



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

REPORT ON THE SEMINAR
"THE RECRUITMENT AND ORGANISATION
OF WORKERS IN TRADE UNIONS"
WARSAW, 1 & 2 DECEMBER 2006

At the Prague Congress, the ETUC's member organisations expressed their desire to take action in connection with "Strengthening the ETUC and European Trade Union Identity". This commitment was renewed at the two ETUC summer schools and the Executive Committee meeting of March 2006.

The issues associated with recruitment and the unionisation of new members have become complex and represent a challenge for the European labour movement. Since 1980, union density has been falling in many countries and the proportion of unionised affiliates has never been as low as it is now.

Clearly it is not the role of the ETUC to run recruitment in companies or be in regular contact with workers. Instead, its task is to coordinate activities and policies as well as exchanges of ideas between its member organisations.

Given this context, the ETUC decided to launch a first project, supported by the European Commission, and entitled "Workers' role and reinforcement of their ability to act in the framework of European construction". This project is being based around two seminars and aims to structure the discussion on the unionisation and organisation of workers.

The first seminar was held in Warsaw on 1 and 2 December 2006.

The second, based on the same model, was scheduled to take place in Italy in February 2007.

This report runs through the work done at the first seminar.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

ETUC Confederal Secretary **Jozef Niemiec** opened the seminar by welcoming all the participants. He reminded them of the political will of the ETUC and its General Secretary, John Monks, to rise to the real challenge of unionisation for the European labour movement as a whole. He said it was time for the trade unions to put answers on the table and act.

Juliane Bir, the project coordinator, then took the floor, reminding the participants of the backdrop to this activity.

Why take up the issue? How urgent was it? And not just because the ETUC's member organisations had committed themselves to it, but rather because trade union organisations really had no choice. Despite the differences between the situations in different countries and their systems of workforce

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representation, the general European trend in terms of membership numbers was towards decline, or at best - in some countries - stagnation. Some estimates suggested that union membership in the EU-25 fell from 32.6% in 1995 to 26.4% in 2001. This decrease had been particularly marked in the new Member States, where membership fell from a level of 42.7% to 20.4% between 1995 and 2001, whilst in the EU-15 it slipped from 31.0% to 27.3% over the same period (EC 2004). The proportion of unionised affiliates had never been as low as it was now.

The aim of the seminar was also to show the complexity of this issue.

Clear, interdependent trends had also been seen in the profile of unionised workers.

The main trends were towards:

- increased concentration of affiliates working in the public sector;
- more women among unionised personnel;
- a growing proportion of retired workers and unemployed people among affiliates;
- in most countries, too few young workers and workers with a foreign background appeared to be joining, which limited the renewal of the respective trade union organisation;
- the proportion of affiliates in managerial, executive and associate executive posts was on the increase.

This situation clearly had financial, material and HR consequences for the labour movement.

There were a number of factors, and the unions could influence limited control over some of these:

- a rise in unemployment;
- development of the labour market (the shift of jobs from the industrial sector to the private sector, i.e. services, where the unions were not well represented);
- employers' attitude;
- the attitude, image and structure of the trade unions: not sufficiently proactive, and not modern enough.

Faced with this situation, what needed to be done?

As mentioned in the introduction, it was not the job of the ETUC to run recruitment in companies or be in regular contact with workers. Instead, its task was to coordinate activities, meetings and exchanges of ideas involving its member organisations.

Accordingly, the following objectives could be pinpointed:

- to support recruitment strategies;
- to identify and collect good practices (within the national confederations and European federations);
- to allow the recruitment experts in our organisations to meet and exchange ideas;
- to convey the unions' image in a positive way;
- to develop a European recruitment network.

Specifically, this meant a fully-fledged ETUC strategy based on the following actions:

1. conducting a study with the assistance of experts featuring a stock-taking exercise and an analysis of the challenges to be faced;
2. organising seminars where good practices could be exchanged;
3. developing a communication campaign (toolkit and audio commercial);
4. the aim of setting itself a quantitative target (a higher number of members) and also a qualitative objective (via National Action Plans).

STOCK-TAKING EXERCISE: ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION AND MAJOR CHALLENGES

After these introductory comments and the presentation of the ETUC's strategy, two experts gave their perspective on the position of the trade unions in Europe.

The two paragraphs below take up only those topics discussed by the experts.

Their full presentations are annexed to this report.

1 Stock-taking exercise

Pere Beneyto, from the University of Valencia, began by giving an overview of the situation.

He took membership as an indicator, mentioning recent developments in this respect, its distribution and changes in its internal composition.

Then he made a comparative analysis, explaining the qualitative and quantitative differences between the various countries.

He also talked about the explanatory factors. These were either exogenous (structures, institutions and culture) or endogenous (organisation and intervention models) to this situation.

Lastly, he enlarged upon the different recruitment strategies put in place by the trade unions.

2 Presentation of a study

This initial general survey was rounded off by a presentation by **Jeremy Waddington** from the University of Manchester of the study he had carried out.

In addition to the specific results of this study, which are annexed to this report, Jeremy had some strong messages for the seminar's participants.

He said there was an urgent need to respond to the crisis in the labour movement.

At 25%, union membership in Europe had suffered a real decline.

To respond to this, he said, everyone had to set themselves priorities and targets and think strategically.

Jeremy stressed the importance of the crucial role played by workforce representatives in companies, since they were the people to whom workers turned. Thus it was essential to develop a better understanding of the reasons that motivated employees to become unionised, and ensure that those receiving their applications worked efficiently and were properly trained.

Lastly, he said that the unions' recruitment campaigns needed to be systematic, be clearly targeted and include the development of the necessary skills.

3 Participants' reactions

Following these two presentations, the participants discussed the following topics (the following list is not exhaustive):

- the importance of trade union marketing;
- the need for teaching about our actions;
- the need to think about the factors that explained such a situation;
- the challenge facing the unions here entailed some serious self-reflection;
- the question arising for the individual trade unions was this: were we an organisation providing a service or a solidarity-based organisation?
- the importance of discussing social topics such as sustainable development and new forms of cooperation;
- clarification of the link between bargaining and organisation.

REFLECTION ON TOPICS

The presentations for which documentation was handed out were not included in this report, but would be annexed to the minutes.

Topic 1: The sectoral dimension and the challenge facing the tertiary sector (services)

Introduction

ETUC Confederal Secretary **Jozef Niemec** introduced and chaired this session.

He started off by reminding the participants that the trade unions had only a marginal presence in some sectors and that we were in a position to do something positive in this regard.

He also emphasised the role and support that the ETUC could enjoy.

The key thing, he said, was of course to act in unison.

He also put forward some questions for discussion:

- In which sectors were we weakest (at the national and European levels)?
- Which specific elements could be pinpointed?
- Which companies and sectors could be targeted?
- Which results could we evaluate?

Finally, he stressed the importance of mapping out all the given members of a sector or company to ensure that any action taken proved effective.

Good practice

UNI General Secretary **Bernadette Ségol** took the floor, presenting the situation on the ground in her sector. She explained that for UNI, as a European industry federation, the issue addressed by the seminar was both fundamental and complex.

There were, she said, some good examples being set in northern Europe, Belgium and Spain, where numbers of members were increasing. But for the countries and sectors where unionisation was facing a challenge, she asked, what could be done?

Bernadette indicated a number of possible strategies:

- the re-establishment of the crucial idea that trade unions are an asset;
- the promotion of a vision of unionisation;
- the reconciliation of several different approaches and methods;
- the reconciliation of the representation of individual interests with the common good;
- being specialised and effective in the service rendered.

This aspect of recruitment was already, and would remain, on UNI-Europa's agenda.

The second example of good practice was that of Solidarnosc (see the presentation in annex) given by **Krzysztof Zgoda**.

Conclusion

Jozef closed this session with four observations:

1. the examples given show that there were some embryonic solutions;
2. as the title of the Seville Congress indicated, it was absolutely essential to be "on the offensive";
3. priority for action had to be given to the services sector;
4. the unions had to determine points on which their structures (including the ETUC) needed to concentrate;

5. to this end, we needed to take the situation on the ground and a stock-taking exercise as our basis.

Topic 2: Organising workers' representatives and investing in EWCs

Introduction

ETUC Confederal Secretary **Catelene Passchier** introduced and chaired this session.

Catelene began by explaining the importance of workforce representation and worker participation.

Then she attempted to identify and investigate the problem. In so doing, she emphasised two points:

- The potential clash between the trade union representative and the works council representative. In this context, it was important, she said, to identify problems and opportunities.
- This tension was exacerbated in a pluralist model.

She then returned to the role of EWCs before inviting the two speakers and the participants to discuss both the problems and recommendations.

Good practice

Yucel Top, from Turkey's National Integration Commission, spoke first, talking about the situation in his country.

His presentation focused on two key points:

1. information about the projects in progress;
2. the limits of the Turkish legislation.

With regard to the second point, he explained how the steps towards unionisation were being constrained by very stringent legal provisions.

Indeed, the organisation of workers had to take place in secret.

He also talked about the difficulty of integrating women into the labour movement, the importance of training and the necessity of a link with the respective European federations (cf. the textile sector for example) and European Works Councils.

Nelke Temme, from FNV, then reminded the participants of the need for trade union renewal and of the urgency of taking practical decisions about finance, training and strategic alliances.

For her, people's mindsets had to be changed.

She explained that employers' attitude in the Netherlands had changed. Works councils were weakening the unions' position, and the links between the unions and the works councils where the trade unions were represented were highly complex.

For her, it was essential to ensure that the trade unions were more visible and that the leaders invested in training. The loss of members boiled down to a loss of power, and works councils were not helping in this process.

REFLECTION ON SPECIFIC GROUPS

The discussions on the second day of the seminar focused on unionisation strategies with respect to particular groups.

The presentations for which documentation was handed out were not included in this report, but would be annexed to the minutes.

The position of women

Following a general introduction, **Danuta Wojdat**, from the Women's Committee, explained why trade unions were not attractive to women. She noted a lack of programmes for women, the difficulty in gaining access to professional development, the difficulty of reconciling work with family life and the virtual impossibility of influencing decision-making.

So what did she feel needed to be done?

For her, it was crucial:

- to be able to challenge some practices that were not adapted to women;
- to coordinate financial resources and the work of experts (data gathered and distributed);
- to implement the Framework of Actions negotiated in this regard at national level by the European social partners;
- to reflect on an ETUC structure that would act as a tool of persuasion to implement the Framework of Actions.

Ada Jacobs from the FGTB/ABVV then presented the example of good practice provided by her union organisation. See the presentation in annex.

The unionisation of managerial staff

The general introduction was given by EUROCADRES President **Carlo Parietti**, and the good practice presentation was given by **Jana Fromm** from Sweden's TCO. See the presentations in annex.

The unionisation of workers with a high level of job insecurity

Catelene Passchier then presented the issue of unionisation of these workers.

She explained that the fundamental problem was knowing how to give them a voice within the labour movement.

She said we lived in an age in which the number of forms of contracts was dramatically increasing and where, in the name of flexibility, the necessary security, negotiation and agreements that provided a framework for them were all too often ignored.

She reminded the participants that not only was a change in the law required, but the unions had to fight against job insecurity, adopting a proactive approach by unionising workers in highly insecure jobs.

Sebastian Reyna then spoke, presenting the measures that UPTA in Spain had taken to organise self-employed workers.

For this 'type' of worker, the question that had arisen was whether they needed their own union, set up especially for them, or whether they would be best off joining a federation. UPTA had opted for the latter.

UPTA was now the main organisation representing self-employed workers (16,000 individuals).

This sector was experiencing very rapid growth and was mostly made up of women and young people.

These people were placing their trust in UPTA for the following reasons:

- UPTA had a proven track record in using recruitment techniques adapted to these new situations;
- UPTA was genuinely able to defend these workers' rights;
- the workers in question had access to professional training as well as healthcare.

The status of these workers was currently being discussed by the Spanish parliament.

Sebastian Reyna said the Spanish experience demonstrated that it was possible to unionise these workers.

(+ presentation in annex)

The unionisation of young people

Youth Committee Coordinator **Juliane Bir** then spoke about the unionisation of young people.

She began by noting the absence and lack of involvement of young people in 'traditional'

organisations (political parties and trade unions).

She said that there were a number of reasons for this:

- a lack of information about the unions;
- a difficult employment situation (unemployment and precarious work);
- the concentration of young people in the services sector, where the unions only constituted a very marginal presence;
- the unions' image (as bureaucratic, ageing, always being against everything, and so on);
- the unsuitable language used by the unions.

Lastly, she reported on the strategies devised, which involving setting up youth departments at confederation level.

The main efforts being made were geared towards unionising young people (campaigns, target sectors, summer school, websites, and so on) and organising this group (special newspapers, training sessions, and so on).

She concluded by referring to the campaign run by the ETUC Youth Committee.

CFDT's **Olivier Guivarch** then presented an example of good practice (presentation in annex).

The unionisation of migrants

Catelene Passchier began by saying that migration was a complex issue of vast scope.

She explained that even defining the term 'migrant' was no easy task. For example, migrants often had the nationality of the country where they were living.

Many of them constituted what could be described as a 'new proletariat'.

Some were highly qualified and made a very valuable contribution to society, but unfortunately they rarely received credit for this.

The situation on the ground now was that the trade unions were not good at integrating these people, regardless of whether or not they were recent immigrants to a region.

All too often, the unions ignored immigration and asylum issues.

According to her, the main challenges faced by the labour movement today were these:

- How should young immigrants be integrated into society and their trade union?
- What action needed to be taken?
- What policies had to be developed for immigrants without papers?

Catelene then reported on the work in progress at the ETUC, mentioning the conference that would take place in the spring, the ETUC 2003 action plan that was under review and the unfortunate fact that the Commission had rejected funding the ETUC's mobility project.

The first example of good practice was presented by the TUC's **Paul Nowak** (see presentation in annex).

Ewa Blasik, from CISL, then presented the situation in Italy. This had been marked by a large number of waves of immigration. There were now 3 million immigrants in total in Italy, coming from about 190 countries.

The Italian trade unions regarded migration as a crucial issue. Even though the country had a shorter history of immigration than France and the UK, they viewed it as the key challenge of our age.

CISL has 213,000 active migrant members.

This success was the result of cooperation agreements with other countries and - above all - the establishment of an association called 'ANOLF'.

This nationwide association (with 121 territorial sections) had the legal status of an NGO and boasted the advantage of being organised by migrants themselves.

Moreover, this organisation had forced the unions to ask themselves some genuine questions and thus to move forward.

CONCLUSION

After all these informative presentations, **Patricia Grillo**, the ETUC's Head of Press and Communications, explained the different elements of the ETUC's campaign on the subject.

She began by highlighting a paradox: while the unions had a negative image, often conveyed in the media, employees tended to give an affirmative answer when asked which organisation was best placed to defend their interests.

In her opinion, this was where we had room to manoeuvre and had to be able to change the way we worked.

Image, she said, was very important in a unionisation context.

This was why the ETUC was working on a campaign comprising:

- the production of a newsletter with a feature on the subject in each issue;
- the production of a video for the Congress;
- the development of a campaign kit.

A campaign targeted at young people had already been run on the subject and the ETUC wanted to build on this momentum.

She concluded by reiterating the key messages of the conference:

- the need to establish a presence;
- the need to systematise the unionisation issue;
- the need for communication about the unions' usefulness.

Juliane Bir then concluded the proceedings by making some remarks.

She reiterated the main elements of the seminar, reiterating the different areas where work needed to be done.

The study conducted by the two experts had shown the difficult position facing European trade unions in terms of their membership and highlighted the required response.

The unions had to be proactive and base their efforts on the reasons that motivated people to become unionised.

The good practices presented regarding specific topics or groups had all constituted messages of encouragement on which the trade unions were urged to follow up.

The methods proposed by the experts and participants also indicated some future areas of work.

In addition to the study, seminars on good practice, training and the campaign, the unionisation issue would also be a focal point at the Seville Congress.