

The finances of British trade unions 1975 - 1985

by

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and

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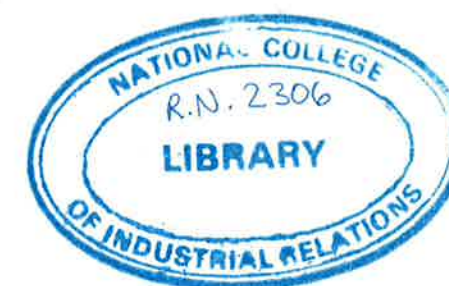
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P. Brannen
Chief Research Officer

Abstract

There has been no systematic study of changes to the financial circumstances of trade unions in the UK since 1970. The data needed to conduct such a study exist in the form of the statutory annual returns made to the Registrar on Trade Unions from 1971-4 and the Certification Officer thereafter. This Report focuses on part of this data, namely that for the 56 unions with over 20,000 members from 1975 to 1985. Over that decade, the majority of unions have managed to sustain increases in real income and expenditure despite membership loss, primarily by increasing real income per capita. This contrasts with the evidence of an earlier study focusing on the period 1960 to 1970. Investment income has increased in real terms, by rather more than has the real value of assets themselves. There remain substantial differences in net worth per capita between the unions in the sample, and there are, overall, considerable differences in financial performance which cannot be explained solely in terms of membership loss or merger activity during the period. Differential ability to raise subscription income appears to be important. Political fund income and expenditure show a rather different pattern, with high income and expenditure in election years. Once more, however, the ability to raise per capita income explains much of the change in political fund net worth over the period 1977 to 1985. The Report also looks at the rules for management of union funds contained in the rule books of the largest unions (those with over 100,000 members in 1985). In the main, income and expenditure decisions are centrally controlled, but National Executive Committees retain substantial discretion over the disposition of funds.



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