

Health, safety and industrial relations: a U K study

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Drawing on a sample of safety committee members in 51 plants in the United Kingdom manufacturing industry, this paper examines 3 aspects of the relationship between unions and management on health and safety issues. The contention that safety is less of an area of conflict than other industrial relations issues is explored. The potential conflict, between efficiency and democracy in the operation of committees, is examined, leading on to an exploration of the relationship between union safety committee members and the shop floor.

Introduction

In the August 1982 issue of this *journal* (Beaumont and Leopold, 1982a), we outlined the history of the attempts to establish joint health and safety committees in Britain on a voluntary basis and the subsequent attempt to legislate for their development. In this paper we examine the wider implication of the activities of safety representatives and joint safety committees at plant level. In particular, we explore 3 main themes; is health and safety a conflict or consensus issue, are safety committee members faced with a conflict between democracy and efficiency, and what is the nature of the relationship between trade union safety committee members and shop floor workers?

In examining these questions we draw upon evidence gathered as part of a survey of the operation of 51 plant health and safety committees in the manufacturing industry sector of the United Kingdom economy. The sample was stratified by industry accident rate and plant size. On the basis of reported industrial accident statistics, our sample of plants broke down into three sub-groups:

- (1) High accident rate: metal manufacturing; petroleum products; bricks, pottery, glass and cement; food, drink and tobacco. (N = 20)
- (2) Medium accident rate: paper; textiles; vehicles; timber; chemicals; metal goods not elsewhere classified; mechanical engineering; other manufacturing industry. (N = 13)
- (3) Low accident rate: clothing and footwear; instrument engineering; leather products; electrical engineering. (N = 18)

It was also our aim to balance our sample to reflect the overall size distribution of manufacturing establishments. Our final breakdown was:

Plants employing more than 1 000 workers	N = 17
Plants employing 500 - 1 000 workers	N = 6
Plants employing 200 - 499 workers	N = 12
Plants employing less than 200 workers	N = 16

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At each plant we sought to interview 5 members of the joint health and safety committee: the safety officer; the senior manager on the committee; a line manager; the senior trade union representative and a safety representative. In some plants 1 or more of these categories did not exist in the plant or on the committee, so that our total number of respondents was 229. Of these, 129 were management members and 100 were employee representatives; all but 6 of the latter were trade unionists.

Prior to the *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA 1974)* Various unsuccessful attempts had been made to voluntarily establish joint health and safety committees. The new *Act*, for the first time, created a general statutory right for workplace health and safety representatives to be created and it placed a general duty on employers to consult with these representatives. However the detailed rights and powers of safety representatives required the implementation of the *Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977*, which came into force on October 1, 1978.

Safety representatives were an entirely new concept in British industrial relations when introduced by the *HASAWA 1974*, although voluntary joint health and safety committees have had a long history. These committees were, however, disproportionately concentrated in large plants and in high accident rate industries. What difference did statutory backing make to the establishment of safety committees? The survey evidence presented in our previous article may be briefly summarised: as a result of the legislation, there was a spread of safety committees to low accident rate industries and to small plants (less than 200 employees) in all industries; moreover, in one-fifth of the plants surveyed by the Government enforcement agency, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), in 1979, existing joint health and safety committees were altered as a result of the *Regulations*; usually by the inclusion of trade union safety representatives in the committee composition. In short, the main variables which influenced the existence of safety representatives and the establishment of joint safety committees were industry accident risk, plant size, and union density.

Health and safety – conflict or co-operation?

The *HASAWA 1974* was based on the Robens Committee Report on Safety and Health at Work. One of its main contentions was that:

There is a greater natural identity of interest between 'the two sides' in relation to safety and health problems than in most other matters" (Robens, 1972, Para 66).

We examined this proposition by asking all 5 respondents at each plant to judge the

Table 1 *Management and union respondents views on the relationship between management and union aims on a range of collective bargaining issues*

Issue	management and union aims are completely the same		management and union aims are more often the same than different		management and union aims are more often different than the same		management and union aims are completely different	
	Union (%)	Management (%)	Union (%)	Management (%)	Union (%)	Management (%)	Union (%)	Management (%)
Safety at work	60	66	33	33	6	1	1	1
Healthy workplace	66	73	25	25	6	2	3	1
Job security	41	46	39	46	13	7	8	1
Absenteeism	37	29	37	53	20	15	5	3
Work allocation	21	29	55	48	18	21	5	3
Overtime	22	17	51	40	16	32	11	12
Worker participation	26	21	29	45	28	27	18	7
Manning levels	14	13	49	42	23	32	14	13
Wages	4	7	15	23	34	46	47	25

extent to which management and union aims differed, or were the same, over a list of industrial relations issues. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Management clearly have a less conflict-oriented view on nearly every issue than their trade union counterparts. The 2 exceptions were questions of overtime and manning levels, where management felt that differences were more likely to exist. There seemed general agreement on the question of levels of overtime, but management was unhappy about the question of who controlled its allocation and distribution.

However the main point revealed by the Table is, that both union and management respondents clearly saw health and safety issues as an area where there was a marked congruence of interest. As with other issues, management felt more strongly than their union counterparts that there were no, or only minor, differences but, in both cases, safety and health issues were clearly differentiated from all other issues.

Impact of union involvement in health and safety

These findings then are clearly consistent with the conventional wisdom as expressed in the extract from the Robens Report. But to what extent is this general belief in the mutuality of interest on health and safety matters translated into practice in the workplace? As a step towards answering this question our 3 management respondents at each plant were asked to assess the impact and outcome of union involvement in health and safety issues in the plants, and to indicate the frequency of use of a range of possible tactics at the disposal of union representatives to press health and safety issues. Union involvement was taken to include both the activities of health and safety representatives and of health and safety committees. The results of the first question are summarised in Table 2 and the parts are discussed in the order that they appear in the Table.

Table 2 *Summary of management views on the impact of union activity on health and safety issues in the plant*

Statement of possible impact	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Indifferent (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	N
Been a harrassment to the company without any benefits	81	13	3	0	3	125
Reduced friction between union and management	1	9	23	62	5	125
Provided information for making decisions	0	13	14	64	10	125
Resulted in some major improvements in the safety conditions in the plant	0	13	18	62	7	125
Resulted in a lower injury rate in the plant	0	13	19	53	15	125

Table 2 clearly shows, that any fear that management had that the arrival of trade union safety representatives with extensive statutory powers would prove to be a disruptive influence, has proved groundless. Cases of difficulty are in the minority and, as one safety officer claimed, are not always directly related to safety:

There have been one or two circumstances where they (the unions) have tried to use safety as a ploy which has nothing whatsoever to do with safety

The impact, however, is clearly seen to have been in the opposite direction; over two-thirds of managers felt that trade union safety activity had actually helped reduce friction between unions and management, and, as one senior manager put it:

I believe it has helped relationships between management and unions, both inter-union and inter-management. There is now a lot of common ground for discussion or as a senior steward argued:

There is no doubt there has been a spin off into other areas. We have both been faced with a common problem and this has forced us to arrive at a common solution. There is now a lot more co-operation from all sides on a host of issues.

The general agreement, that trade union activity in health and safety has had a beneficial impact on relationships, is also reflected in views on the impact of the activity in more concrete measurable items such as making major improvements in safety conditions and in lowering the injury rate in the plant. One can perhaps detect, however, a greater element of disagreement in this as 13 percent of respondents disagreed on both counts. This is partly because accident levels are low in low risk industries, and safety does not rate as a high priority for either management or unions. Thus, the production director of a clothing factory claimed:

It is a low risk area. It doesn't get the priority. Safety committees and works councils are not taken terribly seriously. They are a nuisance.

Another factor influencing this was change over time.

The last few committees have not made any decisions that would lead to any changes. The most important things have now been done.

Co-operation or conflict?

Both management and union interviewees felt strongly that safety and health were areas of common interest, and management respondents clearly have indicated beneficial impacts of trade union activity on safety. The logic of these points is that trade union safety representatives, both inside and outside of committee activity, would accept co-operative problem solving tactics, rather than adversarial ones. By problem solving tactics we mean such activities as, openly identifying all problems of mutual concern, seeking out information exchanges, and the avoidance of coercive and threatening tactics. Items 6-9 in Table 3 are in the problem solving category. Adversarial tactics, on the other hand, include, limiting the amount of information, bluffing and use of coercive behaviour, such as, warnings, promises and threats. Items 1-5 in Table 3 fall into this category. Do our findings on the frequency of use of particular tactics bear this out?

The most obvious sign of an adversarial position would be recourse to industrial action or the threat of industrial action. Clearly from this evidence this is not the case. Fewer than 10 percent of management respondents claimed that the unions in their plant threatened industrial action and, in even fewer cases, did it actually occur. Although over one-third of managers claimed that industrial action was threatened, less than a quarter reported this threat actually being put into practice.

It could be argued that management respondents may have been reluctant to admit to industrial action on health and safety issues and therefore these figures understate the actual incidence. Our trade union respondents were, however, also asked to state how frequently industrial action had occurred on health and safety issues over a 2-year period, and fully 68 percent of them claimed that no action had ever taken place. Similarly, only 4 percent claimed it was a frequent occurrence in their workplace. Possible explanations of this finding are discussed in a later section.

One other indicator of an adversarial position would be regular use of HSE inspectors. This would indicate that issues were not being resolved at shop floor level and be indicative of conflict on health and safety issues. Again our figures indicate that this is not occurring. Over 90 percent of managers claimed that the unions had never, or only very occasionally, called in a factory inspector.

There was a similar relationship between threatening to call in a factory inspector and actually carrying out the threat, and between threatening and actually carrying out indus-

Table 3 *Management perceptions of frequency of use of a selected range of union tactics on health and safety issues*

Tactic	Never (%)	Once or twice (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	N
Actually taken industrial action	75	22	3	0	0	123
Threaten to take industrial action	55	38	6	2	0	123
Actually report a matter to the HSE	75	22	3	0	0	117
Threaten to report the matter to the HSE if it is not corrected	54	29	15	2	0	124
Threaten to bring the matter to the attention of more senior management officials	57	18	17	6	1	122
Offer to study the problem with management	6	8	26	37	23	122
Provide information on the cause of a problem	5	15	44	27	10	124
Provide a clear solution to the problem	15	25	49	9	3	124
Agree to get workers to accept the suggested change	11	11	45	26	7	124

trial action, as in both instances the threat was made more frequently than it was carried out. These views were confirmed by the senior trade unions representatives. Only 6 claimed to have called in an inspector in the year prior to being interviewed, although an inspector had actually visited the vast majority of plants. In some cases, trade union representatives had to take issues to more senior management officials in order to get a matter resolved satisfactorily, but again this was in the minority of instances.

A different pattern of response emerges when we consider more co-operative problem solving approaches, such as providing information on the cause of a problem, offering to study a problem with management, providing a clear solution to the problem, and indeed agreeing to get workers to accept any suggested change necessary to solve a problem. It would appear that trade union safety representatives were being positive in seeking solutions to perceived safety problems, rather than merely drawing management's attention to the problem and leaving the solution to them, but, while it is clear that managers feel that willingness to seek joint solutions is a frequent occurrence, they are not quite ready to concede that the union representatives actually come up with clear solutions.

I doubt the union have the technical backup, the technical capability to make the major part of the decision.

It is also apparent that management are ready to use trade union representatives to relay changes back to the shop floor, and expect union safety representatives to be able to more easily persuade their members to accept changes. The trade union representatives appear to accept this role, despite the potential dangers of them of being seen as "management's men". Indeed, a sizeable minority of safety representatives reported that their members did feel that they had become over-identified with management.

Democracy and efficiency: a conflict?

The findings discussed so far relate to the overall view on health and safety at the workplace. The main focus of our study was on joint health and safety committees and it is, to a consideration of the impact of these on union management relationships, that we now turn. Our 5 respondents were asked what constituted an effective joint health and safety

committee. Briefly, as we discuss more fully elsewhere (Coyle and Leopold, 1981; Beaumont and Leopold, 1982b), we found that the key factors in the effectiveness of the committee were that: the committee should meet regularly; a senior manager with decision-making authority should be present; its members should be committed to health and safety and not simply be making up numbers; its members should have undergone training; there should be communication channels between the committee members and the shop floor; and, above all, that there should be a co-operative working relationship between employee and management representatives on the committee.

The committees were being judged both as a means of getting things done on health and safety problems, its instrumental end, and as a forum of employee-management participation, its intrinsic end. The 2 ends, however, may not be mutually compatible. Indeed one could well postulate a conflict between efficiency and democracy; between getting things done quickly and technically correctly, and involving people in open, democratic discussion to resolve problems.

The above dilemma is particularly true in the health and safety field where a high degree of technical knowledge and experience can be involved in making decisions. To this end most firms employ a safety officer or adviser, whose job it is to advise management and employees on the technical aspects of health and safety. There are also a whole array of technical experts and consultants who can be called in to deal with particular problems such as excess noise or chemical fumes. In such cases, if the employee representatives cannot match the technical expertise of the safety adviser or consultant, they can be put in the position of merely rubber stamping the decisions of others, and not really being involved in a joint problem-solving exercise.

Our interviewees pointed up that top management involvement in the committee was considered crucial to its success. This was the belief of managers, safety officers, and employee representatives alike. This viewpoint is summed up by a senior manager:

We feel that it is important that the chairman is someone from senior management. If we have a discussion on the committee than I am able to make a decision, rather than say "I'll see the manager and report back".

Trade unionists welcome this willingness and ability to make decisions and are willing to reciprocate such arrangements:

To demonstrate the seriousness it was decided to take the convenor and sub-convenor, so that we could insist on a reasonable level of senior management being involved. Having senior management there means that if something has to be done it can't go any higher than that.

While this factor can be important in ensuring the effectiveness of the committee in getting things done, it can also operate against the flourishing of democracy and joint decision-making in the committee. Kenneth Knight in discussing the general problems of introducing participation schemes has pointed out the dangers that senior management involvement can have:

The one obvious danger in the special case of participation schemes is that the system will come to be seen as the top man's "baby", with other managers and employees going through the motions to please him, but with no personal identification in what is going on. The problem for the "patron" is therefore how to give the system maximum support without appearing to take it over, how to generate the commitment of those whose participation or representation is the aim of the system (1979, p. 273).

Joint health and safety committees face a double danger of being dominated by 1 individual to the detriment of the effective participation of all the committee members. The committee could be dominated by the decision-maker — the senior manager with the authority to make changes — or by the technical expert who has a monopoly of technical expertise and knowledge and who is therefore looked upon to take the bulk of decisions. What evidence is there, from the survey, of those 2 possibilities occurring to the detriment of the committee as a whole?

In general, our respondents felt that the decision-making process in the joint health and safety committee was in fact, a joint one. There was a clear recognition by management that the employee representatives had something positive to offer:

Health and safety is not the responsibility solely of management. Workers have every right to have a say, and an effective say in it.

There was, however, also a clear recognition that, where the proposed solution to a problem involved the expenditure of large sums of money, that the decision had to be left to management to take, if necessary out of the committee. Thus, a senior manager in an engineering works stated:

If there is a very controversial item raised which will warrant a huge expenditure, then obviously it is taken on the consultation side.

This reluctance to take decisions involving high sums in the joint committee was the norm no matter how senior the senior manager in the committee was. There was nearly always some other forum of decision-making where such issues had to be referred. The exceptions to this were in small firms where the senior manager was also a director. Here final decisions could be made in the committee because there was no other layer of decision-making for the issue to be referred up to.

This was the case in only 3 firms but, in all cases, the director involved was concerned about the effect on the rest of the committee of his being able to make decisions alone. Although this could enable problems to be resolved quickly, it could actually undermine relationships between the management and the workforce. Thus the production director of a clothing firm claimed:

They see me making the decisions and then feel they are devious management decisions that are being made.

Another director in a similar position was acutely aware of the dangers of being seen to make all decisions himself, so he encouraged participation by employee representatives.

The other area where there was an expressed reluctance to fully share decision-making was where technical matters were involved. Thus one senior manager in a high technology, high risk industry, felt that trade union committee members should not have an equal say in health and safety matters, but should be consulted before management made the final decision.

In most plants, the safety officer is the repository of technical knowledge and expertise. Safety officers regard themselves as being *ex officio* members of the committee, present to advise all members of the committee, not just management. However, in many cases their expertise is relied upon heavily and they are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the committee decisions. It is possible to some safety officers to feel that the best way to resolve health and safety issues is through action on their part and not through a joint committee. In such cases the committee is less effective, although many health and safety problems will be resolved through the safety officer's actions.

Employee representatives and their members

There is another related aspect of workers participation which can be examined through the operation of joint health and safety committees. Such schemes are based on representative democracy and, as such, we must examine how these representatives relate back to their original constituency — the workforce as a whole. This relationship can be measured by the number of, and nature of, the suggestions which the workforce channels to the committee via their representatives. It can be further measured by the way that committee decisions are fed back to the workforce and the channels used to do this. These can range from no formal channels at all, through the posting of minutes on noticeboards, to shop floor meetings where a 2-way flow of discussion can take place and the committee member can be kept in touch with what the constituents think and feel. This latter channel

of communication is clearly the optimal, and without such a procedure the committee member can easily become isolated from the constituency. Indeed, given the technical and specialized nature of health and safety this can be a real possibility.

Ironically the extensive programme of training of trade union health and safety representatives, which the TUC has undertaken since 1977, can actually exacerbate this potential danger. The gulf created between trained representative and untrained member could widen, unless steps are taken to ensure the continued participation of the workforce in determining the views to be pursued in the joint committee by the employee representatives. Indeed, the situation could easily arise where there is effective democratic participation in the joint committee between employee and management safety specialists, but these discussions go on over the heads of the people they are meant to benefit, namely, the workforce as a whole.

In order to examine the relationship between the safety representatives on the committee and the rank and file membership, we asked representatives to assess the concern and interest of the shop floor in the health and safety committee and how importantly they thought their members viewed health and safety compared to other industrial relations issues. One could hypothesise that if rank and file members felt that health and safety was not as important as, say, wages or redundancy, then the representatives would feel constrained in the forms of industrial action they could recommend in the event of failure of negotiations. We therefore asked the union committee members which forms of industrial action they would favour to deal with different substantive areas of disagreement and which forms of action had actually taken place in the plant in the previous 2 years. Indeed, Kochan *et al.* (1977, p. 16) have postulated that if the rank and file feel safety to be important, but at the same time an issue they are unwilling to strike over, then this could push safety representatives into a joint problem-solving mode of operation to resolve the outstanding issues. These, then, were the working hypotheses we set out to examine. What was the experience of our sample of 100 union committee members?

The vast majority of such committee members gained office by some form of election by the members they were to represent. In a minority of cases, they were chosen indirectly from the shop stewards who had been directly elected. The majority of issues which the representatives dealt with were brought to their attention by the shop floor members, although a substantial minority had to seek out issues themselves, using their own experience and expertise.

The vast majority of representatives reported that their members expressed little concern and interest in the work of the committee. The exception was where an issue directly affected the interests of an individual member or group of members when they would show a close interest and pursue the matter until it was satisfactorily resolved. Thus 1 senior representative commented:

Where there are some potential hazards there is more awareness of safety and of the committee. In other areas, where there aren't so many problems then there is very little awareness of the safety or the committee. Safety is not on the mind of the person working in the workplace.

This seeming disinterest in health and safety by the average member can pose a problem for the trade union health and safety specialist. What do you do if your members show little interest in most of the items under discussion in the committee and are only really interested in items that directly affect them? This can be a very real problem as a union committee member from a high risk workplace pointed out:

I can take a safety report and put it on the noticeboard but they just look at it in amazement. You get laughed off the face of the floor if you ever mention health and safety because 9 out of 10 never see the problem.

Indeed, as most committees are dealing with plant-wide issues, the subject matter is even further removed from the concern and interest of the individual worker. His or her problems are more likely to be resolved by the safety representative taking the matter up directly and immediately to line management and/or the safety officer.

The main channel of communication between union committee members and workers was through posting the minutes on notice boards. This was true of over 70 percent of our sample of plants. This method is, of course, a passive method in that it relies on the worker to take the initiative in reading the notice board. It also assumes that the minutes are fully explanatory and not merely brief statements of what was decided. Finally, one cannot question a notice board and thus the communication is only 1 way. In just under one-quarter of the plants, department meetings are held where representatives report back on committee business and thus gave the workers the opportunity to query decisions made and to contribute solutions to problems. In a further 4 small plants, this sort of activity occurred on a less formal basis through chats in canteens or with a small group of employees.

There has been much debate within the British trade union movement as to whether safety representatives should also be shop stewards. In most of the main manual worker unions this is indeed the policy. One key reason for this decision was the fear that shop stewards and safety representatives could be making contradictory decisions if they were not the same person. In practice, however, even in unions where it is policy that safety representatives should be shop stewards, many safety representatives are not shop stewards. The potential problem of contradictory decisions is then tackled by having safety committee members report back their decisions to the shop stewards' committee and for the shop steward then to report back to the membership. Thus the reporting back on safety committee business is second hand and is dependent on how often, if at all, the shop steward is able to have departmental meetings.

From the viewpoint of developing 2-way channels of discussion and communication, these arrangements are clearly not satisfactory. There are few formal examples of communication channels which allow shop floor workers to express and discuss their views with their committee representatives. Informal methods of communication in canteens and at tea breaks do exist, but mainly in small firms or in small departments, and are in no way systematic. Thus the experience for most workers is that they are not actively involved in discussions about ongoing safety committee business. They may be involved in matters which directly affect their personal situation, but not in the bulk of matters under consideration in the committee.

The low priority accorded to health and safety issues by members was confirmed by the representatives' opinions of the importance they attached to health and safety compared to other bargaining issues. The results are summarised in the Table below.

Table 4 *Percentage of trade union respondents estimates of how their members viewed the importance of health and safety issues compared to a range of collective bargaining issues*

	Safety is more important than: (%)	Safety is about equally important as: (%)	Safety is less important than: (%)	N
Wages	10.1	24.2	65.7	99
Grievance cases	28.3	41.4	30.3	99
Overtime	36.4	18.2	44.4	99
Discipline	39.4	29.3	31.3	99
Redundancies	15.2	17.1	67.7	99

Safety is clearly seen as less important than the central issue of wages and, in the climate of the current recession, redundancies are also of much more importance than safety. The gaps are not so wide when we consider grievance procedures, overtime, and discipline. Wages and redundancy are issues which affect everyone directly and therefore are ones in which even the most apathetic rank and file worker is likely to have some interest. Disci-

pline and grievance procedures are like safety, in that one would wish them dealt with if they prove to be a personal problem, or affect the small work group of which you are part, but they remain low key and in the background for most of the time.

This disinterest and lack of priority is reflected in both the willingness to take industrial action and the experience of industrial action. With wages, the issue affects the whole workforce simultaneously and in a similar manner and union committee members are more likely to favour using forceful methods of industrial action such as the threat of a strike, or a strike. With safety, however, the favoured method is blacking; that is of dealing with the particular issue in a particular ad hoc way involving only the individual or small work group involved. Most other methods, which would first involve obtaining the support of the entire workforce, are not favoured, and certainly not practical.

Further confirmation of the unwillingness of workers to take industrial action over health and safety issues is provided by aggregate figures on the causes of stoppages and working days lost published by the Department of Employment (Smith *et al.* 1978, p. 44). Between 1966 and 1976, on average, the much wider category of working conditions and supervision, which includes health and safety issues, accounted for 7 percent of stoppages and only 1 percent of working days lost. Thus there were relatively few stoppages on matters related to health and safety, and those that did occur were of short duration.

What other factors are there that make both union committee members, and the workers they represent, feel and act differently over health and safety issues? One factor is one's opinion on accident causation and its consequent influence on accident prevention. In our survey, the majority of employee representatives, and the vast majority of employer representatives, believed that, in general, accidents were caused by carelessness on the part of the individual worker. This emphasis on the individual is in contrast to the collective nature of most other industrial relations issues such as wages, overtime, and redundancies, which, although they can affect individuals differently, do have an impact on the group as a whole, and consequently are tackled as a collective problem. If, however, one believes that accidents are caused by individual carelessness, then one is led to follow courses of action which will have an impact on the careless people and cause them to change their behaviour. If the person who takes on the post of safety representative believes this, and further believes that they personally, are not careless, then an elitist, paternalistic attitude towards the rest of the workforce as a whole can develop. This can be strengthened and confirmed by membership of, and participation in, a joint employee-management committee where the careless worker view is the norm. This, in turn, can affect the representative's relationship with the constituency, as the task has not been one of getting the majority of workers to support a particular course of action, but of getting the minority, the careless workers, to change their ways. Thus the representative quoted above, who felt his members did not see the safety problems, found himself caught between 2 stools when it came to dealing with what he considered to be the major problem in the workplace, namely eating in the lead department.

The management are dragging their feet, I'm sorry to say. Unless I give names — and this is the big union snag here — they won't act on it.

He was in the position where he felt that the union committee member's function could best be fulfilled by having management discipline workers rather than win the support of the workers for a more satisfactory solution. This was not an isolated view. A safety committee member who was also a shop steward expressed a similar view;

I felt that people who needed to wear glasses should be forced by the management to wear them.

Conclusion

It is clear that legislative changes through the *HASAWA 1974*, and its associated *Regulations*, have had an impact on the provision of joint union-management health and safety

committees. This impact has not been uniform and the considerable inter-industry, and size of workplace, variations detected in the voluntary spread of joint committees persists in the post-legislation period.

It would be unwise to conclude from our findings that health and safety is an area entirely without conflict between management and unions. What is apparent, however, is that those differences which do exist are more likely to be resolved through problem solving activity on the part of management and unions than would be the case for most other collective bargaining issues. This stems not only from the nature of the issues themselves but also from the nature of the relationship between trade union safety committee members and the workers they represent. Safety representatives are only too well aware that their members do not rate health and safety as a key priority and that they are therefore unlikely to be able to win widespread support for industrial action on most health and safety issues.

The relationship between representative and member is vital; a relationship which needs to receive more attention in trade union training course for safety representatives. In fact, as we have discussed elsewhere (Leopold *et al.*, 1982) the emphasis on individual solutions to individual problems flows from a belief that accidents are caused by individual carelessness and not from dangers inherent in the workplace and work process. By concentrating on individual "careless workers" there is an emphasis on the individual aspects of health and safety to the detriment or even exclusion of the collective. Such an emphasis is at variance with the collective nature of most other workplace bargaining issues and potentially leads union committee members to adopt courses of action which do not rely on collective strength but attack individual weakness. To overcome this, union safety committee members must seek to more fully involve the workforce as a whole in what is to be discussed and what sort of solution should be sought for the better health and safety of all employees.

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