

The role of the trade unions and the social provisions of the EEC^oTreaty

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The role of the trade unions and the social provisions of the EEC Treaty

From the very beginning of the European recovery process in 1955, the trade unions had followed very closely the negotiations between the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The trade union movement actually felt itself to be directly affected by European issues. Back in 1950, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) had created a European Regional Organisation (ERO), before the creation of the Trade Union Committee of Twenty-One which represented the trade union confederations of the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, the affiliated unions in the coal and steel industries, a representative of the ERO and a representative of the international trade union organisations concerned. The trade union organisations, like the employers' groups and the consumers' unions, thus participated in the work of the Consultative Committee which, from 1952 onwards, assisted the High Authority of the ECSC in its sectoral policy. Hardly had discussions begun between the Six when the Belgian General Federation of Labour (FGTB) informed Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs who chaired the Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference, that any progress towards economic integration would have to involve the creation of joint committees for individual industries and a general joint committee whose findings would have the binding force of collective agreements in all the countries of the Common Market. From that moment onwards, the trade union movement would make every effort to demand a formal guarantee of the harmonisation of social progress in the treaty that was being prepared.

On 14 September 1955, in other words just over three months after the crucial Messina Conference, the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU) published a manifesto on European recovery, a manifesto which, a few days later, was sent to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Six. Convinced that only the attribution of real powers to the European institutions would bring about an effective solution to the problems of economic and social policy in Europe, the IFCTU requested that its members should be able to participate fully in the work of the Spaak Committee. This request, however, was not followed up. The fact was that the IFCTU regarded the future Common Market as the heart of a supranational European community which would have the task of moving towards bringing employment conditions into line and promoting workers' interests via full employment and labour mobility. On 18 May 1956, in anticipation of the conference of the six Member States in Venice, the IFCTU welcomed the scope of the Spaak Report, which advocated the creation of a general common market and an atomic community in Europe. However, it insisted that the institutions of the Common Market should have wide-ranging powers to establish a Community social policy which would be constructed on a joint basis between trade unions and employers, and would not be designed purely as a corollary of economic policy. Determined that workers should be involved in the management of the Common Market, it strongly condemned the absence, in the Spaak Report, of any mention of an Economic and Social Committee (ESC) which would have the right of initiative and which would have to be consulted on any issue of importance. In fact, throughout the whole period of the negotiations, first in Brussels and then in Val Duchesse, the IFCTU continued to send to the Presidency, the Secretariat and the experts of the Intergovernmental Conference a series of detailed notes, in which it reiterated, in particular, its desire for social powers to be given to the future European Economic Community (EEC), for an Investment Fund and a Rehabilitation Fund for the unemployed to be created, and for Euratom to be exclusively peaceful in nature.

For its part, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) did not remain idle either. In January 1957, as the Val Duchesse negotiations entered their final stage, it prepared two memoranda, one on the subject of the drafts of the Euratom Treaty, and another on the subject of the Common Market. The ICFTU drew attention, in particular, to its conviction that the future EEC should have the effect of re-establishing or stimulating healthy competition within the European economy, by encouraging a rational division of labour and creating the conditions essential to mass production. From an institutional point of view, the ICFTU argued in favour of the European Assembly having a right of initiative and powers which almost amounted to co-decision-making. It also believed that it was essential that a place on the EEC Commission and at the Court of Justice should be reserved, by a process of co-option, for a representative of the trade union movements. If the ESC had to have the right of initiative, insisted the ICFTU, then the Community would have to have its own resources, which would be independent of national budgets, raised by means of special taxes or a direct levy. Finally, the ICFTU made the European fund for vocational

training and worker mobility one of the priorities in its list of demands.

Trade unions were also closely involved in the debates about European recovery via the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, which Jean Monnet, retiring President of the ECSC High Authority, created in Paris in October 1955. His ambition was to bring together leading political and trade union figures who were in favour of European unity, in order to bolster support, in parliamentary circles and in the minds of the general public, for the idea of a federal Europe. By means of its declarations and resolutions, the Monnet Committee made it possible for the trade union organisations to face up to, and express their views on, the economic and social challenges of European recovery.

In addition to the determined action on the part of the trade union organisations, the problems linked to social harmonisation in the context of the EEC also took on political importance owing to the demands of the French Government. Those demands were concerned with both the equivalence of paid holiday schemes, the regulation of working hours and overtime pay. These later became the subject of a protocol on certain provisions, involving France and annexed to the EEC Treaty. Despite its insistence, the French delegation at Val Duchesse succeeded in getting the Treaty to include only some of its demands for social harmonisation, upon which the unions and employers' organisations had made their support conditional prior to the ratification debates in the National Assembly. In the Treaty establishing the EEC, Member States agreed on the need to encourage improvements in living and working conditions for workers, so as to enable them to enjoy an equal share in progress. They thought that such a development would largely ensue from the functioning of the Common Market, which would favour the harmonisation of social systems. From the point of view of the institutions, it was the Commission which was given the task of promoting close cooperation between Member States in the social sphere, in matters relating to employment, labour law and working conditions, basic and advanced vocational training, social security, the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases, occupational hygiene, and the right of association and collective bargaining between employers and workers.