

Employee Forums in the UK: Friend or Foe of Trade Unions?

Michael Whittall, Alan Tuckman

With a tradition of informing and consulting employees resting on a single union channel, the 2002 EU Information and Consultation (ICE) Directive was bound to have a significant impact on employee relations in the UK. Undoubtedly, the works council as an institution, or employee forum as it is often referred to in the UK, represents a totally new departure in UK employment relations. The article specifically focuses on the repercussions employee forums might have for trade unions. We focus on two companies which have both recently founded employee forums to comply with ICE regulation. We ask whether such forums should be considered as posing a threat to British trade unions, or platform for revitalising their position within the workplace.

Key words: European Information and Consultation Directive, works councils, trade unions, British industrial relations, employee representation

1. Introduction

Until recently employee representation in Britain was seen almost exclusively in terms of trade union channels of collective bargaining. As in other European countries, the traditional British industrial relations landscape has undergone drastic change in recent times – so much so that the word “tradition” often appears redundant, a term that describes a golden age of collective employee representation long past. In making such a claim we are by no