

# TRADE UNIONS AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF SOCIAL EUROPE

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## European Unions and the European Union

A century ago, Commons argued that the boundaries of employment regulation expanded in response to the enlargement of product markets, from the local to the regional to the national. In order to harness the competitive forces unleashed by the dissolution of traditional barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour (to use the more recently familiar terminology), unions were forced to extend their scope and the common rule established by collective bargaining was made more encompassing.

A couple of decades later, one of the leading figures in international trade unionism, Edo Fimmen, insisted that the process of economic integration across national boundaries required a corresponding extension of regulation. 'One of the most notable of the economic phenomena of the post-war epoch in Europe is the vigorous concentration of capital' (1924: 15). Employers, he added wryly, 'do not hold congresses; they do not pass pious resolutions about international class solidarity. Nevertheless, they think and act internationally.' By contrast, 'the workers have international organisations; hold international congresses; pass numerous and high-sounding resolutions. None the less, they continue to restrict their activities to the national arenas.' National unions, he added, were 'terribly alarmed' lest the international organisations which they themselves had created should interfere in their national affairs (1924: 104).

Perhaps these arguments sound familiar. Economic internationalisation is today the focus of political and intellectual contention: the liberalisation of trade, the anarchy of transnational financial flows, the visible hand of transnational corporations are all perceived as challenges to traditional, national forms of employment regulation. The major analytical faultlines are whether these developments are best comprehended under the label of globalisation, or whether the focus should be on integration within the regions of the 'Triad' – with the European single market the exemplary case (for a selection of positions see Gray 1998; Hay and Rosamond 2002; Hirst and Thompson 1996; Ruigrok and van Tulder 1995); and whether, or to what extent, the capacity for continuing national regulation is undermined (Boyer 1996; Boyer and Drache 1996; Crouch and Streeck 1997; Hall and Soskice 2001; Hemerijk and Schludi 2001). The bias of opinion – there is certainly no consensus – would seem to be that the relatively integrated European market (the EU, or the somewhat wider EEA) is sufficiently self-contained to be potentially insulated from 'global' challenges to the 'European social model' of employment; that the 'four freedoms' of economic activity within this space nevertheless pose a threat to many traditional safeguards for the status and standards of workers at national level; that rule-making at European level increasingly impinges on, without displacing, national regulatory systems; and that if this supranational regulation remains weak and 'negative integration' the norm (Scharpf 1999), this is the result of political contingencies rather than economic imperatives.

Students of trade unionism have focused, in the main, on two consequential issues. The first has been the impact of economic Europeanisation on national industrial relations systems in general and national trade unions in particular. How do unions react in their representational and bargaining activities to the increasing openness of national product and labour markets, and the altered balance of forces resulting from the internationalisation of capital? What is the impact of EU-level regulation (for example, the establishment of European Works Councils) on union strategies? How far is there increased mutual learning among unions in Europe, and to what extent does this entail convergence in structures and practices? Second, how should we understand the character and *modus operandi* of the institutions of trade unionism at European level: in particular the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and its associated European Industry Federations (EIFs)?

These are important issues, but my own focus is somewhat different. The weight of current research concerns the European level – the nature of the emergent transnational industrial relations system, if such it can be called, and the role of the trade union movement in its construction; and the downwards impact of 'Europe' at national level. By contrast, I primarily address the upward involvement of national trade unions in the processes of European integration. As subsidiary questions, I ask how this involvement illuminates the role of different trade union movements in national politics, and the evidence it provides concerning the nature of the internal politics of individual unions and confederations.

This paper represents preliminary analysis and exploratory ideas. I start with a range of questions which I am pursuing in my current research. First, *what* are the aims of European trade unions in their responses to European integration? How far do unions in different countries have a clear agenda in addressing the project of 'ever closer union'? If their primary orientation is support, or conversely opposition, is this the outcome of strategic analysis or simply a reflex reaction based on traditional ideology? How do we make sense of inter- and intra-national differences in union positions towards Europe? And what is the relationship between the various unions and their associated political parties on European questions?

Second, *how* do unions intervene at European level? How active are they as members of the ETUC and the EIFs? To what extent do they seek, and obtain, positions of leadership? What links do national unions maintain with the Commission and with MEPs? How far, and with what success, do they attempt to be integrated in the European activities of their national governments? What are the patterns of responsibilities for and control of European activity, and what resources do different unions devote to lobbying and to a more general presence in Brussels? If (as is now true of most national movements) they maintain a Brussels office, how is it integrated with national activities? Is a posting to Brussels a coveted position, or the equivalent of Siberia? How far have the Brussels officers of different national confederations themselves become a collective force?

Third, how do European activities relate to more general intra-union politics? How closely do the internal political alignments and debates over European integration match other political faultlines (left/right, 'modernisers'/'traditionalists')? How potent are internal union controversies on this issue, and how far do these reflect hierarchical (leadership/rank-and-file) as against horizontal (sectoral and occupational) differences? Are there systematic differences in terms of relative euroenthusiasm and euroscepticism between, for example, public- and private-sector or manual and white-collar unions and confederations? Along a different dimension, what are the different interconnections between leaders and members over European issues? What evidence do we have of membership attitudes, and how do these compare with leadership positions? To what extent does European integration figure in internal union education and communications? Is there a serious attempt to inform and persuade the rank-and-file, and with what success?

To pursue such a research agenda it is possible to focus on a number of 'symptomatic issues'. One important example might be the management of EWC affairs. Is this treated as an extension of national workplace representation, hence part of the portfolio of existing union departments with responsibilities for representation at national level; or is it defined as a 'European' issue and hence a matter for the international or European department (Eberwein et al. 2002: 57-8)? Such decisions have major significance, often, for the balance of power within internal union politics.

To reiterate, these are questions to which as yet I am unable to offer systematic answers. For the remainder of this paper I will address one important but far narrower question: why has the official position of virtually every national trade union movement become supportive of the dynamic of European integration, albeit with certain reservations, when there are many indications that the attitudes of large sections of union memberships are very different?

## **The Puzzle**

The ETUC, which has just celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, has achieved a remarkably comprehensive representative status as the voice of European trade unions. It is also one of the

most reliable interlocutors of the European Commission, and one of the most enthusiastic supporters of more extensive European integration. The official positions of most national unions, even those formerly hostile to at least elements of integration – such as the British TUC or the French CGT – are today similarly positive.

Yet rank-and-file attitudes are in many cases significantly different. The evidence of surveys and of electoral behaviour indicates that in most countries, those sections of the population among which union membership is most strongly rooted (manual workers, those with limited educational qualifications) display considerable Euroscepticism (or even Europhobia). This has been particularly evident, perhaps, in the Nordic countries. Miljan (1977: 226) spoke of 'an elite-mass gap' dividing the Norwegian labour movement at the time of the 1972 accession referendum; more generally, Archer (2000: 105) has concluded in an overview of the Nordic countries that 'trade union leadership has been positive, but with some reservations, and has often found the membership hostile'. Much more generally, Wessels has identified a discrepancy across most EU countries between policy-makers and rank-and-file in political parties, though he suggests that the gap may have narrowed over time to the extent that leaders 'have been able to mobilize their supporters' (1995:161). This was written, however, before Amsterdam and Nice; the convergence thesis no longer seems so plausible.

This is (or should be) a matter of practical concern for trade union policy-makers and for supporters of European integration. But it is also a problem for scholarship: how do we make sense of this disjuncture?

There are several relevant considerations. First, international issues have always been a primarily elite concern within trade unions. Logue's attempt to sketch a general theory of trade union internationalism starts from the premise (one perhaps more self-evident to an American than to most Europeans) that unions are primarily organisations pursuing the short-term economic interests of their members. In consequence, significant internationalism is possible only where (on the principle familiar today as 'subsidiarity') unions are unable to achieve their economic goals at national level. Otherwise, he argues, labour internationalism is a 'parasitic elite activity', or else the outcome of a 'culturally transmitted' belief that international trade unionism is necessary, possible and effective (1980: 29). Another, perhaps complementary consideration is that proposed by Busch (1980: 1): 'on the whole international labour activities are political in nature and are designed to achieve ends that are not normally included in the confines of a collective agreement; international trade unionism is the expression of political rather than economic power'. On the one hand, as discussed further below, union leaders can articulate at least the rhetoric of internationalism whereas the dominant rank-and-file perspectives may be nationalist or even xenophobic: a key issue in the era of the Second International before 1914 (Howorth 1985). Conversely, unions with an established position in national politics may pursue international engagements as adjuncts of 'their' governments. Writing of the mid-twentieth century, Silverman has commented (2000: 19) that 'the realm of international labor was for the most part a realm of bureaucrats and politicians'; while Harrod (1972: 399) describes the overseas activities of the British TUC as demonstrating 'the absorption of the trade union foreign policy decision-makers into a foreign policy-making elite at the national level.... They did *not* act as trade unionists but rather as quasi-government policy-makers.' Certainly the cold war reinforced this tendency in most western trade union movements.

These are important background considerations, but there are three more specific factors which may help account for the disparity between official union positions and membership attitudes towards European integration. The first is material. It could be argued that union policy-makers recognise a need to develop the regulatory capacity of the EU in order to realise their own national objectives, because economic internationalisation ('globalisation') has reduced their ability to do so in the purely national arena. From this perspective, a deepening of Europeanisation is necessary in order to defend their members' interests. But the rank and file, it would appear, does not (as yet) appreciate the need to transcend traditional action at national level. Hence the disjuncture between elite and mass can be seen as reflecting a contrast

between long-term strategic vision and more traditionalist defence of the (no longer defensible) established practices.

A second incentive to favour European integration is organisational: participation in activity at EU level brings resources and recognition to unions. This is certainly true of the ETUC – which is to a significant subsidised by the Commission, and acquires much of its *raison d'être* from its role as 'social partner' at European level (a status enshrined in the Treaty). But what of national union movements? In some countries, Europeanisation can be seen as compensation for declining status domestically. This is certainly an important factor in explaining why, in the 1980s, the British trade union movement shifted from opposition to the whole project of European economic integration to broad support; the same is almost certainly true of the equally radical shift in the position of the French CGT a decade later. But how far can such an argument be generalised?

A third factor, less commonly discussed, is ideological. Commitment to Europeanisation can be regarded as defining a 'mission' for European unions which fills an ideological vacuum. This is the theme which I develop in some detail below.

### **'Social Europe': A New Ideology?**

As I argue in my book *Understanding European Trade Unionism* (Hyman 2001), trade unions have possessed a variety of identities, and have embraced a multiplicity of objectives. Typically, both the meaning and the purposes of trade unionism have been contested, both within and between unions. Ideology necessarily conditioned the choices of what a union should be and what it should do; those who joined, and certainly those who became activists and leaders, embraced the distinctive self-definition of their chosen organisation; and they in turn helped reaffirm this identity.

In Europe, the continent where trade union organisation has the deepest roots, at least three distinct identities can be recognised. Anglo-Saxon business unionism is one of these: a conception of union purpose primarily, though never unambiguously, embraced in Britain. (Liberal trade unions in some European countries had some affinities, though usually with an explicit anti-socialist coloration.) A second, derived from revolutionary social democracy, defined unions as 'schools of war', agencies of mobilisation against employers and the bourgeois state, at one and the same time economic and political actors. A third, initiated by the catholic church at the end of the nineteenth century, regarded unions as a 'corporatist' institution, furthering the integration of workers within the existing social and economic order. Though this conception emerged in explicit opposition to socialist trade unionism, as social democracy became purged of its revolutionary character so social-democratic unionism embraced similar perspectives.

For at least half a century, (west) European trade unionisms have been almost wholly organised around one of three ideologies: communist, christian and social-democratic. Continental liberalism, as a distinctive political tendency, became insignificant as a basis for trade unionism. 'Pure-and-simple' economic unionism, always primarily a British peculiarity, became substantially modified by the British 'Labourist' variant of social democracy. For a time, indeed, social-democratic unionism appeared almost hegemonic. Many of the communist movements had already moved in revisionist directions before the collapse of the Soviet empire; 'Eurocommunism' signalled that trade union mobilisation was no longer conceived primarily as a means of anti-capitalist resistance. France was for a long period an exception; but the withdrawal of the French CGT from WFTU and its entry in 1999 into the ETUC can be seen as the culmination of the post-communist transition. Most christian trade unionisms became post-christian at an earlier stage; the Belgian CSC/ACV is the only substantial European union with an explicit religious identity (though currents within the Italian CISL display nostalgia for old ideological roots). Hence it is not implausible to argue that virtually all significant European unionisms came to reflect variants of a social-democratic project. This has indeed facilitated the emergence of the ETUC as an encompassing representative of the region's trade unions.

Yet by outset of the twenty-first century, circumstances had changed significantly. We appear to be at a moment of post-trade union ideology. Social-democratic unionism has in the main turned to a more straightforward business union posture in the context of a distancing

between unions and their 'sister' parties, and the hollowing out of Keynesian welfarism as a hegemonic project. The period of success of the social-democratic vision of trade unionism – what I have elsewhere termed 'political economism' (Hyman, 2001) – rested on the economic predominance of Fordist production regimes and the relative autonomy of the fiscal and monetary policies of nation-states. Both preconditions no longer apply, or only to an attenuated extent. Most European governments, even if nominally social-democratic, have embraced a logic of 'decentralised monetarism' (Iversen, 1999), in a process reinforced by economic and monetary union. Old models of political exchange have lost their capacity to deliver material benefits to union members and supporters. In consequence, European unions have lost much of their legitimating mission; hence a diminished capacity to inspire their constituencies to a 'willingness to act' (or even, in many countries, a 'willingness to pay') (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1985). Thus it is plausible to speak of an end of trade union ideology: not in the sense that systems of belief and frames of reference no longer shape trade union practice (indeed old background assumptions sometimes operate all too evidently to inhibit new strategic initiative) but in the exhaustion of an inspirational message which can constitute trade unionism as a 'sword of justice' (Flanders, 1970).

This exhaustion must be seen as a key background factor in the conversion of most mainstream European trade unions to the role of protagonists of EU integration. Indeed it is necessary to trace also the material and organisational incentives favouring Euro-enthusiasm, as Gobin (1997) has emphasised. But the ideal of a European identity would not have become so rapidly influential but for the vacuum of inspirational ideology which it seemed to fill.

Embracing the idea of 'social Europe' has involved a dialectic with traditional (non-revolutionary) trade union values, embodying notions of progress, equity, internationalism but also the pragmatics of regulating an increasingly supranational economy. In the process, social-democratic trade unionism has itself Europeanised. The process has been marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, under the umbrella of the ETUC the trade union movement has become the most reliable interlocutor of the European Commission; on the other, its emphasis on the need for a strong social as well as economic dimension to integration constitutes an implicit, and occasionally explicit, critique of actually existing Europeanisation (Martin and Ross 1999, 2001). Cynics might suggest that trade unions take the Commission's rhetoric more seriously than the Commission itself. Yet can they exert significant influence to give this rhetoric genuine effect, or is it true that 'unions in the EU are trapped between the demise of the autonomous national political economies which their organizations were built to cope with, and their inability to shape the new regimes that are replacing them' (Marks and McAdam 1996: 107)?

There is much evidence that the principle of subsidiarity is mirrored in the internal politics of the ETUC: an implicit lesson, for example, of Dølvik's detailed study (1997). Is there a similar replication of the 'distrustful mutual control' which Héritier (1999: 274) considers central to EU decision-making? There are signs of an uneasy tension between a form of trade union *Realpolitik* and the appeal of more elevated principle. Europeanisation may reflect at one and the same time the dynamics of 'push and pull factors' exerting their impact on trade unions (Visser 1998), reflected in calculated choices to use European-level action as a replacement for diminished national influence, and the normative embrace of an 'epistemic community' (Börzel and Risse 2000; Haas 1992) which presents 'being "European" [as] being virtuous in an otherwise menacing setting, analogous to being a socialist, conservative, or devotee of a particular religious creed' (Martin and Ross 1999: 355).

Such a form of 'conversion experience' (Martin and Ross 1999: 35) can be seen, as suggested earlier, as filling an ideological vacuum. It is apparent in the way in which 'Social Europe' has become the rallying cry of European trade unions. 'The "European home" can only be meaningfully extended if there is also an extension of social security and justice for all,' the ETUC president has declared (Verzetnitsch, 2000: 6). Yet does this express a primarily defensive concept of 'social Europe' as a recipe for preserving or reproducing a (perhaps idealised) model of national practice at a time when the Keynesian welfare state faced few material or ideological challenges? Is 'social Europe' a *retrospective* utopia rather than an

inspirational vision of a possible future? More prosaically, is there a credible strategic programme for the pursuit and/or defence of 'social Europe' in the face of market-driven challenges to social regulation? Some of these issues are considered in the concluding section of this paper. First, however, it is necessary to raise the question: what do European trade unions (or those who speak and act on their behalf) understand by 'Europe'?

### **The Contested Meanings of Europe**

What is the meaning of 'Europe'? In the early days of post-war European integration, Dürrenmatt (1960: 51) insisted that 'Europe is a political concept and a political possibility; therefore it is also a political reality'. Soon afterwards, Aron (1964) detected a shift from European integration as a by-product of the cold war to the emergence of Europe as a coherent actor capable of shaping its own future. Such sentiments resonate still at ceremonial European occasions.

However, most analysis of the meaning of 'Europe' is more sceptical or uncertain. Attali (1994: 9) cautions that 'Europe, evidently, does not exist. It is neither a continent, nor a culture, nor a people, nor a history. It is neither defined by a single frontier nor by a common destiny or dream. Yet there exist diverse *Europes*, which elude us when we seek to grasp their contours too precisely.' Others identify the idea of Europe as 'an essentially contested concept' (Cederman 2001: 2), and an ideological resource deployed in support of particularistic interests or projects. "'Europe' is not a neutral reality but a contested concept' (Diez 1999: 602); 'it was always politics masquerading as geography that determined the definition of Europe' (Delanty 1995: 49).

As so often in the political sphere, discourse may cloud political reality. One element in such discourse is heroic myth (García 1993: 5). In an influential discussion, Obradovic (1996) has attributed political outcomes to the efficacy of myth ('symbolic values through which people share an idea of origin, continuity, historical memories, collective remembrance, common heritage and tradition, as well as a common destiny'); and it is possible to interpret debates about European futures in terms of a clash of competing myths (Hansen and Williams 1999). Some of these, however, are far from heroic: European integration itself generates a routinisation of symbolic values. This finds its distillation in Eurospeak, an organising discourse which – presumably unintentionally – most effectively distances professional Europeans from the citizenry of European states. There is 'a multitude of common understandings, inter-institutional agreements and informal modes of behaviour which are reproduced every day in the political and administrative practice of the EU'; and 'a lobbying community has produced an entire political class that shares the language' (Christiansen et al. 1999: 539, 541). To the extent that the ETUC (and national union representatives active within its structures) embrace this anti-myth, their capacity to mobilise around an alternative vision of social Europe is neutralised.

'Europe' is a slippery and contested abstraction, heavy with historical and ideological baggage. Over the centuries, its meaning has altered radically (Delanty 1995; Hersant and Durand-Bogaert 2000); and in contemporary discourse it is possible to identify at least three incompatible understandings. The first, the most prosaic but almost certainly the most powerful, is the idea of Europe as a common market *tout court*. Whatever the broader ideals and visions of its 'founding fathers', what the Treaty of Rome established was a European *Economic* Community. If the central adjective was quietly expunged from official communiqués a quarter of a century later, this was perhaps in embarrassed recognition that the relaunch of European integration ('completing the single market') was driven above all by the neo-liberal project of eliminating obstacles to free trade within what was by now the Europe of the twelve: winning popular commitment required a more positive gloss (Boyer, 2000: 26-7).

A second conception focuses on the elusive question of European identity; as Laffan argues (1996: 82), 'the *politics of identity* have enormous salience in the new Europe'. One reason is that EU integration itself displaces certain symbols of national identity (not least, within the euro zone, national currencies – see Verdun and Christiansen 2000: 169); and political symbolism abhors a vacuum. A consequence has been an essentially artificial attempt to invent a common European identity (Kohli 2000): artificial because the boundaries of Europe are unclear, the relations among its component states have historically been marked as much

by antagonism as by commonality, and because the continent is in reality 'a field of multiple, overlapping and sometimes even conflicting identities' (Calhoun 2001: 52). As a corollary, as Hobsbawm (1994: 11) has suggested with reference to the broader, but equally insubstantial idea of western civilisation, 'there was no other way left to define group identity, except by defining the outsiders who were not in it'. The twelve-star flag may have become an innocent fashion accessory; but in practice, the project of creating unity out of diversity is most readily achieved in counterpoint to an alien outsider: the moslem world in the formative era of the European idea, the 'dark continent' in the heyday of colonialism, the soviet threat during the cold war, today all who challenge an ethno-cultural identity of Europe as a repository of white, judaeo-christian civilisation (a conception linked to the exclusionary model of Fortress Europe). Ironically, while a radically different understanding of Europe from that of a neo-liberal market, these two conceptions may be seen as strangely complementary, mediated by a market-based understanding of 'EU citizenship' (Hansen 2000).

A third alternative (closely linked to the idea of social Europe) identifies a distinctive articulation between market relations on the one hand and social support and solidarity on the other. This perspective has both social-democratic and christian-democratic variants, the latter not, as far as I know, intensively studied. Three key figures in the formation of the EEC – Adenauer, de Gasperi and Schuman – were described ironically as 'three tonsures for one priest's cap' (Mouriaux 1997: 143); and catholic trade unionism has remained influential through the history of European integration (Delors was of course a former activist in the CFTC). In whichever variant, this third vision is also ambiguous: the 'European social model' is plural rather than singular (Esping-Andersen 1990) and its contours are elusive (Ebbinghaus 1999). The origins of many national welfare systems in Europe were inseparable from the rise of militarism and imperialism (one need only think of such names as Bismarck and Chamberlain). Likewise, images of 'social' and of 'Fortress' Europe can readily overlap: the welfare of those within the boundaries (wherever these may eventually be drawn) being conditioned by the exclusion of alien outsiders. 'Will we build walls (electronic no doubt) to protect ourselves from the "rest of the world"?' (Héritier et al. 1991: 10). Surely this is the whole point of the Schengen process.

### **'Social Europe' versus Euroscepticism**

As noted above, a key issue in trade union Europolitics is the relationship between elite and 'populist' orientations. Across Europe, the strongest support for European integration comes from professional, business and political elites (largely including the leaderships of social- and christian-democratic parties and trade unions). Euroscepticism is strongest in proletarian, peasant and small-business milieux (Wessels 1995). How do the various European trade unions negotiate the disjuncture between their increasingly positive orientation to Europeanisation and the predominantly negative reactions of their constituents – sharply apparent in a number of the numerous referendums held on European issues (Roberts-Thomson 2001; Svensson 1994)? How can we analyse the different ways in which these tensions have evolved between and within countries? A number of interesting pointers are provided by a recent symposium on national variants of 'Euroscepticism' (Archer 2000; George 2000; Milner 2000a and 2000b; Teschner 2000).

There are substantial cross-national differences in popular attitudes to European integration, though the patterns have changed significantly over time (Duchesne and Frogner 1995; Martinotti and Stefanizzi 1995). There are two main approaches (perhaps not necessarily incompatible) to explaining such differences. One is cultural and historical: for example, Dale (2001: 31) notes that England and Denmark resisted Charlemagne's single currency project 1200 years ago, just as they have latterly opted out of EMU. The other stresses the contemporary structuring of interests as a basis for rational choice (Gärtner 1997; van Kersbergen 2000).

Ray (1999) has provided a map of the changing political party orientations in all main western European countries (the EU 15 plus Norway and Switzerland), which has been interrogated by subsequent analysts. Marks and Wilson (2000) have proposed a rational-choice interpretation of the differences and trends. Their analysis of social-democratic parties (their

account covers the whole political spectrum) emphasises the variable capacity for national socio-economic regulation. Socialist parties with limited strength and effectiveness at national level tended to regard European integration positively; those with a greater power to shape national policy resisted the idea of subordinating national decision-making capacity to an (almost certainly more conservative) European regime. But once locked into the European framework, such parties were likely to favour more elaborated integration which could facilitate a greater EU competence for social and macroeconomic governance. This interpretation of a dynamic of policy shift was anticipated in some detail in an earlier study by Haahr (1992, 1993) of the changing official positions of Danish social democracy and British Labour.

Marks and Wilson provide a valuable, though insufficient explanatory framework. First, it neglects the *interactive* character of politics: parties adopt stances at least in part either to distance themselves from, or to capture the same ground as, their antagonists. Second, as Featherstone (1988: 317-8) has indicated, the pragmatics of parties *in government* can encourage a political logic whereby other interlocutors (national business elites, international financial institutions, foreign governments) prove influential: perhaps more so than their own members or their domestic electorate. Thus, for example, in Britain in the 1970s (despite sharp internal divisions) the Labour government embraced a far more accommodating stance towards continued European Community membership than did many of its influential constituents. In the Nordic countries, the preoccupations of macroeconomic management likewise seem to have inclined social-democratic leaderships in government to favour EU accession. More fundamentally, though: how far does the logic proposed by Marks and Wilson relate to trade unions?

To a degree, certainly, the same propositions apply. Probably the most detailed study – of both party and union policies towards European integration – is the comparison by Geyer of the British and Norwegian labour movements. He argues that international sensitivities pushed their leaderships towards support for European integration despite rank-and-file scepticism or hostility. In the 1994 Norwegian referendum (which in many respects replicated that of 1972), 'despite strong support from the trade union leadership, at the grass root level the majority of trade union members remained opposed to membership' (1997: 2). In line with Marks and Wilson, he suggests (1997: 5) that the strength of Norwegian social democracy made EU membership relatively unattractive to labour. Conversely, the effect of the Thatcher onslaught in the 1980s was to enhance the attractions of Brussels for British unions. Geyer also notes that in Britain, embracing European integration appealed to the 'modernizers' who from the 1980s were in the ascendancy within the Labour Party; in Norway 'social democratic traditionalism' was more strongly rooted (1997: 7). One may note here that the British party leadership began to moderate its anti-EC posture after the disastrous electoral defeat of May 1983; the TUC shifted its official position only with Delors' watershed speech to Congress in 1998. There is by now a significant literature on British labour's 'conversion' to Europe, though in some respects the explanations differ (Daniels 1998; Geyer 1997: 161-5; MacShane 1991; Rosamond 1993; Teague 1989). As so often in the recent history of the TUC, policy shifts long bitterly contested were ultimately embraced with minimal debate. In Norway, by contrast, attitudes within LO remained finely divided (Geyer 1997: 60-9). Certainly within more recent British controversy over the single currency, trade union positions seem to have owed far more to pragmatism than to traditional ideological orientations. In the words of the secretary of the T&GWU (Morris 1998: 182), 'the real criteria against which all claims need to be tested is jobs. So the EMU debate needs to be sober and balanced.'

Another comparative study focuses on Finland and Sweden. While Geyer's interpretative approach is primarily material – the capacity of labour movements to regulate labour markets and welfare systems at purely national level – the emphasis of Johansson and Raunio (2001) is for the most part on ideological factors. They identify seven determinants of European policy positions: basic political ideology, public opinion, nature of internal factionalism, strength of leadership influence, importance of inter-party rivalry on European issues, engagement with cognate parties (and by analogy, trade unions?) in other European countries, and the process of European integration itself. Only the last theme connects with the



perspective of Marks and Wilson (though unlike the latter, Johansson and Raunio do take account of dynamic shifts in EU regulatory capacity). A simple statistical contrast in their account is that the slightly greater referendum majority for EU accession in Finland than in Sweden was linked to a sharp contrast in support among social-democrat voters: 3:1 in the former, 50:50 in the latter; the Left Party in Sweden was also more strongly opposed than its Finnish counterpart. Unfortunately Johansson and Raunio say little concerning trade union involvement in these events (nor do they stress the degree to which, in Finland, EU membership was seen as a protection against a possible renewal of the Russian embrace). Their neglect of the trade union role is mirrored in Christensen's comparative study of left parties (1996). Haahr, in his comparison (1992, 1993) of British Labour and Danish social democracy, gives some attention to the position of LO, but the discussion is only marginal; and while he notes in passing the specific attitudes of individual unions (SiD and *Metall* hostile on several occasions, NNF in support of the Single European Act), no explanation of such differences is proposed. In Sweden, it is interesting that LO appears to have supported accession earlier than the social-democratic party (Misgeld 1997) – though it is interesting to note that Rudolf Meidner, progenitor of the 'Swedish model' of industrial relations, was an ardent campaigner against EU membership.

Dølvik (1997: 29) has proposed that 'the incentives for trade unions to engage in Europeanisation... are influenced by interplay between the particular structure of opportunities related to the social dimension and the structural bias of the broader trajectory of European integration'. Structures of opportunity should be broadly understood. At one end of the historical trajectory, this helps explain why the German DGB supported European integration at a stage when the SPD remained opposed. The founding of the European Coal and Steel Community provided an agency with the capacity to regulate the economic environment of the two largest DGB affiliates, and trade unionists were appointed members of the ECSC High Authority. At the other extreme of historical development, the Austrian ÖGB was perhaps reinforced in its support for EU membership by the government's provision of a strong role in the accession negotiations (Falkner 1999) – though domestic concerns have certainly entailed a critical orientation to eastern enlargement (Meardi 2002); while the French CGT overturned its long-standing ideological opposition to European integration as its isolation came to seem increasingly a recipe for impotence – though the shift can also be seen as an expression of the strongly contested victory of 'modernisers' over 'traditionalists' within the PCF. A possible inference from the diversity of national experience is that analysis must accept the need for 'contextualised comparisons' which are sensitive to the ways in which traditional identities have shaped distinctive 'sticking points' in different countries (Locke and Thelen 1995).

### **The Dilemmas of 'Social Europe'**

There is a tense and threatening relationship between work, employment, citizenship, European integration, 'globalisation' and trade unionism. The 'European social model' represents principles which to an important extent vary cross-nationally, sometimes substantially, but nevertheless reflect a common core. Most fundamentally, employment is not simply a form of economic contract but is a relationship which embodies reciprocal rights and obligations and hence cannot be terminated at will. Workers possess collective interests which can legitimately be expressed in organised form, and can expect employers and governments to engage constructively with their representatives. The state has the right and duty to defend the principle of collective representation, to underwrite minimum standards of employment conditions where these are not codified voluntarily, and to 'decommodify' (Esping-Andersen 1990) the position of the working class more generally by managing a system of welfare provision.

These are important values. Nevertheless, they are certainly not unproblematic. First, welfare states were created as elements in more general national systems of organised capitalism. In important respects they were key components of different types of 'historic compromise' between the entrepreneurial ambitions of the newly consolidated employing class on the one hand, and on the other *either* the defenders of pre-capitalist conceptions of social rights and obligations (notably the catholic church), *or* the demands of the rising labour

movement (or in some cases, both). This accommodation was enabled by a competitive regime within which employers were willing (not usually enthusiastically, indeed) to share the costs of social solidarity, partly because governments could 'take social and labor standards "out of competition"' (Streeck 2001: 22). This willingness has evaporated in the new regime of international competition.

Second, most welfare states were primarily mechanisms for the redistribution of resources and life-chances within rather than between classes; and were rooted in a typical life-cycle when the employee spent far longer working (and hence contributing to the costs of welfare) than in deriving benefits. Extended education, earlier retirement, and above all increased longevity, have shifted the balance radically (Korpi 2001; Palme 2001). Such trends posed important challenges even before the tightening constraints in public finances which EMU has now institutionalised.

Third, the progressive character of welfare states was normally bounded. In most cases they rested on the model of the 'male breadwinner', reinforcing a sexual division of labour and a culture of female dependency (Korpi 2001; Lewis 1992). More generally they tended to demarcate 'insiders' from 'outsiders', a problem increasingly recognised in recent years with growing emphasis on issues of social exclusion.

It is against this complex pattern of challenges that the need for 'modernisation' of social protection has become part of the conventional wisdom, not least within the European Commission (Palme 2001). The dominant understanding of 'modernisation' is threefold. Perhaps the overriding priority, though not always admitted as such, is cost-cutting: governments must spend less on welfare. Second, in part as a corollary, welfare should be privatised: by restricting the range of publicly financed provision, by imposing or increasing charges for services, and by shifting from tax-based to insurance systems. Third, 'supply-side' considerations should increasingly shape welfare: provision should be targeted towards enhancing national competitiveness and productivity, hence 'political capacities are deployed to improve and equalize the marketability of individuals and their ability to compete, instead of protecting them from the market' (Streeck 2001: 26).

How might trade unions respond? The typical reflex is to reassert the need to protect 'Social Europe' (Mückenberger 2001). Yet this primarily defensive reaction coexists with the recognition of an imperative for European unions 'to radically overhaul their policies and structures. Only on this basis will they be able to fulfil their classic role – *ensuring social cohesion and justice* – and uphold their cultural values – *solidarity and equal opportunities*' (Hoffmann 2000: 627). This more nuanced conclusion, however, raises both strategic and tactical dilemmas.

Strategically, the 'modernisation' of the welfare state cuts to the heart of the meaning of 'Social Europe'. Who is to be protected, and how? What type of social order is a common objective of the diverse constituents of European trade unionism? What concessions to the economic *Realpolitik* of European integration are unavoidable, what can appropriately be contested? And where contestation is indeed appropriate, how far, and how, can it be coordinated transnationally?

Tactically, the key questions concern the modalities of 'political exchange' involved in any process of 'modernisation'. At national level, across western Europe, unions have more often attempted to negotiate the dilution and at times dismemberment of established welfare systems, in the hope of blunting the most radical aspects of demolition, rather than mounting determined opposition, let alone mobilising in support of an alternative vision of social welfare. In part this is because, in so many countries, unions are locked into the administration of the actually existing welfare regime and can sustain their traditional organisational advantages through a consensual approach to 'modernisation' (Crouch 1999). The organisational benefits which labour movements derive from national welfare arrangements help explain the fact – which Streeck (2001: 25) finds remarkable – that most unions are committed to their 'familiar and predictable national institutions' rather than attempting to create a new, more homogeneous European welfare regime.

In an important sense, then, there is a triple obstacle to strategic union intervention at European level in pursuit of a new, stronger and more equitable system of social protection. First, most union conceptions of social Europe are defensive rather than proactive. Second, rhetorical commitments to Europeanisation fail to override unions' own ideals of subsidiarity. And third, the institutionalisation of supranational intervention discussed earlier – matching that involved in social pacts at national level, though perhaps yielding fewer organisational benefits – ensures that a vigorous struggle in support of a distinctive agenda is virtually precluded.

Could a more resilient and more progressive version of social Europe be envisaged, and how might it be pursued? Here it is useful to revisit the familiar distinction between two dimensions of trade unions: as movement and organisation (Herberg 1968), as 'sword of justice' and 'vested interest' (Flanders 1970), as bearers of 'moral' and 'pragmatic' legitimacy (Chaison and Bigelow 2002). Almost universally, unions emerged as social movements which challenged key principles of the prevailing social and economic order, depending for their effectiveness on their ability to persuade, first their own constituents but also the broader community, of the legitimacy of their vision and their objectives. Like all social movements they were 'networks of interaction' (Byrne 1997: 11) and participants in 'contentious politics' (Tarrow 1998). With time, however, unions became increasingly dependent for their survival on institutionalised internal routines and formalised external relationships with employers and governments. As Gramsci noted (1977), this constituted an 'industrial legality' which could bring organisational (and material) advantages yet could weaken the organic, ideational resonance with those whose aspirations unions sought to voice.

Unions' engagement with the EU has largely abdicated contentious politics in favour of industrial legality. Such an outcome, as has been seen, has been systematically cultivated by the European Commission. One may note that this domestication of contention has been extended beyond trade unions to other representatives of 'civil society' through the 'civil dialogue' launched in 1994; the White Paper on European Governance (EC 2001) can be viewed as in part a project to gain the EU some of the legitimacy of popular social movements drawn into 'partnership', while diminishing the latter's spontaneity and accentuating their bureaucratic aspects. In this way the civil dialogue, like the social dialogue before it, can result in 'a paradoxical dilution of participative democracy' (Armstrong 2001: 10).

Conversely, an autonomous trade union policy for social Europe would need to be radically distanced from official EU conceptions of welfare modernisation. It would require a vision and imagination capable of meeting the interests and aspirations of a diverse and sophisticated workforce; a language of social solidarity able to rekindle unions' moral legitimacy as a 'sword of justice'; and a will and capacity to re-learn cross-nationally both strategies and tactics. Utopian indeed: but utopias are indispensable in the bureaucratic maze of official Europe.

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