Countervailing power has long been used to suggest that the power of labour unions largely explains the origins and coordination of Employers’ Organisations (EOs). However, labour unions have declined since the 1970s, but EOs continue to feature in employment relations. If labour unions are not sufficient to explain continuing employer coordination, what accounts for it? This article pursues this question by examining the evolution and activity of UK employer organisation between the 1960s and 2016. Our argument extends previous countervailing power arguments beyond labour union pressure to include changing regulatory pressures and demands by the state, such as individual rights legislation, as well as pressure by social movement organisations. The variation of these three societal pressures over time helps to explain the shift from an EO focus on collective bargaining, nowadays only pursued by a minority of EOs, to lobbying and political representation, corporate social responsibility and the provision of individual services.

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