplace issues through the traditional format of chapel meetings which have become a rarity in the workplace. The impact of this situation is that there is a more passive approach presented to management by the chapel and a reluctance to engage in local bargaining.

Significance of thesis for trade union structure and collective bargaining in the UK general print sector.

The emphasis of this thesis is to assess contemporary workplace industrial relations in the general print sector in the context of a resilient national bargaining framework.

The thesis therefore sets out to explain why multi employer collective bargaining remains vibrant in the general print sector despite reports in research such as WERS heralding the demise of this approach to industrial relations in the private sector of the

UK economy. This analysis involves examining both the national union approach to representing members in general, and collective bargaining in particular; and the impact of the policy decisions and consequent strategies on the members at the workplace level.

At the national level the union has had to introduce strategies to deal with the impact of a falling membership and the consequent financial problems that this brings. In the traditional areas of the general print sector the membership density remains relatively high. This is despite the legislative attack on the maintenance of the closed shop that was a prominent feature of workplace organisation in the industry. Therefore the bedrock of union membership remains firmly rooted in the traditional areas of the sector. However, this membership base is declining in the face of two major factors. Firstly, the industry is suffering from large scale redundancies as a result of a major restructuring of the industry, partly induced by take over activity. Secondly, there is fierce competition from new technology, particularly digital technology, which is taking work away from the traditional organised areas to the extent that the work is slowly shrinking, or being subsumed within a wider communications sector. As a result of these structural changes in the industry new membership potential is increasingly to be found in the expanding publishing houses and digital reproduction companies that remain largely non-unionised.

Current union membership is around eighty thousand working members and falling, in a sector that claims to employ in excess of two hundred thousand people. This is a situation that has been recognised by the union and there has been a strong policy drive to enter into an intensive recruitment campaign across the sector utilising the

expertise developed by the TUC Organising Academy. This recruitment campaign is based on a model where dedicated organisers look to build union activity around workplace issues and follows a traditional adversarial approach to industrial relations. The problem for the national union strategy on recruitment and retention manifest itself in the federal structure of the union that permitted a high degree of autonomy in the branches. This has led to a piecemeal approach to recruitment with some branches fully embracing the policy while others completely ignored it.

Falling membership and the accompanying financial problems were a major factor in the GPMU not being able to continue as a sovereign trade union and in November 2004 the union transferred its engagements into Amicus. However, the union managed to maintain a discrete GPM Sector within the new union for up to five years post merger in order to protect its identity within the industry. This merger has now been superseded by the decision of the membership of Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union to join forces on the 1st May 2007 to form Unite, a union that now claims to have some two million members. The merger of GPMU with Amicus is a departure from the previous series of amalgamations that have taken place over time in the industry. Previous mergers had a synergy with the realisation of a single union for the industry. The joining with Amicus is more in line with the reasoning presented by Waddington (2003) who sees union mergers as a means of maintaining a presence in the face of falling membership and the inability of unions to break into new and largely non union environments.

Turning to the relation with employers, the national union and their industrial relations adversaries the BPIF continue to commit to a national agreement for the

industry. On several occasions there have been tensions over reaching a satisfactory settlement for both sides and this pressure has put the existence of the agreement under strain. In recent years the BPIF have held consultations with their members seeking ongoing commitment to the agreement which has to date been forthcoming, albeit in some instances reluctantly. This might reflect the diverse and complex nature of the sector and the proliferation of small and micro companies that are the majority of employers. Therefore, despite the tensions, the national agreement has evolved over time. Most recently there has been a major change in the emphasis of the agreement in that it has been presented in the form of a newly modernised agreement that was developed through funding received from the DTI. The new agreement was introduced to the sector in 2005 and promotes the concept of a partnership agreement that intends to build on best practice rather than set minimum terms and conditions of employment.

This thesis has shown the concept of partnership at work as a major departure from the traditional adversarial approach to industrial relations that the union has historically adopted. The analysis of internal union documents and the observation of many meetings and events has revealed that in return for the partnership agreement the union has pulled away from taking action over elements of the agreement such as full cost recovery, an issue that has been hotly debated at union conferences. The new language of the agreement encourages a joint approach over industrial issues and the BPIF see this approach as a stepping stone to finding an alternative to national collective bargaining in the long term. Learning and skills has come into the new agreement and is a major initiative for the national union who have long argued that the industry needs to improve the training available to employees.

In Chapter Six it was noted that the implications of the Partnership at Work Agreement would become clear in time (p 204), and a clear example of a shift in the bargaining position from the union comes through a report in Printing Week (2007) where the virtues of 'banked hours' as a means of working flexibly are extolled. A company representative suggested that the seasonal nature of work meant that work had to be organised differently and that "it was only with the BPIF Partnership Agreement in July 2004 that we hit on the idea of banked holidays as a way round this seasonality". The scheme allows workers to work overtime during the busy periods but defer payment for the hours worked and take the hours as 'extra' holiday instead during quiet spells. This is an example of introducing change in a long established BPIF company who have been involved in seasonal work for many years and have managed without using banked hours. Before the introduction of the partnership at work agreement bargaining over an issue that had the impact of reducing overtime premiums would not have taken place, but here, the employer's agenda becomes dominant and long established procedures for overtime calculation are undermined.

The implication of the introduction of partnership at work for the officers representing members in the sector is that the changed emphasis of the agreement will have the potential to open the terms and conditions of members to the vagaries of local bargaining from a position of weakness rather than from a position of strength. The whole concept of second tier bargaining was that it allowed for improvements over and above the minimums established in the national agreement. The agreement established minimum terms and determined areas that were deemed sacrosanct, for example the calculation for holiday pay or the rule against balancing time where the

principle of each day stands by itself protected overtime hours, and created opportunities for chapels to push management into conceding over issues such as rates of pay, shift and overtime premiums. This aspect of workplace bargaining was what made the printing agreement different from Sisson's (1983) position that multi-employer bargaining had the advantage for the employer of negotiations taking place at the national level, keeping the union out of the workplace. Traditionally in printing, workplace bargaining to improve on the agreed terms in the national agreement took place as a matter of course and house terms were commonplace in the sector. This meant that the union was very much present in the workplace. Today, the employers are more confident that what is agreed at the national level is the maximum and any local discussions centres more around the issues of cost recovery and as we are now seeing, changing long established practices. This research provides some understanding of what underpins this confidence.

However, whilst the partnership agreement may be seen as a compromise for the trade union, it also puts pressure on the employers and is not as one sided as it may initially appear. The Partnership at Work agreement provides a platform on which training issues can be progressed, again on a joint partnership basis. In an attempt to influence the training agenda in the sector the union has fully engaged with the funding made available by the government through the Union Learning Fund. Through these resources the union has sought to raise the profile of not only vocational training, but also lifelong learning, through employing dedicated learning organisers to recruit train and support Union Learning Representatives to promote the learning and skills agenda in the workplace. However, there is a sting in the tail in the learning and skills clause with the government warning the employers that if the training agenda cannot

be progressed under a voluntary arrangement then it will review the position in 2008 with a view to introducing a training levy to the sector.

The argument is raised in the thesis that, from the GPMU perspective, there now appears to be a dichotomy in approach to industrial relations. This situation is exemplified by the trajectory of the union that commits it to supporting a national agreement and accepts a change in emphasis that involves adopting a partnership approach. This alignment with the employers represents a major shift in the unions' traditional adversarial approach to industrial relations. However, on the other hand, the union continues to commit to an organising agenda based on the TUC organising academy model. This approach involves adherence to traditional methods of trade union organising, based on building union membership around perceived issues or injustices created by the employer. Although there have been problems in the organising strategy for the union, working within the Amicus framework, without the devolved power in the local branches, will allow for a more focused approach to the organising strategy with the dedicated organisers coming under central control in the new union. The organising agenda will fit well with the philosophy of the Transport and General Workers Union and time will tell if this approach to organising will prove more successful for the new union and if the strategy conflicts with the partnership approach that is now central to the national agreement.

At the local level this research finds that the chapel remains the focus of the union activity in the workplace. This approach to workplace representation remains very much intact and continues to present a hierarchal structure based on craft or skill status. This structure has the effect of limiting the opportunity for workers to progress

to higher skilled and better paid jobs. It is also very much at odds with the learning and skills agenda that has emerged in the new partnership agreement that seeks to address issues such as retraining and up-skilling. The hierarchical system is reinforced by the continuation in many cases of separate chapels for members that reflects the departmental and skill division within the company. Even in the few cases where a single chapel structure has been achieved, mostly in the small to medium sized companies, it is the skilled or craft workers who tend to become the FOC.

Some initiatives have been introduced to the national agreement that should help to break down the barriers to job segregation and job progression. One of these factors is the introduction of the full flexibility clause that encourages the abolition of all demarcation lines in the sector and puts in place the opportunity for employees to work across all the departments in the company. However, there appears to be little evidence from this thesis of any move towards full flexibility in the sector. Both chapels and management appear reluctant to fully engage with the concept of inter departmental flexibility and the extent of flexible working seems to be confined to within a department. This situation is further exacerbated by the reluctance of employers in the case studies to engage in any meaningful training initiatives leading to people being excluded from training that might help their progression. This reluctance to work flexibly is supported in a recent article in *Printweek* (2007) which claims that despite all the reported benefits “the UK’s print firms are yet to get excited about flexible working” (p 27).

The thesis has demonstrated that this chapel structure also encourages a high degree of gender segregation with women being mostly confined to lower skilled jobs or

clerical and administration posts. The membership continues to be a predominately white male stronghold. This is despite the introduction of an intense recruitment campaign launched by the national union to bring into membership the diverse workforce that now represents the entire sector. However, despite the importance of recruitment being stressed as a priority for the union, the campaign has had a limited effect at the workplace level where the workplace structure discourages recruitment of periphery workers, mostly part-time or casual, into the union.

Despite the image of a strong union organisation at the workplace, when one digs beneath the surface a different picture emerges. The notion of a well organised and accountable chapel is replaced by the reality of a situation where the chapel is, in many instances, moribund. Chapel meetings are rarely, if ever held. This leads to a situation where the democracy of the chapel is reduced. In the interviews for the case studies some workplace representatives indicated that they were elected at the chapel AGM, however, in reality they stood unopposed. The lack of election of officers of the chapel means that at best, representation comes from those prepared to take on the M/FOC role because no one else will do the job, rather than being committed to the role; or alternatively, at worst, purely to ensure that traditional structures continue. This often means that chapel officials are reluctant to take up workplace issues and are more likely to pass them over to a branch full time officer. This leaves the M/FOC becoming little more than a post box, passing on union information and presenting the face of the union in the workplace. This apathetic approach to workplace organisation is extended to representation on the local branch committee where numbers have steadily fallen and often meetings lack a quorum. This situation is further highlighted by the lack of enthusiasm among members working under the national agreement

when it comes to voting for the recommendations of the negotiating team. The overall number of ballot papers issued reflects the falling membership covered by the agreement, but the number of ballot papers returned is well below the levels that the union experienced in past ballots and has been a matter of concern for the national union in recent years. It would appear that the membership is not as enthusiastic as the national leaders in securing a national agreement.

One of the far reaching outcomes of this apparent apathy and lack of activism in the chapel revealed in the thesis is the demise of second tier bargaining that was an important element of workplace organisation in the sector. In the past chapels used their strength to improve on the minimum terms settled in the national agreement through determining 'house rates' by second tier bargaining. Today, with poorer workplace organisation coupled with the inclusion of clauses in the national agreement that allow for cost recovery, chapels are not prepared to push for extras over and above the terms settled for in the agreement. The employers now feel secure enough to argue that the terms set in the agreement are now the maximum rather than the minimum. This situation has major implications for trade union organisation in the sector. The inability of chapels to raise the profile of the union in the workplace through progressing issues and engaging with management will do little for regenerating workplace activity and in turn making the case for union recruitment. It is against this background that it is difficult to envisage circumstances where in the face of perceived employer injustices, workers mobilise and take action to address those issues, and in doing so generate the conditions required for Kelly's concept for union renewal.

As a result of the actions of the union at both the national and local level, major implications present themselves to the actors in the general print sector. The situation that exists in the general print sector is that at the national, or macro level, the ability to continue to bargain with employers paints a picture of a strong and vibrant trade union delivering improved terms and conditions for their members. The sector agreement is held up by the union movement and some government departments as a lasting example of national collective bargaining in an environment that is hostile to this form of industrial relations. The continuation of a national agreement in the print sector remains a strategic priority for the national union as the concept represents an example of how industrial relations can be approached in other areas of the graphical, paper and media sector and sets a benchmark for terms and conditions of employment across the industry. Talks are currently under way to introduce a similar partnership format in the Papermaking industry where a national agreement still operates. A major implication of the national strategy to merge with another union is that it will be difficult to maintain a distinct GPMU perspective for the printing sector when the Graphical Media and Paper sector becomes one of twenty three other industrial sectors that Amicus and now Unite organise across.

Theoretical framework.

The structure of the research utilises the concept of the research map developed by Layder (1993). This map provides the opportunity to present the research data in a structured manner that allows for the both the national and local, or macro – micro, dimensions of the national agreement to be examined. The research map also allows for the important aspect of the historical evolution of collective bargaining in the general print sector to be fully appreciated and to show how history plays an essential

role in the resilience of multi-employer collective bargaining in the sector. A multi-method approach was adopted for the research which included documentary analysis, a traditional method used by industrial relations scholars. The documentary analysis was complemented by my own participant observation, analysis of a survey and interviews from the case studies. The findings of the research show that both sides of the industry have strived to maintain the agreement at the national level, albeit that this resolve is tested from time to time. History also shows that from the national perspective the agreement is dynamic, responding to the pressures that are presented in an ever changing political, economical and technological climate.

In earlier chapters I have highlighted the importance of a ‘frame of reference’ in helping to understand how industrial relations issues are dealt with across a unitarist – pluralist axis (see Fox, 1966 in Chapter 2: p 31) and how unions need to respond to the changing industrial relations agenda that sits somewhere on that continuum. Fox (1966) argued that in the UK, with its voluntarist traditions, the ‘pluralistic frame of reference’ was dominant and supported a status quo that legitimises the principle of honouring majority decisions reached through a process of free and equal joint regulation. However, in a later work, Fox (1974) identified a more radical frame of reference that unions might adopt that leant towards a more to a pluralist – Marxist approach. This radical perspective recognised that pluralism involved bargaining at the margins and constrained unions by validating the moral commitment to honouring agreements freely negotiated (p 288). Unions who adopt a radical frame of reference “do not accept that all agreements are ‘freely and honourably negotiated’ and therefore do not feel honour bound to respect the agreements that they feel they have

been coerced into accepting (p 288) It is within this radical frame of reference that I place my own analytical framework.

The theoretical framework that has been adopted within which to construct the research findings is based on the worker mobilisation theory put forward by Kelly (1996) that addresses the problem of how worker power can be utilised to achieve change in the workplace. Mobilisation theory argues that workers will use their collective power to address a perceived injustice on the part of the employer in order to coerce that employer into changing their behaviour. However, this action will only be taken if there are leaders who can raise the worker grievances and organise around the perceived injustices, and where, ultimately, the workers judge that the benefits of collective action will outweigh the costs.

Kelly constructs an excellent contrast between the virtues of a militant approach to industrial relations and the consequences of a moderate union approach. However, within the context of local bargaining Kelly's bi-polar model appears to play down the real consequence of apathy by union members in the workplace. From my own experience I have witnessed the growth of a form of workplace organisation that hovers between what can only be described as a passive, tending towards an apathetic disposition among members. This display of passivity is reflected in the increasing workload of regional officers who spend time fire-fighting in their region often dealing with grievance and disciplinary issues that would previously have been dealt with by the chapel. In many instances M/FOCs can no longer be considered as leaders but instead see their role as passing on issues to full time officers and this course of action reflects on the organisation of the chapel. In order to address this extension of

Kelly's continuum I have adapted his model to reflect the passive approach to workplace organisation so as to reflect this growing phenomenon within the sector.

Reflective view of the approach to the research.

The current research has made a considerable contribution to understanding the dynamics of industrial relations in the general print sector. The approach to the research has allowed for an in-depth view of how the sector is organised from the perspective of an industrial officer working in the sector. The original proposal to carry out this research stemmed from my own observations of how the union organisation was changing in the industry. This is not necessarily the story I set out to tell. I would have liked to have been able to report that industrial relations in the general printing sector is alive and well and reflects a strong and vibrant organisation. However, the evidence proved that this was not entirely the case and the story more reflects how the union is coping with change at both the national and workplace level. I have been involved in printing all my working life. I experienced working life under the closed shop and witnessed the limiting effect that the chapel could have on the aspirations of management. In my early days in the industry the chapel was the focus of the union and it was deemed to be failure if a workplace issue had to be passed on the local branch to be resolved. The national union was somewhere over there and had little association with the workings of the chapel. I was elected as a full time officer in 1988 and since then have seen the power and organisation of the chapel diminish. I have experienced dealing with workplace grievances and issues that in the past I would have dealt with as an FOC or chapel official.

Experiencing this aspect of change in the industry was the impetus for setting out on this project. I had undertaken some earlier research as part of my MA and decided to build upon that platform. The research for my MA was based on evidence from my own region so was necessarily a narrow focus. The intention for this project was to examine the impact of the national agreement in workplaces across a wider geographical area. To some extent I feel that this objective has been accomplished. My own observations have been tested in three geographically distinct areas and the findings have helped to present a picture of workplace organisation in the sector. However, I made several broad assumptions in my planning for this research. With regard to the questionnaire, I had hoped to get a reasonable response from activists attending the union BDC. This response was not as high as I would have hoped and in future I would look to gaining the cooperation of colleague branches to distribute the questionnaire. This would have the impact of reaching more chapels and hopefully gain a higher and more representative response.

I mistakenly assumed that gaining access to companies to carry out interviews would be an easy task given my connections in the sector. This proved not to be the case and while gestures were made to allow ease of access, in reality this became a very difficult task and reduced the number of companies where access could be agreed. A great deal of time was spent writing to companies who had been put forward as potential case studies. In many instances a reply was not forthcoming, and where a reply did arrive it was with an excuse why the company could not participate. With the advantage of hindsight, if I were to carry out further research into the sector I would adopt a different approach to engaging with companies. The direct approach was more fruitful and with the luxury of time I would make the approaches well in

advance and engage the shop stewards more in the process. This approach would allow for more companies to become involved. I would also adopt a more formal approach to seeking the views of my colleague officers. Many of the comparisons I made with experiences of officers in other branches were anecdotal, reflecting the nature of participant observation, and were derived from informal chats at officer meetings and other such forums. These were valuable and spontaneous and arguably give a more accurate picture of individual's perception of a situation. Participative observation relies on regular detailed note taking and some subjective interpretation and recollection. Nevertheless, in undertaking any further research I would formalise these discussions in the form of an interview schedule. This would allow for a wider view of industrial relations in the sector and allow easier access to the data.

Contribution to knowledge.

In many ways the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis has emerged in the discussions in the above sections. It is the task of this section to more explicitly summarise this contribution. To a great extent the thesis has achieved its aims and objectives. It has shown the importance of an understanding of industrial relations in the UK in general, and to an understanding of industrial relations in a particular sector, in this case to the general print sector. Further in using Layder (1993), it has shown the importance of context and multi-level analysis in industrial relations research.

The thesis has made a contribution to our knowledge of collective bargaining and workplace organisation in the sector at a number of levels. It has shown how the wider debates on organising and partnership have permeated the union strategy and the collective bargaining processes at national, branch and chapel level. Our

knowledge on the industrial relations structure of the sector is improved with a greater understanding of how the traditional chapel structure remains intact. Importantly, the thesis identifies the difference in the image and reality of workplace organisation in the sector where behind the appearance of chapel strength lies an air of apathy and poor organisation that ultimately impacts on chapel activity and local bargaining.

The thesis presents original data on the state of collective bargaining in the sector, and in particular identifies a shift from the traditional adversarial approach to partnership in the national agreement and at local level. Theoretically, the thesis has shown the value of an adapted version of Kelly's model for union mobilisation. By introducing the third concept of 'passive' to the model, the thesis has been better able to capture the contemporary reality of industrial relations in the sector. The adapted model has been shown to be of value in assessing the level of union activity and in considering the likelihood of increased union activity in the workplace in the general print sector. The adapted model may have wider value to other sectoral industrial relations studies. Finally, the thesis identifies the importance of using a multi-method approach to IR research and in particular the value of participant observation.

Future Research.

I believe that this thesis has opened the door to further research in the printing sector and beyond into other areas of the Graphical, Paper and Media sector. The national agreement has changed in emphasis and there should be further observations on how this change impacts on those working under the agreement. The GPMU has been subsumed within a larger general trade union. There is a commitment in the merger document for the Graphical, Paper and Media sector to remain distinct within the new

organisation for a period of up to five years post merger. Research into how the national agreement fairs in this new setting and how the membership in the industry is represented under the changed regime would be an appropriate issue for research. The introduction of the learning and skills agenda and the accompanying creation of a new type of activist that is the Union Learning Representative needs to be assessed.

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