

# ***Conference on the role of trade unions in the coming decade***

***maastricht, november 20-22, 1985***

*Provisional call for papers  
first announcement*

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



***European centre for work and  
society***





# ***The problem***

- The current crisis is not apparent only in terms of low employment perspectives: it is also a social and political crisis. A redistribution of power and a redefinition of roles is taking place among existing and new groups which constitute our social structure. Trade unions are in the centre of this change.

One of the aims of trade union action is to encourage a "desired" social and economic organisation around work. However, a continuous change is occurring in this field. The quantity and quality of work are expected to change, new relationships exist at the workplace and the dividing line between formal and informal activities is shifting. The current crisis may be for trade unions an opportunity to redefine their role, adapt to the new requirements and consequently shape relevant strategies for action. But if some consider an organised labourforce as a factor promoting balanced growth and social cohesion, others look at it as an obstacle to change.

Employers often see the current crisis mainly as the result of labour rigidities and excessive demands put forward by organised labour. Conversely, for a certain number of trade unions, economic crisis is seen as the weapon of the owners of the means of production in order to regain their lost power. Has the crisis sharpened the conflict of opposing interest groups? Does current social and economic organisation constitute an obstacle in the search for a consensus? Were past strategies and goals pursued by trade unions and employers compatible in a growth context but inadequate to solve long-term problems? Is there a necessity to review past agreements in order to achieve a higher flexibility of our social and economic structure? Or are abrupt changes necessary and only rendered possible in a crisis period? What do employers and trade unions propose in order to reestablish full employment (if it is a feasible goal) and how do they view their mutual role?

Conflicts arising in the workplace may be overshadowed by efforts to meet new demands. Trade union members as citizens participate in a political process for the allocation of legal power; as workers they claim their rights at the workplace and the fruits of their productive efforts; as taxpayers they ask for more equality and as consumers for better services. Conflicting claims at the grass-roots level may develop into a crisis of trade unionism and its place in the future.



The emergence of new demands and new industrial organisations determine the rise and decline of organised social groups. The future profile of trade unions may significantly change. Are they going to lose their power as our economies enter into a new wave of social and economic innovations? Critics will answer that this is a condition for change while supporters will point out the role trade unions play in the maintenance of social and economic justice. Advocates of a free market economy will argue that by their action trade unions reduce the efficiency of the system, while others will accept them as regulators in an economic transformation process which in their absence could lead to explosive and uncontrolled individual actions. These are some questions which need to be answered in order to understand the functioning of our societies and the role trade unions play in all aspects of our political, social and economic life. In this conference we will try to identify the reaction of trade unions to the current crisis and predict their future role. This will contribute to the development of relevant social and economic rules which may enhance the capacity of our societies to successfully tackle the problems they face.

## **Themes of the conference**

- The main topics will be discussed in parallel sessions during the second day of the conference. The themes which follow and the comments are indicative and not exhaustive. They simply aim to serve as an orientation for the authors.

### **1 Social power and class opposition.**

Each organised social group gains power around a role or a function. What is then the respective role of employers and trade unions? Roles are changing; how do the latter react to these changes? Is the concept of class opposition still relevant or is it overshadowed by new kinds of demands? Does an organised labourforce limit its action to the economic area or does the defense of its members require initiatives in the social and political fields? If the latter is true, how can economic opposition interfere with the democratic process for political power? Is there any discernible trend which permits us to predict the future structure of our societies and the distribution of power among its constituent groups?



## 2 *The emergence of new pressure (interest) groups.*

New cultural and social demands are growing. Demographic factors mean that the elderly are more numerous; women demand equal treatment; youth claim the right to work; citizens are increasingly interested in the quality of life; and consumers fight for their rights. Do trade unions adapt their strategy to meet these new demands or do they oppose them? Can trade unions survive in the future if they cluster their actions into the production area? Is the emergence of new groups around these demands ineluctable or does it result from trade union inertia?

## 3 *Individual versus collective labour relations.*

New relations are expected to be established in the workplace. New rules and new bargaining processes may follow. They question the desirability of intermediary groups. Moreover, how is the development of individual values going to influence employee/employer relations and trade union strategy? New technologies favour the emergence of new groups of workers such as the home workers. They also favour, in certain cases, the development of small enterprises where personal relations prevail. Do these new phenomena constitute a threat to trade unions? How is the shift of the dividing line between formal and informal activities going to influence labour relations?

## 4 *New technology and production systems.*

New technology systems are thought to change labour relations radically. They are expected to change the quantity and quality of work, introduce new relations into the workplace and redistribute power and control of the production process. They are also expected to strengthen the process of rise and decline of industries and skills. What does all this imply for trade unions? Some argue that new technologies permit the dispersion and relocalisation of many functions of a company giving a new profile to the firm of the future. Sub-contracting and hiring of services to specialised agencies by a company gives the impression that the company is "disintegrating". How is all this going to affect the nature and strategy of trade unions? What does the de-industrialisation process mean for the trade unions and what is their reaction?





## **5** *Trade unions and the internationalisation of economy.*

Free market economies become increasingly interdependent. Actions initiated at a national level may be frustrated if they do not take into account external constraints or if they are not coordinated at an international level. How do trade unions react to the internationalisation in trade unionism or do specific cultural and historical backgrounds deter such a movement? Is there any relationship between dominant economies and dominant trade unions? Do international comparisons help to understand and predict the role and nature of trade unions?

## **6** *Profiles of trade unions: management and leadership.*

In an economy characterised by rapid change, spontaneous reaction of informal groups in the workplace may conflict with trade union leadership. How are decisions taken and how are internal disputes solved? How do the rise and decline of industries affect the structure of membership and how does the redistribution of power in the production process affect the balance of power inside trade unions? These questions are critical in understanding how flexible a trade union is in the bargaining process and whether it looks for a global or specific goal. More important, trade unionism is not a homogeneous movement and recent developments may have changed the balance of power between the different federations of workers.

### ***Aim***

- It will be an open conference. Its aim is to promote the exchange of experiences and institute a dialogue between trade unions and all interested parties in the theme of the conference. It has to provide a European and an international forum for discussing current trends and future policies.

### ***Working methods***

- Authors wishing to present a paper at the conference are requested to take into account in their contributions the following elements:



- 1 to present practical experiments initiated by trade unions with emphasis on those which can be transferred to other countries and which may give indications of trade union and government policy;
  - 2 to present an analysis and evaluation of past and current trends which help us understand the functioning of our societies and the role trade unions play;
  - 3 to present prospects and draw scenarios in the future in relation to trade unions' nature and role. These scenarios may be sectoral (i.e. economic) or general (i.e. socio-political).
- In all cases it is desirable to present factors which are going to affect the role and nature of trade unions and the way current crisis is determining the future profile of trade unions. They should assess the present and indicate the way ahead.

## ***Call for papers and deadlines***

- Authors wishing to present a paper at the conference could address themselves to one of the six main topics. They are requested, when submitting their abstract, to indicate whether their paper analyses existing experiences or contains descriptions of future trends. A limited number of proposals will be selected. Final approval of the papers themselves will be given upon receipt of the manuscripts.

Plenary sessions of the conference will have English-French (possibly German) interpretation; most parallel session will be conducted in English, mainly without interpretation. Papers will be accepted in English, French or German, provided they include a summary in English (200-300 words).

Authors wishing to contribute to the conference within the above mentioned framework should send an abstract of their proposed contribution (maximum one typed page, double spaced A4) before March 15, 1985 to the secretariat of the conference.

The Scientific Committee will meet early April to select those proposals which could be presented in parallel sessions and included in the proceedings. Authors will be informed by May 1, 1985 whether their proposals have been selected. Manuscripts should be delivered by September 1, 1985 and final acceptance will be confirmed by September 15, 1985.

Deadlines for submission of abstracts and manuscripts should be strictly observed, i.e.:



Submission of abstracts: March 15, 1985  
Acceptance of papers: May 1, 1985  
Manuscripts delivered: September 1, 1985.

The organisers are in no way committed to the financial support of the authors of accepted contributions, neither for travel nor accommodation expenses. However, authors of accepted papers will receive a reduction in the conference fee.

Interested authors who would like to receive complementary information on the themes of the conference or other aspects of the content for the preparation of their paper, could address themselves, even before proposing an abstract, to the secretary of the Scientific Committee, Stephanos Grammenos.

## **Structure of the programme**

### ■ *first half day (plenary session)*

Presentation of the main issues. The ETUC could be asked to present the conclusions of its 1985 Conference dealing with connected topics;  
The economic, social and political framework.

### ■ *full second day (parallel sessions)*

Presentation of papers and discussion in groups established around particular themes based on a selection of papers. Number of parallel sessions will thus be determined at later dates.

#### *first half of the day*

Trade unions and the crisis.

#### *second half of the day*

Trade unions and the future.

### ■ *third, final half day (plenary session)*

Report of the working groups. General exchange of views: The changing union and its future profile.

## **Correspondence address**

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## **Dates and location**

- Maastricht, November **20-21-22**, 1985, the Netherlands.

## **Scientific advisory committee**

- As of November 1, 1984
  - Wil Albeda**, University of Limburg, Maastricht
  - Roger Blanpain**, University of Leuven
  - Hans Baumann**, Gewerkschafts Bau und Holz, Zürich
  - Merli Brandini**, CISL, Roma
  - Sergio Bruno**, Istituto di Economia, Università di Roma
  - Hubert Carniaux**, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels
  - P. Cohendet**, University of Strassbourg
  - Gabriel Fragnière**, European Centre for Work and Society
  - Mathias Hinterscheid**, European Trade Union Confederation, Brussels
  - Otto Kuby**, Social and Economic Committee, EEC, Brussels
  - Hans Pornschlegel**, Sozialakademie, Dortmund
  - Denis Segrestin**, Conservatoire National des Arts & Métiers
  - George Spyropoulos**, International Labour Office, Geneva
  - Willem van Yvoorden**, Erasmus University Rotterdam
  - Gaetano Zingone**, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels

Secretary of the Committee:

**Stephanos Grammenos**, European Centre for Work and Society



KLM Royal Dutch Airlines  
Official Carrier