



Seminar

Krifa and WOW-Europe & the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA)

Palma de Mallorca (Spain), 06-08.02.2019

Is there a future for trade unions?

Scope and aim of the Seminar



Trade unions today are struggling with their image. This image of trade unions is an important factor why people do not become a member. But this is just one factor. According to a research done by EUROFOUND in 2010 a number of structural transformations in the economy have been identified as possible reasons for the representation and regulatory crisis of workers' organizations:

- sectoral shifts in European economies;
- public sector reform;
- a renewed unilateralism in personnel issues pursued by company management;
- a tendency towards the individualisation of employment relations;

- the globalisation of economic activities.

Thus unions will have to come with more creative approaches to remain of interest. This is big challenge for unions which long had strong positions and perhaps did not act to the changes taking place timely. For this it is important to know which groups are difficult to attract becoming a member.

Trade unions will really have to look at themselves. What made them successful in the past is not necessarily making them successful today. In a society that has changed rapidly and tremendously. New answers will have to be found. News paths and approaches will have to be chosen.

While some say that perhaps the days of the trade union movement as we know it are counted other state that with the coming of the digital age and the uncertainties this will lead to, the unions will be more important than ever. The future will show which way it will go, but unions will have to act in order to remain relevant.



The President of EUROFEDOP, Mr. Fritz Neugebauer, gave a welcome speech that was linked to the title of the project and the Treaty of Lisbon. The instrument is "Social Dialogue". There are countries where the dialogue is slowly getting on its way, and there lies the role for us to force the governments into social dialogue.

Ms. María Luz Rodríguez Fernández, Doctor of Law at the University of Valladolid and Professor of Labor Law and Social Security at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), spoke mainly about the training of personnel. Trade unions must insist on financing these courses.

For EUROFEDOP spoke Mr. Johan Traets about the dangers of Burn-out and the necessary balance between work and private life.

Ms. María Luz Rodríguez Fernández further discussed the working hours arrangements and necessary appointments in connection with private data.

Spain with soaring youth unemployment, and young people failing to complete their training with is a challenge that the unions also have to play a role in.

Dr. Karin Schönflug, Senior Researcher Security and Stability, Institute for Advanced Studies (Austria), talked about "Workers' organizations in a changing World". Age is the key for choice of social media channel. Standard jobs are declining. The challenge is to learn from platform workers. The target groups work each with their own medium. The challenge is how are we going to tackle, organize and maintain this as a trade union?

Subsequently, **Mr. Thomas Bank Møller**, Head of Communication Krifa (Denmark), took the floor We have to ask ourselves the question, why and how? This question is necessary on a daily basis. For a we use Twitter, for b Facebook, for c direct mailing. Conclusion: working with digital strategy is a necessity for the trade unions.

Mr. Dr. Artjoms Ivlevs, Associate Professor of Economics, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England (United Kingdom). Are trade unions not, themselves guilty of the decline of their membership? Independent organizations without a collective goal cannot really mobilize members. The speaker discussed the reason why there are still members today. This certainly has to do with inertia, habits and coercion rather than confidence. The public sector and big industrial enterprises are present in a post-socialist world, which brings about stress, need for adaptation and transformation. The speaker then discussed the differences in industrial relations models across regions today.

Subsequently, **Yaroslav Kovalyshyn** of Ukrain spoke about their input in their country and the changes since 2009.



Mr. Paul de Beer, Professor Labor Relations at the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labor Studies – AIAS (Netherlands). He stated that unions are under pressure, but still play an important role in a lot of countries. He also explained the "Dutch Polder Model". At the end of his speech, he saw two possibilities:

- Revitalization of unions based on an existing model.
- A new business model for unions, based on votes instead of membership and funded from mandatory contribution by all employees. In the discussion the German model was mentioned, but for discussion of this model an extra seminar would be needed.

Mr. Mark Freeman, who for several years has been member of the POA (UK) and for a certain time also chairman of the Trade Council Justice of EUROFEDOP, explained the privatization of prisons in the UK and the consequences of this for the unions.

The different working groups presented their results in the plenary session. A lot of good ideas came forward, but our delegation asked themselves whether they should not talk to employers about these issues as a trade union. Are the collective agreements applicable to everyone? Enforce membership? A fee to be paid to the trade union by the employers for every staff member?

This very interesting seminar, at an equally interesting location, was followed by 7 Eurofedop delegates at the invitation of WOW.

I wish to thank and congratulate WOW with the execution and results of the seminar. I also would like to thank Johan Traets for the detailed report that was shortened for publication reasons.

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Bert Van Caelenberg,
Secretary General of Eurofedop

