

No 3/2003

Which unions survive ?

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

How to organise the trade union movement in the 21st century? could have been the rather neutral name or less neutral *The end of the labour movement*. The latter however was already used by the German sociologist Theo Pirker as early as 1978.

But no, the last CLR-workshop was simply named *Trade union structures on the move: which unions survive?*

The initiative came from Hans Baumann, our Swiss colleague and longstanding member of the steering group of CLR. At our annual meeting in May 2003 Hans proposed to organise a meeting about the mergers and restructuring that take place in today's trade union movement.

Our third and last issue of CLR-News for 2003 reports about the debates and contributions during this workshop that finally took place in Zürich on the 20th October 2003.

It was for the first time in the CLR-history that we restricted ourselves to a German speaking audience. As we had these contributions in German we decided to bring out the issue of CLR 3-2003 in two languages (besides this English version there is a German one).

We have the feeling that the items discussed were and are of great impact for all trade unionists and academics that cooperate with the trade union movement.

Our debates were very animated and all those present from Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands had the feeling at the end that it shouldn't stay with that one meeting.

The themes are important for all in our ranks and that is why we can only recommend our CLR-readers to read the presented and slightly edited contributions in a critical way.

The first contribution comes from the initiators and paints the trade union landscape from an organisational angle. The authors describe mainly the trends and developments inside the trade unions since World War II. Yesterday's papers perhaps. But it is sometimes not only necessary but also of great value to reflect on the history.

Other contributions treat the trade union debates in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and Germany. The separate contributions illustrate that the ongoing mergers and restructuring of the trade union movement in Europe take place without any unified or consistent concept.

The question is whether such a concept is necessary. But the question is also whether we can afford to invent the wheel in 2003 in every separate country.

If our workshop and this publication can contribute to avoid this happening we can be satisfied.

As usual we also have our Reviews and Events.

I do hope we will get a lot of feedback this time.

Jan Cremers, 12-12-2003.

SUBJECT ARTICLE

Reform or finished ?

Hans Baumann, Jan Cremers, Jörn Janssen

1. Some Dimensions of Trade Union Structure Today

The history of trade unions in Europe is multifaceted. Each union organisation has its respective specific historical origin and, hence, a strong national character. Thus structures have developed that have become obsolete through the development of the economy and lost their effectiveness. It has not always been easy to overcome these structures. In some countries, for instance, it was not until the end of the second world war that it became possible to set up new structures just because the old ones had been destroyed by the war. In other countries huge losses of membership or other threats were needed before ineffective traditions could be finished with. In the central and east European states the collapse of the planned economy eventually came to make the concept of unions as ‘the transmission belt of the party’ obsolete.

Despite national differences, however, typical dimensions of trade union structure can be distinguished. As a rule, trade union organisations first originated in the private sector. Unions for employees in the public sector were initially prevented through lack of appropriate legislation or simply forbidden. As a result there is a *private-public* split in trade unionism across Europe and only recently has this barrier been overcome in some countries (ver.di/FRG, UNISON/UK).

Another dichotomy, which has lost its importance in western Europe but always caused an important – even intra-organisational – split, in particular in the construction industry, is between *regional and company* approach. Particularly in those countries where social security was part of trade union activity, unionised colleagues in their village or community were more important for construction workers than workplace representatives, in contrast to other industries where temporary and mobile workplaces are unusual.

With social change (increased mobility, capital concentration) activities related to enterprises and workplaces have increasingly gained importance. As a result, in western Europe the importance of local or regional organisations has constantly declined because these have more and more lost personnel and become dependent on pensioners and older members (though social security has frequently remained a function at the local level). In a number of central and east European countries this local orientation, which has sometimes proved successful in confrontation with the nomenclatura, is still alive.

For a long time by far the most important principle of organisation was according to trades and therefore not yet initially of employees in the same enterprise. A number of contributions to this issue of CLR-News (e.g. that by Jeroen Sprenger) show the historical development of these unions to becoming *industrial unions*. In some countries the second world war was the precondition for the departure from old structures.

Moreover, in some countries there have been attempts to organise entire production chains or to reorganise umbrella organisations according to this logic. But these failed at the time when internationalisation and the differentiation of markets had already brought into existence firms that no longer fitted sectoral divisions at all. In fact economic reality overtook these attempts at reorganisation in the 1980s.

Simultaneously, or following mergers leading to the unification of occupational segments of the same industrial sector, the *national* level became by far the most important for trade union policy geographically. This is the level where wage rates were negotiated, where industry wide or regionally-binding collective agreements were concluded and social policy and labour law negotiated with governments. As a result of the European single market and the social dimension demanded by trade unions transnational organisation came to be discussed. In the meantime *decentralisation* in the West and, after the collapse of the planned economies, the fragmentation of the economy in the East triggered a new orientation at the lowest firm and inter-firm levels.

Another kind of split developed at an early stage particularly in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland and partly in France and Spain. Several umbrella organisations of different religious and political affiliations with their sectoral organisations were created. These parallel confederations, or trade union centres based on different denominations, are regarded as weakening the movement, in particular among the militants of unitary unionism. Such concerns are not, however, shared in most west European countries where, within well-established employment relations, trade union diversity does not cause lower trade union density and may even mean that a wide range of employees can be organised. In other countries where, from a trade union point of view, positions are weakly represented and unions can hardly survive, these political and religious divisions only feed internal controversies and weaken the whole trade union movement. Unity in diversity will flourish only where, in the last instance, unity is paramount and diversity can be afforded.

The last split, which has existed for a long time and has not been overcome, in particular in the construction sector, namely that between wage earners and salaried staff, has made for the development of autonomous *white-collar unions*. Though countries such as Denmark or Sweden from early on developed a unitary structure based on industrial unions, these remained for a long time without sections for salaried staff. In Belgium until recently there was strong opposition to closer cooperation between workers' centres (Arbeiterzentralen) and white-collar unions.

This short sketch is intended to be complemented by an historical sketch, presenting the developments and effects of these principles in the individual countries as well as clarifying questions arising from them. Is it an over-interpretation to say that the complicated trade union scenery in Britain came about partly because the second world war did not destroy the old structures? Why has the attempt to create greater unity with the CFDT in France failed? What has remained of trade union unity in Italy, discussed again and again over so many years? Does it make sense to present the model of industrial unionism to the accession countries at a time when there is a general departure

from it in many west European countries? What is the logic behind the latest trans-sectoral mergers in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland? There is no space here for answers, but a few trends can at least be pointed out.

2. The Debate about Structures Revived

Following the above-listed principles of organisation, we do not intend to rewrite the history of the debate about trade union organisation in Europe, simply to describe some important trends.

We have shown the survival of the split between trade unions in the private sector and associations in the public services. The same is true for some countries concerning the division between unions for blue- and white-collar employees. To the examples mentioned above we may add the Dutch where, after the merger of the two umbrella organisations, a new separate union centre emerged for executive employees. And in Switzerland we see that to date public service unions have only hesitantly participated in the debate initiated by SMUV and GBI. The question may be asked whether, at a time when privatisation and competitive attitudes are on the increase, these divisions make sense in the long run. This is also why the development of the German trade unions, which have integrated the salaried union (Deutsche Angestelltengewerkschaft, DAG) and partly removed the private-public split, is monitored with great interest. Germany, however, still remains the exception rather than the rule.

In the mid-1970s it looked for a while as though the trade union diversity based on several parallel confederations was coming to an end. Since then we can observe that, in most west European countries in which several umbrella organisations with differing political and religious affiliations co-exist, divisions in the trade union area have rather deepened. The French trade unions have not come to any closer cooperation. As always in Italy, particularly among officials, no serious interest in seeking unity can be identified. But also in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, despite their loss of membership and debates about further mergers, there is little hope of getting together across religious and political boundaries. And again

and again the split in Spain between UGT and CC.OO produces acrimonious accusations. As mentioned above, these divisions do not always need to have counterproductive effects and we should admit that the bitter disputes about competence and responsibility that tend to erupt among TUC-unions in Britain and DGB-unions in Germany are not so different.

Most relevant for our debate, however, is the question of whether those trade- and sector-related principles that have determined the division of the union landscape into large industrial unions and social partnership in economic sectors are still meaningful. Historically speaking, this division came to an end by the end of the 1980s. In Britain, despite a great loss of membership, the aim to create a single large building and woodworkers' union within the TUC has not been fulfilled and cooperation between TUC unions in individual sectors has remained a frustrating matter. In Germany mergers took place in which no sectoral logic was to be found. In Scandinavia individual unions were able to maintain the principle of unionism for separate trades through their financial power and their connection with social security services. But here too we now observe the trend towards larger unions. The question of whether the structuring of unions according to economic sectors can and should be maintained is perfectly justified.

What is the state of affairs in the accession states? In the socialist state, according to the soviet model, the industrial unions were branches of single central unions, which with the collapse lost their function in economic planning as well as in implementing decisions of the politburo. Conversely, enterprise union organisations, which often actively participated in overturning socialism, survived as now autonomous and usually large units. The remainders of the central unions were restructured as reform unions whilst, as their counterpart, parallel confederations committed to liberalism and generally western sponsored were founded. Both depend on the membership of enterprise unions. In terms of staffing and finances, the sectoral federations are so weak that they can hardly maintain regional offices. They are even less in a position to offer competence and resources for special services such as membership education, labour law, wage policy/economy, management, foreign relations, vocational education,

etc., at a level that is indispensable for efficient representation. In these countries too, therefore, the sector approach, albeit for other reasons, is on the defensive.

Construction is for the time being a special case. Though employment figures are declining, at European level it can be defined as a relatively homogeneous sector representing between 5% and 10% of the workforce and consisting mainly of on-site employees. In contrast to other areas of the economy, there remains an interest on the part of employers and employees in negotiating regulations and agreements. For how long this will still be the case is open to question.

3. New Challenges: Deregulation and Globalisation

At our workshop in Zurich, the subject of this issue, the most important trends in employment relations were reported in an exemplary way. The virtually classic developments at national level have already briefly been summarised. In the past 20 years the rapidly changing labour market, the disappearance of sectors and shifts towards service industries have fundamentally altered economic relations and respective conditions for individuals, as well as what unions stand for and are able to achieve in common. The predominance of the market economy, which was the core of the concept of the single European market, has contributed to the pressure on the Welfare State in the area of social security, of other provisions based on solidarity, as well as of social partner institutions. A social tissue, a protective network, is still in existence, but the dismantling is fast progressing. And in the accession states the necessary levels of support and time to build up this tissue are missing.

The crisis of the 1990s, the neo-liberal offensive of deregulation, the ever-increasing orientation of companies in industry and services towards the world market as well as the flexibilisation and precariousness of employment relations in all countries threaten to cause a fundamental power shift between capital and labour and to force the unions to reorient themselves. The model of sectoral collective agreements prevailing in most countries is under great pressure, in particular because companies operating globally are

aiming at decentralising parts of the collective agreements down to the level of enterprises and workplaces or at abolishing them altogether. The trend, observable for a number of years, to negotiate de-centrally wages and working conditions and to implement framework agreements through firm agreements has the consequence in many cases, particularly where strong representation of employees is absent, that workers' rights get lost. This trend is enforced by legislation that transfers the implementation of fundamental rights, such as equal opportunities, to the social partners at enterprise level – as happened recently in the Netherlands. Many studies make it clear that compliance with rights in medium and small enterprises where unions and works councils are absent can hardly be ensured. Thus decentralisation at the same time undermines equality for employees and, with it, a fundamental European right.

The pressure from 'globalisation' and the increasing threat of 'relocation' is being used by employers to play off the unions against each other and to try to lower social standards as well as to disintegrate existing labour and social structures. World trade, international financial transactions and the internationalisation of groups have grown into dimensions that jeopardise the survival of the sovereignty of nation states and national structures of social relations, characterised in Europe by the model of 'Rhineanian Capitalism'. More and more areas of social policy are becoming dependent on the world market of supra-national decisions removed from the influence of individual nation states or social partners at national level. This has become an explosive issue, for instance, in construction with the 'posting' problematic caused by the liberalisation of construction markets and the freedom of movement, which required a European directive in order to contain social dumping on construction sites. Collective agreements can also less and less be negotiated by individual countries in isolation.

Though in most nation states social relations are strongest at the sector or branch levels, where collective agreements – as the most important components of the social state – are also usually negotiated, this sectoral structure is still the least developed at European level. Apart from procedures of consultation concerning sector-specific issues, the first steps towards sectoral dialogues exist only in the form of

common opinions and relatively loose agreements and declarations of intent. Initiatives aiming at a European wage policy are still in their infancy. This is attributable not least to the fact that the wage and sector policies of the unions are, as always, strongly focused on the national level and that national systems of labour relations are different from country to country. This is the reason why, even among west European countries, big differences persist in labour conditions, not only with regard to the level of effective wages but also to qualitative aspects such as working time. If we take the 10 accession states into account the differences are even greater.

As a result of the variety of social systems and labour relations in Europe strategies for the improvement of working conditions, for example, through working time reduction, are also conceived very differently in different countries. A large section of companies is oriented towards the world market and no longer depends on national markets and location. This is also increasingly the case in sectors that were hitherto oriented towards the internal economy. The problem of working conditions and thus the level of labour cost is posed completely differently from those for predominantly national markets: there is a general pressure to adjust or assimilate working conditions trans-nationally. Independent steps by individual countries aimed at major changes in working conditions have become more difficult. The rising pressure of competition within western Europe, more and more including the central and east European countries, makes it increasingly necessary to move together on collective agreement policy.

The segment of large company groups poses a problem entirely in its own right. Merging several national unions from different sectors does not correspond with the globalisation strategies of these large groups. Though a completely unified strategy cannot be discerned, there is a predominant trend to focus on a core business (typically on one albeit-complex branch) involving a 'slimming' of national structures and simultaneous conquests of global markets in as many countries as possible. In groups pursuing this strategy, employee organisations have to respond with a concentrated branch- or company-specific union policy, though one that is at the same time internationally structured, in order to have an effective impact on the power of these

groups and to be able also, for instance, to give advice and support to employees. But we are still far from having an appropriate structure for this work in large multinational groups. The same holds true for the cross-border care of increasing numbers of legal and illegal migrant workers.

Finally we have here to mention the split between, on the one hand, company management and, on the other, ownership that has become the rule in recent years. In large groups especially we find more and more capital ownership at a distance and a new layer of company managers partly pursuing their own interests. The classic relationship between capital and ownership has, in this sense, for long been a matter of the past. In many firms financial participation takes place almost anonymously. In such cases the representation of interests is complicated and thus also the question of which coalitions should be formed.

Present processes of restructuring in different countries, especially the mergers of sectoral unions into multi-professional organisations, try to give an answer to some of these social and economic trends. They thus respond, for instance, to the increasing tertiarisation, the uncertainty of consistent professional careers, the increasing mobility between branches and occupations, or also to the greater power of concentration and deregulation on the part of capital.

But it would be presumptuous to believe that all-important problems – such as those that are the consequences of globalisation, the ensuing pressure for more international cooperation and the formation of a supranational counter-power – will be resolved quasi-automatically through structural innovation. There is much need for reorientation and also redistribution of resources that has no direct link with the debate on structures.

4. Which Questions need to be Answered?

Since their origin from spontaneous combinations of workers in their struggle for the improvement of working conditions, trade unions have become large complex providers of services whose tasks have

changed according to the development of labour relations. These developments – as mentioned already – may occur differently and asynchronously according to societies and regions. Nevertheless we can identify some historical movements that are shared by all unions and from which *function areas and levels of action* can be derived for the near future. It remains uncertain, however, which disputes between employees and employers (also governments) will determine the direction of union action.

If we divide function areas into a) the organisation of labour disputes and interest representation at workplaces and in companies, b) the enforcement and defence of established rights, c) the negotiation of rights, and d) exerting an influence on government policies (above all economic, education, social policies, etc.), we observe a long-term shift from the concrete tasks in labour disputes towards the more abstract tasks in the sphere of politics. This shift is simply the expression of the consolidation of unions as accepted organisations of civil society.

Furthermore, if we look at levels of action, we are used to distinguishing roughly according to a) workplace/company, b) region, c) (national) state, d) federation of states (e.g. European Union), e) world organisation. There is no doubt that the centres of decision-making about employment conditions have moved to the higher levels. At the same time it seems that the unions have not been able to resist the pressure of employers versus the decentralisation of negotiations. This has caused a tilting in the balance of power in favour of capital playing at a global level. Employee representation is weakest at the levels of federations of states and world organisation. Governments, as the third social partners, increasingly tend to decentralise responsibilities or to delegate them to supra-national bodies, entailing a further weakening of (national state) representation.

This constellation is the fundamental challenge for the unions. To put it into simple terms, employee organisations have to become more intensively engaged in areas of politics and to enforce their power at higher levels in order to be able to take effective action at lower levels. Confronted with these functions, questions concerning sectors, religion, political affiliation, or employment status are rather marginal

and tend to deflect attention to secondary scenes. Nevertheless, decentralisation forces unions to develop much stronger networks at company level. This involves shifting functions upwards as well as to the lowest level downwards, though in this respect consistency and clear strategies about subsidiarity are often missing in their own ranks.

In the process of restructuring of social labour an important role falls to the unions. Restructuring, however, will usually not take place within the framework of existing divisions and departments, but transform these themselves. Discussion about the reproduction of labour, the substantial issue of employees, concerns the form of social labour altogether, all occupations, blue-collar as well as white-collar employees, men and women, public and private sectors, employed and unemployed, all regions and countries etc. It also concerns the geographical distribution and migration of labour at a global level. This is a supreme challenge for *cooperation between unions and their divisions*. It does not follow from this that existing functions or unions have to be dissolved from today to tomorrow, but in the first place that the limitations of traditional functional divisions and organisations have to be perceived and that energy is not wasted in barren demarcation disputes. But it is perfectly clear that in, for instance, the representation of employees in pensions reform, the financing of vocational education, health insurance, unemployment benefit, etc., unions have to cooperate not only across sectoral, religious, political, etc., demarcations, but also across national boundaries. The issue of social protection is furthermore a unity and, above all, a core issue for the formal development of wage labour relations. Similarly the question of codetermination and the role of unions vis-à-vis the general representation of employees beyond their scope and divisions needs an answer. Conversely, special functions (e.g. health and safety on sites, training of electricians, working conditions at computers, wage differentials in banking and insurance, working time regulations for flight personnel, social insurance for cross-border labour markets etc.) need to be reserved for particular departments. In order to be able to react to newly arising tasks unions need flexible structures across existing divisions.

The unions are not isolated and have to maintain connections with other representations of employees.

- Though works councils partly originated in the trade union movement, in many countries they represent all employees as a statutory body irrespective of union membership. Members of works councils need special education and support from the unions.
- Though there exist close historical relationships between unions and political parties, these are by no means exclusive (except in the case of some confederations with a political/religious background). Trade unions try to establish open contact with all political parties except those parties that are unilaterally oriented to employers or of an authoritarian nature.

Furthermore, the diversity of the expression of political commitment requires an increasing openness of outward alliances and internal groupings. Thus grass-root movements for environmental and consumer protection, against racism, against excesses of globalisation, privatisation of post, telecommunication, railway and health services etc. can be natural partners of the unions. Cooperation with the womens' movement and parts of the youth movement also has to take a new shape.

Union reform processes that exclusively aim at offering services to members at lower costs and higher efficiency are bound to fail in the long run and might even herald the end of the historical mission of the trade union movement. Certainly remuneration and working conditions remain at the core of disputes about the rights of employees. But in a *long-term strategy* the position of the employee in society is at stake and this is organically connected with influencing the use of capital and natural resources. The ongoing processes of restructuring and their accompanying discourse will have to be oriented towards the aim of making this influence effective and durable.

Analyses and Reports on Experiences about Restructuring and Mergers of Trade Unions

Workshop Programm

Morning:

Introduction (*Vasco Pedrina/CH*)

Dimensions of Trade Union Structures (*Jan Cremers/NL*)

IG BE and IG BCE Merger into IG BCE (*Marcus Kahmann/D*)

Super-Merger ver.di (*Karlheiz Gerhold/D*)

Formation of Trade Union Groups in Austria (*Anton Korntheuer/A*)

UNIA, federation of GBI+SMUV+VHTL +unia (*Andreas Rieger/CH*)

Afternoon:

Takeover of GHK by IG Metall (*Wolfgang Bonneik/D*)

Projekt for the Organisation of Migrant Construction Workers (*Frank Schmidt-Hullmann/D*)

Trade Unions in Central Europe (*Jörn Janssen/GB*)

Good bye (*Jan Cremers/NL*)

The Netherlands

The development of the trade union structure in the Netherlands: two steps forward and one step back

*Jeroen Sprenger**

Introduction

‘The quest for the ideal structure is like trying to square the circle’, a Dutch trade union president once sighed. The existing structure was never ideal, the defects made themselves felt all too often, but proposals for a new structure often threw up more drawbacks than benefits. Being a pragmatist, he usually went on to say: ‘If we cannot do what we should, we should do what we can.’

The trade union movement came into being as a reaction to developments in industry whereby matters of importance to workers, such as opportunities for advancement, income, social security and the quality of work, were coming under threat. Members not only wanted their trade unions to provide an alternative to the ‘protection’ that had been lost, but also to a greater or lesser extent to ensure that from their point of view their branch of industry developed along favourable lines. They therefore wanted not just to be followers but also to be proactive. In such a dialectical process it is impossible to remain unchanging oneself. Policy not only needs to be continuously adapted to the changes taking place, the structure itself also needs to be modified in response to structural changes affecting the sectors. This article describes developments within the Dutch trade union movement, with particular emphasis on the building and woodworking industry.¹

Developments up to the second world war

Industrialisation spawned the development of the trade unions. As the process started some 50 to 100 years later in the Netherlands than elsewhere in western Europe, the emergence of trade unions also lagged behind, although the first ones were comparable in nature to

those elsewhere. People working in a particular occupation initially grouped together into local organisations with a strong social and cultural character. Later on, as industrialisation was even more clearly accompanied by adverse consequences for the position of craftsmen and other workers, these associations increasingly assumed the traits of an interest group. The different organisations, which increasingly took on the character of a trade union, came together locally in general federations (*besturenbonden*) responsible for representing workers' interests overall at local level. At the same time these local organisations set up national associations of workers in the same occupation. This dual development – grouping together locally with other workers' associations and at national level with associations of workers in the same occupation – took place in the Netherlands from about 1890 onwards. There were certainly prior attempts but not ones with any lasting results.

A process of denominational segregation took place in Dutch society during the same period. The Catholic community, after two or three centuries of repression, sought to assert itself and to carve out its own place in society, so making a distinction between itself and the dominant Protestant-Christian community. The move prompted people wishing to emphasise Protestant-Christian standards and values to put forward their views, with the consequence that the so-called general organisations saw their claim to be umbrella organisations gradually lose credibility. For the trade unions this meant that Protestant-Christians and Catholics split away from the original general organisations, a process that was 'encouraged' by the growing influence of 'socialists' within the general organisations. Those that left argued that they were no longer 'at home' in them.

This segregation of Dutch society thus led to the development between 1890 and 1910 of a trade union movement divided into three different currents.

Developments within the now three national trade union centres followed a comparable course. Within all three between 1905 and 1910 the grouping together of unions at local and national level led to the formation of a national trade union centre in which all organisations from the same denomination came together. While the

trade union centre is an expression of centralisation, as soon as such a federation has been formed a process of concentration starts. 'Not only was there a need to bring greater unity to the national movement, so rendering its activities more manageable, there was the additional consideration that the national units so created should represent the greatest possible concentration of power.'ⁱⁱ

It is important in this connection to recognise that to an increasing degree there were matters of concern on the agenda for workers at national level with still little or no input from the workers themselves. The fight for general voting rights was therefore a key area of action for the trade unions, along with efforts to influence newly-emerging social legislation. The desire or need for centralisation and concentration was therefore not only originating from within the trade unions but was also a need imposed from outside. 'Even if you do not want to concern yourself with politics, be well aware that politics will concern you', is the message successive generations of trade union leaders put across to their members, first of all to get them behind the campaign for universal suffrage and later, from 1922 onwards, to urge them to make use of their voting rights.ⁱⁱⁱ

Organisations that want to influence national policy or day-to-day developments in their sectors need continuity. Pursuing action to obtain improvements or new regulations is one thing; enforcing compliance with agreements made and consolidating positions acquired is something else. A spontaneous campaign on a particular issue is relatively easy to organise. Good results can also be achieved in this way. But if you want to ensure that achievements are maintained over the long term and that you can get your viewpoint implemented without always having to hold a knife to people's throats, regular dialogue with the government and employers is important. And for this purpose a sturdy organisational framework that is not going to blow down at the first breath of wind is necessary. Knowledge of this fact gradually prompted related occupational organisations to merge where they were too small to meet this requirement. Accordingly, in 1912 the Central Federation of Building Workers was created within the general national centre from a merger between the bricklayers' and stonemasons' unions. Eight years later this organisation once again found that it lacked sufficient clout and

joined the carpenters' union to form the General Dutch Building Workers' Federation. Unions within the Catholic national centre that represented carpenters, painters and limestone and stone workers had already merged in 1917.

These mergers did not alter the organisational principles: occupation remained the decisive factor in the choice of trade union. However, the less specific the category that a trade union represented the greater the chance that its sphere of operations would overlap with another's. Should local community road workers and gas fitters fall within the province of unions representing civil servants at local level? Are milkmen 'transport workers' or agricultural workers/dairy product processors? Do knitters belong to the textile workers' union or to the garment workers' union? And what about cocoa processors; should they be members of the bakers' union or the factory workers' union? These are questions that can cause a great deal of conflict between unions at a time when each one wants as many members as possible and officers of national centres spent much time resolving such problems.

Unsurprisingly no final solution was found. The blurring of boundaries has been produced by developments not only in industry but also in workers' career paths. New industries are born in which new working methods are applied that place new requirements on the workers. Take, for example, the emergence of artificial silk factories. Do we have here a textile that can be made from artificial silk or a chemical process with artificial silk as its end product? Do the workers therefore belong to the textile workers union or the factory workers union? And if we look at the individual career of a worker, if a worker in a dairy produce factory has the opportunity to become a milk supplier for the same employer, is he then required to transfer to the transport workers' union?

The regular occurrence of demarcation disputes in a trade union movement organised along occupational lines was not the only motivation behind the quest for a new structure. As the trade union movement in general carved out a place for itself in society, views evolved about a new economic order as an alternative to capitalism. Work to come up with alternatives took place in all sections of Dutch

society after the first world war, although for a long time proposals differed. The confessional organisations emphasised the autonomy of employers and of workers settling matters amongst themselves with as much freedom as possible and independent of government. The general organisations, of social democratic hue, wanted a significant role for the State, such that within the boundaries and guidelines laid down by the State employers and workers should be able to conduct a dialogue on industrial affairs.

In spite of these differences the industrial structure that emerged from the alternatives was similar. Individual industries were subdivided into branches of industry and, so the thinking went, these sectors were to be headed by an all-industry, umbrella, socio-economic council. The work on developing proposals was set in motion around 1918, stalled during the second half of the 1920s, but was then taken up again in the 1930s as a consequence of the far-reaching economic crisis. The question was no longer confined to paper. In 1933 the Branch Council Act, which can be regarded as a modest formulation of the body of ideas dating from the early 1920s, was adopted. The outcome was nowhere near what the trade unions, both confessional and social democratic, had in mind. The Act made provision only for employers and workers to set up joint councils at sectoral level for organised dialogue on a wide range of socio-economic subjects. By 1940, 21 such councils had been set up and none of them can be described as a success. John Windmuller and Cees de Galan, in their standard work *Industrial relations in the Netherlands*, concluded: ‘With hindsight their significance was that they – and the Act which made them possible – created a precedent and a basis for renewed efforts to achieve an effective public law industrial organisation after the war.’^{iv}

The Branch Council Act once again brought home the imperfect structure of the trade unions. By setting up a branch council in a sector of industry, unions and employers’ organisations can hold a dialogue on industrial relations, vocational training, employment, the establishment of funds and the implementation of social legislation. But which unions should take part in the dialogue? There are relatively few problems with the manual workers’ unions; their sphere of activity is confined in most cases to a small number of sectors. For non-manual workers the situation is fundamentally different, as their

sphere of operation encompasses almost all sectors. The trade unions urged that non-manual workers also be assigned a place on the branch councils, but the minister of social affairs and the employers were not in favour.

A third incentive to review the structure of the Dutch trade union movement arose from the development of the social security system. The first provisions for sickness, unemployment and old age benefit were shaped by the trade unions. These provisions were regarded as an instrument for giving the unions some degree of continuity. If membership of the trade union is also associated with the payment of benefits, so the thinking went, people are likely to think twice before cancelling their membership. Originally management of these funds was purely a trade union matter, but this did not stand in the way of the further development of ideas about State welfare provision for people who, through no fault of their own, are unable to participate in the work process and hence cannot earn an income. Consequently, in 1917 at the urging of the trade unions and sympathetic politicians the government accepted responsibility for providing for the unemployed and ever since then the State has augmented trade union benefits.

No general provisions for sickness benefit were adopted before the second world war, although views on the role of the State and the social partners did move closer. In social democratic circles there was acceptance that the sectors must be assigned a role in the implementation of a social security system, but in that case the structure of the trade union movement must correspond.

In 1919 a committee was set up within the Protestant-Christian trade union centre with a remit to consider the demarcation disputes between the different occupational trade unions. It is not surprising that the debate started in this particular national centre, for the need to safeguard continuity is first and foremost going to affect the smallest national centre with the smallest trade unions. It is even less surprising that it was the factory and transport workers' union that grasped the nettle, as it was the one most affected by demarcation disputes.

The proposal put forward by the committee in 1921 for a trade union movement structured along sectoral lines went too far in the eyes of the national centre:

The general assembly, while agreeing with the principal idea formulated in the report whereby the industry must form the primary basis for the organisational form of trade unions, takes the view that the consideration of this question in its various aspects has not yet produced a comprehensive insight into the details, such that a decision, also having regard to the changing industrial relations context, cannot be deemed binding in all respects.^v

As a compromise, a demarcation disputes committee was set up to resolve such matters case by case. It was, however, still too early to tackle the underlying issues.

The Catholic trade unions are next in terms of size. In 1938 the question of structure was submitted to a committee, which a year later proposed a sectoral organisation and product rather than working method was to serve as the basis for determining the sector. The committee also had a solution for the 'multi-sector companies' that had emerged since the first world war. For example, over the course of time Philips no longer confined itself to manufacturing light bulbs and thus workers at the Philips paper plant should be organised in the factory workers' union along with those working in its light bulb factories. However, the furniture makers at Vroom & Dreesmann, a retail chain, continued to come within the operational sphere of the furniture makers' union and workers in private print shops continued to belong to the print unions. These outcomes can be viewed as a compromise revealing the balance of power within the Catholic national centre, where the shop and office staff unions were not as strong as those for furniture makers and printers.

The committee also proposed that those workers who frequently changed their employment sector should be organised in the union active in the industry where they were most often employed. This would, for example, cover excavation workers who were sometimes employed on land development projects and sometimes on civil engineering works. It was proposed that in the case of non-manual

workers an organisational structure along occupational lines should be maintained. However, their unions needed to be subdivided into industry groups that would require them to cooperate in solidarity with the corresponding manual workers' unions. The report was discussed in March 1940 but not accepted. It was decided to discuss the matter with the other national centres, but by May 1940 nothing had come of this.^{vi}

The debate on the desired structure was also conducted within the largest national centre representing the social-democratic trade unions, but as these were somewhat larger the need for a new structure was perceived as less important. While concentration occurred within the confessional national centres, in some cases this process lagged behind in the largest national centre. Carpenters, bricklayers, painters, plasterers, road makers and dredgers within the Catholic and Christian national centre soon united to form a 'building workers' federation'. The concentration process in the social-democratic national centre did not extend, however, beyond the carpenters, bricklayers and stone workers, and separate unions continued to exist for painters, plasterers and road makers until the German occupation. Attempts to marshal forces misfired time after time. Although merger was eventually forced upon them by the occupying forces, the dredgers' union was not absorbed into the 'building workers' federation' until the 1950s.^{vii}

From a national socialist point of view, industrial relations were highly centralised with no subdivisions along industry lines. Thus the German occupiers not only forced the trade unions to group together within sectors defined by them, but also imposed a greater degree of centralisation on the whole movement. The joint unions were no longer under the control of the national centre but rather of a centralised executive body. Even within the social-democratic national centre, where such views were shared when it came to State powers, this was not to be the case. Eventually, with effect from 1st May 1942 the occupying forces decided to merge the trade union movement into the Dutch Labour Front (Nederlands Arbeidsfront (NAF)), following the example of the German Labour Front, which by 1933 had already absorbed the German social democratic and Christian trade unions. NAF enjoyed very little popular support. From June 1941 the confessional organisations within NAF exhorted those union that had

not already been run down to do so once they were placed under German control, and the running-down process then moved into full swing. Once the war ended cooperation after 1st May 1942 was a criterion for needing to account for oneself in front of the purification committee.

The fact that most trade union leaders went underground did not mean that dialogue between them ended; they knew how to find each other and continued discussions about the desired structure once the country had been liberated. The leaders of the national centres met secretly with the employers' representatives and laid the foundations for the post-war structure of labour relations that, as the 'polder model', was to cause a international furore. In order to maximise trade union power within this model, ideas on an appropriate organisational form for the movement were hammered out in greater detail among the trade union leaders. At the same time the communist movement was developing the idea of a unified trade union movement in which, at the very least, there would no longer be the three denominational currents.

After the second world war

In the wake of the liberation in May 1945 energetic efforts were made to rebuild the trade union movement. At the same time as the 'old' national centres and unions were being re-established, a Council of National Trade Union Centres was set up within which the trade unions were to shape their cooperation. One of its first decisions was to establish a 'Committee for considering the question of the sectoral organisation of workers', which within a few months submitted its findings.^{viii} The findings were not, however, unanimous. Union representatives organising public servants, factory workers and woodworkers had unspecified 'differences of opinion on important points'. Given the unions concerned, it is clear that the 'important points' were the consequences for their organisations. In spite of objections from within the Committee, during the course of 1946 all the unions accepted the recommendations – but that did not mean yet that they were implemented.

The introduction of a sectoral organisation meant doing away with the old unions, creating new ones and reallocating the members. This sweeping reorganisation caused pain throughout the movement, although many officials saw it as a 'moral duty to help implement a decision taken by the trade union movement.'^{ix} The most difficult part was implementation within the Catholic national centre. The unions representing technicians, foremen and supervisors, and commercial, office and shop staff opposed the change both privately and publicly. They withdrew from internal consultations and let few opportunities slip to express in public their rejection of sectoral organisation. Finally in 1951, bypassing the national federation, they placed the matter before the Dutch bishops. It then took until the early 1960s(!) for the bishops to give their judgement.

The outcome of the controversy was the founding of a new union for public servants and managerial and executive personnel in medium-ranking and supervisory positions. Representatives of this union quickly started sitting around the negotiating table with the different sectoral industry unions. In this way, 25 even 30 years after its publication the Catholic national centre's report proposing a sectoral organisation was actually put into practice. The industry groups within the non-manual workers federation were to cooperate on a basis of solidarity with the manual workers unions, now transformed into sectoral unions. This cooperation was to last for less than 10 years. When in 1976 the Catholic and social-democratic national centres started to build up a new joint structure at confederal level, this sent a signal to the union of public servants, supervisory and executive personnel to leave the Catholic centre and it was later to form the core of a new national centre. As the Protestant-Christian national centre did not want to join with the other national centres at confederal level, let alone participate in the final merger that took place on 1st January 1982, the Dutch trade union movement retained three different currents.^x

'The Blue-Black Booklet', as the report by the 'Committee for considering the question of the sectoral organisation of workers' is popularly known, has had a major influence on the structure of the trade union movement right up to the present day. But it was by no means the last word on the subject. As unions within particular sectors

again became too small to be effective a great many mergers took place along the lines set out in the booklet. One of the founding organisations of the Dutch trade union movement, the powerful diamond workers' union, merged during the mid-1950s with the metalworking union and at the beginning of the 1970s the metalworking union joined forces with the factory workers' and textile workers' unions to form the Industrial Trade Union Federation (*Industriebond*). The building industry unions merged with the furniture and woodworking unions, and those representing the dockworkers, the transport sector and the railways merged to form the Transport Trade Union Federation (*Vervoersbond*). Even when, from 1976, closer cooperation was sought across the boundaries of the national trade union centres and the segregation of Dutch society was beginning to wane in importance, the Blue-Black Booklet constituted an important blueprint. Certainly votes were taken on a different course of action, but the rejection that André Kloos, the popular president of the social democratic national centre, received from his unions in the late 1960s sapped the will of many a trade union leader to launch an in-depth discussion about structure.^{xi}

Kloos proposed that the national centre be remoulded into a single undivided organisation. The national centre would not have as many member organisations as there were unions, but all members would be direct members. Within this single organisation the interests of the members would be represented by industry groups corresponding approximately to the old industry unions. The main difference was that members would not pay dues to the union, which would have to hand over a portion to the national centre, but would instead pay their dues directly to the national centre. The executive of the centre would then make a budget available to the industry groups. Besides the practical need to deal with contributions with a greater sense of thrift, Kloos believed that rapid social changes supported the case for his proposal:

Society is in a state of flux: some branches of industry are expanding, others shrinking, while yet others are doomed to go to the wall. We must expect people to switch from one sector to another, from one occupation to another, to a greater degree in future. We have to ask ourselves whether, against this background, the current – statically-

conceived as based on the existing sectors – organisational form can be maintained.

In the late 1960s, some 20 years after the end of the second world war, Kloos could take his pick of examples. The Dutch diamond industry, in which Jews had been dominant, was greatly weakened after the war. The diamond industry union had therefore merged with the metalworking industry union. The Dutch government decided at the time to close down the mines with immediate effect and there was no further place for the mineworkers' union. Textile factories were still operating at full steam, but under the management of the future Nobel Prize winner Jan Tinbergen discussions began on relocating production to the developing world. As for the shipbuilding industry, fierce competition with Japan was in the offing, with all its attendant consequences for jobs. On the other hand, large companies were becoming increasingly heterogeneous in nature. The throwing open of the European market forced companies to upsize and provided the impetus for numerous mergers within industry, not only within the boundaries of the traditional branches.

This growing dynamism on the industrial front did not leave workers' career paths untouched. Increasingly workers changed occupations and sectors more frequently, sometimes forced to do so by their company closing down or where the old occupation disappeared, and sometimes encouraged by the new opportunities created by this same dynamic trend. The same post-war trend also included increasing distances between home and work. Many residential areas were built around centres of industry, although after the second world war such expansion was often at variance with views on living in a healthy environment. New residential areas came to be located further away from the workplace, while accessible forms of (public) transport kept journey times and travel expenses within acceptable limits. However, this development had a disastrous impact on local trade union work as the degree of homogeneousness lessened. In response to this, work in the plants began to develop. The place of residence was no longer decisive in the subdivision of the unions, but rather the branch of industry or large enterprise. This seems a logical consequence of the sectoral structure of the trade union movement, but no real improvement has been achieved. The rapid succession of changes in a

worker's career path makes any continuity of trade union work within a company or the creation of a clear counterbalancing power or the uninterrupted pursuit of works-council work extremely difficult.

The continuing story of the structural question

There are two reasons why the question of organisational structure continues to call for the attention of the Dutch trade union movement. On the one hand the structure must be such that power can be used as effectively as possible so that from time to time good results can be achieved. On the other hand the structure (and clearly also the culture) must have sufficient appeal for workers that they are prompted to join in large numbers. In relation to these basic premises, the structure in place to date exhibits some defects. The current structure is indisputably better geared to the tasks that the trade union movement has to fulfil. At national level it is a negotiating partner on behalf of the workers that cannot be ignored by employers or the State, even though the total unionisation rate is barely 25%. It therefore has a clearly discernible impact on social legislation and on the creation of forums within which dialogue on terms and conditions of employment in each sector can be given shape.

In many branches of industry it also cannot be ignored. This is certainly the case where the unionisation rate is above the national average, such as in the public sector and the construction industry. Its influence on conditions of employment, provisions concerning specific sectors, vocational training, and working conditions is undeniably significant.

The fear that the positions of power acquired are being diminished is preventing a proper approach to tackling the structural shortcomings.

Anyone who subjects the Dutch trade union movement to close scrutiny will find that it is still strong in the sectors where it first started its upward march 150 years ago, provided, that is, that these sectors still exist. The sectors such as docks, certain industrial sectors and the building and woodworking industry are those in which manual work still predominates. The trade union foothold is still weak among

non-manual workers and those employed in the new sectors. Ten to 15 years ago the largest national centre, FNV, created following the merger of the Catholic and social democratic federations, found that its membership still reflected the labour market of the 1950s. Since then there have been intensive efforts to change this situation, but the results are far from impressive.

The building industry illustrates the fact that it is difficult for the trade union movement to escape its own shadow. Organisation along industry lines should result in office staff in contractor companies also joining the building industry union. For a fairly lengthy period building workers viewed their office colleagues as extensions of their employers; they did not belong to *their* union. Until well into the 1980s this sentiment was apparent when it came to recruiting members from among works foremen and technical and administrative personnel. Conversely, office staff and white-collar workers were asking themselves, when considering trade union membership, whether they would really feel at home in this sector union. Those who had achieved promotion from carpenter to works foreman often stayed on with the union, as did those who for ideological reasons were to a greater or lesser extent inspired to side with the union. But a genuine breakthrough to reach the group of works foremen and technical and administrative personnel simply failed to take place, in the same way as the macho culture of the building union stood in the way of women entering the industry. The labour market for building workers is constantly becoming smaller, productivity is rising and order books are declining, but there has been little success in offsetting these trends through recruiting office personnel in building firms. And even the objective of achieving a higher unionisation rate in the related woodworking sector has not been achieved. The powerful building industry union remains powerful, but only for an ever-shrinking part of the industrial relations scene.

In 1997 four FNV unions – the Industrial Workers’ Federation, the Service Workers’ Federation, the Transport Workers’ Federation and the Foodworkers’ Federation (*Industriebond*, *Dienstenbond*, *Vervoersbond* and *Voedingsbond*) – took the decision to merge there and then. They wanted to marshal their forces and sought to transfer the strong position carved out in what were now shrinking sectors to

the growth sectors where a trade union presence was still very weak. In this way they endeavoured to escape the crippling debate about the future of the trade unions. The idea was a good one, but the way in which it was put into practice was poorly thought through. Merger problems not only took up a great deal of the attention of union executives, but also called for substantial financial resources. Only during the course of 2003 was it possible to draw a line under years of continuous losses. Initially the building workers' union was disappointed, and actually extremely angry, that it was not invited to participate in the merger. Given the way that the merger has proceeded it will probably have got over its disappointment by now.

A consequence of the laborious progress of the merger process is certainly that the idea of a joint headquarters for the FNV, which was to have been realised during 2004 or 2005, has been put on ice. The expectation that the joint headquarters could provide a springboard for more far-reaching cooperation between the FNV unions has vanished as a result, in the same way as earlier moves to promote cooperation in the provision of services to members has been nipped in the bud in recent years. The phrase 'two steps forward, one step back' comes to mind all too clearly when reflecting on the question of trade union structure.

In conclusion

The structure of the Dutch trade union movement still implicitly assumes that workers will in principle spend their entire working life in a single sector. Plant-based work has narrowed this thinking further to the notion that they will in principle spend their entire career in a single plant or company. In practice that has never been the case. In any event, the reality is moving ever further away from this concept. The concept of *lifetime employment* must make way for *lifetime employability*. It is on this basis that the trade unions must seek to cater for workers and their interests be represented, for it is a fact that increasingly workers will only be working in a particular plant or company for a certain time: depending on the occupation carried out, they are likely to switch from plant to plant and, equally, from sector to sector.

Within the European trade union movement ever-closer cooperation has developed. As the European market allows a Portuguese construction worker to find employment in Berlin and French building firms to take on contracts in the Netherlands, initiatives have been formulated in the EFBWW to represent the interests of union members across national borders. However, construction workers are not only able to go to another country to work: carpenters may be included in maintenance teams for hospitals, while painters can work as stage designers in a film company. Or again, they may completely turn their backs on an occupation and find another one. Over the past decade, the Dutch police and public transport services have benefited considerably from this trend. Fewer and fewer people are opting to work in a construction trade directly after completing secondary education. Entry into the industry via the sideways route has become the main route. This concept is associated with the trend whereby an ever-dwindling number of people are choosing to make their occupation permanent, let alone choosing to stay in a particular sector. This makes it necessary continuously to review the structure to ensure that the interests of mobile workers can be properly represented.

The present structure has strengthened the perception of workers that they belong to a particular plant or branch of industry. This detracts from an awareness that, regardless of their occupation or industry, they share many common interests. The role of the separate unions is therefore greater as a result of this trend and that of the national centre less important. However, the interests of the mobile worker are not only served by a strong trade union presence in their own industry and own country but also across sectoral and national boundaries. As to what structure is needed, the aim must be to cater better for the new, mobile, international worker.

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ⁱ In writing this article the author has made use of the article '*Een onooglijk boekje met ingrijpende gevolgen* (An unsightly booklet with sweeping consequences) in H.Klooster, J. Sprenger and V. Vrooland (1986) *Het Blauwzwarte Boekje, van beroepsorganisatie naar bedrijfsorganisatie* (The Blue-Black Booklet, from occupational organisation to sectoral organisation), Barendrecht.

ii See E. Hueting, Fr. de Jong Edz and R. Ney (1983) *Naar groter eenheid* (Towards greater unity), Amsterdam.

iii In the Netherlands general voting rights for men were introduced in 1918. From 1922 women also had the vote.

- iv J.P. Windmuller and C. de Galan (1970) *Arbeidsverhoudingen in Nederland* (Industrial relations in the Netherlands), Utrecht/Antwerp.
- v H. Amelink (1950) *Met ontplooide banieren* (With unfurled banners), Utrecht.
- vi Report by the Catholic Workers' Federation 1939-1947, Utrecht 1948.
- vii A. Leusink (1950) *Op hechte fundamenten, Geschiedenis van de Algemene Nederlandse Bouwarbeidersbond* (On firm foundations, History of the General Dutch Building Workers' Federation), Amsterdam.
- viii Report by the Committee for considering the question of the sectoral organisation of workers' trade unions, Utrecht 1946.
- ix K. Dijkstra (1979) *CNV – Beweging in beweging* (CND – Movement on the move), Utrecht.
- x Report by the Catholic Workers' Federation 1948-1954, Utrecht 1955.
- xi See E. Hueting, Fr. de Jong Edz and R. Ney (1983) *Naar groter eenheid* (Towards greater unity), Amsterdam.

Switzerland

The U N I A Merger Plan

- for workers in the private sector in Switzerland -

Andreas Rieger

All the signs are that in the autumn of 2004 four private-sector trade unions will merge to form a single " cross-sectoral" union of workers in the private sector. Discussions concerning this project have been going on for the past five years and the first practical steps have already been completed. What are the reasons and strategy behind this project?

Base scenario in the 1950s

Key features of the trade unions and workers organisations in Switzerland during the 1950s are shown below:

- The majority of trade unions had the structure of *sectoral or multisectoral organisations* along industrial union principles.
- The trade unions had a *strong presence in industry and in State undertakings* (Post Office, railways, ...).
- Non-trade union workers organisations added to the high unionisation rate in State undertakings (combined figure of over 60%) and in industry (all workers organisations together totalling 40%-90% of the workforce depending on the sector).
- In *private-sector services* trade unions were virtually absent, but other workers organisations also had only a very weak presence.
- *Coverage* of collective agreements amounted to just 50% of workers employed in the private sector.

1950 until 1980/90

From 1950 until 1980/90 the trade unions grew in tandem with employment growth in the sectors where they had already been established since 1950, i.e. mainly in industry and the State sector. For example, the trade union representing building and woodworkers,

GBH, which had 66,000 members in 1950 saw its membership rise to 124,000 in 1990. The trade union VPOD, representing municipal and canton manual and non-manual workers, grew from 31,000 members in 1950 to 42,000 in 1990. In expanding private-sector services, by contrast, there was barely any growth in trade unions and that in other workers organisations remained only meagre.

The organisational structures of trade unions remained frozen as they had been in the 1950s. Industrial relations during this period were marked by almost complete peace, i.e. by means of tight corporatist arrangements in the organised sectors which virtually ruled out strikes.

Crisis of the old model

During the economic crises of 1973/74 and 1981/82 and finally in the 1990s, the traditional strongholds of the trade unions were particularly hard-hit by structural change. Almost all trade unions sustained an erosion of membership and to some extent the foundations of trade union existence collapsed in their main sectors:

- The scope for distribution within the corporatist framework was sharply reduced.
- Industry (machinery, textiles, chemicals, printing, ...) and the construction industry were decimated.
- Parts of the postal/telephone service, public transport, etc. were dismantled and privatised.
- The sectoral mobility of trade union members towards private-sector services led to further losses.

A number of smaller trade unions were subsequently forced to give up their independence and be absorbed by other trade unions, either according to the sectoral principle (printing and media, post and communications), or according to political orientation (incorporation of the chemicals/textiles/paper and building/woodworking unions within the *Gewerkschaft Bau und Industrie* (GBI, Construction and Industry Union). As a consequence, three smaller confederations were also no longer able to survive on their own, so that by 2003 their ranks had dwindled from five to two; today only the *Schweizerische Gewerkschaftsbund* (SGB, Swiss Trade Union Confederation) is left,

as well as the minority confederation "travail.suisse", which encompasses what had previously been the Christian trade unions together with a number of salaried employees' organisations.

The trade union "wilderness" in private-sector services

The fundamental problem of trade union organisation in private-sector services had not yet been tackled. Employment in the sector had grown over decades, but without the trade union having systematically acted to organise workers. Private-sector services represented 55% of all wage earners in 1990, but only 5% of them were union members.

	<i>1950 Proportion of workers</i>	<i>1950 Union membership</i>	<i>1990 Proportion of workers</i>	<i>1990 Union membership</i>
<i>Workers in industry</i>	50%	55%	30%	50%
<i>Workers in public services</i>	15%	40%	15%	45%
<i>Workers in private services</i>	35%	5%	55%	5%

Of the some 4 million workers in Switzerland, more than 2 million are employed in the private service sector. But the organisation rate in this sector by the SGB in 1990 stood at no more than about 1% (*Gewerkschaft Handel, Transport und Lebensmittel, VHTL - Commerce, Transport and Food Union*). Coverage by the Christian trade union in the sector was even smaller. But even the combined total of the other workers organisations (banking personnel, office workers, chauffeurs and restaurant workers) came to just 6-8%!

For collective agreements in private-sector services the coverage of workers falls far below the figure in industry; the entire edifice of collective agreements in Switzerland thus came under increasing pressure.

From "little" unia to "big cross-sectoral" UNIA

Given this weakness, it became clear in the 1990s that only the strongest trade union organisations would be capable of successfully building up a trade union presence in private-sector services.

In 1966, the two largest trade unions in the Swiss Trade Union Confederation, *Bau und Industrie* (GBI, Construction and Industry) and *Metall, Maschinen und Uhren* (SMUV, Metalworking, Machinery, Clocks and Watches) together founded the union "*unia*" with a view to organising workers in the sector for private services. The starting point for its development was in the retail and restaurant industries, conducting a high-profile public campaign on the minimum wage, and is today a bargaining party to the restaurant/hotel workers agreement. *unia* today numbers in excess of 18,000 members and is already the sixth largest member of SGB.

No new trade union infrastructure was created for *unia*, as members had access to the facilities and services of GBI and SMUV on the basis of their dual membership. A critical factor remained, however, as to who would foot the bill for the substantial outlay required, particularly when it came to investing in a new "independent" trade union. In the end, it became clear that the huge task of organising a trade union presence for private-sector service workers could only be achieved by a single integrated trade union.

This was one of the main reasons which led senior officers of GBI and SMUV to look at the idea of even integrating the "parent organisations".

Main reasons for UNIA, the "Trade Union for All" in private-sector services

Since 1998, intensive discussions had been conducted, initially on stepping up cooperation, later on integrating as a confederation and finally on a merger. At the same time, moves were already being made to join forces on such matters as trade union journals, training, IT, and also at the regional Secretariats. In the autumn of 2002, finally, the extraordinary congresses of SMUV and GBI approved a

merger of the unions. In 2003 the congresses of *unia* and the trade union VHTL decided likewise. The aim was to create a new "cross-sectoral" union covering all workers in the Swiss private sector, which was consequently named UNIA.

The main reasons prompting this decision are as follows:

- Establishing a presence in private-sector services is vital for the trade unions and can only be attained by marshalling all forces.
- For building and civil engineering, the completion and installation industries, removing boundaries between organisations on the construction sites creates greater opportunities for organising union members.
- Many of the trade union tasks in industry (today representing only half a million workers in Switzerland, chiefly in the engineering industry, chemicals and foodstuffs industry) are largely similar.
- Occupational mobility of workers is an ever-growing trend; with a single cross-sectoral union, changing from one sector to another no longer requires a change of trade union.
- Integration makes it possible to maintain full-time Secretariats in some 80 locations in Switzerland (that is right down to the smallest towns), which would otherwise have been under threat. This ensures that the union remains close to the highly decentralised locations at which the workers are employed.
- Lastly, a number of synergy effects are generated at the level of trade union infrastructure: network of Secretariats, unemployment fund, legal advice, journals, etc. no longer need to be duplicated.

Key tasks of UNIA in the sectors

UNIA will on the one hand have a structure comprising local and regional organisations which form the basis for the national UNIA structures (delegates assembly, central board). On the other hand, the dozens of sectors that UNIA will encompass will be grouped together into four sectors at national level; depending on the base scenario there will be different tasks concerning these sectors over the years ahead.

Construction sector (in particular, building and civil engineering, with approx. 45,000 members)

- Expansion of the unionisation rate in a stagnating sector by weakening the competitor organisations and building up union membership in weakly-organised groups (construction planning, horticulture, etc.);
- Completely securing collective agreements against cross-border social dumping and the reduction of bargaining areas;
- maintaining capacity for action and extension into related areas.

Finishing trades/engineering construction/plumbing and heating & ventilating sector (about 40,000 members)

- There is scope here for higher absolute and relative growth in membership.
- Completely securing collective agreements against cross-border social dumping and the reduction of bargaining areas;

Industrial sector (about 45,000 members)

- A reversal in the trend of erosion in membership prevailing until now should be the objective.
- New regulation of the wage settlement system in the context of collective agreements (minimum wages, ...).
- Harnessing sections of the "tertiarised" workers in and around the industries.

Service sector (approx. 40,000 members)

- Building up a balance of power in the sectors (retail, restaurants, ...).
- Trade union presence and profile by means of across-the-board campaigns (minimum wages, equality for women and men, ...).
- Strengthening of existing collective agreements or conclusion of new ones, covering such matters as cross-border social dumping.
- Pilot schemes in sectors little charted by the unions (insurance, road transport, ...).
- Alliance or integration of individual professional federations.

Impact and outlook for the trade union movement

UNIA is seeking to provide a coherent response to the problems of building a trade union presence in the Swiss private sector. This is not to say that UNIA claims to have all the answers to establishing the movement.

The *public-sector unions* also need a coherent perspective, whether individually, jointly, or in conjunction with UNIA. The debate on this subject has only just begun.

The parent organisation, the Swiss Trade Union Confederation, needs a perspective too. The UNIA merger does not call SGB's existence into question. It has two key functions:

- *Organisational policy*: the SGB should admit or link up with workers organisations which have so far remained unaffiliated. The following organisations have already decided to do so: the banking personnel federation, the organisation of airline personnel, the Federal staff federation, and the social workers federation.
- *Trade union policy*: as many workers organisations as possible must be urged to take action against the cuts in social services, deregulation, etc. The tremendous onslaught waged by neoliberals in Switzerland on almost all groups of wage earners has created more scope for putting up such a broad front together with organisations that until now had stood outside the fold of the SGB, as has been shown on a number of occasions in recent years.

As to what the effects of setting up UNIA will be on the trade union movement as a whole, this will only be apparent from 2005. By then, UNIA will be operational throughout Switzerland and in all branches of the private sector as a "cross-sectoral" union, provided that the Congresses of GBI, SMUV, *unia* and VHTL taking place in October 2004 give the final go-ahead for setting up this organisation.

Germany

Merger of trade unions in the Federal Republic of Germany, taking the example of the mining, chemicals and energy workers union, IG BCE ⁱ

Marcus Kahmann

I shall focus on some of the causes and motivations as well as the results of the merger of the three unions for chemicals, paper and ceramics (*IG CPK, Chemie, Papier, Keramik*), mining and energy (*IG BE, Bergbau und Energie*) and leather (*GL, Gewerkschaft Leder*). In order to avoid the impression that the cause and effect of union mergers followed a single pattern, I shall contrast our findings at various points with the process undergone by ver.di and UNISON.

Causes and motivations of the merger to form IG BCE

Broadly speaking, there are two distinct sets of reasons which led to the merger to form IG BCE. The first relates to policy and strategic considerations, and the second to developments in trade union structures.

Table 1: *Chronology of trade union mergers*

1989 :	Printing and paper union + arts union = media union (IG Medien) (<i>IG Druck und Papier + Gewerkschaft Kunst = IG Medien</i>)
1996 :	Building-stone-earth union + horticulture, agriculture and forestry union = building-agriculture-environment union (IG BAU) (<i>IG Bau-Steine-Erden + Gewerkschaft Gartenbau, Land- und Forstwirtschaft = IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (IG BAU)</i>)
1996/97 :	Chemicals-paper-ceramics union + mining and energy union + leather union = mining-chemicals-energy union (IG BCE) (<i>IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik + IG Bergbau und Energie + Gewerkschaft Leder = IG Bergbau-Chemie-Energie (IG BCE)</i>)
1998/1999 :	Wood and plastics union + textile-clothing union + metal workers union = IG Metall (<i>Gewerkschaft Holz und Kunststoff + Gewerkschaft Textil-Bekleidung + IG Metall = IG Metall</i>)
2001 :	Public services, transport and traffic union, commerce-banks-insurance union, media union, German postal union, German salaried employees union = ver.di (<i>Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste, Transport und Verkehr, Gewerkschaft Handel-Banken-Versicherungen, IG Medien, Deutsche Postgewerkschaft, Deutsche Angestellten - Gewerkschaft = ver.di</i>)

Already in 1992, IG BE and IG CPK had signed a four-year cooperation agreement. At the end of this process, both organisations were to merge. The smallest union, GL, with 25,000 members, also signed up to the agreement in 1993. The differences in the time of signing and size of membership between the partners make it clear that the chief movers for this merger were IG BE and IG CPK. For the purposes of my analysis, therefore, I shall confine myself mainly to these two organisations.

IG BE and IG CPK shared a range of policy and ideological views: in the first place, they advocated a trade union policy with a marked cooperative slant; secondly, during the 1980s they were united in opposing the policy of weekly working-time reductions, as pursued by IG Metall; thirdly, industrial policy occupied a crucial role in both organisations. This last aspect was particularly important in the case of IG BE, as the hard-coal subsidy arrangements led to its members directly relying on the negotiating power of their trade union at political level. From the 1970s onwards, IG CPK also increasingly sought to pursue a policy of protecting production sites in a bid to keep jobs in Germany in the export-driven chemicals industry. From the policy angle, the so-called "joining of forces" by these two organisations with their similar philosophies was therefore close to being achieved to a certain extent.

Not to be forgotten, finally, are their consensus views on the question of DGB reform. Both organisations were agreed that the DGB was too expensive and ineffective. They believed that the national Confederation should no longer provide services for the member federations, have its own structures for representation of interests or provide legal advice. Instead, the DGB should concentrate on its political lobby function, and its coordination work. Any trade union not in a position to provide sufficient support for its members should merge. Both merger unions, by amalgamating, had the explicit intention of triggering a wave of mergers based on the snowball principle. The aim was to promote reform of the DGB and reduce the number of affiliated organisations. That they had calculated correctly is demonstrated by the fact that the number of DGB unions halved, from 16 to 8, between 1989 and 2001.

As well as these reasons relating to the organisational environment, the longer-term structural problems of the unions involved also worked in favour of merger. These problems were exacerbated following reunification. The pattern of membership reveals two trends:

The long-term decline in membership of the leatherworkers trade union and IG BE, first of all, is striking. A decisive factor here is the persistent erosion of jobs in both industries. For instance, IG BE was particularly hard hit by job losses in the hard-coal industry. This industry accounted for around 70% of the workers organised by this union. Between 1990 and 2000 the corresponding number of workers dropped back from 123,000 to barely 50,000, owing chiefly to the decision decision of the government to cut hard-coal subsidies.

Developments in the employment situation of the leather industry were almost equally dramatic.

The unionisation rate of IG BE of around 85% in the mid-1990s makes it clear that the union had little scope for further increasing its membership. It had reached the limit of expansion in its sphere of operation and henceforward the only way was down. The same situation could also be said to apply, in less marked form, to the leatherworkers union, whose gross unionisation rate in 1994 also stood at the relatively high figure, in DGB terms, of 64%. The gross unionisation rate of the IG CPK, by contrast, at about 50% was significantly lower and highlighted the expansion potential in its area.

The impact of reunification on the membership figures of IG BE and IG CPK is typical. Their steep rise reflected the absorption of members from East German unions organised along similar sectoral lines. Already by 1996, the membership levels of IG BE and IG CPK had returned to approaching those of the pre-reunification era. The persistent erosion in membership and expansion into East Germany carried along on a wave of optimism also led to financial problems.

I should just like to refer at this point to the higher proportion of staff costs to income from contributions in all three unions as this illustrates particularly well the structural problems. A proportion of 50% staff

costs is generally viewed as the upper limit in German unions. Between 1990 and 1994, in the IG CPK this figure rose from 38.4% to 44.6%. In the IG BE it rose between 1990 and 1996 from 35.2% to 52.8%. Already in 1992, the leatherworkers union was spending 62.9% of its income from contributions on staff costs. These figures make it clear that even if IG BE and the leatherworkers union had continued to operate independently some radical structural measures would have had to be taken. Otherwise the capacity of the organisations to operate as trade unions would no longer have been secured in the long run.

It is worth noting that issues concerning the changes in added value chains and sectoral structures as well as the resulting overlapping of areas of industrial organisation – unlike in the case of ver.di – did not play any part in the choice of merger partner: the three unions exhibited no organisational conflicts with one another. The wood and plastics union, GHK, which was also prepared to merge and, applying the industrial logic, was also a "suitable" partner for IG CPK, was not considered in view of its close alignment in policy terms with IG Metall. The dominance of the policy motivation also throws light on the attempt to include the conservative textile and clothing union, GTB, in the IG BCE merger process -- which failed owing to the salary requirements of the GTB officers, and it finally opted to join IG Metall.

On the whole, the establishment of IG BCE marks the beginning of the emergence of highly heterogeneous multi-sectoral unions which only retain the loosest connections with the industrial principle. This process reached its high point with the founding of ver.di as an interest representation body encompassing over 30 sectors and about 1000 occupations. It is clear that the movement away from the industrial principle observable *grosso modo* in the German merger process in tandem with the concentration of organisational and financial resources in the hands of a small number of organisations with substantial memberships (IG BCE, ver.di and IG Metall today represent over 80% of the DGB's members) is having a lasting impact on relations with the national confederation and with the affiliated organisations.

Consequences of the merger to form IG BCE

First of all concerning membership and finances: as is clearly shown by Table 2, IG BCE has not succeeded in reversing the negative trend in membership. Between 1997 and 2002, membership declined by 17.8% to 833,000. Compared with the period between 1992 and 1997, however, there has been a slight slowing in the pace of erosion: during this period the combined membership figure for the three original unions fell by 22.7%. The continuing decline in employment, particularly in hard-coalmining and the chemical industry was primarily responsible for this erosion. However, the net unionisation rate also fell between 1997 and 2000 from 52.7% to 47.6%. While there is little evidence that the unionisation rate of the three unions, had they continued to exist, would have developed more favourably, it can still be said that the merger did not help resolve the persistent weakness in organising workers.

TABLE 2: MEMBERSHIP FIGURES AND PERCENTAGE OF WORKING MEMBERS

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
1,010,555	963,432	922,783	891,587	862,364	833,693
52.7%	49.5%	48%	47.6%	-	-

Source: IG BCE; EIRO

The finding of a persistent or even slightly increasing organisational weakness is all the more noteworthy as following the founding of IG BCE it has proved to be one of the first German unions to endeavour to recruit members on a systematic basis. As part of the "Future Offensive", all trade union secretaries in the overstuffed main administration have undertaken to work four weeks every year in so-called recruitment teams. In these teams they must seek to recruit members in plants where unions are already present as well as those where they are not, and also to strengthen the commitment of existing members. It was also believed that taking legal advice services away from the DGB would enhance membership loyalty (IG BE had already organised such services on its own account prior to the merger).

On the financial front, meanwhile, IG BCE has scored some notable successes: the ratio of income to expenditure followed a favourable trend from 1998 onwards. In 2000 a surplus of 11% was even recorded. Compared with the deficits run up by IG BE and the leather

workers union prior to merger, this indicates consolidation of the financial situation. The organisation also succeeded in cutting the proportion of overheads (personnel and administration): whereas in 1998 this item still accounted for about 74% of income from contributions, by 1999 and 2000 the figure stood at barely 67%. This is a further success in consolidation compared with the period before the merger when the overheads of IG BE and the leather workers union exceeded the proceeds of contributions.

The question remains, however, as to what extent these successes can be traced back to merger-related synergy effects or to conventional cost-cutting measures. The reduction in union staff following a freeze on new recruitment and early-retirement arrangements come to mind here in particular: whereas at the time of IG BCE's foundation there were still 1500 staff, by the year 2000 this number had dropped to only 1151. It also has to be asked whether a continuing downtrend in membership will not in the medium term put the consolidation effects in jeopardy again.

Next a few remarks concerning the organisational development of IG BCE. A crucial aspect when discussing the structure of the new organisation must be "securing its own identity". This was a central preoccupation of the IG BE in particular, given its atypical organisational culture within the DGB. This culture was essentially based (and this also applied in most respects to the leather workers union) on the exceptionally high level of commitment by volunteers in the lowest ranks of the organisation, the local district groups. Their activities extended outside the working lives of the miners and into local politics. Members' involvement in IG CPK, by contrast, tended to be more administrative in nature. The equivalent of the district groups in the IG CPK, the plant-level union representatives, were less common and often had a precarious status compared with the powerful works councils.

Chiefly at the urging of IG BE, IG BCE was therefore largely based on a model which combined the organisational structures of IG CPK and IG BE. Consequently, workplace union representatives' bodies and local district groups are today to be found alongside one another, carrying equal weight, within IG BCE. The continued existence of the

local salaried employees' groups in IG BE was also accepted by IG CPK. The industry groups were also added in. Policy responsibility for the industry groups remained in the hands of the corresponding old union. Compared with the attempt within ver.di to make sweeping organisational changes by adopting the "matrix organisation" model, the IG BE organisational structure quite clearly qualifies as being structurally conservative. Strengthening the volunteer element by comparison with IG CPK was coupled with more direct intervention by the management board in personnel policy to ensure that the organisation can be "managed on a top-down basis", in accordance with the centralist and corporatist tradition of both unions.

The regional concentration in the members of IG BE (North Rhine - Westphalia, Saarland) and the leather workers union (southern Germany) gives an overall picture of very little integration for the new organisation. This is at least true at the decentralised organisational levels. A contributing factor is that the existing district groups have scarcely been taken up by the IG CPK members and that wherever there are no district groups, CPK members have also established very few district groups. Interestingly, our impression is that the low integration level has not stood in the way of forging a common trade union identity. The long cooperation phase and shared basic policy beliefs have certainly assisted this process.

At this point I only want to mention two problems in the organisation's development: people interviewed in IG CPK referred first of all to the volume of funds earmarked for the district groups, their autonomy as well as their character as "old-age pensioners' meetings". In 2000, 43.1% of district group members were no longer in paid employment. On the other hand, voluntary and paid officers in IG BE and the leather workers union regularly referred to the bureaucratic work procedures and lengthy communication channels: nowadays people had to rely on themselves to a greater degree, was the response we found in the lower echelons of the organisation.

Limits and problems of mergers

In conclusion, I would like to outline three what I consider to be important findings from our research work.

1. Trade union mergers require time and a willingness to participate in internal dialogue. This last aspect is hampered not only by the fact that unions all see themselves differently and have developed different practices. These are also fields of combat in which status, power, and the shaping of policy are at stake. Mergers turn these conditions upside down: career expectations are crushed, everyday routines have to be changed, new adversaries emerge and new allies have to be found. The internal union culture of debate, frequently characterised by adversarial relations does not facilitate dialogue or arriving at pragmatic compromises. Our findings concerning UNISON and ver.di suggest that, at worst, it may take a new generation of volunteer and paid officers before there is an understanding that, despite all the differences, they are working towards a common goal.

2. The basic assumption frequently made concerning trade union mergers that there is a direct relationship between size and strength needs to be changed. Our impression is that union mergers can produce benefits on the external relations front, particularly in terms of gaining access to the political stage (using the electorate argument). As far as internal relations are concerned, the merger union achieves efficiency gains – if at all – in the long rather than the short term. ver.di seems to me a good and also a bad example in this respect: the employment guarantees and salary structures set in stone for years produce massive over-employment (currently around 1000 employees); every year tens of millions in contributions are required to mop up the deficit. The communication, coordination and negotiation requirements of the new form of organisation are vast, work is duplicated or worse, while over- and under-employment are the rule rather than the exception.

3. In this connection, I would like to question the equation whereby size equals strength from another perspective. There may be sound arguments for expecting that the differentiation tendencies in the social, occupational and economic fabric would tend rather to promote the creation of smaller organisations – in fact the opposite to the concentration process presently observable. The growth in membership of German professional associations, particularly in the service sector, as well as the success of the nursing federation, RCN, in Britain, serve to confirm this statement. Trade union policy is faced with the even greater challenge of how to keep closely in touch with its members and mobilise the different groups on a basis of solidarity given the heterogeneous membership and larger (and probably also more bureaucratic) organisation. The solution devised by such unions as ver.di and UNISON was to set up decentralised and specialised interest representation structures (special sections and/or service groups) and to integrate these at different levels. Such "technical" solutions to the high-tension and often precarious conditions of diversity and unity need to be brought to life in trade union practice.

Should the unions opt for the – in my opinion necessary – route of differentiation and decentralisation of union policy in the sense of taking greater account of occupational/special needs and interests of the members, this calls for a powerful vision of a more just society which extends beyond group interests and day-to-day business. This could also contribute to turning on its head the definition of structural questions in union mergers, which is frequently "empty of content" and/or driven by considerations of power or continuation of the status quo. Instead, this definition, after analysing the challenges in the field, could be worked up into a more strongly strategic structural reform. As the decisions of political and economic actors which are relevant to labour and social policy are taken increasingly less often at national level alone, what is also needed is to give greater thought to European (and international) forms of organisation.

In the merger unions investigated by us, even after a number of years they have not always succeeded in stemming or reversing the decline in membership. In other areas of influence which are more hard to quantify, such as bargaining or social policy, it is difficult to identify any definite gain in influence. This adds further fuel to the argument

that far more radical structural and policy reforms are needed for the trade unions to be able to survive.

i. This contribution is based on a more detailed research project by the Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik Hamburg and UMIST Manchester under the direction of Jürgen Hoffmann and Jeremy Waddington: Waddington, J., Kahmann, M., Hoffmann, J. (2003) *United We Stand? The Trade Union Merger Process in Germany and Britain*. Final project report (accessible at: <http://www.agf.org.uk>). Marcus Kahmann (2003): *Changes in National Trade Unions Structures: Organisational Restructuring by Mergers in Central and Eastern Europe, Germany, the U.K., and Australia*. Brussels: ETUI (accessible at: <http://www.etuc.org/ETUI/Publications/DWP/Kahmann4.pdf>).

ver.di

Karlheinz Gerhold/Secretary at ver.di, Land district of Berlin Brandenburg¹

My trade union ver.di is holding its first union Congress, currently taking place in Berlin. This Congress is taking stock of the situation for the organisation of the whole. For the purposes of this article, I am speaking only on my own behalf.

In the light of the discussions to date, I would like to highlight the extreme importance of this debate, to which the initiators have invited us today. For what reason? According to present EU policy, every country is today required to subject public services, services of general interest and national/local authority activities to competition and privatisation. And the European Trade Union Confederation sees its role and that of all national unions as being to help give this process of privatisation and destruction a socially-acceptable form. It is for that reason that in my opinion the debate is very important.

With regard to the trade union merger process currently underway in Switzerland, I would only like to issue a warning not to be overhasty in following in the footsteps of other countries.

In my own organisation, there are at present major concerns about the future of ver.di. Many colleagues are asking themselves what interests their union is representing? I would like to share this concern about what is happening in ver.di.

Accompanying the CLR Working Papers for this conference is an essay by Michael Wendl entitled "After the merger: what now for ver.di?". Michael Wendl, with whom I am personally acquainted from various discussions, was prior to the merger ÖTV district leader in the largest region, Bavaria, and for a long time numbered among the opponents of the merger. As I see it, his diagnosis is correct -- I would like to emphasise some things and add yet others.

Michael Wendl refers to what are for me the seven key points:

- The analysis of the figures correctly shows that even a merger cannot by itself stem the erosion in membership which in ver.di is actually now accelerating in dramatic fashion.

¹ Karlheinz Gerhold is a member of the Working Group on Workers Questions (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Arbeitnehmerfragen*) in the SPD and co-editor of the periodical, Social Policy and Democracy (*Soziale Politik und Demokratie*).

- Creating centralisation at a level, which does not correspond to any economic structure and establishing complex organisational structures.
- Expanding areas such as personnel, finance, etc. which are remote from the membership at the expense of support for an approach which involves servicing the members (bargaining policy, social policy, legal advice).
- Misdirection of financial resources through the internal budgeting system.
- The so-called "matrix" problem, i.e. recreating dual structures which hinder one another (special sectors/levels). An organism is resolved into a matrix and not constituted by it. The overriding principle of the trade union, whereby all the workers are the subject of policy, is jettisoned in the matrix model.
- Delegation of central issues of policy conduct to the senior management and risk of increasingly decoupling social policy decisions by the ver.di leadership from the real representation of members' interests.
- Given the mounting unemployment, reduction in so-called normal working conditions (full-time employment relationships which are governed by collective agreements and social legislation) as well as the rise of insecure employment, the members perceive weaknesses in union representation of interests: inadequate collective agreements, impression of a lack of representation of interests in the political arena, concerning the Agenda 2010, the "labour market reforms", the implementation by the FRG Chancellor of EU regulations, etc.

All of this is described correctly by Michael Wendl. But in my opinion his diagnosis falls short when he talks about "misdirection" or, at another point, blames the "working methods which are remote from the membership" on an "enormously increased coordination requirement in an unnecessarily complex organisation".

Ver.di is in fact bringing a new quality worthy of mention. The foundation texts of ver.di, concerning the organisation and programmes, define it as being a new modernised organisation, a "trade union of the new type". Ver.di defines itself as a federation of 13 relatively autonomous special sections (*Fachbereiche*) with about

100 relatively autonomous specialised groups in the place of a trade union, breaking with the principle of the establishment of affiliated unions of the DGB as unitary bodies representing the interests of all colleagues in an industry, branch of industry or economic sector (such as public services and related areas or an occupation/profession in the broadest sense, such as the teachers union (*GEW, Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft*)).

In fact, ver.di has its origins in the self-disbandment of four DGB unions -- Commerce, Banking and Insurance (*HBV, Handel, Banken und Versicherungen*), Post, Media and Public Services, Transport and Traffic (*ÖTV, Post, Medien und Öffentlicher Dienst, Transport und Verkehr*) and the German Salaried Employees Union (*DAG, Deutsche Angestellten Gewerkschaft*), which after 1945 was founded as a corporative salaried employees organisation, counter to the DGB principles.

It should also not be forgotten that the decision to self-disband to form ver.di, particularly in the case of ÖTV, but also of HBV, came up against fierce internal union opposition; for example at the last ÖTV union conference, in a preliminary vote, only 63% voted in favour of ver.di, while more than one third were opposed.

In the eyes of colleagues, the arrival of ver.di raised the competition stakes among the unions to a new level. Competition with other DGB unions is growing, and in ver.di there is rivalry over every member of the sections, as ultimately the budget and personnel are linked to membership numbers.

Michael Wendl rightly talks about the fact that ver.di did not highlight a break with bargaining policy practice as in the summer the collective agreement was concluded for public services in Berlin, concerning for the first time working-time reductions without pay compensation, which was recorded as a bargaining success. Another matter equally deserving of criticism and which he completely disregards in his essay is the fact that ver.di, in concluding this Berlin agreement, also breaks with the tradition of unitary sector-wide agreements, the achievement at central level of collectively-agreed guaranteed conditions of pay and work for all colleagues within the organisational sphere of the union. As a consequence, this also broke with the practice of defending the public service as a unitary sector, which constituted the basis for existence of the union ÖTV as the unitary union

encompassing all colleagues in public services, transport and traffic. According to the ver.di programme, the boundaries between the public and private service sectors are blurred. As a result, the public service is broken down into a confusingly large number of sections. The logical consequence of this is that the existing national agreement covering the public service has been relinquished in favour of agreements covering particular sections, for example local-authority energy supplies, but there is also pressure to do likewise in local transport and the health sector.

For many colleagues, ver.di is no longer organised as a unitary and powerful trade union. As they see it, instead of focusing on the need to adapt to the "changes in modern working life" on the basis of "codetermination", ver.di defines itself as an organisation for "shaping the policies of social change" on the basis of "consensus with government and employers". To this end they also refer to the ver.di programme where, concerning the place of ver.di in the EU and the ETUC, it is stated: "Ver.di must also step up its efforts to assist with the role of the EU in shaping the social dimension of globalisation: the EU represents economic, trade and monetary policy interests in the WTO, OECD, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund -- these must also be given a social dimension ...".

In conclusion, I would like to look at the question of what a union should stand for and how declining membership can be halted.

A national confederation must have a clear identity, and trade union principles must be preserved and defended. In my opinion, it is crucial that the union be defined as an independent representation of workers interests and that it should not be perceived by the colleagues as a body for shaping policy on the changes driven by globalisation, which bring with them deregulation, privatisation and the destruction of workers rights and democracy.

The overall policy of deregulation and flexibility of working conditions is aimed at "reducing labour costs", including additional wage costs as the strategic policy line of the international financial institutions. Precisely for this reason they want trade unions today to have the role of a "body responsible for shaping policy" and therefore to convert them into corporatist bodies.

We are already finding that negotiations are taking priority over the weapon of industrial action when it comes to asserting workers

interests, is what colleagues told me. So why should workers come to us, they ask? The trade union must be seen as representing interests and not as an organisation that allows itself to be tied down in consensus strategies, is their reply. The only true basis for a trade union is its presence in the plant. The competition mechanism of the so-called "reform" policy, in other words privatisation policy, individualises every hospital, every university and requires that support and bargaining work are the responsibility of a single body so that, on this basis, sector-wide agreements can be secured and implemented: directly for the members in the plant.

In accordance with the principle of the trade union movement, the union must seek to organise all workers in a sector, on the basis of the common, unitary interests of all colleagues. The trade union constitutes the marshalling together of trade union forces. The unitary interests are manifested, for example, in common demands put forward in collective bargaining and form the basis for a strong membership and associated capacity for action. The German trade unions have in the past proven to be organisations able to fight for and defend sector-wide collective agreements. The trade union as a body representing interests, prepared for conflict and with the power to assert itself is necessary for the future.

Italy

The situation of the trade unions in Italy, first steps towards rapprochement

Claudio Bertini

The situation of the trade unions in Italy has been influenced over the past two to three years by the so-called "B Factor". The political anomaly embodied by Berlusconi has also had an impact on the unions. Until 2002 a long period of trade union unity prevailed in Italy, but the overwhelming victory of Berlusconi in the 2001 national elections marked the end of this unity. At the present time a protracted process of rapprochement is taking place between the unions, triggered by the Iraq war and the pension reform by the Berlusconi government. On 24 October 2003, for example, it was planned to organise a united four-hour general strike against Berlusconi's pension reforms.

The trade unions have always represented an element of cohesion in Italian society. Following the demands of the 1970s with the enactment of the *Statuto dei Lavoratori* (Employment Act), with its provisions concerning the reinstatement of workers dismissed for no good reason, the unions contributed to overcoming terrorism. The trade union unity threw up a barrier that prevented terrorism from putting down roots in society. The three largest confederations correspond to the different currents (*anime*) in Italian society. The CISL represents workers of Catholic denomination, and the UIL and CGIL both have socialist origins, although the position of the UIL is more moderate than that of the CGIL which originally organised Communist workers.

In the early 1990s, which were characterised by corruption and terrorist attacks by the Mafia, the advent of Berlusconi on the political stage was unable to damage the Confederations' unity. The first Berlusconi government in 1994 attempted to introduce a pension reform without giving the unions a hearing. The outcome was one of the largest-scale demonstrations by the three unitary confederations

with some 1.2 million workers in Rome. This dealt a death blow to the reforms and led to the stepping down of Berlusconi. The key word for trade union action during these years with the implementation of the pension reforms under the Dini government in 1995 is *concertazione*. This involves joint talks in which the government, unions and employers organisations seek to agree common objectives and their implementation. This practice enhanced the unity of the unions during the 1990s. The attempt by Berlusconi to circumvent this process as if it were simply an obstacle brought about his political downfall. Unity was strong between 1994 and 1998. The support of the unions and the workers helped contribute to Italy meeting the Maastricht criteria for establishing European monetary union. The unexpected political crisis of the Prodi government in 1998 had implications for the unions. The divisions between the parties of the left were reflected in the three confederations.

Owing to the difficulties in maintaining unity the three confederations refrained from considering any proposal for union which was at the centre of the trade union debate between 1992 and 1999. After some vacillation, the President of CISL, Sergio D'Antoni, decided in 2001 to found a party which supported the Berlusconi coalition. The breakaway from the other two confederations was the next step. The CGIL was already standing against the parties of the right before the election.

At the end of 2001 Berlusconi, who already had the support of sections of UIL and CISL, prepared a reform of the labour market, the so-called *Patto per l'Italia*. This contains the reform of article 18 of the *Statuto dei Lavoratori* (Employment Act). The government proposed as part of a general reform programme for the labour market to abolish the right of reinstatement for workers dismissed without good reason. Whereas the CIGL adopted a strong opposing position, the other two confederations entered into negotiations with the government. The opposition of the CGIL reached its peak with the demonstration held on 23 March 2002 in Rome numbering 3 million participants. This impressive mobilisation neither prevented

the reforms from going ahead with the support of CISL and UIL nor the consequent final breakdown of trade union unity.

UIL and CISL did not break off the negotiations on the *Patto per l'Italia*. They believed that the tax concessions and the investment in the Mezzogiorno (southern Italy) were good reasons for relinquishing the protection of article 18. With the exception of the investment in southern Italy, CGIL was strongly opposed to the other concessions. In particular, during a phase when the parties of the left were absent, still in shock after the election defeat, CGIL believed that the rights acquired by the workers could not be given up and regarded the concessions proposed by the government as a trap.

The *Patto per l'Italia* was then signed and promulgated in July 2002. Almost one year on, some of the promises, such as those concerning investment in southern Italy, had not yet been honoured. The situation of State finances and the obligations towards the European Union arising from the Stability Pact, have stood in the way of the investment. This was already foreseeable in 2002. The lost unity does it is true have its origins in the enactment of the *Patto per l'Italia*, but also in the general vision of the role of the trade union in Italy under the Berlusconi government. The question concerns the political mobilisation of the unions. Should a union take up a certain political role in opposing the government of the right or should it only defend the contractual policy interests of the workers? During the period 2001-2003 the CGIL played a strong political role. Following the election defeat in 2001 many people disappointed in the parties of the left identified with the CGIL and its president, Mr Cofferati. Although this played an important role for the parties of the left, which led inter alia to the victory of the left in the local elections of May 2003, it also sparked off a debate in the CGIL. Various members and officials in the CGIL are calling for a return to contractual policy activities. The CGIL is also being urged within the organisation to reassert its independence from politics.

UIL and CISL have sought to meet the demands of the not insignificant number of workers who elected Berlusconi, which also constituted an attempt to match the power of CGIL. An important issue that has caused the failure of united trade union action is also the fear of hegemony by the CGIL in a new trade union. The individual confederations wanted to retain their autonomy.

In 2003 the unions have refound unity via a general issue such as peace. A general issue can more easily unite CGIL, CISL and UIL, but now it could also be possible to try using some social issue of national importance as a way of taking joint action again. The general strike on 24 October is a significant example and an important touchstone.

This evolution in relations between trade unions shows how important it is for a merger proposal that there should be an equilibrium between the different parts. The different political currents which characterise the three confederations call for cautious conduct on political topics.

Year	Political situation			Trade union situation	
	Government	Majority	Actions	Action by the unions	Relations between unions
1994	First Berlusconi government	Centre-right	Attempted pension reform	Successful action with strike and demonstration	Unity of the three confederations CGIL-CISL-UIL
1995	Dini	Technocrats	Pension reform	Participation in reforms and approval. Key word 'Concertazione'	
1996	Prodi	Centre-left	Employment Agencies Act	Clear support of the government. Concertazione on social policy	
1997			Entry into EMU		
1998	D'Alema		Support for the Kosovo war	First divisions with criticism by CISL of the government	Final failure of merger proposal
1999			Provisional government following the defeat in the regional elections	CISL president D'Antoni founds a party which supports the Berlusconi coalition	
2000	Amato				
2001	Second Berlusconi government	Centre-right	First Laws	Important role of CGIL in unity of the left, opening up of CISL-UIL to Berlusconi government	Breakup of trade union unity
2002			Reform of Art. 18 Employment Act on reinstatement of workers dismissed without good reason	CISL-UIL support the changes in the Employment Act on dismissals and sign the Patto per l'Italia on 5.7. 2002	
2003			Support of the Iraq war by Berlusconi, Pension reform in the Budget Act	Disappointment by CISL-UIL at the government's failure to keep promises	

From the Discussions

For this issue of CLR-News we have edited only the most important contributions to the workshop. Jan Cremer's presentation on 'Dimensions of Union Structures', Hans Baumann's written paper on 'Union Structure and Globalisation', and Jörn Janssen's summary about the situation of 'Unions in Central European ex-Comecon States' are integrated into the introductory article 'Reform or finished?'. Three further contributions can be mentioned here. Wolfgang Bonneik/IGM/Germany reported about the way the membership of the Gewerkschaft Holz-Kunststoff (Union of Joiners) are cared for and supported in the overpowering IG Metall (Engineering Union) - a typical case of an acquisition of a smaller partner. Anton Korntheuer and Herbert Aufner/ÖGB/Austria reported on the bringing together of the Austrian sector unions in four cooperating groups. And Frank Schmidt-Hullman/IG BAU/Germany presented the initiative which is aiming neither at acquisition nor at merger: the German IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (Construction and Agriculture Union) has allocated 3.2 m EUR for the transnational organisation of migrant workers with partner unions.

The discussions between the different presentations were very informative in illustrating the international situation with examples from other states. Generally speaking we may conclude that the structuring of trade unions is a question in all European states but has not yet sparked off a strategic debate among all those concerned. That is why the restructuring, usually under the pressure of some precarious situation, remains limited to partial mergers (union born of necessity) and acquisitions (rescue operation). In order to give an impression of the discussions, we will highlight a few important interventions:

- Comparing the many cases in recent years of mergers and acquisitions, a central theme is hardly to be detected. As the case may be, the criteria can be of a political or structural nature, determined by equal or grossly unequal balance of power or size as well as by affinity of sectors. A strategic line cannot be made out.

- If it comes to the point of crisis it is often a matter of opportunity, the more favourable offer for reemployment and remuneration of full time officers, that decides who joins whom.
- Though the form of a single union as a united organisation with sectoral or other subdivisions has a long tradition in the debate (e.g. Germany after World War II), it was introduced as a rule only in socialist states (except Austria) and typically discredited as centralist in the West. Now the autonomy of individual unions makes it difficult to restructure in common.
- The position of the inter-professional (inter-sectoral) umbrella confederations will continue to be weakened to the extent that sectoral organisation is undermined by mergers and the emergence of inter-professional unions.
- The financial and structural failure of mergers is partly explicable through the taboo on dismissing union officers for reasons of restructuring. Hence not only have unnecessary jobs been conserved, but innovation in the organisation has also been prevented.
- EU enlargement holds the danger that the deregulation of labour relations as far as the destruction of unions, enforced mainly by the USA, will now put pressure on West European unions.
- Patronising East European unions through uncoordinated advice as well as support from the West does not help much to encourage the consolidation on the own initiative of these organisations. It is especially absurd to force sectoral organisation upon them while the same is disintegrating in West European states.
- At European Union level the rights of employee organisations are polarised between Works Councils on the one hand and the Social Dialogue on the other. The representation of employees at different regional levels in particular through collective agreements are hardly addressed and, as a consequence, remain a matter for national organisations.

The discussions between all participants took place in an atmosphere of the greatest openness imaginable. They showed the need to come out of the defensive in favour of a strategic debate.

REVIEWS

Berndt Keller, and Hans-Wolfgang Platzer ed.:

Industrial Relations and European Integration: Trans- and Supranational Developments and Prospects.

Ashgate, Aldershot 2003, 192 pp. 45 £.

This edited volume discusses current issues and developments affecting industrial relations in the European Union. The contributors examine how and at what stage trans- and supranational needs for regulation have arisen in order to complement national industrial relations regulatory mechanisms. They analyse the interests of the various actors in establishing regulations and look at the degree of political integration needed to structure and foster development of trans- and supranational industrial relations. The three main institutional settings examined are multi-sectoral Social Dialogue, sectoral Social Dialogues and European Works Councils. The developments and prospects found include the restructuring of EU level relationships between trade unions and employers post Maastricht, the upgrading of Social Dialogue and the formalisation of social partners who have become co-actors in the making of EC social policy. However, the editors are fairly pessimistic concerning the future development of a coherent, horizontally and vertically interconnected and integrated EU system of industrial relations.

The basic link of theoretical interest between all the contributors is the changing modes of social regulation at European level. This focus is due to the critique that EU social policy is neo-voluntaristic and this laissez-faire approach has led to neo-liberal consequences for the social dimension and a form of ‘negotiated Europeanisation’. Horizontal co-ordination rather than vertical integration has become the leading principle of regulation and this, according to Platzer and Keller, will lead to increasing fragmentation and particularisation. They argue that there is a shift from ‘hard’ binding and legal to ‘soft’, non-binding and agreed means and instruments.

The separate contribution by Keller discussing the prospects for Social Dialogue at sectoral level touches on the current challenge that eastern enlargement poses for industrial relations and for the possibility of building a social dimension in Europe. He acknowledges that the structures for social dialogue are not developed in accession countries and doubts whether existing members will be able to cope with the enlarged system. Müller and Platzer's contribution reflects a more positive development by examining the important impact of European Works Councils on integration and on furthering the Europeanisation of industrial relations. Other contributors examine interprofessional social dialogue and the shift towards less binding forms of regulation (Falkner); the prevalence of coordinated collective bargaining in Europe despite unfavourable economic conditions (Traxler); the Europeanisation of collective bargaining and current trade union initiatives (Schulten) and the evolution of employment policy since the 1990s (Goetschy).

This collection critically examines the prospects for European integration and informs the reader of recent developments, presenting the current challenges for social integration and the Europeanisation of industrial relations in an accessible form.

Heather Connolly
University of Warwick

Antonella Picchio (ed):

Unpaid Work and the economy: a gender analysis of standards of living.

Routledge ISBN 0415 29694-3

Antonella Picchio has long argued that a comprehensive analysis of any economy needs to consider two hidden elements: firstly unpaid work and, associated with it, non-money incomes and access to physical and social resources. Without this, not only is the extent of

women's work hidden, the implications of policy decision on gender relations are barely knowable.

As a result of earlier work by Picchio and feminists across the world, the 1995 UN Beijing conference called for countries to include domestic labour in their assessment of economic resources. The fruits of this are now becoming evident in many European countries and estimates of the time spent in unpaid work, variously defined, and its contribution to the economy are beginning to become available.

The production of a comprehensive study of time use in Italy has enabled Picchio, with the help of a number of Italian feminist economists, to develop her analysis into the policy arena. In particular this edited volume looks anew at the measure of income inequality within and between households to incorporate the unpaid sector of the economy in the measure of differential well-being. Caiumi shows, for example, that the measured effect of children on Ereal¹ equivalent income of different households varies with the scale of unpaid work. This implies that existing measures of child poverty between households may be defective and that policies to reduce the scale of unpaid work - that is the provision of welfare services - can have an important effect on child poverty levels.

The volume provides much data from the Time Use studies and the Bank of Italy income and expenditure surveys and in doing so provides some better estimates of Italian economic relationships between men and women, but also between North and South and between different social groups, than is available from the official statistics, which cover only the formal economy.

Though the book concentrates on Italy and provides a very useful analysis of the Italian welfare system and its reliance on family labour, much of the methodology and many of the insights could prove helpful in other European countries.

Ana C. Dinerstein, Michael Neary (eds):
The Labour Debate, an investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work.
Ashgate, Aldershot 2002.

This book resumes a debate which flourished in the late nineteen sixties early seventies, when in the Western Camp of the Cold War a new generation of students, politicians and trade unionists became aware that post war reforms of capitalism under the auspices of the Welfare State, instead of transforming it, had only helped to consolidate this economic system based on the subordination of labour. Now, thirty years later at the beginning of the third millennium, after a period of ideological restoration and the simultaneous collapse of the planned economies under the communist state, this debate about the nature of labour under capitalism has good reason to be revived:

- Globally wage labour relations are still expanding at the expense of petty commodity production and subsistence fishing and farming;
- The experiment of the planned economy to liberate labour through the primacy of politics over economics under socialist auspices has failed to meet the expectations of the working people;
- The expansion and intensification of capital in the production process has resulted in an increased dependence of labour from capital as expressed by the rising level of unemployment coupled with desperation, misery and, in many regions, starvation;
- The incongruence between trade union bargaining of collective wages and conditions on the one hand and the use of a global labour market outside collective agreements becomes ever more apparent.

The major aspect of the debate is whether there has been a qualitative change in class relations and consequently the labour movement. Typically the anti-globalisation movement, the Zapatista uprising, and roadbloks in Argentina (and elsewhere), summarised as ‘new social’ or ‘grass-roots’ movements, are claimed to be modern forms

of the confrontation of capital and labour and hence class struggle. Some authors, Ana Dinerstein, John Holloway, Harry Cleaver, Massimo de Angelis take this view, which is contested in different ways by Simon Clarke and Michael Neary, who maintain that the subordination of labour under capital is fundamental to the mode of production, and therefore the dispute about wages and conditions represents the core of the labour movement. “The only secure base of [the broader labour movement] ...has proved to be the trade union organisation that develops out of the struggle over the terms and conditions of wage labour.” (Clarke, p. 47) Various other aspects of the development of labour are raised by Werner Bonefield (on the constitution of class), Graham Taylor (on the subjectivity of labour), and Glen Rikowski (on the role of education for the revolution). All authors have in common the attempt to underpin their views by Marx’s thinking and writing. In this sense the book may be read also as a review of the relevance of Marx’s work about 150 years later in relation to the contemporary history of capitalism. This universal reference to what is at risk of remaining a doctrine, makes for much repetition and sometimes a level of abstraction that obscures the arguments put forward. But we must hope that this debate will go on, perhaps with more empirical reference to changes in employment conditions and capital ownership structures. It can help a lot in the understanding of social relations dominating the dynamic of the global production process and its political implications.

Jörn Janssen

EVENTS

18 March 2004, London:
Women in Construction
University of Westminster and CLR
35 Marylebone Road

This is being planned by the Women in Construction editorial group and will include contributions from the book to be launched on the same day. It will include speakers from the US, Denmark, Britain and the ILO, be interspersed with personal accounts and conclude with a discussion on why the industry and the trade unions have been closed to women and ways to bring more women into the industry.

Collaboration with: WAMT, GLA, Leicester and Hackney (Jacky) DLOs, WIC editorial, Lambeth Women's Workshop.

19 March 2004, 11 a.m., London:
CLR Annual General Meeting
at University of Westminster
35 Marylebone Road

for accommodation contact
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2 April 2004, Dortmund/FRG:
Inaugural meeting for the CLR-Dortmund Office

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20 April 2004, Copenhagen/DK:
**Inaugural Conference for the CLR-Denmark Office on
Migration of Workers in Construction**

for details contact
Sten Bonke
Technical University of Denmark
DK – 2800 Lyngby
Email: sb@byg.dtu
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Programme:

9.00 – 9.30 registration and welcome
9.30 – 10.15 Challenges in relation to the EU enlargement and
mobility of the construction workers. **Arne Johansen**, TIB,
Denmark. EFBWW, Bruxelles.

10.15 – 11.00 The south European perspective on the migrant construction workers after 1986. **Justin Byrne**, Fundación Juan, Madrid, Spain.
11.00 – 11.30 coffee
11.30 – 12.15 The German experiences with migration after the reunion in 1999. **Gerhard Bosch**. Institute of Work and Technology, Gelsenkirchen, Germany.
12.15 – 13.15 lunch
13.15 – 14.00 The challenges of migration after 2004? **Jan Cremers**, CLR Europe. Bruxcelles, Belgium.
14.00 – 14.45 The challenges for the Danish model. **Nikolaj Lubanski**, CLRdenmark, Denmark
14.45 – 15.15 coffee
15.15 – 16.30 Panel discussion
16.30 – 17.00 closing

May 27th 2004, London:
Historical Change and the Future of Construction Trade Unions
University of Westminster and CLR
35 Marylebone Road

This seminar will be concerned with understanding significant changes in the nature of labour in the industry through looking at trade union activity, roles and structuring, in order to help us understand the future of the construction trade unions. The seminar will include a British and an international contribution, and an assessment by a leading trade unionist. It will conclude with a discussion on policy today.

Collaboration with: LRD, Mary Davis, Nina Fishman, Labour History Museum.

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