

The Case for Social Democracy as the Trade Union Perspective in Europe

by Otto Jacobi

- The trade unions are lacking a modernization programme for Europe. In terms of ideas and organization they are lagging behind to a significant degree.
- Social democracy is the trade unions' guiding line for establishing a policy on Europe.
- The trade unions are indispensable as a force for social protection.
- The shaping of the European Social Union requires better use of existing opportunities on the part of the trade unions.
- The trade unions can make use of their diversity as a source of energy for cross-border cooperation and cooperative pluralism.
- The European Trade Union Confederation: A solid pillar of support for comprehensive trade union activity in Europe.
- The internationalization of trade union operational structures is long overdue.

Abstract

1. In view of the rapidly progressing integration of the world economy, continuously growing political cooperation between nations and the convergence of Western European societies, the need to overcome trade union lagging behind in matters of policy and organization has become an obvious and crucial task.

Until now the trade unions have lacked a "self-prescribed modernization programme" cast in the same ambitious mold as the one established by the West European countries to carry out the task of creating the European Union.

Could modernizing the welfare state in the West and establishing it in the eastern part of the continent eliminate this lagging behind and also lead to the training of a Euro-trade unionist?

2. Western Europe has assured itself "prosperity and peace through an irreversible process of integration" (Engholm), The European Community is more than the cheap slogan "Europe of capital" bandied about by certain trade union groups stuck in left-conservative, anti-European nationalism.

The political culture_ of Western Europe, its peoples and its welfare-state character continue to be the foundation stones of a pan-European perspective and require that the trade unions overcome the fearfulness for which they themselves are responsible. The continuation into the 21st century of democracy characterized by a welfare-state under the rule of law is the trade union contribution to the Europe of the modern age.

3. The demise of the communist regime has irrevocably changed the conditions of the European integration process. The necessity for action has risen dramatically, but it offers a tremendous opportunity for the trade unions to renew themselves, particularly if they succeed in meshing together the pre-democratic and pre-modern stage of development in the East with the social and economic structures of the West which have reached well into the post-industrial age. The trade unions have an indispensable role to play as a force for social protection.

4. Despite the extremely difficult political and economic situation which marks Europe at this time (as a result of the once paramount goal of economic union), a courageous and purposeful trade unionist capable of acting across the entire European stage will find open gateways to a European Social Union. EC-Europe is in a stage of on-going experimentation and has already created many valuable prerequisites for the shaping of the social dimension.

5. The splintering of the trade unions and the patchwork of nation-specific working conditions (often serving the trade unions as an excuse for delaying their full appearance on the European stage) can be turned to advantage when the unions learn to practice a cooperative pluralism in the course of their work. A Euro-trade unionist will find that a form of organization directed to the resolution of existing problems can arise out of this diversity, but not if it is based on a policy of establishing uniformity.

6. Within the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the conditions are taking shape for it to become the central political force in supranational trade union activities. The ETUC is already today a privileged participant in the political discussion taking place in Europe; internally as a mediator in inter-union conflicts and externally as a representative of the trade unions' Euro-policy.

Z The national trade unions (like transnational corporations) must internationalize their organizational forms. It is only through Europeanization that the unions can escape the trap of continuing to orientate their organizations and staff to the merely national level.

8. The fears of workers in the more prosperous EC countries and those with developed forms of co-determination should be taken seriously. These fears stem from the underbidding effects of low-wage workers and the deregulation programmes of neo-liberal politicians. Clearly, there will only be protection against a shift to the right by a worried work force if the trade unions take up the task of shaping the social dimension in Europe. What the national unions have managed to do in their own countries they must now repeat on a European-wide basis: welfare-state democracy is not the task of EC officials, but rather that of workers' organizations.

In contrast to the frequently heard thesis (especially in Germany) that a strong national anchor is the best means to prevent anti-trade union developments in Europe, the opinion expressed in this paper is that the Europeanization of trade union activity is the best protection for the native workforce.

The European Welfare-State Perspective

The European Union is an ambitious modernization programme which the Western European countries prescribed for themselves once they understood that only cooperation could unleash the synergistic energies needed to meet today's diverse challenges. The goal is to assure a place for Europe - politically, economically and technologically - in a complex world which is dependent on global cooperation, yet torn by sharp contradictions. The means to accomplish this are to be found in the most intelligent possible combination of elements drawn from the European capacity to make cultural diversity work to the advantage of all. Western Europe has become a successful laboratory for the development of interdependencies. On a voluntary basis and through democratic pluralism it has evolved into a field of force for supranational cooperation. But certain wide-spread moods and attitudes clearly show how hard it is to mentally abandon a national framework which no longer has a place in current political, economic and scientific realities.

It is obvious that this self-prescribed modernization programme has no trade union counterpart. A trade union policy vis-a-vis Europe is still in embryonic form. There is significant lagging behind in the understanding and consciousness among union members and the trade union apparatuses are dragging their feet with respect to ideas and organization within the union apparatus.

Is it still possible to eliminate the deficiencies of the trade unions' policy on Europe, deficiencies which can be traced to a tardy and merely reactive adjustment, ie., to a lack of flexibility with regard to substance and organization?

In their efforts to eliminate this lag, the trade unions can find assistance in their great European traditions. The trade union workers movement saw in a united Europe - that is to say, in opposition to a Europe marked by the warring rivalries of authoritarian nation states and their colonial-fascistic outgrowths - a socio-political model which corresponded to

the goals of democracy, peace and solidarity championed by trade union internationalism. The events of the twentieth century show how much history has judged the unions to be right. Readopting the earlier democratic, European tradition could help the trade unions overcome the anti-European attitudes currently fashionable in their ranks.

Social democracy is the historical inheritance which the unions have bequeathed contemporary Europe. Civil rights and co-determination rights for the workforce, freely negotiated labour contracts and social protection in case of unemployment, illness and old age constitute the image of modern Europe; an image which is unmatched elsewhere in the world. Building on this success, specifically by pushing forward the modernization of the welfare state structures in Western Europe and by struggling for the establishment of social democracy in the Eastern part of the continent could be seized as the political perspective for European integration which sets the unions on the offensive and allows them to become the social architects of Europe. Clearly, the concept of Europe as a sphere of social democracy presupposes the creation of trade union Euro-forces.

The Continuation of the European Project of the Modern Age

Western European integration, which has had its center of gravity in the Europe of the EC, is the most important (perhaps the only important) policy innovation of the postwar era.

The idea of confronting nationalist tendencies with cross border integration has made partners out of what were once enemy countries. The pluralistic democracy of Western Europe has created an "unparalleled sphere of prosperity" (Willy Brandt). Compared with other areas of the world, (Western) Europe is also a sphere of unparalleled stability with regard to politics, economics and social issues: "Prosperity and peace through an irreversible process of integration" (Engholm) are the results of the European conception of success.

Europe is quite obviously more than the cheap slogan "Europe of capital" with which it is suggested that the "dog-eat-dog laws of capital" reign uncontrolled and have a deregulating effect. Many traditional, socialist-oriented trade unionists use this caricature in order to preserve their comfortable position in a kind of "left-wing nationalism".

Peculiar anti-European alliances of right-wing conservative parties and the left-conservative wings of certain parties and trade unions have arisen in a number of West European countries. The most prominent examples include: the Danish EC defence line consisting of the right-wing conservative Progressive Party and the traditional, socialist People's Party; the well-known rejection coalition in the EC Parliament consisting of British Conservatives and French Communists; and most recently the distinctive mixture of French rightists, Communists and the self-proclaimed left-wing of the Socialist Party. One could draw up a long list of similar anti-modern, anti-European constellations of traditional rightists and leftists.

One point of special interest is to better understand the new fearfulness among many trade unions and trade unionists, particularly in the more prosperous West European countries. The fears that many trade union members have about losing the standard of living achieved in the postwar era is combined with fears of foreigners and a fear of the future. This new fearfulness is wide-spread within the traditional workforce; apparently the thrust of modernization and internationalization in the 1980s has given rise to massive uncertainty. There is an existing tendency to cling tenaciously to the trusted national context. Although all empirical data contradicts this "skepticism based on ignorance" and shows that the prosperity in West European countries is due to the successful concept of European cooperation, the anti-European mood in many unions is being nourished and strengthened by traditional leftists with their slogans about the "Europe of capital", the "Europe of the big corporations", and the "Europe of the bureaucrats". The ghetto of

conservatism stamped in a traditional left wing mold offers scarcely more than a backward-looking orientation. It has no future, unless perhaps the one it shares with nationalist, right-wing conservatism in Europe: "Lack of direction transforms itself all too easily into fundamentalism", Social-Democratic theoretician Peter Glotz wrote recently.

The alternative to such a slide into the past consists in the continuation of the European modern age to which the trade union movement has made the decisive contribution; specifically, the civilizing of capitalism through welfare-state democracy under the rule of law. Only in Western Europe (and not everywhere here to the same degree) have the successes of the political and trade union workers movement led to the consolidation of the rule of law and the welfare state and their anchoring in trade union and political structures.

In order to further guarantee that this political culture of Western Europe, its society and welfare-state character acts as a foundation for a pan-European perspective, the trade unions must overcome the fears of their own making. But this will only happen if the unions remain conscious of the fact that the European workers movement has definitively influenced Western political culture during the last hundred years, even during many setbacks. "Tamed capitalism" is a result of the workers movement; it is the historic compromise between capital and labour. The "softer" features of West European capitalism, its political civilizing through the establishment of civil rights for all and its economic civilizing through welfare-state intervention in the market - all these developments should have taught the trade unions two things:

First of all, that capitalism is capable of showing a high degree of political flexibility and social elasticity which can benefit the underprivileged classes.

Secondly, that the trade unions have repeatedly proved their innovativeness by adjusting their basic programme and their instruments for advancing their wages and working conditions to meet the demands of new circumstances.

Society's capacity to learn (when forced) in matters of social democracy was the historic success of the trade unions and is their contribution to modern Europe. Accepting the challenge of further integrating (Western) Europe and guarding against neo-liberal relapses means continuing the European project of the modern age into the 21st century.

The Implosion of a Regime Incapable of Reform and its Repercussions in Europe

In sharp contrast to the West European dynamic, one finds the ossification and collapse of the communist regime. This large empire was caught in pre-modern and pre-democratic structures. Not least due to the suppression of political and social opposition movements, it was only able to attain the status of "a Mali with atomic bombs", as former chancellor Helmut Schmidt once expressed it.

The demise of the communist regime has indelibly changed the conditions of European integration. Assistance for the development of democratic structures and a more or less functioning economy, and the political integration of Eastern Europe are exclusively the tasks of Western Europe. In contrast to the EC, the other two poles of the world economic triad - Japan and the US - will merely be able to offer modest aid. But, as always with challenges, future benefits are intimately bound up with current burdens. Thus, it is not surprising that the well-known American economist Lester Thurow (who has also made a name for himself as an adviser to the Democratic Party) believes the 21st century will belong to Europe if the Western half of the continent can extend eastward its till now successfully activated capacity for integration.

Many conservatives are pushing for the speediest accession of as many East European states as possible into the EC. At the same time, they consider a European Political Union,

such as the United States of Europe (an old goal of the workers movement), to be of the devil's making. Clearly, they see in the largest possible number of EC members a guarantee of Europe becoming at best a large economic sphere, but not a political and social union. In other words, the old game of the European nation states will be allowed to continue in splendid fashion; specifically, the continued practice of going it alone politics within a framework of changing coalitions and alliances.

In opposition to this stands the legacy of Willy Brandt: "I see a Europe of uneven densities: Around the nucleus of our community, a ring of associated states and a further circle of states with whom a relationship of a qualified, ever closer cooperation develops."

EC Europe enriched by the EFTA states will have to develop the strength for comprehensive aid to our neighbours. In view of the fact that European security risks have shifted from the military to the economic and social level following the implosion of the unreformable communist empire, this neighbourly assistance is first of all in the West's own interests. Secondly, it opens up for the trade unions an unbelievable opportunity for renewal. It is true that the risks and opportunities involved in creating European-wide trade unions are great. That is to say, unions which can succeed in integrating the pre-democratic and pre-modern stage of development of the East into the social and economic structures of the post-industrial West.

In their role as a force for social protection the trade unions are indispensable for Europe. To reproduce in the East what has already been successfully achieved in the West - the welfare state under a rule of law - is the historic opportunity confronting the trade unions. If European integration does not have an accompanying social dimension, then Europe will have no democratic future. The trade unions could become essential participants if they are able to condense their two-fold task into a purposeful, forward-looking policy.

The Offer to Shape the European Social Union

Until now one could not help but notice that economic cooperation has always been in the foreground of relations among EC countries. Not least of all this has been due to politically motivated attempts to control German economic power through supranational integration. The renewal of the EC, which began in the mid-eighties and reached an important stage of development with the Single Market, confirms the fact that economic interests have priority. The EC has become an instrument of European capital which needs a united economic power to meet the global competitive pressures posed by the Japanese and American poles. The EC has long since passed beyond its status as an entity dominated and nearly ruined by protectionist agrarian interests to an economic and technological community with worldwide claims. A consistent continuation of this policy is to be found in the Maastricht Treaty on the "European Union". It is not a coincidence that the agreements on the European Currency Union have been negotiated to the smallest detail, while political and social union have only been given vague expression.

Thus far the economic dynamic in Western Europe and the productiveness of its workforce have guaranteed social prosperity and simultaneously provided greater than average advantages to the lesser developed countries so that they have been able to make up ground and reduce the differences in developmental level. Without doubt the EC has been an overall plus for all concerned.

The tilt toward economic union is clearly no occasion to speak tearfully of a "Europe of the big corporations" or to voluntarily fall into left-wing abstentionism. That the advanced state of economic and currency union is not matched by similar progress in the area of social issues is less due to the dictates of capital than trade union disinterest. Until recently they had ignored the economic dynamic and neglected the task of shaping the social

dimension in Europe. Who is responsible for the European Social Union if not the trade unions? Only slowly has their attitude given way from demanding that the EC guarantee welfare-statism throughout the community to recognizing that they themselves have some homework to do.

Despite the impression created by the game of blaming EC bodies (which is so popular in many quarters), there are already today good conditions for shaping the social dimension in EC-Europe. Some assume that social deregulation will be carried out across the entire community by the EC. But an examination of the situation reveals this to be based more on speculation than empirical evidence. In fact, the thesis can be proved that if the social dimension remains underdeveloped, it is due more to the deficient management of opportunities on the part of the trade unions. This can be illustrated with five examples:

1. It cannot be denied that within certain EC bodies there are in fact representatives of certain political forces who look on the idea of a European social union with indifference or disapproval. The other side of the coin is obviously the fact that the grand coalition of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats ruling the EC Parliament has long been the fore-runner of a European Political Union. Key features of the coalition are the welfare state, co-determination and collective bargaining autonomy.

This coalition finds itself once again in a weakened state on the European Council. The EC Commission, on the other hand, is led by a socialist who comes from the French trade union movement. To the disappointment of the employers, the Directorate General V of the Commission (which is responsible for labour relations) and the Economics and Social Committee are both pro-union. Significant means are made available, directly and indirectly, for trade union activities. For example, the EC finances to a large degree the European Trade Union Institute and the European Trade Union Academy, in addition to many international

conferences for unions and works councils. (For works council meetings alone the EC has provided about 30 million Deutsche marks.) If one adds to this the EC's financial support for social science research, the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the "European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions" and the extensive social reporting within the framework of the "European Observatory of Industrial Relations", it is misleading possible to uphold the caricature of a "Europe of Capital".

2. This determination finds its confirmation in the policy pursued by the EC in matters of social protection and participation. One pillar of this policy is the "Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers: a celebratory declaration (in terms of its official status), a political declaration of intent with which the EC professes recognition of the European welfare-state. This European charter has provided the stimulus for many activities in the area of labour relations.

3. The EC's comprehensive minimum legislation in the spheres of labour and health protection is already a matter of tradition. On the occasion of the "European Year of Health and Safety at the Workplace", the German Trade Union Federation (GTUF; Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) recently declared that many improvements in Germany have been achieved via Europe: "EC law provides German workers with a higher level of protection in all essential points." This is an assessment which applies above all to the less developed EC countries. Here we find one of many examples which prove that an upward adjustment in social standards takes place, rather than the frequently predicted decline. The EC Commission is pointing in the same direction with its draft of a directive concerning the deployment of workers to foreign countries. According to this directive, when a firm in one EC country sends its employees to work at one of its facilities in another EC country for more than a certain specified period of time, it must provide them with wages, working

conditions and social benefits equal to those prevailing in the latter country.

4. With reference to information and participation rights in transnational companies, the EC Commission's draft law for the formation of European works councils is of particular interest. It represents a truly important step forward.

Although not yet adopted, this directive would provide for the election of European works councils in companies operating in at least two EC countries with a combined workforce of more than 1000 employees. They are to be equipped with information and consultation rights; not, however, with co-determination rights similar to those provided for in the German Works Constitution Act. These European works councils - which would not replace but supplement the national systems of worker representation - would be an institutional innovation of the first order. The intelligence and quality of this innovation consists in the fact that the minimal position required by the EC can be raised to a higher level of co-determination through freely negotiated agreements between the concerned social parties. With this solution three things can be achieved:

- Rather than bureaucratic, centrally set instructions, the principle of subsidiarity will be observed by striving for decentralized regulation.
- Variety, diversity and differentiation will take the place of a policy of harmonization through leveling.
- Rather than comprehensive regulation by means of EC legislation, the social parties will be given broad latitude for the free shaping of working conditions in transnational firms.

What the social parties actually make of this offer now lies with them. The trade unions seem to have recognised this opportunity. In any case, intensified (if still insufficient) efforts point toward the conclusion of agreements on European works councils.

The value of social dialogue as a further instrument for exercising influence on the shaping of the European social dimension has been enhanced by the Maastricht Treaty. Until now social dialogue in the form of tripartite discussions between the Commission, the employers and the trade unions had never passed beyond the stage of "joint declarations". In future, expanded information and participation rights will be granted the European collective bargaining parties; above all the new latitude and freedom with regard to determining and enforcing agreements will be observed. One piece of legislation intended by the EC in the area of working conditions and social policy is based on consultation with the bargaining parties. This obligation to consult with the relevant EC bodies is suspended if the bargaining parties declare that they are striving to reach a contract solution through bilateral negotiations. Free collective bargaining between the European parties will be given precedence over the legislative measures of the EC.

With this step the way is also opened up for the bargaining parties to act on the European level as representatives for their members - for the workers and for the employers. This new way of concluding contracts could possibly lay the basis for the self-regulation of European working conditions; ie, free of state intervention. Reservations have already been raised by constitutional lawyers who maintain that the autonomy enjoyed by the bargaining parties goes too far and restricts the rights of the EC Parliament. In doing so they have pointed out (perhaps unwittingly) the scope of the proposed guidelines.

It remains to be seen what use the trade unions will make of these offers. In fact, the EC and its often-maligned bureaucracy of 16,000 men and women (smaller than the administrative staff of a large German city and scarcely more than that of the GTUF) have created a number of intelligent conditions for the shaping of the European social union. Whoever perceives that Europe finds itself in a stage of on-going experimentation and that the European project is still unfinished is the

one who can grasp the opportunities which have been presented to a committed, active European Trade Unionist. Poor utilization of these opportunities will then be the fault of the trade unions.

European Trade Union Diversity and Social Culture

Much has already been written about the diversity of trade unions in terms of their structure and political orientation as well as the patchwork of wage systems and industrial relations. As a rule the opinion prevails that this variety will continue to grow and that it must be seen as the most important reason for the fact that the unions have arrived late on the European stage and are still acting in an inadequate manner.

A few striking examples can illustrate this diversity:

a) In contrast to the Central and North European countries with their unitary, non-partisan trade unions, there are the trade union systems of Belgium, France and the Mediterranean countries in which politically partisan unions compete against each other.

b) Sectoral trade unions are to be found in Germany, while craft and general unions exist elsewhere.

c) If the organizational strength of the unions is measured in terms of membership as a percentage of the entire workforce, the differences are extreme. The spectrum runs from under 10% (Spain and France), to a middle group (Germany, Italy and Great Britain) with 35-45% unionization, up to the frontrunners with more than 60% (Belgium, Austria and the Scandinavian countries). Measured in absolute numbers, the German Trade Union Federation (with 11,800,000 members in unified Germany at the end of 1991) outnumbers all other ETUC associations.

d) The differences in the level of political-administrative professionalism are also serious. Only in a few countries do we find trade unions with a consolidated and efficient working apparatus. Such unions are able to make and implement strategic decisions with the assistance of a qualified political and scientific staff. In Germany, for example, the unions have a professional group of full-time functionaries who increasingly serve their organizations like modern service enterprises.

e) Of paramount importance for trade union policy is representation at plant level. The extreme cases can best be compared with the shape of a triangle:

In Germany, the works council is an independent body enjoying many information and co-determination rights with which the trade unions carry out a unified programme of worker representation according to a specific division of labour; from the micro- to the meso- to the macro-economic levels.

In other countries, such as Great Britain and Italy, the representative organs at factory level are the basic units of the trade unions and they have negotiation and strike authority. These are not institutions whose existence is guaranteed by national law, nor do they have legally recognized co-determination rights; they rely exclusively on trade union resources. As a result their effectiveness is extremely dependent on the shifting power relations which change with the general political climate and overall economic situation.

In a third group of countries with mostly weak trade unions (France and Spain) one can find mixtures of relatively undeveloped forms of both the works council model and the delegate model.

f) In the area of collective bargaining the spectrum of agreements ranges from those which are overwhelmingly concluded at the company level (as in Great Britain), to the sectoral contracts signed with one or another employers' association representing the enterprises in a particular branch of industry (as in Germany), to the countries (such as Italy) in

which the main trade union organizations are dominant and the governments are heavily involved in the bargaining process.

g) That there is just as much variety in terms of the trade unions' right to strike and the employers' lock-out rights as there is with arbitration procedures need only be mentioned in passing.

To summarize this section, it can be seen that there is significant variation concerning the degree of institutionalization and legal rights as well as the degree of centralization, representation and professionalism. We find both protected and unprotected systems of representation, flexible and rigid rules and regulations, robust and temperamental structures, coordinated and fragmented representation, innovative and conservative trade unions.

These relationships make it clear that all efforts to harmonize the nationally distinctive trade union and social cultures with a leveling model of uniformity can only be counter-productive. The trade unions will have to learn how to forge an intelligent combination of features that can both compensate for weaknesses and exploit strengths. Such a process of reciprocal learning will be promoted by the fact that there is no national trade union and bargaining system which is superior to all others in all matters of importance. With respect to institutionally supported stability, there are indeed a number of structural advantages to be found in the West and North European model. On the other hand, features of equal value can be found in other countries when one focuses on political innovativeness and connections with the rank and file.

In establishing a capable policy suitable for all of Europe, the trade unions face essentially the same problems as all other participants: how to prevent the diversity of structures and interests from leading to chaotic and highly competitive fragmentation? And the reverse: how can diversity be transformed into cooperative gains which benefit all through the combination of complementary qualities?

Trade union interests vary from country to country and reflect the political and social cultures in which they originate. As a result the unions must succeed in imbedding these interests in a supranational strategy and programme of representation. The conception of Europe as a sphere of social democracy demands that the divergent trade union interests do not lead to a Balkanization of the European union landscape, but rather the emergence of Euro-trade unions which balance out common ideas and divergent interests as a sort of laboratory for interdependencies. There is no other way forward but the one marked by arduous efforts to manage trade union diversity. The art of conducting trade union policy with respect to Europe consists in meshing the various trade union cultures into a network of pluralistic interest representation.

A look at the non-European world might be helpful in this venture. What it reveals is that the European trade union scene is in no way made up of absolutely heterogeneous elements. Rather, there is a specific European identity to be found which makes possible a synthesis of diversity and unity. The features of an unmistakably European trade union culture are:

- recognition of the trade unions as the representative organs responsible for social issues.
 - a commitment to social democracy which finds support from the overwhelming majority of the population and the political centre comprised of Social Democrats, Greens and Christian Democrats.
- = the socio-political claim of the unions to shape the future of labour in the modern society.

These three reference points clearly distinguish the politically ambitious European trade union and welfare-state models from both the business unionism contained in the liberal social and labour model of the United States and the paternalistic factory system of Japan.

The ETUC as a Pioneer in the Development of Trade Union Policy on Europe

The traditional values of solidarity, social justice and the right to play a role in the shaping of society constitute the rudiments of a social culture common to the majority (if not all) of the West European trade unions. They are the connecting threads which will allow the creation of a trade unionist Euro-activity in the context of an increasingly interdependent Europe.

European integration is leading to an ever greater convergence of common, community-wide problems to which the trade unions must react with a new combination of centralized coordination and decentralized execution.

Much speaks for the fact that the European Trade Union Confederation has made itself the center of supranational trade union politics as a consequence of developments in the EC. There can be no doubt that the ETUC is currently the only recognized representative of European trade unions and that it has risen to the level of a privileged interlocutor of such EC bodies as the Commission and the European Parliament. According to a joint research group from the University of Amsterdam and the European University Institute in Florence, the ETUC is "the one and only voice of Labour in Western Europe". They also quote a high-ranking trade union official who states that the reform programme in 1991 further propelled the ETUC "from a coordination body between national centers into a supranational organization".

The development of the ETUC into a significant representative of trade union interests is impressive confirmation of the fact that trade union unification has progressed alongside the process of European integration. The tendency toward the establishment of "super-unions" observed in certain countries (Great Britain and Germany) can be understood as a reaction to the development of a European economic sphere. It can also be seen that great hopes are being placed in Europe and

trade union internationalism by those in the countries with weaker national union movements.

The earlier division of the European trade union scene into three trends - the Social Democratic ETUC, the Christian Democratic World Federation of Workers (Weltverband der Arbeitnehmer) and the Communist-dominated World Trade Union Federation (Weltgewerkschaftsbund) – has almost completely disappeared to the advantage of the social democratic tendency.

The only noteworthy trade union organization working outside the ETUC network is the French General Confederation of Labour with its well-known communist tilt. All other large unions from the Christian and socialist-communist camps have long since given up their old associational loyalties and are now members of the ETUC. Also of interest is the fact that the German White-Collar Workers Union (Deutsche Angestelltengewerkschaft), a competitor of the GTUF, now is a full member of ETUC. On the sectoral level we can observe comparable centralization processes operating in favor of the traditional political center of the trade unions.

On the one hand, this developing trend from the periphery toward the social democratic-dominated centre reflects deep secularization tendencies to which the Christian and communist (trade union) "churches" have had to pay tribute. On the other hand, however, it manifests the ability of the trade union centre to take up programme elements of the former rival organizations. The best-known example is undoubtedly the synthesis of the socialist idea of trade unions as counterweight and the catholic social teaching of social partnership and co-determination.

One can also see a parallel between this development and similar trends in various countries. The change from militant union models which are aimed not only against the employers but also against competing trade unions to those models characterized by co-operation and tolerance has strengthened those advocating a more moderate direction

and allowed the ETUC to develop into a monopoly-like representational body. Like the GTUF on the national level, the ETUC enjoys an "associational monopoly" on the European level because all relevant organizations have been absorbed into it.

In addition, this process of concentration has been promoted by certain forces in the EC. For one thing, EC bodies prefer to work with those who represent the broadest spectrum of workers, rather than sectional representatives. For another, the dynamic of European integration has led to the convergence of many problems and to many community-wide problems of a new kind which require a supranational reaction on the part of the trade unions. The ETUC has successfully assumed the role of a Euro-mediator between the unions of different nations and has become a pioneer in the provision of services which promote trade union convergence in Europe.

The network of trade union Euro-services is increasingly expanding:

The ETUC has experienced a gain in status as a result of the participation of the various national member organizations. Moreover, there has been an institutional fusing with the European branch associations.

The "European Trade Union Institute" (ETUI) plays an important role by providing specialized reports to the trade union Euro-practitioners, distributing information material throughout Europe and maintaining contact with social scientists.

The "European Trade Union College" (ETUCO) is constantly expanding its instructional and educational programme.

The "European Technology Office" and the "Association for the Continuing Education of Workers in New Technologies" round off the trade union services provided in Brussels.

That clear progress has been made with respect to the promotion of the European social union is mainly due to the ETUC. It has been

making up for the opportunities to shape Europe which have been criminally squandered as a result of the narrow nationalism of many individual unions.

In countries with dominating sectoral trade unions (such as Germany) it must be acknowledged that the unions are playing only a supporting role on the European stage at this time. Large branch unions are beginning to grasp that strategic authority in matters related to Europe as a whole has been in the hands of the higher main organization and that practical execution has been the responsibility of the sectoral unions. It is not for nothing that IG Metall speaks of "tripartism between the EC Commission and the European-level peak associations representing the employers and trade unions". With respect to the expanded rights provided by the Maastricht Treaty, IG Metall speaks of a "new incentive" for the unions to examine their cooperation within the Single Market: "If they want to use this instrument they must direct their decision-making structures more strongly toward Europe." There can be no doubt that the creation of effective and competent branch trade unions at the European level is on the agenda and that agreement must be reached on an appropriate division of labour between them and the ETUC for the representation of workers interests. Such a development is unavoidable if the unions want to achieve their goal of collective bargaining at the Community level: "With the official establishment of the Single Market one year away, the trade unions are far from this", according to IG Metall in early 1992.

European-level collective bargaining which is comparable to that currently taking place in individual countries will not be possible for some time. The various stages of development thus far attained by the national economies of EC member states are so far apart that a community-wide wage policy is not likely in the foreseeable future. Different and even contradictory interests will only be leveled out or resolved in the course of a protracted alignment process.

It is conceivable that something like platform agreements can be concluded with European employers on the basis of agreed upon wage-policy goals of the ETUC or even the European branch organizations. Initial forms of such platform agreements can be seen in the joint statements made by the ETUC and UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe).

Platform agreements could establish the principles for dealing with specific contract issues, procedural rules and developmental trends which are then implemented in a decentralized way according to the principle of subsidiarity which is supported by both bargaining parties and adapted to the given conditions.

According to the platform agreement, bargaining issues would include length and structuring of worktime, the organization of teamwork, groupwork or quality circles, information and participation rights as well as workers protection and safety. It seems as if environmentally-sound products and production processes as well as problems of occupational training and further education are among the high-priority issues with which an innovative, European-wide collective bargaining policy could be set in motion.

The large corporations operating across Europe promise to become a special focus of attention. The trade unions have increasingly recognized that transnational firms are superb places for the development of international cooperation between the micro-level units of worker representation. The creation of European works councils as the common representative of multinational workforces in transnational companies is a gateway to across border trade union cooperation.

The Internationalization of the National Organizations

If the national trade unions are to learn international cooperation, it is important that they open up their organizational structures.

Trade union policy-makers and lay officials must be schooled for international work. Transnational companies have long grasped that a professional career is no longer possible without international experience or an understanding of supranational problems. This finds expression in how these companies see themselves and their organization charts. The time has come for the trade unions to catch up. It is occasionally said of those who set union policy that they are "an elite waiting for their chance". Clearly, a modern (and that also means democratically legitimized) leadership team will remain provincial if it does not think and act internationally.

To a large degree the adjustment of national trade union structures to meet the demands of flexible, supranational cooperation can be implemented in a way that does not lead to greater overall costs and which benefits all sides. A systematically organized exchange of lay personnel should quickly pay for itself since their qualifications would be raised and networks of communication would be strengthened. The exchange of trade union specialists in collective bargaining, economics and technology, or their journalists, teachers and legal experts, would allow the development of bi- and multi-lateral working connections. This in turn would spell a speedy end to what has become an unaffordable luxury: the wasting of synergistic energies and cooperative gains as a result of narrow-minded, nationalistic calls to "siege behavior."

Gains in cooperation can be achieved in the area of lay activities as well. A great deal of pioneering work at the grass roots level which is aimed at concretely strengthening international solidarity could be carried out in regional, city and factory partnerships. Another example is to be found in the individual efforts of works councils and worker delegates

to establish co-determination bodies in transnational firms. The fact that a "Europe from below" could well flourish in the future can be seen in three examples of a growing trend of grass roots activities: the interregional cooperation between Saarland, Lorraine and Luxembourg; the establishment of a European works council at Volkswagen; and a company-level labour contract at the French-German television channel ARTE.

Academic facilities and institutions with close ties to the trade unions should be urged to put more emphasis on "study abroad" programmes for their scholarship recipients. Improving the language skills of these young people and their ability to deal with foreign cultures and international problems is also a human investment in the trade unions which will assure the development of a multi-talented, highly qualified generation of policy-making leaders.

There are also various initiatives aimed at those in the scientific community who desire to play a role in international research projects, educational and training programmes, and specialized congresses. Until now the trade unions have made only slight use of this resource.

Trade Union Opportunity Management

Many workers in the more prosperous West European countries and in countries with developed systems of co-determination have fears of "social dumping" due to the hiring of low-wage workers from Southern and (above all) Eastern Europe, and the introduction of neo-liberal deregulation programmes. These fears should be taken seriously. Even when it can be proven with historical and empirical evidence that such fears have little foundation, there remain the uncertainties which are obviously connected with the modernization dynamic in the West and the unpredictable character of the world situation.

The fears of "souls without direction" (Peter Glotz) are clearly to be found not only among workers in general, but among considerable sections of the union apparatus and their officials. Indeed, hidden behind the radical-sounding slogan "Europe of the big corporations" one can find a structure of fear similar to the xenophobic slogans of many workers.

For this reason, the internationalization of national trade union organizations deserves special attention. Beyond expanded competence in handling international problems, this is principally a matter of adopting measures which promote common experience, thereby replacing left conservatism with left modernity.

There will be security against a shift to the right by an anxious workforce when the trade unions strengthen the enlightened, anti-authoritarian traditions of Europe and themselves take up the task of shaping the European social dimension.

One could claim with complete justification that European intergration might not be the one and only solution, but without it we are doomed to failure. An entire century lies between the European Union in Western Europe and the warring, nationalistic relapses now occurring from Yugoslavia to the Caspian Sea.

A modern trade union equipped with an internationalized apparatus and supported by an enlightened policy-making staff and lay officials must enhance the progressiveness of European integration through the enrichment of the welfare state under the rule of law.

The promotion of European solidarity must be raised to the level of a general perspective that guides trade union action. This is the alternative to the unions' reluctance to abandon narrow national attitudes. The challenges and opportunities involved in a renewal of the trade unions in tomorrow's Europe find expression in a continental model of co-determination and collective bargaining autonomy.

Acting in a timely manner means carrying out a policy of future-orientated opportunity management, not one of reactive crisis management after the fact. The one who today can conceive a policy of opportunity management will become tomorrow's acknowledged social force and speaker for workers. The opportunity for trade union renewal will be realized through the Europeanization of their policies and activities.

The frequently heard thesis (especially in Germany) that a strong national anchoring of the trade unions is the best condition for the prevention of anti-trade union developments in Europe is opposed by the view of the author who holds that the europeanisation of trade union politics assures the best protection for the workers. The Florence-Amsterdam researchers have expressed it well: "Organized Labour will have to be international, or it will not be." The prerequisites for this are modern structures and ways of thinking as well as a European trade union entity which functions not as a gigantic organizational unit in the sense of "one big union", but rather as an interactive network which binds together diverse forms of trade union organization. When this happens it will also be possible for the trade unions to provide the plans and concrete elements for a social Europe that can grow into structures which will not fall prey to nationalism and totalitarianism.