PYQAIR

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EPFO Industrial Relations & Disputes Edge

UPSC EPFO — APFC & EO/AO Examination

Assistant Provident Fund Commissioner • Enforcement / Accounts Officer

Concepts · Facts · Definitions + Solved PYQs (2023–2025)

43 solved PYQs • APFC 2015/2023/2025 • EO/AO 2017/2020/2023/2025 • Concept notes + options + answers + explanations

Contents — Chapter Index

#	Chapter	Page
PART I — FOUNDATIONS & WORKPLACE GOVERNANCE		
1	Foundations, Perspectives & the Concept of Industry	3
2	Trade Unions & Unionism	7
3	Standing Orders, Discipline & Grievances	15
PART II — DISPUTE RESOLUTION & INDUSTRIAL ACTION		
4	Collective Bargaining & Dispute Settlement	19
5	Strikes, Lockouts & Industrial Action	22
6	Retrenchment, Lay-Off & Closure	26
PART III — INSTITUTIONS & THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION		
7	Worker Participation, ILO & Institutions	29
PART IV — RAPID REVISION		
8	Rapid Revision — Don't-Confuse Pairs & Objective Facts	35

Chapter-wise PYQ Frequency

#	Chapter	PYQs	Priority
1	Foundations, Perspectives & the Concept of Industry	—	HIGH
2	Trade Unions & Unionism	20	VERY HIGH
3	Standing Orders, Discipline & Grievances	4	MEDIUM
4	Collective Bargaining & Dispute Settlement	—	VERY HIGH
5	Strikes, Lockouts & Industrial Action	7	VERY HIGH
6	Retrenchment, Lay-Off & Closure	6	VERY HIGH
7	Worker Participation, ILO & Institutions	6	HIGH
8	Rapid Revision — Don't-Confuse Pairs & Objective Facts	—	REVISION
	TOTAL (mapped PYQs)	43	—

QUICK RECALL — How to use this document

- Read each chapter's **concept notes first** (definitions, tables and callout boxes) — they carry the statute numbers and distinctions EPFO tests; then work that chapter's **solved PYQs** at the end.
- **Trade Unions is the single heaviest cluster (20 of 43 PYQs)**; Strikes/Lock-outs and Retrenchment/Lay-off/Closure are the next VERY-HIGH blocks — master these three first.
- **Chapters 1 & 4 (Foundations/Industry and Collective Bargaining) have no standalone PYQ tagged yet** but are core, high-priority syllabus — included in full for completeness.
- **Legacy vs Code:** many questions quote the OLD Acts; always fix the era before answering a number/threshold. **Negative marking:** −⅓ per wrong answer.

PART I — FOUNDATIONS & WORKPLACE GOVERNANCE

CHAPTER 1 · Foundations, Perspectives & the Concept of Industry

About this chapter

The conceptual base of IR — the four perspectives, Dunlop's systems approach, and the 'Triple Test' for what counts as an 'industry'. No standalone PYQ is tagged here yet, but the Triple Test and perspectives are directly examinable.

1.1 What Industrial Relations Is

Industrial relations (IR) = the web of relationships between workers, employers and the State arising out of employment.

The modern aim is **not 'zero conflict'** but to provide channels through which disagreement can be expressed and resolved before it becomes destructive (functional vs dysfunctional conflict).

1.2 The Four Perspectives

Perspective	Core idea	Keyword
Unitary	• The firm is one integrated team with common goals. • Management is the sole legitimate authority. • Conflict is abnormal.	• one team / one authority
Pluralist	• Multiple groups with legitimate but different interests. • Conflict is inevitable but manageable via collective bargaining	• multiple interests / legitimate conflict
Radical / Marxist	• Conflict is rooted in the capitalist structure and unequal power. • Unions can be instruments of class struggle	• class / power / capitalism
Trusteeship (Gandhian)	• Capital held in trust for society. • Labour and capital are complementary, not antagonistic	• non-violence / trusteeship

1.3 Systems & Other Approaches

Approach / school	Core idea — what it says	Thinker · keyword
Systems approach	• An IR system = **actors** (workers, employers, State) in a **context** (technology, market, power), bound by a shared **ideology** and producing a **web of rules**.	• **J.T. Dunlop** • Rules
Human relations	• Output depends on **morale, informal groups and communication**, not wages alone. • Conflict signals a breakdown of relations.	• **Keith Davis** • Morale
Oxford approach	• IR is the study of **institutions of job regulation**. • **Collective bargaining** is the central rule-making process.	• **Flanders** • Job regulation
Industrial sociology	• The workplace is a **social sub-system**. • Behaviour reflects wider social structure and group norms.	• **Margerison** • Sub-system
Action theory	• Actors' own goals and definitions drive outcomes. • Conflict is settled through **negotiated action**, not imposed rules.	• Action • Bargaining
Giri approach	• **Voluntary collective bargaining** and **bipartite settlement**. • The State should facilitate industrial peace rather than substitute compulsory adjudication.	• **V.V. Giri** • Bipartism

Approach / school	Core idea — what it says	Thinker · keyword
Trusteeship (Gandhian)	• Capital is held **in trust** for society. • Labour and capital are complementary. • Disputes are settled by **non-violent** means, with arbitration as the remedy.	• **Gandhi** • Trusteeship
Industrial democracy	• Workers share in the **governance of industry**. • Participation is treated as a democratic right, not a concession.	• **S. & B. Webb** • Democracy

Building block	What it covers — Dunlop's system
Actors	• **Workers and their organisations**, **managers / employers**, and **government agencies** (labour ministry, conciliation machinery, tribunals).
Context	• **Technology**, **market and budgetary constraints**, and the **distribution of power** in the wider society.
Ideology	• A **shared body of ideas and beliefs** that binds the three actors and keeps the system stable.
Rules — the output	• The **web of rules**: **substantive** rules (wages, hours, benefits) and **procedural** rules (how rules are made, applied and enforced).

QUICK RECALL — Thinker ↔ approach pairings

- **Dunlop** = **Systems** approach — actors, context, ideology, rules. Not 'human relations'.
- **Flanders** = **Oxford** approach (job regulation) · **Keith Davis** = **Human Relations** · **Margerison** = **Industrial Sociology**.
- **V.V. Giri** = voluntary **bipartite** settlement · **Webbs** = **industrial democracy** · **Gandhi** = **trusteeship**.
- Dunlop's output is the **web of rules**: **substantive** rules say what (wages, hours), **procedural** rules say how (making, applying, enforcing).

VALUE ADDITION — Important terms you must recognise

- **Golden handshake** — contractual clause giving an executive a large **severance package** on dismissal, restructuring or scheduled retirement; wider than a **golden parachute**.
- **Golden handcuffs** — financial allurements (**stock options**, restricted stock, repayable bonuses) designed to **retain** highly paid or rare-skill employees.
- **Glass ceiling** — invisible barrier preventing a group, typically **women**, from rising beyond a level in the hierarchy; coined by **Marilyn Loden (1978)**.
- **Yellow-dog contract** — also the **ironclad oath**: employee agrees, as a condition of employment, **not to join a trade union**; outlawed in the US by the **Norris-LaGuardia Act, 1932**.
- **De-jobbing** — reducing the number of jobs by increasing functional flexibility, **delayering** the hierarchy and **downsizing** the workforce.
- **Iron law of wages** — real wages tend, in the long run, towards the **subsistence minimum**; named by **Ferdinand Lassalle**, building on **Ricardo** and **Malthus**.
- **Featherbedding** — hiring **more workers than the job needs**, or adopting pointless procedures, merely to create work (**'make-work'**).

1.4 The Concept of 'Industry' & the Triple Test

Bangalore Water Supply & Sewerage Board v. R. Rajappa (1978) laid down the **'Triple Test'** for whether an activity is an 'industry' under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

Profit motive is NOT decisive; ownership (public/private) is not decisive either — the character of the organised activity matters.

FACT — The Triple Test

- **(1) Systematic activity**
- **(2) organised by cooperation between employer and employee**
- **(3) for the production/supply/distribution of goods or services to satisfy human wants.**
- **MCQ traps:** 'profit motive is mandatory' → wrong; 'Triple Test was laid down under the Trade Unions Act' → wrong; 'Triple Test = wages + hours + conditions' → wrong.
- **Current-law caution:** the IR Code, 2020 now has its own statutory definition of 'industry' with exclusions — answer legacy questions by the ID Act, current questions by the Code.

1.5 Core Actors & Scope of IR

Actor	Role
Workers / Employees	• Provide labour • Seek wages, security, dignity and fair treatment
Employers / Management	• Organise production and capital • Seek productivity, flexibility and continuity
Trade Unions	• Aggregate individual worker interests into collective representation
Government	• Legislates, regulates, conciliates/adjudicates — and also acts as an employer
Employers' Organisations	• Coordinate and represent employer interests
Courts, Tribunals & Labour Administration	• Provide the legal and institutional dispute-resolution machinery

Main areas covered by IR: wages & benefits, working time, employment security, recruitment/promotion/transfer, discipline, grievance handling, collective bargaining, strikes/lock-outs, retrenchment/lay-off/closure, worker participation and occupational safety.

1.6 Causes of Industrial Conflict

Category	Typical trigger
Industry-related	• Wage policy, working-hour rules, employment terms
Organisation-related	• Technology change, shift systems, job evaluation
Individual-related	• Personality clashes, lack of recognition/participation
Government-related	• Policy or legal changes, enforcement gaps
Miscellaneous	• Political unionism, inter-union rivalry, ownership change

QUICK RECALL — Traditional vs modern view of conflict

- **Traditional view:** conflict is harmful, abnormal and a sign of managerial failure; the response is avoidance or quick suppression.
- **Modern view:** conflict is inevitable in any organisation with diverse interests; well-managed conflict can be functional (improves goal attainment) rather than dysfunctional (harms performance).
- **Exam link:** the same functional/dysfunctional distinction is tested alongside the Unitary/Pluralist/Radical perspectives in 1.2.

FACT — PYQ status — this chapter

- No standalone EPFO IR PYQ is tagged to this chapter in the supplied bank, but it is **core, high-priority syllabus** (e.g. the Triple Test for 'industry' and the conciliation–arbitration–adjudication ladder) and directly supports the questions that do appear. Five practice MCQs from the 100-question set are mapped to this chapter.

Practice MCQs — Foundations, Perspectives & the Concept of Industry

MCQ 1 · Practice · Pluralist perspective
The Pluralist Perspective believes:
(a) Conflicts are anomalies that should be eliminated.
(b) Industrial relations are based on cooperation rather than conflict.
(c) Trade unions play an important role in resolving conflicts.
(d) Employers and employees have identical interests.
Answer: (c) Trade unions play an important role in resolving conflicts — Pluralism accepts conflict as inevitable between competing interest groups and treats trade unions as legitimate, conflict-channelling institutions. Options (a), (b) and (d) all state the Unitary position.

MCQ 2 · Practice · Tripartite structure of IR
Consider the following elements of the tripartite structure of industrial relations in India:
1. Government 2. Employers 3. Workers 4. Judiciary
Which of the above are included in the tripartite structure?
(a) 1, 2 and 3 only (b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only — Tripartism means government + employers + workers acting through their unions. Courts and tribunals are dispute-resolution machinery, not a party to the tripartite structure.

MCQ 3 · Practice · Systems model — characteristics
Which one of the following is NOT a characteristic of the Systems Model of industrial relations?
(a) Interaction between labour, management and government (b) Influence of environmental factors (c) Elimination of trade unions (d) Formation of rules governing employment
Answer: (c) Elimination of trade unions — Dunlop's system runs on three actors (workers, employers, the State), a context, a shared ideology and a web of rules. Doing away with unions is a unitary-perspective claim, not a feature of the systems model.

MCQ 4 · Practice · Systems model of industrial relations
Who proposed the concept of the Systems Model in Industrial Relations?
(a) Karl Marx (b) John Dunlop (c) Adam Smith (d) Max Weber
Answer: (b) John Dunlop — John T. Dunlop set out the industrial relations system — actors, contexts, ideology and the web of rules — in Industrial Relations Systems (1958).

MCQ 5 · Practice · Unitary perspective
The Unitary Perspective of Industrial Relations assumes that:
1. Management and workers have conflicting goals.
2. Trade unions are unnecessary as management represents all interests.
3. Organisations operate as cohesive social systems with shared objectives.
4. Conflicts are natural and inevitable outcomes of industrial relations.
Which of the above are correct?
(a) 1 and 4 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 2, 3 and 4 only (d) 1, 2 and 3 only
Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only — Unitarism assumes one harmonious team with shared goals, so unions are treated as unnecessary or hostile. Conflicting goals and inevitable conflict belong to the Pluralist and Radical perspectives.