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# Thirteenth Edition LAWOF CONTRACT

**Paul Richards** 



## Law of Contract

Thirteenth Edition

## Law of Contract

PAUL RICHARDS Formerly Head of the School of Law, University of Huddersfield



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Edinburgh Gate Harlow CM20 2JE United Kingdom Tel: +44 (0)1279 623623 Web: www.pearson.com/uk

First published 1992 (print) Second edition published 1995 (print) Third edition published 1997 (print) Fourth edition published 1999 (print) Fifth edition published 2002 (print) Sixth edition published 2004 (print) Seventh edition published 2006 (print) Eighth edition published 2007 (print) Ninth edition published 2009 (print) Tenth edition published 2011 (print) Eleventh edition published 2013 (print and electronic) Twelfth edition published 2015 (print and electronic) Thirteenth edition published 2017 (print and electronic)

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© Pearson Professional Limited 1995 (print)

© Financial Times Professional Limited 1997 (print)

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ISBN: 978-1-292-17610-9 (print) 978-1-292-17611-6 (PDF) 978-1-292-17612-3 (ePub)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data A catalogue record for the print edition is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Names: Richards, Paul, 1951- author. Title: Law of contract / Paul Richards, Formerly Head of the School of Law, University of Huddersfield. Description: Thirteenth edition. | New York : Pearson, 2017. Identifiers: LCCN 2016056451| ISBN 9781292176109 (print) | ISBN 9781292176116 (pdf) | ISBN 9781292176123 (epub) Subjects: LCSH: Contracts—England. Classification: LCC KD1554.R53 2017 | DDC 346.4202—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016056451

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 21 20 19 18 17

Print edition typeset in 9/12 Stone Serif ITC Pro by SPi Global Printed in Slovakia by Neografia

NOTE THAT ANY PAGE CROSS REFERENCES REFER TO THE PRINT EDITION

For my partner Maggie, my sons Phillip and William and my brother Anthony

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## Preface

At the time of writing the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of this book, the Consumer Rights Bill 2014 had just been introduced into Parliament and began what appeared to be a painfully slow path towards enactment. Like many legal authors this one found himself on the horns of a dilemma – to deal with the Bill or, take something of a gamble and treat the Bill as if it had been enacted. The safer route was adopted - one can never be sure of Parliamentarians! In this edition, therefore, with the Bill having progressed through to the Royal Assent, becoming law on 1 October 2015, it has been possible to deal with this important legislation in more definitive terms. On the face of things the Act seems to make the law in this area more complex, in that there is now a sharp divergence between implied terms and exemption clauses in consumer contracts from those in business contracts. Certainly this seemed to be the impression when the Act was in its embryonic stage as a Bill. Whilst working on this manuscript I came to the conclusion that whilst there is more law, it is nevertheless more accessible and clearer with regards to consumer rights. Gone are the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contract Regulations 1999, which at best were an unhealthy stop-gap process for the introduction of the European Directives in this area which caused great hand-wringing in the courts as they struggled to implement concepts that were largely alien to the law of contract as practised in the United Kingdom. The Act therefore implements the European dimension in a rather more measured and logical fashion in terms that are rather more readily recognisable. The Act is Certainly the biggest shake-up of consumer law for at least a generation and undoubtedly achieves its objective in providing a more transparent code for consumer rights. One other dimension to the Act is that Parts 1 to 3 largely extend to the whole of the UK. There are some exceptions where Part 3 does not apply to Scotland or Northern Ireland because of the differences in the law. For example, in Part 3 there are changes to the Sunday Trading Act 1994 which does not extend to Scotland or Northern Ireland. Similarly the provisions regarding the complaints handling scheme in higher education only apply to England and Wales on the basis that the original legislation only extended to these countries.

The law of contract has, as many lawyers and law students have no doubt lamented, been subject to the influence of European Directives and Regulations for some 40-odd years now. As Lord Denning famously observed in *Bulmer* v Bollinger regarding the incoming tide of EU law, 'it flows into the estuaries and up the rivers. It cannot be held back, Parliament has decreed that the Treaty is henceforward to be part of our law. It is equal in force to any statute'. It would seem that following the 'Brexit' vote in the referendum on the membership of the United Kingdom in the European Union, that tide may well begin to ebb. Whether that will be for the better or worse in terms of the law of contract in the United Kingdom is for the future; however, my own opinion is that our law will still and continue to be robust and indeed the choice of law in the vast majority of commercial transactions around the world. In any event, it can be seen already that the Supreme Court is increasingly taking on board decisions in Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and Singaporean courts where the jurisdictions have a great deal more affinity with our own common law system.

In this edition, I have considered a large number of cases but pre-eminent among these are Marks and Spencer plc v BNP Baribas Securities Services Trust Co (Jersey) Ltd [2015] UKSC 72 on implied terms; Parkingeye Ltd v Beavis [2015] UKSC 67 on unfair terms; Hayward v Zurich Insurance Co plc [2016] UKSC 48; Versloot Dredging BV v HI Gerling Industrie Versicherung AG [2016] UKSC 45 on misrepresentation; Salt v Stratstone Specialist Ltd (t/a Stratstone Cadillac Newcastle) [2015] EWCA Civ 745 on recission; Hounga v Allen [2014] UKSC 47 public policy considerations in illegality; Bilta (UK) Ltd v Nazir (No 2) [2015] UKSC 23; Patel v Mirza [2016] UKSC 42 on the illegality defence; Bunge SA v Nidera BV [2015] UKSC 43 the compensation rule in damages; Wellesley Partners LLP v Withers LLP [2015] EWCA Civ 1146 the reasonable foreseeability test in damages; Fulton Shipping Inc. of Panama v Globalia Business travel (formerly Travelplan SAU) of Spain, The New Flamenco [2015] EWCA Civ 1299 mitigation in damages; the conjoined appeals of Cavendish Square Holding BV v Talal El Makdessi and ParkingEye Ltd v Beavis [2015] UKSC 67 penalty clauses. Apart from the inclusion of these important cases I have endeavoured to rewrite some quite large areas of text, particularly with regard to Chapter 7 on terms and Chapter 8 on exemption clauses where the onset of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 has been more fully integrated into the text. Considerable chunks of new material have also been added to Chapter 9 on misrepresentation and Chapter 12 on illegality.

As in previous years, I have continued to refrain from making widespread use of unreported cases in order to maintain the original ethos of the book, in that it should so far as possible stand alone, and that if a student needs to look further, they should be able to obtain the information they want from a readily available source. Of course the objectives behind the writing of this book remain the same – that of presenting the law in a readable and accessible form by setting out the general principles of the subject with reference to the leading and most recent cases. I have attempted to avoid including new cases just because they are new. The courts hear many decisions and I have attempted to be conservative in choosing cases that have a real impact on the law wherever possible, as I see little point in cluttering up the text with minor decisions since these will only distract the student, create confusion and get in the way of developing a proper understanding of the law. The fact remains, however, that some of the judgements that are coming out of the courts, particularly the Supreme Court, are now of a very complex nature and reducing these to an easily understandable set of principles is now a challenging exercise in its own right. I hope I have done justice to these decisions for the reader.

Problem areas and other contentious aspects are also considered but as a means of leading the student into more specific reading. For this reason, there is a further reading section at the end of each chapter providing a selection of authoritative texts and articles in a variety of legal journals. Hopefully, these will also save students time when having to research particular topics. I have also attempted to continue to present the text in a user-friendly and structured form that eliminates footnotes that so often are a distraction and an intimidating presence which tend to obscure rather than clarify the principles behind the subject.

Whilst this book can be used as a stand-alone text, it is written not with this intention but to encourage students to undertake further reading so that they have a full understanding of the wider issues that surround this increasingly complex subject. The book has been written with the intention of providing a halfway house between a student's lecture notes, more substantive works and articles in legal journals and to encourage this learning process. In order to prompt student's into becoming more autonomous in their reading and learning I have included in this edition a number of 'Debates' and I hope that these will engage students in thought provoking exercises on the various topics contained within the 'Debates'.

All too often new students coming into higher education for the first time have not developed the learning skills to manage their own learning. Many academics have their own views on why this is the case but whatever those reasons, it is vital that the student of this subject spends time in the lawyers' laboratory, the library, reading around their subjects. It is also for this reason that the additional reading section is included.

Not that many years ago, the law of contract was regarded as one of the easier undergraduate law courses. I do not believe this to be true any longer (if, indeed, it ever was) and certainly some areas which in my days as a student were relatively straightforward are no longer the case, and the whole subject is now becoming quite a challenging one. The reception and comments received with respect to the last edition were extremely encouraging although, as ever, I welcome any suggestions that may improve it. In time-honoured tradition, all errors and omissions are entirely my responsibility.

It is a tradition and always a pleasure in the preface of a book to thank those who have given their help and assistance in the writing and production of it. I would like to give my thanks to Cheryl Cheasley and all the staff at Pearson or their continued support of this book and the Foundation Studies in Law Series in general. Their efforts, ideas and enthusiasm have contributed immensely to the success of both. The quality of the production of the book and the series is a tribute to their dedicated hard work. I thank them also for their patience when I overrun my date for submission of the manuscript.

There are many others who have given me support and help in terms of advising me about content or design and I thank them all for their input, particularly the students who have been so supportive of the this textbook. In particular, I have to thank Gerald Swaby at the University of Huddersfield for his telephone calls informing of new Supreme Court decisions and our discussions about those judgements. It has been a great privilege to act as Gerald's supervisor for his PhD and I am sure he will be very succesful in his viva later this year. I wish him and his lovely wife Hillary well for the future.

As in previous years I thank my sons Phillip and William for their love, support and companionship as they move on in life through difficult and what can be hard and challenging times. I thought that I had got rid of them but this seems to be a generation that keeps returning to the family nest! Phillip at least has his own place now and no doubt in the fullness of time William will find his place. The truth of course is that I love them both dearly and the home is never quite the same when they are not there. Such are the times we live in but at the end of the day it is their happiness that is of paramount importance to me.

I also thank my partner, Maggie, for her love, support, patience and for quite simply being there despite my long absences when I have been working on various manuscripts. I also thank my brother Antony Richards MBE for his unswerving support. We work together as a mutual support partnership and in between seeing some atrocious movies during our weekly dinner engagements as well as trying to hit a golf ball straight.

Paul Richards

August 2016

#### Acknowledgements

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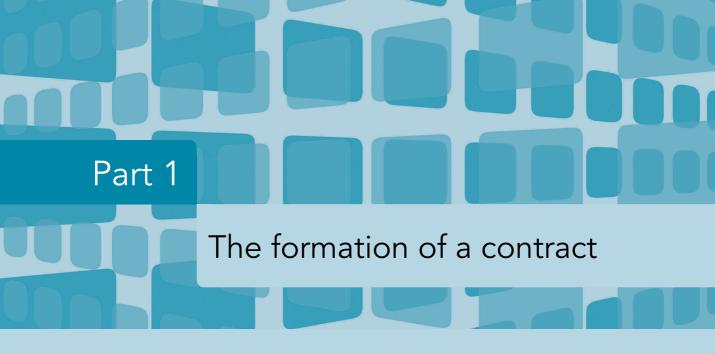
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- 1 The evolution and definition of the modern contract
- 2 The fact of agreement
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- 5 Capacity
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# The evolution and definition of the modern contract

# **Objectives**

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- 1. Understand how the law of contract evolved historically.
- 2. Understand how the law of contract has evolved in modern times and explain the nature of contracts of adhesion.
- 3. Define a contract.
- 4. Recognise when a contract arises in legal terms.

# Evolution

# The early development

Objective 1 The law of contract in England has a long history which dates back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Its early development was connected closely with the growth and expansion of the jurisdiction of the common law courts over the myriad courts that evolved before and after the Norman Conquest. Some local courts in the Middle Ages exercised a limited jurisdiction based on custom that was very similar to that of the law of contract. This jurisdiction was termed the 'law merchant' and was often administered at local fairs, markets and ports. It was, however, the common law courts that evolved a more generalised jurisdiction.

The evolution of contract began initially with forms of action based on covenant and debt, roughly equivalent to what we know today as contracts under seal and simple contracts. Under 'covenant' some agreements were regarded as so important that they were formalised in writing. In addition to this, and no doubt because of widespread illiteracy, the parties were required to acknowledge the written document by sealing it. Initially, the action was based on the need to enforce a specific promise to do something, such as ploughing a field, but it evolved into an action for damages for a sum of money, awarded by a jury for breach of the 'covenant' or agreement.

The informal contract evolved in a very different way since the action based on covenant could not be used in a parol (oral) contract. Here the action began on the basis of debt and

detinue, whereby specific sums of money lent or otherwise owed (debt) or chattels sold or lent (detinue) could be recovered. These forms of action revolved around a fiction that the claimant was recovering their own money or property. The main deficiencies with these actions were that they could not be used to enforce a positive obligation, the only remedy being the recovery of the debt in all property. Further, the trial procedures were based on compurgation or wager of law, whereby a defendant could evade liability by producing a number of oath-swearers (usually 12) to swear their innocence in respect to the money or property alleged to be held by them. An action could be lost merely by the incorrect enunciation of the oath by one of the oath-swearers. Other rules made these actions inappropriate and often unjust, and it was at this time that the jurisdiction of the courts of chancery began to intervene to correct the inadequacies of the common law and evolve their own particular remedies applicable to agreements.

While the actions of debt and detinue were the earliest recognition of the enforcement of agreements, the modern law of contract in relation to informal agreements does not originate from these actions. As already stated, at this time there were a large number of different courts all vying to expand their own jurisdictions. The common law courts developed a jurisdiction over wrongs in which the king had a special interest. These were known as pleas of the Crown and involved actions relating to breaches of the king's peace. Such actions were founded on actions in trespass (i.e. actions in tort) which were particularly useful, in that the form of the writ was flexible and allowed the writ to be developed and used in many different situations. It is for this reason that Maitland called trespass 'the mother of all torts'. These types of writ were called 'actions on the case' and were tried by a jury which itself awarded damages as a remedy. Eventually the bringing of these actions ceased to be the sole prerogative of the Crown and could be used to remedy purely civil wrongs. Those torts that did not evolve in this way went on to form the basis of the criminal law. Among the torts that evolved at this time was an action in which the claimant alleged that the defendant had entered an informal agreement with them and then by a defective performance caused the claimant some damage. One particular anomaly in this early trespass on the case, known as 'assumpsit', was that it lay only for a misfeasance, that is performing one's obligations badly, rather than a nonfeasance, that is not performing one's obligations at all, though this restriction was removed after Thoroughgood's case (1584) 2 Co Rep 9a. The lifting of this anomaly was significant in the development of a law of contract since it meant that any breach of promise could be actionable, even though the agreement was merely informal.

The only remaining blot on the development of assumpsit was the relation of this action to debt. Again the significant factor was the competition for jurisdiction between the courts. With assumpsit, the Court of the King's Bench was prepared to allow the action to be used instead of the action on debt. The Court of Common Pleas regarded this use of assumpsit as improper, with the result that it would not allow a claimant to recover a specific sum of money by way of an action in assumpsit. It required such a claim to be brought in debt with all its incumbent defects. The dispute between the two courts was resolved in *Slade's case* (1602) 4 Co Rep 92a when the views of the Court of the King's Bench were upheld. The result of the case was to produce a single form of action for the enforcement of informal agreements and potentially produce an action that held no bounds in the enforcement of promises.

The open-ended scope of assumpsit needed to be controlled. The controlling element as to what types of promise fell within the general scope of assumpsit emerged also in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the doctrine of **consideration** evolved. How this doctrine arose in English law is unclear, but what is clear is that by the seventeenth century a principle had emerged that it was necessary not only to show a promise, but also some motivating reason for the existence of the promise. Put another way, a promise may be regarded as a statement of will but for that statement to have legal effect, it had to be supported by a motive for the exercise of that will or consideration. The establishment of the need to show consideration produced a broad form on which the modern law is now based and one which was not to be subject to radical reformulation until the nineteenth century.

## The nineteenth century

The nineteenth century is regarded as the golden age of contract since it was at this time that the law of contract evolved into the structure that we have today. Perhaps just as important was the fact that the significance of contract changed within the legal psyche of lawyers since it emerged as a subject in its own right.

The emergence of the law of contract at this time has often been put down to the Industrial Revolution, though this development owes more to coincidence than to a substantive causative link. As Smith and Atiyah (2006) point out in *Atiyah's Introduction to the Law of Contract*, the emergence of the law of contract is really the result of the adoption of the theories of natural law, which propounded the idea of an inalienable right of people to own and deal with property, and that the state via the law should interfere as little as possible with the affairs of individuals. The effect of these two approaches was to elevate the law of contract to a higher plane and produce the notion of the sanctity of the contract, the function of the law being to uphold the contract and only to become involved when things went wrong, not concerning itself with the fairness or social justice of the situation.

This latter comment is of course too simplistic and creates an imbalance when the reality of the situation is assessed since the Courts of Chancery did attempt to protect individuals who found themselves bound by an onerous contract. Nevertheless, the protection offered by the Court of Chancery was limited and probably even reduced during this period, which was a time of great corruption within the court, as is graphically illustrated by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*.

The result of the above changes produced, by the early part of the nineteenth century, a new concept of individualism, whereby the person in the street was regarded as self-sufficient and imbued with a new notion of self-reliance, in being able to control their own destiny. Given this development one then had to consider at what point the courts should become involved to settle any dispute that might arise from a contract, though central to this question was whether a contract had been entered into in the first place.

The answer here lies in the perhaps obvious statement that a contract materialises where there is an agreement between the parties. Again the statement is far too simplistic, since the stereotypical response where any breach of the contract is alleged is: 'I did not agree to that'. The problem is one of measuring the existence of the agreement. Further, in many situations, a party may not have expressly 'agreed' to anything. Thus, the act of buying a ticket and getting on a train shows no agreement on the face of things, the same being true of any standard form of contract, in that one has no option but to sign and accept; there is no question of 'agreement' here.

It is at this point that the notion of freedom of contract shows its frailty since the law imposes an objective test to find for the existence or not of an agreement, the court representing the so-called reasonable man. At the end of the day, then, the idea of individualism fails and the courts have to find for the existence of a contract based on the intention of the parties. That intention is found by reference to a legal rule rather than the intention of the individuals themselves, despite the fact that some judges at this time considered that *consensus ad idem* (total agreement) was an essential feature of the existence of an enforceable contract.

A further misconception of the notion of freedom of contract is the idea that it provides the parties with freedom of choice as to the terms on which the agreement is entered into. Such an idea holds good where there is equality of bargaining power but is plainly false where this is not the case. Indeed, it is the fact of the powerful imposing terms on the weak that led to the notions of collectivisation, the growth of the trade union movement, the intervention of government and the weakening of the notion of freedom of contract, with its laissez-faire basis, as the underlying principle on which the modern law of contract is based.

The classical theory of contract, as we have seen, played an important part in the early economic and social development of the country, when modern economic theory and power were still in their infancy and true freedom of choice existed. Once large, powerful industrial units developed, as in the railways, for instance, where there was no competition or freedom of choice, then the chinks in the armour of the classical theory began to open up, allowing interventionism and a new dawn of state paternalism to develop.

# The modern era

#### Objective 2

The nineteenth century saw great social, economic and political change in Britain which heralded a swing away from the classic theory of freedom of contract. Britain became firmly established as an industrial leader and this brought with it large industrial concerns, mass production with a wide selection of goods readily available and the dawn of a new consumerism. While previously an individual was free to negotiate an agreement, now they were faced with **standard-form contracts**, large companies carrying great financial power and products which required a scientific knowledge beyond that of the person in the street. Political and social changes were also occurring, taking the form of a widening of the franchise and a movement towards a more socialist society, the result of which was a change from, as Smith and Atiyah put it, 'a corrective form of justice to one which was distributive'.

The modern era then became one of protectionism and a subsequent decline in the freedom of contract caused by the fettering of negotiating discretion. This decline was only partial and in many aspects of business freedom still persisted, particularly in the manufacturing industry. The new protectionism evolved in three ways, all of which often interacted with each other.

#### Social protectionism

The Industrial Revolution, culminating in the 1880s, the 'golden age' of Britain's economic and industrial transformation, produced a society dependent on earning a living since the population now became centred on major areas of industrial activity. The movement from the country to the towns presented massive social and infrastructure problems. The worker was treated by his employer as a commodity that without careful financial control could be a considerable liability. The effect of this was to produce slum dwellings, jerry-built with little or no sanitation, and working conditions that had the appearance of the devil's cauldron, with unsafe working practices and widespread pollution. These conditions could be seen to be the result of the need to further the profit motive, to produce housing and a workforce that allowed for the greatest maximisation of profit, this objective in turn being achieved by the negotiation of the contract between the manufacturer and the distributors of their goods. Freedom of contract in the classical theory could be seen as being at the centre of the exploitation of the most vulnerable members of society. It was to curtail these excesses that Parliament and the law were called in, and this they did, imposing planning controls, prohibiting certain types of contract and imposing terms into contracts.

So far we have seen how protectionism began but this process also continued right through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Thus there has developed a whole network of institutions designed to act as a safety net for the individual, to protect them from the extremes of commercial and industrial life, such as a system of national insurance, a national health service, statutory recognition of trade unions, a compensation scheme for those made redundant and a whole battery of legislation to protect tenants from the excesses of their landlords. There has also been a recognition of the dangers of the concentration of economic power with the development of restrictions on the growth of monopoly power.

#### Consumer protection

As already stated, the Industrial Revolution brought with it mass production, a great deal more freedom of choice and the development of goods of a complexity never before available. Britain had also become a consumer society, one where an individual generally had to work to earn a living to buy not only essentials such as food and clothing, but also those items which had hitherto been luxuries and beyond the aspirations of the ordinary person to acquire and which were available because of mass production techniques.

With this development the common law and Parliament imposed conditions on the parties to contracts, particularly sellers of goods, to comply with certain basic standards. Such legislation generally protected the individual against the vagaries of the commercial enterprise, though more limited protection was also imposed on contracts made between commercial enterprises. In contracts between private individuals the idea of freedom of contract encapsulated in the maxim *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware) still persisted – as it does today.

Consumer protection legislation not only imposed civil liability, which left it to the individual to enforce the terms imposed by way of statute in an action for breach of contract, but also imposed criminal liability in some areas. Thus, the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 made it a criminal offence falsely to describe goods offered for sale.

## Contracts of adhesion

**Contracts of adhesion**, generally known today as standard-form contracts, have now become part and parcel of the commercial life of the country. They derive from the time of the development of the passenger-carrying train when, for the first time, large numbers of contracts were entered into on any one day and it would clearly have been nonsensical to have to negotiate every single contract. The railway companies thus produced a standard contract which applied to everyone, the terms of which were not open to negotiation.

It might be thought, therefore, that such contracts are of recent origin, but they are not, and their history goes back to the very beginnings of mercantile enterprise. Initially, they could be found in trade usage, and eventually they were transformed into documents such as charter parties, insurance policies and bills of lading. Their purpose here was to save time and expense since clearly in complex matters such as those indicated, it would be commercially wasteful to have to sit down and negotiate each contract separately. A further purpose was to indicate where particular risks lay in carrying out the contract, so enabling a party to insure or guard against the risk becoming a loss. In contracts for export

sales, for example, a strict **free on board** (or FOB) **contract** requires the seller to place the goods, at their own expense, on a ship nominated by the buyer. The price quoted on such a contract does not include the price of the freight or insurance, both of which must be provided for by the buyer.

Such contracts are quite legitimate when entered into between people of business at arm's length. Indeed, this might also be the case where a contract negotiated with a private individual can assume that the individual themselves would normally insure against a particular risk – for example, the cancellation of a holiday. Such contracts become illegitimate where the standard-form contract seeks to impose harsh and onerous terms on an individual who has no option but to accept them. Very often the weaker party will be unable either to renegotiate the contract or, very often, to go elsewhere since such contracts may be common to all operators within a particular industrial activity. A further criticism of such contracts is that they are often drafted in such a way as to be virtually incomprehensible to the ordinary person and often impose wide-ranging exemption clauses which preclude the stronger party from being liable for breach of the contract in almost any circumstances.

In the twentieth century such contracts became all-pervasive, and while the courts attempted to curtail the operation of such contracts – and in particular the effect of the exemption clause – by means of various rules regarding the construction of such clauses, a more radical step was required. This reform developed in a piecemeal fashion in various statutes until the passing of the Unfair Contract Terms Act in 1977.

# The present day

Sir George Jessel in 1875 in *Printing and Numerical Registering Co.* v *Sampson* (1875) LR 19 Eq 462 stated:

if there is one thing more than another which public policy requires, it is that men of full age and competent understanding shall have the utmost liberty in contracting, and that their contracts, when entered freely and voluntarily, shall be held sacred and shall be enforced by the Courts of Justice.

Such a view is clearly not one which sums up the evolution of the law of contract in the last quarter of the nineteenth century or in the twentieth century. The notion of freedom of contract lives on, but the reality is that it persists only in very limited areas of commercial life. The courts and Parliament have made substantial inroads into limiting the powers of those who exercise economic dominance.

In the 1980s, however, the notion of freedom of contract was given a new lease of life in the form of so-called Thatcherism, the idea that the controls that had evolved over the past 100 years had now become so restrictive and so protectionist that they had dulled the cutting edge of competitiveness which Britain required to succeed in the modern commercial world. The result of this dramatic policy change has been to privatise the once publiclyowned utilities which had become dilatory, safe in the knowledge that they were stateowned and protected monopolies which governments had to support no matter how inefficient. On a more individualistic level the government argued that the population was now better educated and more sophisticated, and that individuals were more able to look after their own interests.

The result of this change of policy has been to reduce the levels of protection offered and to allow the individual to have greater freedom of choice, thereby inducing a new

competitive order to the economy. Thus the previously state-owned industries now had to become more efficient in order to make profits and to keep their customers. Failure to do so meant not only loss of business but also the asking of questions at the annual general meeting of the newly privatised company in question, since now their privatised customers, or at least some of them, were shareholders to whom the board was answerable.

Such changes occurred not only in relation to the old state-owned utilities, but also in relation to some of the benefits previously enjoyed and protected by the state. Thus individuals now became free to choose how to organise their pensions rather than being dependent on the state. Further, in the private sector, tenants had their rights to security of tenure reduced since it was recognised that the wide-ranging protection previously afforded had the effect of reducing investment in the rented housing market with a consequent reduction in the stock of rented accommodation throughout the country.

This new era of freedom of contract is not a complete one; some level of protection will always be required to protect those less able to look after themselves. It is of course not desirable to revert to the slums and deprivations that existed prior to the protectionist era and therefore some level of protection will be maintained. What that level should be is a matter of political debate, though it seems unlikely that, whatever the political colour of future governments, there will be a reversion to the protectionism prevalent prior to the 1980s. All political parties recognise that the competition prevalent in the notion of freedom of contract is essential to a sound national economy.

## Definition

Objective 3 Treitel in The Law of Contract defines a contract as:

an agreement giving rise to obligations which are enforced or recognised by law. The factor which distinguishes contractual from other legal obligations is that they are based on the agreement of the contracting parties.

Beatson in *Anson's Law of Contract*, takes his definition a little further than this, defining it as:

A legally binding agreement made between two or more persons, by which rights are acquired by one or more to acts or forbearances on the part of the other or others.

# Objectivity

#### Objective 4

The notion of agreement is central to both definitions and the question has to arise as to the point at which an agreement actually materialises. The problem of measuring the existence of the agreement has already been looked at in our discussions on the concept of freedom of contract. Nevertheless, it is worth restating the fact that the law requires more than some subjective indication of agreement between the parties. There is a clear need for some degree of evidence of the fact of agreement, otherwise there would be great uncertainty when one attempts to reconcile the theoretical basis of the law of contract with the actual intentions of the parties. An individual could escape their obligations merely by stating that they had no intention of being bound by any agreement. The courts thus require some outward objective evidence of the existence of an agreement. Any subjective element is subordinate to the objective one and is, to a large degree, of no consequence except where it corresponds with