

ABC OF TRADE UNIONISM

I

WHAT IS A TRADE UNION ORGANISATION?

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International Confederation of Free Trade Unions**

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Foreword

This ABC of trade unionism has been drafted by the ICFTU at the request of its Coordinating Committee for Central and Eastern Europe. It aims to present the basic principles of trade unionism in a form accessible to rank and file trade unionists, local and regional leaders.

The document is divided into three parts:

1. What is a trade union organisation?
2. The work of a trade unionist.
3. Trade unionism in society.

Each section is presented as follows: first, there is a theoretical presentation, aimed at defining the different aspects of trade unionism, then there are examples of concrete experiences to show that trade unionism is first and foremost a living and very diverse process. Before each concrete example there are a list of questions or comments to guide the reader.

This ABC has been designed to be used:

- either as reference material, that the reader can look through at her/his leisure;
- or as a teaching manual. The questions and comments can be used as a guide to collective study. It goes without saying, however, that the trainer is perfectly free to use the manual as s/he sees fit, particularly in their approach to the content of each chapter, both the theoretical parts, and the concrete examples.

The trade union movement, as can be seen from reading this ABC, is essentially a pluralist, diversified movement. It is built up within each society, by its own activists. This document is not, therefore, intended as a "model" that can be applied mechanically to every situation. Rather, this ABC aims to encourage the trade unionists that read it to think about what the trade union movement is, and could be, in their own country, or region. In addition, therefore, to the presentation of general principles, and the concrete examples, from Western Europe or elsewhere, there is a third aspect to be developed, which is that of studying the trade union movement as it exists in the reader's own social context. The ABC will have fulfilled its purpose if it succeeds in facilitating this type of study.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRATISATION AND THE TRANSITION TO A MARKET ECONOMY

The societies of Central and Eastern Europe, together with many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, are today undergoing a crucial period of change and upheaval. First of all there is the transition to democracy, which must be consolidated at all costs. In addition, these political changes have opened the way to economic and social change which will lead to the integration of these countries into the international economic and trading system, etc.. All these countries will no doubt encounter many difficulties and obstacles throughout the transformation process. Those experiencing these difficulties at first hand are the workers and the population as whole.

The trade union movement in these societies is at a crossroads. On the one hand it is inevitably taking on an enormous responsibility. With their eyes fixed on short term economic indicators (limiting the budget deficit, curbing inflation, the foreign trade performance...), the governments of these countries seem convinced that the "social" dimension is an unaffordable luxury. But the sharp rise in unemployment, the strangulation of the education system and the health system... the lack of a minimal safety net for a population that found itself living in poverty overnight... are putting the future of these societies in the balance, jeopardizing hard won progress. Without social justice there can be no lasting democracy. Far from being a luxury, holding back progress, as some seem to think, the role of the trade unions is of the greatest importance, because it helps consolidate the social dimension, without which democracy would remain unstable.

WHAT TRADE UNIONISM IS - AND WHAT IT IS NOT

It is therefore important to define the parameters. What is trade unionism? How do the democratic trade unions see their role? These two questions, which constitute the focus of this first section of "An ABC of Trade Unionism", suggest a certain philosophy behind the commitment to trade unionism. It is one that is in direct opposition to "transmission belt" trade unionism, which in the last few decades has dominated labour relations in the communist countries. In short, the accent is on the essential principles of democracy, freedom and independence vis-à-vis all other organisations. This philosophy does not recognise the following as bona fide trade unions:

- organisations governed by objectives that differ from those sought by the workers themselves, on the basis of democratic discussion among their members;
- organisations whose aim is to control the workers, depriving them of the means to voice their own views and demands;
- organisations run or controlled directly or indirectly by other entities, political or economic authorities, other than those chosen by the workers themselves, freely and responsibly;

- organisations which restrict their role to activities that nurture a certain type of social, cultural, educational or even economic behaviour.

In other words, there are unions and there are unions. It is not enough to claim to defend workers to be automatically accepted as legitimate by them, as an organisation that genuinely represents workers' interests. Trade unionism, as the ICFTU understands it, is built on a wide range of experiences and struggles, all based on certain values. These are the values that give meaning to a movement that stands for both freedom and solidarity, for the defence of workers' interests and for democracy.

THE RENEWAL OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT - LIES IN ITS DEMOCRATISATION

Social change also requires change within trade union organisations. Democracy is not only a matter for parliamentary institutions. Political democracy must be backed up by social democracy. However, this also means that the organisations themselves must be capable of adapting to the demands made of society as a whole. It is not enough, for example, for organisations to defend workers rights. Workers themselves must be able to understand their rights and enforce them in their daily lives. How can each worker be made to take an interest in the trade union struggle, whether in the enterprise or in society as a whole? How can everyone be persuaded to take part in a debate and a commitment that concerns all of us. These are the fundamental questions faced by every trade union organisation concerned not only with voicing workers' claims but also with practising democracy. It is also a prerequisite for efficiency. An organisation that is run democratically is an organisation whose every intervention carries the conscious weight of the members as a whole. It is a force to be reckoned with.

II. AN ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION AND DEFENCE OF WORKERS' RIGHTS

Theory

2.1. WORK: A SOCIAL PROCESS

To feed its people and develop every community must produce goods and services, in short, ensure the subsistence and welfare of its members.

To feed themselves and support a family, people must work, and thereby participate in their community's development.

Work is a social activity par excellence. It is also an act of solidarity. It is because the great majority of people work that others may study, undertake activities that are not directly productive, and in the event of illness or job loss benefit from a minimal replacement income.

In our modern, developed societies, fewer and fewer people work for themselves, with their own tools. Increasingly, to work means to participate in the production process, using sophisticated technological means. Work is no longer an activity developed by woman or man alone, it is part of a certain social and technical division within a region, a society, the world. It entails the use of ever greater material and technical as well as human means.

2.2. THE OWNER AND MANAGER: THE EMPLOYER

The means of production have to be found, and investment is needed, usually on a large scale. Capital must therefore be mobilised, either by private individuals or by groups of people, or by the State. These people or companies, public and private, are the initiators and owners of enterprise. Usually they also take charge, directly or indirectly, of the management of these enterprises. Henceforward, they shall be referred to as the employer.

"Employer" refers therefore to a broader category than that of owner. Ownership may refer to very different situations: public ownership (the State, a public service or company), ownership by a cooperative, a private individual, several private individuals (in association, pooling their initial capital), limited companies (where the capital is divided into stocks or shares, that are freely negotiated, and that anyone can purchase, thereby contributing to the enterprise's financial means). On the other hand, whatever form of ownership there may be, the enterprise or company must be properly managed. It is this entity that takes direct responsibility for running the company that we should call the employer, regardless of whether this employer is accountable to the owner or owners, or whether he himself is the owner of his enterprise.

Employers cannot work with capital alone, however. They also need the brains and the brawn to create the products (or services) that they want to perfect, produce and sell ... To do this, they must hire people's services, for which the latter will earn their living. These people take out, formally or otherwise, an employment contract. This contract defines the type of relations - contents of the work, pay, the rights of both parties - that will link, for a limited or unlimited period, the employer on the one hand to the employee, or worker, on the other.

2.3. THE PERSON HIRING OUT HIS LABOUR: THE WORKER

Let us specify one point: by workers we mean any person that enters into a labour contract in the broad sense, whatever the tasks they agree to perform. The chemist in a laboratory, the metalworker, shop assistants...all have different tasks but they are all workers. Whether they are "white collar" or "blue collar", skilled or unskilled, manual or non-manual, or supervisory staff, for us, they are all workers. So is the unemployed worker, the one who survives thanks to social solidarity funds...

Theoretically, an employment contract is drawn up between two people of equal status. In reality, however, this is often far from being the case. Firstly, the employer tends increasingly to be a "legal person" (a company or an association that has a legal identity that does not correspond to that of the people that formed it). Secondly, because in most cases, a worker's job is her/his only source of income and s/he only has a limited choice of enterprises in which to work, s/he is in a much weaker position than the employer. The unequal strength of the employer and the worker becomes apparent when looking at the extent to which the employer is free to allocate their financial resources to one activity or another, to one part of the globe or another, based on the sole criteria of maximising profits; compare this to the situation of the worker who usually only has a very narrow margin for manoeuvre: to live, to be able to feed her/his dependents, s/he must above all find an employer who, by paying a salary, agrees to use their labour. Dismissal, which for the employer is simply a question of economic management, can often be a human and material catastrophe for the worker.

2.4. JOINING TOGETHER TO EXPRESS COMMON VIEWS

A worker is not, however, just an isolated individual, engaged in a private contractual relationship. As soon as s/he begins to work, s/he becomes part of a network of rights and obligations that have been defined, often at the cost of a lengthy struggle, by workers in general, whoever they are. For a long time, workers in the same workshop, office, enterprise...and even the same region or country, have organised and have striven to improve their position together. Joining together to stand up for your rights, to negotiate pay and working conditions with the employer with one voice is, essentially, the fundamental purpose of the trade union movement.

"To express views jointly" "to unite", "to organise collectively" - whatever the language, the same meaning can usually be found for the word "union". This definition can be applied to any group of people or organisations. There are countless "unions" - doctors, shareholders, employers - who have adopted this term for their purposes. Usually, "union" refers to an association of employees. Workers are bound by a contract whereby they sell their labour to an employer, either private or public. By joining together and expressing their common views, workers assert their mutual solidarity, and develop the means whereby they can intervene in everything that, directly or indirectly, affects their living and working conditions.

Practice

2.5. THE BASIS OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORLD TODAY, THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

A trade union organisation is an association of workers. Not workers carrying out individual activities, working for themselves, but workers who are already associated by the fact that they work together, engaged in the same productive activity. "Big business" is in this sense a modern phenomenon, that has made possible prodigious economic development. At the same time, it created the necessary conditions for the birth of the trade unions. Adam Smith (1723-1790) the founder of classical economics, explains the basic principles of "big business" on which our modern economy is founded in the now famous text "The division of labour" (Chapter I of his basic work "The Wealth of Nations").

"The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour.

The effects of the division of labour, in the general business of society, will be more easily understood by considering in what manner it operates in some particular manufactures. (...).

To take an example from a very trifling manufacture; but one in which the division of labour has been very often taken notice of, the trade of the pin-maker; a workman not educated to this business (which the division of labour has rendered a distinct trade), nor acquainted with the use of the machinery employed in it (to the invention of which the same division of labour has probably given occasion), could scarce, perhaps, with his utmost industry, make one pin a day, and certainly could not make twenty. But in the way in which this business is now carried on, not only the whole work is a peculiar trade, but is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades. One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires three distinct operations; to put it on is a peculiar busi-

ness, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about 18 distinct operations, which, in some manufactories, are all performed by distinct hands, though in others the same man will sometimes perform two or three of them. I have seen a small manufactory of this kind where ten men only were employed, and where some of them consequently performed two or three distinct operations. But though they were very poor, and therefore, but indifferently accommodated with the necessary machinery, they could, when they exerted themselves, make among them about twelve pounds of pins in a day. There are in a pound upwards of four thousand pins of a middling size. Those ten persons, therefore, could make among them upwards of forty-eight thousand pins in a day. Each person, therefore, making a tenth part of forty-eight thousand pins, might be considered as making four thousand eight hundred pins in a day. But if they had all wrought separately and independently, and without any of them having been educated to this peculiar business, they could certainly not each of them have made twenty, perhaps not one pin a day; that is, certainly, not the two hundred part of what they are at present capable of performing, in consequence of a proper division and combination of their different operations.

In every other art and manufacture, the effects of the division of labour are similar to what they are in this very trifling one; though, in many of them, the labour can neither be so much subdivided, nor reduced to so great a simplicity of operation. The division of labour, however, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase of the productive powers of labour.

The separation of different trades and employments from one another seems to have taken place in consequence of this advantage. This sepa-

ration, too, is generally carried furthest in those countries which enjoy the highest degree of industry and improvements; what is the work of one man in a rude state of society being generally that of several in an improved one. In every improved society, the farmer is generally nothing but a farmer; the manufacturer, nothing but a manufacturer. The labour, too, which is necessary to produce any one complete manufacture is almost always divided among a great number of hands".

This text was written in 1776. How do we understand today:

- **what the division of labour means not only within a single enterprise but within a multitude of enterprises, that may be scattered across the four corners of the world?**
- **the ever greater role played by technical know-how and science in developing an increasingly sophisticated work process, in which information and coordination, in particular, play a decisive role?**
- **the social and psychological repercussions of such a division of labour on women and men?**
- **the innovations currently taking place in certain enterprises to give workers responsibility for the technical management of production (known as "participatory management", "quality circles"...) and to therefore recreate a certain element of control by the worker or a group of workers over what they produce?**

2.6. WORKERS - BUT ALSO WORKERS WITHOUT A JOB

By addressing workers, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that there are many people who, although belonging to the labour world in the broad sense of the term, are not in fact involved in a regular occupational activity. This applies to all those who, either because they are retired, ill, receiving social security benefits, and who need, as much as anyone, the solidarity of others to defend their rights. However this also applies to all those who have lost their jobs, or have have not yet found one, and who, because of this, are even less able to defend themselves. The persistence of a high level of unemployment, including in the developed societies, is of direct concern to the trade unions. All workers, not only those seeking work, are experiencing increasing social and material insecurity.

Read the two texts below and try to situate them in the context of your own society:

- **what is the rate of unemployment in your society; what is the rate of "long-term" unemployment (more than one year)?**

- what rights do the unemployed have? Are they still members of the trade union organisation? What does it do to help them?
- does the rate of unemployment have a noticeable impact on other workers? In what way is their situation affected? Examine the different situations of workers and discuss how this has evolved over the last few years.
- what are the union's proposals for combatting persistent under-employment?

2.6.1. ACUTE UNEMPLOYMENT

"The industrialised countries continued to pay a heavy price for the crisis in 1992. The economic institutes constantly revised downwards their forecasts for growth, while economic recovery remained either elusive or very weak. In such a context, it is scarcely surprising that public deficits continued to grow - with tax revenue lower than expected and expenditure by the State and public administration higher - and that unemployment continued to rise almost everywhere.

The slowdown in activity has also had a devastating effect on the employment situation. None of the industrialised countries has even managed to stabilise the number of unemployed. Both Germany and Japan have recorded an increase in the number of job seekers. Countries that have so far been spared the crisis, often sheltered by a very protective social model, such as Switzerland or the Scandinavian countries, have also been affected, as have the countries from Europe's former communist bloc who believed they had established permanent artificial full employment.

Although the rate of increase is lower than in 1991, the rise in unemployment has uncovered - or confirmed - strong and very disturbing trends, such as the spread of long term unemployment, the continued

shortage of skilled labour or the appearance of high levels of under-employment in the service sector. Political leaders are rapidly running out of answers, while most of the solutions that have already been tried have proved ineffective. While the State cannot decree growth or job creation, it can at least carry out a policy to stimulate activity. In every large industrialised country there is a confrontation between the advocates of austerity and those who argue for recovery through inflation. Should the State finance more major works and infrastructure projects, allowing the public deficit to shoot up? Or should it concentrate, by favouring lower interest rates and reducing taxes, on stimulating enterprises, enabling them to pay off their debts and increase investment?

Weakened, and sometimes themselves in crisis, the trade unions have urged the State to centre economic policies on combatting unemployment and, at least, to continue to play an important role in social regulation, the safety valve of the social security system that is proving ever more necessary at a time of crisis. But in 1992, as in previous years, they have had a hard time making themselves heard...".

(Source: "Le Monde". Economic and Social Report, 1992. Paris.)

2.6.2. THE EROSION OF THE STANDARD EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

"For the last four or five years there has been a great deal of talk about "flexibility" and the need to soften up rigidities in the labour market. Listening to some of the arguments used, it almost seems as if the time has come to sound the death knell of labour law, of that whole body of legislation which has grown up on the basis of the acknowledged right of the worker to a certain amount of protection in his relationship with his employer who, insofar as he has the economic power of decision-making, would otherwise enjoy an excessively strong position. In recent years increasing numbers of workers have been moving into flexible and non-protected form of employment.

The situation in the Federal Republic of Germany may, by way of illustration, be cited here, for it is broadly similar in many other countries. In the Federal Republic some 25 to 30% of all workers have employment contracts that are in some sense "flexible", i.e. which diverge from the more usual full-time contracts or regular (relatively) protected contracts.

These flexible forms of employment include fixed-term contracts, sub-contracting, part-time work, and forms of so-called "new self-employment".

This does not mean that all these workers are no longer covered by labour law. The developments are taking place within the law itself, with a marked process of differentiation emerging. Some of the acquired rights considered fundamental in the labour world are being called into question. There is, however, a common and essential starting point: if it were not for the existence of some 16 million unemployed in the European Community as a whole, the sting would be to a considerable extent removed from discussions concerning the erosion of the regular contract of employment."

(Dr. Ulrich Zachert, University of Hamburg. "New Forms of Employment Contract". European Trade Union Institute. The Future of Work. December 1990).

2.7. WHEN THE EMPLOYERS ORGANISE

It is not only workers who organise. Employers have also created their own organisations, sometimes long before the workers. These organisations play several roles: commercial, industrial...and social. It is this in this last role that they have been able to define a coordinated position towards both workers representatives and the State, to bring their weight to bear as much on labour relations as on the government's economic and social policies.

As unions, employers' associations can vary greatly according to the society in which they are formed. The example given below of the German employers' associations has very specific features. Germany calls itself a market economy, but from the very early post-war years it placed the running of the economy within the framework of a more or less permanent social dialogue; both trade union and employers' organisations were firmly established and since 1945 a tradition of consultation and dialogue has been built up at almost every level of economic and social activity. These elements help understand the special nature of the "German social model" which is in stark contrast to the style of relations between the social partners in France for example, and in even greater contrast with what is still being sought in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Read the text below and discuss the following aspects:

- employers may represent public or private enterprises, small or large, national or multinational. Examine the situation of enterprises in your country, and look at how these differences are reflected in the way employers' organisations are run; what do you see as the union's room for manoeuvre in relation to these different categories of employers?
- in every society, employers' associations play a political role, trying to influence their government's choices. The way this happens is very different however, depending on whether these associations constitute an independent force or whether they are controlled by the State. How do you see this political intervention by the employers, and what can the workers and the population do to act as a counterweight?

Are the employers in your country organised? If they are, in what form? What, in your view, are the principal problems that the trade unions face in their relations with the employers?

EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATIONS IN GERMANY

"German employers and unions share close-knit collective bargaining ties, which have produced a network of mutual advantage, often characterised as the "uneasy alliance". All German enterprises, from small and medium sized companies to the largest transnational corporations, are organised in federations covering trade, industrial and geographic groupings. The three basic types of organisation are Chambers of Industry and Commerce, Trade or Business Associations and Employer Associations.

The functional divisions between these three different types of organisation help entrepreneurs to identify the specific interests of their labour and product markets, as well as providing an aid in lobbying the government in the interests of their industry.

CHAMBERS AND TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

The interests of companies are represented at a local level, by Chambers of Industry and Commerce or "Industrie und Handelskammern" (IHK). Charged with the improvement of general market conditions, local chambers are public law bodies, membership of which is manda-

tory for local firms. They perform a number of important public duties, including licensing and regulating trade practices and providing apprenticeship training, which in other countries are more usually associated with government functions.

TRADE AND BUSINESS

Whole sectors of the economy are covered by trade and business associations. Concerned mainly with product markets, they provide support for the development of technology, production, marketing and research, alongside technological regulation schemes related to production systems and work organisation. They also organise large international trade fairs and attempt, through lobbying, to influence government research policy.

To achieve these aims, trade associations have a range of geographically based structures from the local area to European Community level, as well as a system of committees and workteams to deal with specific problems.

Nationally, business and trade associations have combined to form the

influential Federation of German Industries or "Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie" (BDI), which as a national centre represents industry's views to both the government and the wider public.

In the service sector, there are similar business and trade associations but they lack a top level organisation similar to the BDI.

EMPLOYER ASSOCIATIONS

The third and final support for business interests is provided by the German Employer Associations. Wholly devoted to industrial relations, they are responsible for representing employer interests to unions in respect of wages, working hours and other working conditions. Their task is to shape industrial relations in order to allow the regulation of the labour market. Responsible exclusively for collective agreements, they are the most important instrument for the resolution of conflicts between labour and capital.

In the German system of free collective bargaining, it is at the level of the branch associations that employers conduct negotiations, conclude binding contracts or decide to lock-out workers in response to strikes. Most of the significant trends post war in the development of policies related to wages, working time and working conditions, emerged from the employer federations covering metal, chemical and construction industries.

Employer associations are brought together in the Confederation of German Employers' Associations or "Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen

Arbeitgeberverbände" (BDA) which, like the DGB, plays no direct role in collective bargaining. It chooses instead to concentrate on mediating between different groups of employers' views on industrial relations and social policy to government and other international organisations.

Covering nearly all private sector employers associations in Germany, the scope of the BDA extends far beyond the industrial sector. However, the iron and steel industry's employers' association remains outside the BDA, as it has a legal co-determination structure which awards equal union and employer representation on the supervisory boards. After the war, the co-determination system was implemented in these two industries as a way to avoid conflicts between labour and capital joining them in the management of the companies. Public sector employers too have separate industrial relations systems, independent of the BDA.

German Employers appreciate having an autonomous system of collective bargaining which, "functions to maintain peace and order" free from state interference. Previous studies of the role and function of German employer associations have shown that they are adept at representing the intermediate interest between the market, the state and the trade unions. Academics see German enterprise associations as good examples of organisations which can encompass differing interests".

(Source: "Die Mitbestimmung". Hans-Böckler Foundation. Special 1992 English Edition.)

2.8. THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT'S FIRST STEPS

In most democratic countries, the unions today are seen as highly structured organisations, aware of their strength, and clear as to their position in relation to the other social partners, the employers and the government.

Obviously, this was not always the case. In the last century, for example, in Belgium (although the example applies to all other countries which were industrialising at that time), it is striking to see how much workers had to fight for what today are considered basic rights (the freedom of association, to start with...). Or to see how any collective expression of their demands by the workers is regarded by the employers as undermining the - moral and legal - fabric of society. Yet this was in a country with a constitution that at the time was considered as one of the most liberal.

Workers' freedom of association is now a recognised right. This was by no means always the case. Compare this point of view with the text below, which dates from the beginning of the Belgian labour movement, with what you know of the beginnings of the labour movement in your country. Can you find similar arrogance shown by the government towards the situation of workers? What do you think about the forms of mutual assistance - scholarships, friendly societies - devised at the time to provide some solidarity between workers, and to what extent are these methods still of use today? How would you define, in modern terms, the demands of these textile workers: that no manufacturer should be able to reduce the established price of labour?

500 COTTON SPINNERS APPEAL TO THE KING OF THE BELGIANS (15 Aug.1831)

"While we are aware that your paternal concern is very much taken up at this time with the welfare of a nation that loves you, we have nonetheless respectfully taken the liberty of bringing to Your Majesty's attention a situation that cruelly affects us, and we beg Your Majesty to be so good as to cast an eye over this, so that we may obtain a right equal to that of our masters, but no more. Sire, there are 500 of us working as cotton spinners in the 75 factories of the town of Gent, the majority of whom are the fathers of families. We have been exposed all too often to a reduction in our wages, owing to the greed or villany of the manufacturer, who seems to take barbaric pleasure in forcing us to die of hunger together with our wives and children. This atrocity finally caused us to leave the workshop where the reduction took place. Now regarded as plotters, we have been sentenced by the Gent criminal court and have been

dragged from prison to prison all the way to Brussels because we could not and would not work to the detriment of our families. Thus, Sire, deprived of our most sacred rights, we have become the victims of a band of men, who have come from nothing, who are growing rich at the expense of the unhappy worker, who does not even have the right to complain. They have dared go further, because they have the right sanctified by law, which says: Any worker wishing to change from one factory to another, shall be obliged to advise his master, who have having made them work their fifteen days, must allow them to leave with due and proper papers, enjoining the manufacturer, if he were to dismiss one or more of his workers, to give them fifteen days notice, unless the worker is thief, and in which case may be dismissed on the spot. This right was, furthermore, ignored.

NO MANUFACTURER, SIRE, SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO REDUCE THE ESTABLISHED PRICE OF LABOUR

Now we see that they again want to reduce our wages, which were fixed long ago by weight and by number, Mr. Brasseur giving the example to the other manufacturers of Gent, and we also see that they have collauded with each other on this. If they believe that by leaving their factories idle, they can force us and our children die of hunger, that they can succeed in pushing us to such an extreme, they are mistaken..."

After this description they asked the king, in terms that are anything but provocative, to be able to create a fund in the form of a mutual benefit society, that would include assistance for the unemployed, which may have been a form of resistance fund in disguise:

"So after painting this heart-rending picture, we beg Your Majesty to take our sad situation into consideration and to rule that no manufacturer may reduce the established price of labour, that it is forbidden for them to cease their activities on any pretext whatsoever, that the spinners have the right to set up a fund to which each one will contribute a certain amount per week to assist their ill or unemployed friends, to be fixed amongst themselves, that the police

shall not be able to disturb them in their meeting place, unless the police suspects one of them of being guilty of some offence; a fund all the more useful given that widows and orphans would also feel the benefits.

In so doing, Your Majesty will be doing justice by 500 people, who with their families will never cease to pray to God so that He may bless you and your illustrious family. Your Majesty will forgive the fact that this petition has not been signed. The reason is that the manufacturers would refuse to employ the signatories. Your Majesty's reply may be sent to Mr. Jean Duval Quai of La Live, Gent."

It seems that Jean Duval did not receive a reply from His Majesty, but he was called to the town hall where he was given to understand that a "fund" should take into account the regulation introduced by the commune on 7 September 1827. This regulation was without a doubt based on the French law banning all forms of coalition...

(Quoted by H. Wouters "Dokumenten betreffende de geschiedenis der arbeidersbeweging". Also quoted in J. Neuville "Naissance et Croissance du Syndicalisme". p 351-352. Ed. Vie Ouvrière. Brussels).

III. THE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF TRADE UNIONISM

Theory

The unions were born with the industrial revolution. That does not mean that they were created, as new organisations, overnight. In fact, the structure of trade unions as we know it, even today, has its roots in the craftsmen's guilds of the Middle Ages. At the same time, however, the economic and social upheaval of the 19th and 20th centuries brought about profound changes in the trade union movement. In short, like any other social body, the unions are highly complex institutions, covering a range of very different traditions. Not only is there no single "model" of trade unionism, that can be found throughout the world, there is also no "model" to be found, other than a few rare exceptions, in any one country. Undoubtedly, one or other of the predominant or characteristic forms can no doubt be found, depending on traditions, in each country. However, this only means that this particular format has subsumed, but not removed, the other forms of organisation that at one time or another, in one social situation or another, shaped that country's trade union history.

3.1. CRAFT UNIONS

This is the oldest form of trade unionism. It was built, almost as a natural development, on the basis of the craftsmen's guilds of the Middle Ages (which were in fact associations formed in the towns, where small industry was born, bringing together the employers, workers and apprentices of the same trade; the aim was therefore to defend "the profession", both technically - the production process - commercially - protecting the name - and socially - providing a certain level of security, particularly in the event of illness or invalidity). The small workshop became a factory, employing first tens and then hundreds of workers. Their interests were increasingly separate from those of their employers, who in turn were becoming "captains of industry".

This was the most common form of trade unionism to develop in Europe, from the beginning of the 19th century, organising highly skilled workers and using their technical "know-how" as a formidable negotiating weapon. Typographers, printers, hatters, tailors, builders, stone masons, glass blowers, coalface miners and carpenters were the first, later followed by teachers', engine mechanics', and postmen's unions ... the craft unions thereby closely following the forms of work organisation that could be termed "pre-capitalist".

This type of trade unionism led almost automatically to a wide range of unions. In one branch of industry, or one enterprise, there are often many different types of occupation and profession. In addition to the typographers, there are journalists, and administrative staff; as well as the train drivers, there are the ticket inspectors, the engineers, the administrative staff, the track layers, the mechanics... In short the organisation of workers on this basis can very easily lead to the existence of ten, twenty or more different unions within one enterprise... with the corresponding problems of coordinating their demands vis-à-vis a single employer.

3.2. GENERAL TRADE UNIONISM

In some countries, the limitations of craft unions soon became apparent. Where do you draw the line between one craft or occupation and the next? What do you do with workers who do not belong to any one definable craft, in other words the new category of workers, often very low skilled, that capitalism brought into its enterprises? In 1889, in London, Willy Thorne founded a "general trade union" which, beginning with gasworkers, accepted into membership workers of all grades from all industries. This type of trade unionism spread very quickly, its demands had a more general appeal (reduction of the working day from 12 to 8 hours) and affected groups, such as dockers, that were unskilled and until that time, therefore, unorganised.

The most typical example was in the United States. Faced with the massive influx of workers entering the country in search of work, the American employers devised various forms of work organisation (production lines, mass production, taylorism...). Unless these workers were to remain defenceless, the trade union movement also had to adapt. Hence the birth of these general unions, grouping workers from different industries and sectors of activity spanning a wide range of skills at the national level, i.e. across the United States and Canada. The United Food and Commercial Workers Union, for example, groups together stone cutters, meat cutters, packers, workers from the food industry, from insurance companies, shoemakers, healthcare workers, barbers, beauticians...

This type of trade unionism does not in general impose any limits on organising or expansion. Organisations are therefore often very large, in terms of membership, and the occupational categories they cover. This gives them considerable negotiating power, and the ability to face lengthy industrial disputes. The other side of the coin is that it is difficult to create a real sense of identity with and solidarity towards "their" union among such diverse categories of workers.

3.3. INDUSTRY UNIONS

The sudden change from traditional skills and the development of new industries also helped unify workers, as a group of people working to produce the same product, hired by the same employer, with the same working conditions. In some cases, the early craft unions simply expanded to cover all workers in the same enterprise. In other cases, where there was no tradition of craftsmen's guilds, the unions were formed from the outset as associations of all the workers within the same enterprise, regardless of their trade or professional status, thereby creating a single union to negotiate with one employer.

The extent to which this process developed varied from country to country. In Belgium, for example and in some cases in Britain, there are unions that represent all the blue collar workers within an enterprise, and others that represent all white collar workers within that same enterprise. It was in Germany that the trend really took hold, from the time the DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund - the German national centre) chose to incorporate both the blue and white collar workers of the same enterprise within the same union.

These unions very quickly joined together with unions from other countries within the same sector of activity. Just as employers in the same sector of industry clubbed together, the workers also organised, forming unions that brought together all the workers within the same industry - metallurgy, mines, education - thereby wielding formidable negotiating power, at least within their sector of activity (as soon as the sector is in crisis, the situation is completely different of course). To further strengthen this power, these unions grouped together to form an ever larger sector of activity. The IG Metall in Germany, for example, groups all workers in the metal-related industry (steelworkers, mechanical construction workers, automobile workers), while the OTV (Öffentliche Dienste Transport und Verkehr), groups all workers in public service and transport. Altogether, there are 16 large industry unions that dominate the trade union scene in this country, and therefore have a decisive influence on industrial relations.

3.4. ENTERPRISE UNIONS

Industry unions have not developed to the same extent everywhere however. In some countries, the trade union movement is still essentially composed of enterprise unions, that have developed links with other enterprise unions, but that remain firmly attached to their roots. In Japan, the predominant form of trade unionism is still the union organised at the enterprise level, or possibly within a company that includes several enterprises, uniting all workers, regardless of their skills.

This form of trade unionism can only work, obviously, under certain conditions, notably the relative job security of the employees within the enterprise (where they can hope to spend their professional career together) and through the development of a strong enterprise "culture" (where all the members of the enterprise see themselves in a sense as being part of the same family). These conditions are more likely to be found, in Europe for example, in public companies or multinationals. This has not however prevented some employers from doing everything they can to set up their own union within their enterprise, a sort of "house union". Neither do they hesitate to agree to certain advantages in exchange for a split from the rest of the trade union movement in the country...although it is questionable whether this (which incidentally is far removed from the Japanese model) can really be considered trade unionism.

3.5. TRADE UNIONISM BORN OUT OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Although trade unions today are organisations for the promotion and defence of workers' interests, and clearly identifiable as such, this has not always been the case. In fact, the trade union movement was formed as an integral part of a broader social movement, fighting to improve the position of workers, for the recognition of workers as citizens in the full sense of the word (fighting for the right to vote for all, regardless of income), and for a fairer and more egalitarian society. In short, trade unionism was created, in almost all cases, within the framework of a broader social movement for the reform of society.

This objective - fighting for a fairer, more mutually supportive society, in which there is respect for the dignity of each individual - explains why very often mutual insurance schemes, trade unions, coop-

eratives (consumer and producer cooperatives), and political parties (to send workers' representatives to parliament) were set up at virtually the same time. The creation of one or other of these branches of the movement would lead to the creation of the rest. In these early days of the labour movement the political and social dimensions were, for most "committed" workers, inseparable. They were demanding both better living conditions and the recognition of their rights, as workers and citizens.

This unity within the social movement can still be found today in certain countries, particularly where the workers still have to fight for some of their basic rights: the right to citizenship, the right to be considered as a human being regardless of the colour of their skin, their national or ethnic origins, religious beliefs, the right to individual and collective expression, notably by forming the organisations of their choice, etc. In these countries, it is because the defence of workers rights and interests is part of the fight against an oppressive political regime, because the fight to improve the position of workers has become inextricably linked to the fight for democracy, that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the social aspects from the political aspects of the workers' movement. More often than not, such a movement may have its roots at enterprise level, but will organise essentially at the regional or national level. This is the form of organisation that has proved the most effective in uniting all workers, and even in establishing links between workers and non-workers, in the formulation of general demands put forward by everyone.

In a democratic society, where fundamental human and workers' rights are respected, this initial unity of the social movement usually disappears. Each plays their own role: the political parties put forward their programme of action for society as a whole, that they try to implement when the electorate votes them into power, while the trade unions defend the specific rights and interests of the workers, be it at the enterprise level or within society. Privileged relations no doubt exist in some countries for historical reasons between the trade union movement and a "labour" party. In other countries, the unions may decide to support a particular candidate or party on the basis of a specific programme, because they believe that the workers' concerns will be listened to by them. However, this does not change the fact that each organisation remains strictly autonomous. A trade union organisation that takes on a directly political role, or whose actions are guided by primarily political objectives always runs the risk of seeing its specific role disappear; the workers will therefore lose the only organisation capable, on a daily basis, of defending and promoting their rights, regardless of which government is in power, or the political choices of that government.

3.6. THE "SOCIAL" DIMENSION OF TRADE UNIONISM

The unions' bargaining role does not exclude their taking practical steps to meet workers needs directly. This is particularly necessary in countries or situations where the State appears indifferent to the main concerns of a population living permanently on the edge of survival: what would happen to them in the event of illness, if they lost their job, when they became too old to work, if the family breadwinner died, if the price of staple foods suddenly shot up...? The trade union movement found many different ways of helping provide for these major risks: mutual insurance schemes, solidarity funds, cooperatives...This tradition can still be seen today in many countries: in Quebec the unions participate directly in an extremely powerful cooperative movement; in Belgium,

the unions continue to pay their members unemployment benefit (although it is the national social security fund that finances it); almost everywhere, the unions have created recreational structures, cultural or rest centres; the Histadrut of Israel has developed enterprises that now represent some 30% of industrial activity in the country... the list of examples is endless.

This type of trade unionism seeks therefore to alleviate society's failure to meet workers' needs (as regards employment, medical care, cultural development...); but this, like many other initiatives that disappear in time as social security and solidarity is organised at the national level and guaranteed by the State would be senseless, except as a temporary measure, if it were to lead employers or society in general to simply abandon all responsibility for social security, leaving it entirely in the hands of the trade unions. In the Soviet Union, and in the socialist states, the trade union movement, renouncing its role as the defender of workers' rights, turned into a sort of enormous social security department, taking charge of workers' lives at every level: from the nurseries to health-care, the organisation of holiday centres and leisure activities, access to culture, and even the distribution of certain consumer goods. It is not for nothing that the "social" dimension of trade unionism is often the only form of unionism tolerated in countries under authoritarian rule, or in companies with authoritarian management. For in confining them to this type of activity, there is every likelihood that the organisations will give up voicing virtually all genuine demands or challenges, and will in effect accept a role that is anything but that of challenging the foundations of the socio-economic system.

Practice

3.7 THE LONG MARCH TOWARDS A REDUCTION IN WORKING TIME

First there was the eight hour day, yesterday's forty hour week, today it is the reduction in working time (36 hours, 35 hours...) The trade union movement has always placed this demand high on its list of concerns. Whether the aim is to enforce a redistribution of working time to combat unemployment, as it is today, or whether, as in the past, it is simply to give workers a more human lifestyle, allowing for leisure time, and personal development... This demand, in which the interests of the individual and society meet, illustrates better than most the meaning of the trade union struggle.

The fight has continued for decades, and has met with fierce resistance from employers and governments, who have not hesitated to use strong-arm tactics to counter workers' demands. May 1, official labour day following the decision taken on 20 July 1889 by the Paris Congress, is a yearly reminder that social progress is not a spontaneous development but requires constant mobilisation and struggle by those directly concerned.

May 1 is still celebrated today in most democratic countries. That does not mean, however, that everyone still knows what it means, and why the workers consider it their day. The labour movement wanted, in celebrating its own day, to commemorate certain tragic events. It wanted to give a meaning to the action of all workers, regardless of their country or their situation.

MAY DAY OR THE FIGHT FOR THE EIGHT HOUR DAY

"The reduction of working hours was an issue that had received a great deal of attention in the second half of the last century. The process of industrialisation had developed with scant regard to the needs of the labour force. Excessively long working hours (twelve, fourteen or even sixteen hours a day) were commonplace, while the concept of health and safety in the workplace lay quite beyond the awareness and concerns of most employers. In this climate of utter exploitation of human labour, voices were increasingly being raised in demand of an improvement of the workers' condition.

The first concerted efforts to achieve a reduction of the working day came, not from the European trade unions which were in the process of formation, but from the American labour organisations where, as early as the 1840s, demands had been

voiced for the introduction of the eight-hour day.

The first group of workers actually to achieve the eight-hour day, in 1856, were the construction labourers in the Australian State of Victoria. In the United States, meanwhile, the demand underwent a temporary lull on account of domestic economic and political circumstances. Then, in 1866, the National Labour Union, in its founding platform, put forward the following claim: "Resolved, That the first and grand desideratum of the hour, in order to deliver the labour of the country from the thralldom of capital, is the enactment of a law whereby eight hours shall be made to constitute a legal day's work in every state of the American Union. We are firmly determined to use every power at our command for the achievement of this glorious aim."

The following year was to see the largest demonstration so far in support of the eight-hour day. This took place in Chicago, on 1 May 1867, and the historian M. Dommanget attributes the choice of date to the fact that in the States of New York and Pennsylvania this was "Moving Day", the date on which rent contracts traditionally began. However, the demonstration failed to achieve its desired end, for the employers made clear their total unwillingness to introduce a reduction of working hours in any form whatsoever.

THE CHICAGO MARTYRS

The next milestone in the struggle occurred almost twenty years later with the demonstrations which took place in Chicago and other cities. On 1 May 1886 almost 400,000 workers went on strike to demand an 8-hour day. The date is of considerable significance for in Chicago, where 80,000 people marched through the streets, the demonstration led to violent clashes with the police.

Some died and others were injured as a result. The unrest reached a climax on 4 May when a bomb, aimed at the police, exploded killing several people. The circumstances surrounding these events remain obscure to this day. The bomb explosion led to a wave of arrests, the main victims being the anarchists, a number of whom were put on trial. In an atmosphere of extreme political agitation and hysteria seven of them were condemned to death and one to fifteen years imprisonment.

These "Chicago Martyrs" as they later came to be known, play an important posthumous role in the history of May Day. However, the May Day tradition cannot be said to have been founded by the events of Chicago.

The American Federation of Labour, founded in 1886, did not abandon its

efforts. At its Congress in St. Louis in 1888 it fixed May 1 1890 as the ultimate date after which the American workers would refuse to accept a longer working day.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS IN PARIS

Discussion on the reduction of working hours had been taking place in Europe in the 1880s but the subject received new impetus as a result of the developments in the United States. Accordingly, on 20 July 1889 the delegates to the Paris congress, meeting at the initiative of the two major workers' organisations at that time, the German Social Democratic Party and the British trade unions, took up the issue. The 400 delegates from 20 countries adopted the following text on 20 July 1889: "A great international demonstration shall be organised on a fixed date so that simultaneously in all countries and all towns, on the same day, the workers shall demand that the public authorities legally reduce the work day to eight hours, and apply the other resolutions of the Paris Congress."

The timing of the May Day resolution was remarkable in its own right. One hundred years earlier the French Revolution had toppled the Ancien Régime, while adoption of the resolution also coincided with the Universal Exhibition being held in Paris in the same year on account of which a joyous and festive atmosphere reigned throughout the city.

"Eight hours of work, eight hours of recreation, eight hours of rest": over the following years and decades this slogan became the battle call of the May Day movement. "

(Source: "The Centenary of May Day". Published by the European Trade Union Confederation. Brussels. 1990)

3.8. DIFFERENT MODELS OF WORKERS ORGANISATIONS

It could be said that there are as many types of trade unionism as there are trade union organisations. Or even more, because a trade union organisation often includes several types of trade unionism from different eras and different traditions. The two examples given below give a good illustration of this characteristic variety of the union movement. It would be wrong to believe that somewhere there is an "ideal" model of trade unionism, one that can simply be applied for example to the countries now in transition to democracy.

The first example we give is that of the United States whose trade union movement follows the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Many of its characteristics can be found in the British, Canadian and Australian trade union movement. The specific characteristics of the US trade union movement have been shaped by the country's social conditions, linked to the integration of a principally immigrant, and usually low-skilled, workforce, and economic conditions, created by the very early development of mass production. These economic and social conditions form the backdrop to the whole evolution of the US trade union movement, since the formation of the AFL, then that of the CIO, to the current organisation the AFL-CIO.

Our other example, that of the Histadrut in Israel, is almost unique. It is important to look back to the formation of the Israeli state to understand the role the trade union organisation plays in the country's economy, and its responsibility for the administration of social welfare and integration funds. Throughout the world, other unions have, particularly in their early days, developed both a social (mutual aid funds ...) and an economic (cooperatives...) dimension. However the Histadrut has taken this further than the rest, while remaining a bona fide union defending and promoting workers' interests. It is this that distinguishes it from the social organisations developed in communist societies...

Read the texts below, and compare them with what you now know about the general principles of trade unionism. Compare them with the situation in your own country.

3.8.1. THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE US. THE AFL-CIO

"The first unions to appear in the United States were small independent organisations, concerned primarily with the problems in their immediate environment. However, even from the earliest days these isolated unions moved to combine with similar organisations, and the formation of community labour councils followed.

The organisation of national unions of workers in specific trades began shortly before the Civil War. The stone cutters, hat-finishers, moulders

and machinists were the first to form unions, followed later by the locomotive mechanics, plasterers, bricklayers, masons and cigar makers. Just after the Civil War, there were 270 trade unions, 32 of which were national organisations; they grouped 300,000 members, but this suddenly collapsed after the 1873 crisis to 50,000 members in 1878.

In these early unions, "bread and butter" issues were frequently pursued alongside political action for the election of labour candidates and for

legislation to improve the workers' lot, schemes for cooperatives, and efforts to obtain free land for potential settlers.

THE BIRTH OF THE AFL

At the same time as the "craft" unions were developing, there were attempts at the creation of a single union for all workers. The "National Labour Union" was short-lived (1866-1869). The "Knights of Labour" was to have a longer life. After operating underground for a while to avoid repression, they came out into the open in 1876 and tried to organise skilled and unskilled labour. The successful strikes they led in 1884-1885 in the railways resulted in a seven-fold increase in membership (729,000 members in 1886).

The first trade union centre to make a lasting impact on the labour scene in the United States, however, was the "American Federation of Labor" (AFL). It was formed in the 1880's by the merger of the "Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions" (FOTLU), composed of six "trade" unions (printers, iron and steel workers, moulders, cigar makers, carpenters and glassworkers) and various other groups, mainly certain larger unions that decided to leave the Knights of Labour, as they felt that the organisation was concentrating too much on social and political reform rather than on trade union issues as such. The Knights of Labour did not survive the split for long, while the AFL developed rapidly, becoming firmly established in the US labour movement (860,000 members in 1900, 2 million in 1904).

Like the British TUC, the AFL is a federation of unions that enjoy a high level of autonomy. The craft unionism it practised led to a corporatist spirit, but it also developed the sense of reality and pragmatism that it still maintains. According to Samuel Gompers and Adolph Strasser, its first leaders, their principal objectives were "the protection of the wage worker; how to increase his wages; to cut hours off the long workday which was killing him; to improve the safety and sanitary conditions of the workshop; to free him from the tyran-

nies, petty or otherwise, which served to make his existence a slavery."

THE CIO: THE BIRTH OF THE INDUSTRY UNIONS

The organisation of mass production industries brought up the issue of industrial versus craft unionism. Union organisation by craft was difficult, if not impossible, in these industries because of the predominance of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Conflict erupted when several of the AFL's older craft unions insisted on keeping their control over workers in certain functions, even though it was difficult to distinguish clearly between occupations. As a result six unions, later joined by four more, formed a Committee for Industrial Organisation. Born out of Roosevelt's New Deal movement, the new trade union organisation was first imbued with socialist ideals.

In January 1936, the AFL executive council condemned this 'dual' unionism; this finally led to the expulsion of nine unions, which were quick to found the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) and set up organising committees to recruit workers in other industries. The rivalry between the two organisations stimulated organising efforts and by 1941 union membership had grown to an estimated 10 to 11 million.

Trade unions continued to grow, although more slowly, in the post-war years. By then, most workers in readily organisable industries and occupations were members of unions. Their action extended to industries based in both the United States and Canada, thereby becoming "international" organisations. Between 1929 and 1945, the membership of the ten largest unions increased from 1,532,000 to 7,649,000.

AFL AND CIO: THE MERGER.

With time and changes in the patterns of industry the differences which existed between the AFL and the CIO decreased. They were also brought together through the two

organisations' struggle to advance the central government's labour legislation. In 1953 the two organisations negotiated a "no raiding" pact. This pact marked the starting point for a process of reunification which culminated in December 1955 with the formation of the AFL-CIO.

Today, the AFL-CIO is a voluntary association of over one hundred national and international trade unions, mainly industry or general unions, and represents about 75% of unionised workers. The AFL-CIO is not directly active in the negotiation or monitoring of collective agreements. The decisive role in this area is played by the local, or branch,

unions (some 65,000 unions, usually representing the workers of a single enterprise or establishment) and international unions (in 1980 there were some 168 international unions, which grouped almost all the union locals). The AFL-CIO's principal responsibility is to press upon the political leaders the views of the labour world."

(Sources: International Directory of the Trade Union Movement. A.P. Coldrick and Philip Jones. 1979. Macmillan Press Ltd; What do Unions do? R.B. Freeman and J.L. Medorf Basic Books. USA. 1984; CFDT Information. The unions in the world. PARIS. 1979).

3.8.2. THE ISRAELI TRADE UNION MOVEMENT: THE HISTADRUT

"The Histadrut, the dominant labour organisation in Israël, was formed in Palestine in 1920 as an expression of both trade union and Zionist aspirations, and played a major role in building the state of Israel. It is unique in the non-communist world in the wide role it plays in the direction and development of much of the Israeli economy.

The origins of the peculiar character of Histadrut lie in the quarter century during which it was effectively the Jewish state in embryo, a microcosm rather than simply an employees' organisation. After the proclamation

of the state of Israel, Histadrut continued its economic activities. Its "workers" company - effectively the employer arm - Hevrat Ha'ovdim controls 30 per cent of industrial output. Histadrut's health insurance system covers around 80 per cent of the population. Since 1989 however, the Labour leadership of Histadrut is under increasing pressure to turn its vast enterprises over to market disciplines."

(Source: "Trade Unions of the World 1989-1990". Longman International Reference. Longman. London.)

THE HISTADRUT - ISRAEL'S LARGEST VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION!

"In democratic societies, it is vital that workers' organisations remain strong; that they be a source of power to balance the strength of the private economy and the government; otherwise, there is a danger that the country will turn into a dictatorship. The fact is that in 1985 Israel managed to avoid an economic crisis. The emergency measures which the government wanted to impose, against which the Histadrut went on strike in full force, are not what stopped the economy from failing.

What stopped it was the understanding that existed with the Histadrut: a preservation of the balance between the government, the employers, and the workers - that saved the economy!

WHAT IS HISTADRUT'S ROLE WITH REGARD TO IMMIGRATION

Today's new immigrant is of a new breed: some 80 per cent of them are university graduates or technicians.

It is well-known the world over that true power lies in the mind, not in military might. Happily, these people are choosing to come to us, and we must take care of them, build industries and develop technologies and research institutes, and integrate them, so they do not leave us and go abroad. The government must understand: we did not bring the immigrants here in order to get cheap labour. A country is not an abstract thing: it is its people, first and foremost, and these people are, first and foremost, the working public. Housing and employment are the government's responsibility. We have our own absorption job to do. Our Sick Fund (Kupat Holim) is the country's major health service. This is a heavy burden for us to carry and the government must carry it. According to an agreement made with the government, the government pays for the first six months of medical insurance of the new immigrant. But what happens after that? The government must make some kind of arrangements for the continuing provision of health insurance until the new immigrant finds work. The Histadrut is focusing its major activities upon immigrant absorption. We have therefore set up a public council, headed by myself, whose purpose is to help soften the blows of landing in a new and strange land.

WHY DOES THE UNION TAKE ON SERVICES THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT?

The trouble is that no-one else is willing to share and shoulder this responsibility. Almost nowhere else in the world has such a thing ever happened. But we in the trade union movement cannot remain indifferent to the needs which exist; we provide services to over three-quarters of the

population, who are our members, and we are not indifferent to them.

HOW CAN THE HISTRADUT REPRESENT THE WORKERS AND OWN COMPANIES?

All along the way there have been people who criticise the Labour Economy. When is there a contradiction between ownership and representation? When the economy is in trouble. But these difficulties are not only ours: there are about 5,000 companies in Israel today that are going bankrupt, and 95 per cent of them are private. However, because there are no political repercussions to be had from this other 95 per cent, no-one pays attention to them, and the spotlights are turned on the Histadrut companies. The truth is, that the economy's real problem - especially in manufacturing - is the high rate of interest. We've learned from the current crisis that if we want to maintain a Labour Economy, a source of capital and employment, we must reassess the balance between rights and obligations, between responsibility and authority. Responsibility must be decentralised; the principle of mutual assistance cannot be allowed to create a chain reaction, when one company fails. We must not differentiate between responsibility and authority: whoever wants authority must also assume responsibility. We are aware of the need to provide management tools, but those who are in charge must also show that they are willing to identify with Histadrut's values."

(Extract from an interview, in Histadrut's monthly publication "Labour in Israel" with the organisation's General Secretary Israel Kessar, on the occasion of Histadrut's 70th anniversary. Appeared in Free Labour World no. 11 30-6-91.)

3.9. TRADE UNIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES: EACH TO THEIR OWN

Because unions act as the mouthpiece of the workers they often have to take a stand on political issues. A trade union is not, however, a political party. Each has their own role: the unions' role is to defend workers' rights, regardless of the type of government in power, the parties', when in power, is to run their society on the basis of the programme they presented to the electorate. Confusing these roles has always been disastrous, both for the smooth running of a democracy and for workers and their ability to defend their interests collectively.

This does not mean that links, sometimes historically very strong - such as in Great Britain where the TUC still plays an active role in the Labour Party that it helped found - do not exist between certain unions and certain parties. Neither does it mean that the unions do not support certain parties rather than others, either because they are of the same origins, or simply because they feel that these parties attach more importance to the concerns of the labour world. Autonomy does not mean total independence. Emphasising this autonomy, however, is extremely important; in the long run, the very survival of the trade union movement often depends on it.

Many examples can be taken from history. We have chosen that of the Polish trade union organisation Solidarnosc. Read what Andrej Adamczyk, Solidarnosc's external relations officer, has to say, and discuss his point of view, examining the situation in your own country.

SOLIDARNOSC: A MOVEMENT, A UNION, POLITICAL PARTIES

"In 1980-81, Solidarnosc had ten million members. That was in its heyday. It was an extremely broad movement, but it was just as much a social or political movement as a trade union. It was the only organisation not tied to the government, but was legal nonetheless. That is why many people, who were not necessarily trade unionists, chose to join. It was the only way to work legally within an independent organisation.

Then there was the state of war, and the organisation was forced underground.

In 1989, Solidarnosc was made legal again. At the same time however, a whole range of organisations that had never been able to see the light of day before were also able to operate legally. The result was that Solidarnosc found itself with about two million members. And many former members of our organisation joined the new political parties and

associations being created.

Solidarnosc decided at that point to restrict its activities to trade unionsim. It could be said, however, that nearly all the political parties - with the exception of the communists and the Confederation for an Independent Poland (a party on the far right) - are to some extent the offspring of Solidarnosc. Our organisation decided that it would no longer officially support any political party, on the right or the left.

SHOULD THE UNION SUPPORT POLITICAL PARTIES?

In 1989, however, during the first legislative elections, Solidarnosc formed a whole network of "Civic Committees", whose task was to support the candidates chosen by Solidarnosc for the parliamentary elections. There was therefore a clear connection between the Solidarnosc trade union, the Civic

Committees and these committees' parliamentary candidates.

We won the elections. A "Civic Parliamentary Club", also linked to Solidarnosc, was created. Things changed, however, and the Club split into different groups of parliamentarians, resulting in new political parties. Some were more to the right, others to the left, but nearly all came out of the Club and the Civic Committees.

By the following elections in 1991, the situation was already very different. All the parties we know today were already well established. Their programmes and perspectives may still have been rather vague, but they had firmly established their identity as political parties.

It was time for us to think carefully about the course we should follow. Could we, as Solidarnosc, the trade union, support one of these parties? Experience had shown that none of the parties that had emerged from the Parliamentary Civic Club could claim to represent Solidarnosc. That is why we decided to leave our members to choose freely who to vote for.

In fact, we had no choice. In the eyes of the people, the Parliamentary Club was still associated with the Solidarnosc trade union. This meant that the members of the different political parties, representing different opinions, might still have been associated with Solidarnosc. That is why we felt it was important to send our own representatives to Parliament, although this could prove dangerous: whoever wins the elections has the duty to form a government. We wanted to avoid that. That is why we insisted on limiting our lists, to ensure that we could only win limited representation in parliament. That enabled us to speak with our own voice, without being obliged to play the game of governmental coalitions... Solidarnosc's view was that such a group was important in terms of information and publicity for the

union. We wanted to avoid people confusing us with the different parties that had emerged from Solidarnosc, but that no longer represented our union's views.

A TRANSITIONAL SITUATION

A second reason was that this gave us the right to initiate legislation. To do so, we needed 15 members of parliament. Finally, we won 26 seats in the Diet and 10 in the Senate. We had therefore reached our goal: the right to initiate legislation and a limited number of seats. The people who represent the union do not form a party. They are not linked to any political party. They do not take part in the government coalition.

This has been foreseen as a transitional period. In two years time, if the situation has become clear, we may decide not to field our own candidates, and to leave our members free to choose who to vote for. For the time being, however, we think that our parliamentary group is useful, if only to exert pressure - which is the normal political game - on the governing coalition, to get certain proposals approved. We discuss these case by case however. We do not wish to become involved in a government programme.

Finally, I would add that this parliamentary group is also a means of saying to all other parties that they are not Solidarnosc. After the '89 elections, people had the impression that they had a Solidarnosc government. Yet a political figure, even if they did initially come from Solidarnosc, does not represent our trade union movement. It was therefore urgent that a very strict barrier be built between the government, the different political parties and the trade union. If not, we were bound to lose our credibility."

(Andrej Adamczyk. Interviewed 26 March 1993)

IV. THE ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE OF TRADE UNIONS

Theory

4.1. THE EARLY DAYS: MANY DIFFERENT UNIONS

In a country, in a region, or possibly even within one company, there may be many different unions. This is what happened in the early days of the trade union movement in the countries where industrialisation began. It is also what is happening in countries where unions are just starting to emerge (or are "reemerging" following major socio-political changes). In some countries there may even be hundreds of different unions, each defined simply according to the group of workers they organise. This is to a certain extent, in terms of the original meaning of the word union, completely normal. At the same time however, it poses a series of very real problems, firstly of possible rivalry between the different unions (poaching members...), and secondly of a crystallisation of their differences (their differing status among the workers, or their denominational allegiances...); in short, there is a serious risk of undermining all real solidarity between workers.

The problems that exist at the enterprise level are also present at the level of society as a whole. The multiplicity of unions, each with their own view of trade unionism, each defending their category or group of workers, leads, in the best of cases, to a waste of energy, resources, and a lack of unity and coherence in the way workers defend their rights.

4.2. GROUPING UNIONS ...

However they began - within a trade, enterprise or industry ... the trade unions felt the need to move beyond their local origins. Today, most unions are organised first at the regional and local level and then at the international level. This follows a dual structure which calls for a dual approach by the union movement:

4.2.1. BY BRANCH OF ACTIVITY

Unions from the same kind of enterprise, belonging to the same industrial sector tend to combine to form unions that defend a whole category or several categories of workers, whether they belong to a specific industry or to several closely (or otherwise) related industries. This process has the direct advantage of creating considerable negotiating power in face of an employer who is frequently organised along similar lines. Furthermore, such unions, owing to the fact that they represent workers who in general terms have very similar working conditions, working in a sector with the same economic and industrial characteristics, often prove to be particularly well suited to joint collective bargaining. The same advantages may therefore be secured for a sometimes very broad category of workers. This unity among workers from the same type of activity, regardless of which region or even, where possible, country they are from, is particularly valuable when negotiating with multinational companies, who have the power to play off one against

the other when dealing with workers whose social and economic traditions are inevitably very different.

4.2.2. REGIONALLY AND NATIONALLY

However, workers do not only feel a need to group together between one enterprise and another, within the same branch of activity. They also live within their region, their country... and this framework also has a decisive influence on their working conditions, the restriction or extension of their rights, their level of income, their job security, or lack of... In short, in parallel to their unity at the occupational or industrial level, the unions are also, in most cases, united across an industrial basin, a region, a country, or a group of countries, thereby creating a multi-sector trade union movement, covering all sectors of activity within a community. In most countries, this type of group led to the setting up of a federation of occupational, industry (or general) unions, in short, an inter-professional, or cross-sector, confederation of trade unions, or a trades union congress, etc. The name does not matter very much, what does matter is that structures are set up that allow for discussion of the defence of the joint interests of all workers, and that the unions representing the different categories of workers have thereby created a body to voice their common concerns, capable of defending their point of view to the economic and political decision-makers.

This type of trade union group, whose interest lies, beyond the different characteristics of a particular enterprise, or a particular industry, in the working and living conditions of all workers belonging to the same community, must first of all succeed in developing the kind of solidarity that is difficult to defend within a single sector of activity: between the employed and the unemployed, between workers and consumers, between workers in developed regions (countries) and less developed regions (countries)... These multi-sector organisations also negotiate with the State, at least where there are structures that enable them to do so, as well as with employers' representatives, on the economic and social measures that will affect all workers: national solidarity mechanisms, general social legislation, the jurisdiction applicable in disputes, linking wages to rises in the cost of living, the fixing of the guaranteed minimum wage. It is usually at this level that all workers are mobilised whenever governments begin austerity programmes that have particularly severe effects on their people.

4.3. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONISM

In most countries the unions are organised along these two lines. These structures are also found at the international level, where in the last few decades there have been three different philosophies governing the trade union movement. One is to be found not so much in the developed western world but mainly in some countries of the Third World, represented by the World Confederation of Labour, the WCL (formerly the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions); another exists almost exclusively in the countries of the socialist bloc, among the communist unions and in certain countries in the Third World, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the WFTU, now in deep crisis, and finally there is the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the ICFTU, which is by far the most representative (at the end of 1992, it grouped 164 national trade union organisations, or confederations, in over one hundred coun-

tries). All of these movements developed their own structures at the sectorial level. The WCL has eight International Trade Union Federations that together form a World Committee for Professional Action; the WFTU has its Trade Union Internationals which, structurally, are affiliated to it; lastly, the ICFTU has a special relationship with the Conference of International Trade Secretariats and the 16 ITS that belong to it. At the international level therefore, as at the national level, the trade union movement has its own structures that enable it to defend workers both in terms of their occupation and in terms of their basic social, civil and human rights. This is reflected in the motto adopted by the ICFTU in 1949: "Bread, Peace and Freedom".

4.4. TRADE UNION UNITY...THROUGH UNITY OF ACTION!

It would seem logical, therefore, and in the interests of all workers, to form in each country a single confederation, or a single congress, grouping all existing unions. The same would presumably apply at the international level. This is indeed the case, or almost, in certain countries. However, the opposite can often be found, where two or several different trade union organisations co-exist, or rival each other, within the same enterprise or society.

Many national trade union movements still experience similar divisions to those that existed in the international trade union movement. In some cases, denominational divisions (based on religion, or secularism) are very important; in others divisions may be caused by privileged relations, or otherwise, with a particular political party; or it may be the very concept of trade unionism and the organisation of the working class that is at the centre of debate. These divisions, which are part of the traditions of the labour movement of each country, cannot be overcome in a day.

However strong the appeals for unity among workers and their representative organisations - at least among the democratic organisations - it is nonetheless important to know that other points of view exist, favouring trade union pluralism and "free competition", for example. That is why, even in countries where the trade union movement is organised nationally, there are sometimes two or several trade union confederations, of slightly or very different tendencies. There are even some cases where different confederations from the same country are members of the same international organisation, notably the ICFTU, thereby demonstrating their belief in the same type of trade unionism. Yet this does not mean that these organisations are prepared to merge. The existence of many unions does not however prevent dialogue between them, dialogue which may enable them to work together to ensure the joint defence of workers' interests.

Practice

4.5. DENOMINATIONAL/NON-DENOMINATIONAL TRADE UNIONISM: THE NETHERLANDS

Trade union movements are formed within a given society, with all the divisions - political and philosophical - that exist in that society. There is certainly no question of denying these divisions, which are very real; rather, the important thing is to know to what extent it is possible to overcome them. The aim should be to ensure that the real interests of workers are put first in the fight by trade union organisations, and do not simply serve as a background to other objectives, political or religious for example.

The example given below of the Dutch trade union movement is particularly interesting from this point of view. It discusses not only the relationship between trade union organisations but also their relationship with the Church and the political parties, the orientation of the trade unions in accordance with one ideology or another. Of course, these discussions took place in a very specific context. However, they reflect the debate that took place in many other trade union organisations in their early days. Above all, it is worth noting how the debate developed. There was a steady move towards favouring the unification of trade union organisations, and the assertion of the principle of solidarity between all workers, whatever their philosophical, religious or political allegiance.

Read the following text, paying particular attention to:

- **the different, opposing philosophies within the trade union movement;**
- **the relationship between trade union organisations and religious or political organisations;**
- **the elements that made the unification of the FNV possible.**

Compare this to the situation in your own country. In what way are these different aspects taken into consideration by the different trade union organisations? Do you think that pluralism and rivalry between trade unions is a positive thing?

4.5.1. THE BIRTH OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

"As in many countries in Western Europe, friendly societies were the precursors of the trade unions in the Netherlands. The printers were the first to discuss working conditions in their social clubs. They were followed by the Amsterdam diamond cutters, who soon formed their own association. It was mainly skilled workers who were involved in this organisational process, and the establishment of these trade unions was soon fol-

lowed by the creation of "steering committees" in the cities - central organisations whose members were the leaders of the local trade unions. A national federation was set up after the founding of the central organisations. This was the General Dutch Workers' Union (Algemeen Nederlands Werklieden Verbond - ANWV), founded in 1871 following a congress held by the central organisations. The ANWV's chief concerns

were the extension of civil rights to workers, the development of the education system and the introduction of the ten hour day. The ANWV was moderate in its approach, advocating close cooperation with the employers.

THE PROTESTANT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Despite its moderate stand, the ANWV's success was short-lived. There was one group of Protestant-Christian workers who held a special place within the organisation. From 1871 onwards they collaborated closely through the Patriotic Workers' Association. This association of protestant workers (that also included employers) aimed specifically at promoting an awareness of Christian principles among workers. When the ANWV eventually opted in favour of secular state education, the association called on its members to leave the ANWV. This led to the creation in 1877 of the Patrimonium Dutch Workers' Union. Patrimonium was against collective action for higher wages, upholding the paternalist bonds between workers and employers.

Patrimonium was soon weakened however by growing dissatisfaction among the workers. This discontent led to the holding of the Christian Social Congress in 1891, which discussed the social questions of the day. In 1900, Patrimonium set up the Christian Workers' Secretariat. Over the next few years, protestant workers debated at length whether they should be free to create independent trade unions, and whether they should be protestant or interdenominational trade unions. These arguments ended with the creation in 1909 of the Christian National Trade Union Confederation (CNV), based on Christian principles, and above all the rejection of class warfare.

THE SOCIALIST TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The socialists also left the ANWV and founded socialist trade union organisations in several towns. In 1881, these local organisations amalgated

to form the Social Democratic Federation (SDB), which rapidly opted for anti-parliamentarianism and anarcho-trade unionism (the doctrine that defends the idea that the unions can contribute alone, through their own action, to social change and the improvement of the workers' condition, and that political parties are therefore not necessary), while continuing to fight for universal suffrage.

At the international level, there was heated discussion within the Second International on the relationship between the socialist party and the trade union movement. At the Socialist International Congress of 1891, it was decided to create national workers' secretariats. These operated as a central coordinating body between the trade unions and the socialist parties. The Netherlands put this into practice with the creation in 1893 of the National Labour Secretariat (NAS).

These two tendencies, anarcho-trade unionism and anti-parliamentarianism on the one hand, and the link between the socialist party and the trade union movement on the other, stirred controversy within the Dutch trade union movement for a good fifteen years. The Social Democratic Federation (SDB) joined the National Labour Secretariat created at the recommendation of the Socialist International, but their lack of enthusiasm gave rise to the founding of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP). Over the following decade, there was a fierce struggle for supremacy in the Labour Secretariat. Finally, and after the crisis that followed the failure of the 1903 railwayworkers' strikes, the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (NVV) was created on 1 January 1906. The NVV aimed to "defend and promote the industrial and social interests" of its members. It would not adopt political positions but rather would limit its action to promoting economic interests, through negotiation with employers or public authorities. The strike would only be used as the weapon of last resort, and would require the prior approval the Executive Board.

THE CATHOLIC TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The Catholic labour movement did not really exist until after the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical (1891), the first encyclical to officially consider the situation of workers. The formation of the first unions, which also included protestants, precipitated a lengthy debate on what type of trade union organisation was suitable for Catholics. Despite appeals from the lower clergy in favour of inter-denominational unions, the bishops put an end to the matter in 1906 by decreeing that "Catholics should be united and kept united in Catholic organisations".

In the early 20th Century, there were two types of Catholic workers' organisations. The first were the diocesan associations, primarily dedicated to protecting the moral and religious welfare of working people. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Catholic trade union organisations came into being. After various efforts to divide the terrain between these two organisations (the unions were responsible for workers interests provided that these interests directly concerned their work), the Diocesan unions and the Catholic trade unions finally decided in 1923 to merge and formed the Roman Catholic Workers Federation (RKWV). The influence of Catholic workers within the Roman Catholic State Party (RKSP) was also on the increase.

FROM COMPETITION TO COOPERATION

The years from 1930 to 1940 were particularly difficult for the Dutch trade union movement. The economic crisis which shook the world had not spared the Netherlands, causing mass unemployment which, at the height of the crisis, plunged 500,000 workers and their families into poverty.

For a long time, there was no question of cooperation between the three main tendencies within the Dutch trade union movement - NVV, CNV and the Roman Catholic Workers' Federation - but rather it was a case of deep mistrust and hostility. The NVV found to its cost that when it called its members out on strike the action was doomed to failure because the non-strikers from the denominational unions went to work.

The war changed this situation. Believing that a competitive fight between the confederations could only be harmful to the defence of workers' interests, their representatives began a process of rapprochement which led, on 5 May 1945, Liberation day, to the founding of a Council of Trade Union Confederations, the consultative body for the three trade unions.

("The Trade Union Movement in the Netherlands". European Trade Union Institute. Info 35. Brussels. 1992).

4.5.2. CREATION OF THE FNV

In the sixties, the attitude of the Catholic Church to social questions changed radically. The approval in 1963 of a joint action programme by the Catholic Workers' Movement (KAB) and the socialist NVV, and the repeal in 1965 of the ban forbidding Catholic workers to join a member union of the NVV are just two examples. In 1964, the KAB changed its organisational structure and was renamed the Netherlands Confederation of Catholic Trade Unions (NKV).

In 1967, for the first time the three confederations elaborated a joint programme that served as the basis for their first joint action against the governments' pay and employment policy (1968). Ever closer cooperation between the three national centres led in 1969 to the first discussions aimed at bringing them together in one large confederation.

At the end of 1973, it became clear that the three national centres did not agree on the type of confederation they were to create. In January

1974, the CNV decided it would no longer cooperate in forming such a structure, believing its own identity would be compromised. The two other confederations decided to pursue negotiations for the formation of the new organisation.

On 18 December 1975, virtually all organisations affiliated to the NVV and the NKV decided to create the Netherlands Trade Union Federation (FNV), which became operational on 1 January 1976. In September 1981, the NVV and NKV Congresses unanimously agreed to proceed on 1 January 1982 to the full merger of the two confederations. These two congresses also agreed on their own dissolution.

The links between the FNV and the CNV were immediately broken after the creation of the FNV. There was no longer any formal consultation between them. Some unions had already left the NKV and did not therefore take part in the creation of the federation. Other Catholic organisations, not affiliated to a confederation, joined the CNV. Hence the CNV became what it had tried to be ever since its creation: an inter-denominational trade union organisation."

("The Trade Union Movement in the Netherlands". European Trade Union Institute. Info 35. Brussels. 1992).

4.6 THE STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

Social realities are not confined to the borders of a national community. That is why, from the outset, the trade union movement also saw itself as an international movement. Which does not mean a single movement. The philosophical and political differences that exist at the national level are, understandably, also to be found at the world level.

Throughout this century the structure of the international trade union movement has been defined by three organisations. The World Confederation of Labour, the World Federation of Labour and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. Below we give a brief presentation of these organisations and their different philosophical leanings.

Read the following text, and discuss in particular:

- **the significance of the orientation of each of the three major international trade union organisations for the unions in your country;**
- **the relationship between the sectoral and multi-sectoral structures in your union and those of the international trade union organisation to which your union is affiliated;**
- **the relations within your own union between sectoral, and regional and national multi-sectoral structures. What are their different decision-making powers; what type of action do they carry out, what structures do the unions play an active role in?**

4.6.1. THE FIRST ATTEMPTS AT GROUPING WORKERS' MOVEMENTS

"The first attempts at grouping national workers movements were essentially along political lines such as, for example, the **International Working Men's Association**, called the **First International (1864-1871)**. Trade union action was of secondary importance, with political aims usually taking the upper hand. Other initiatives of a political nature, notably in Gent in 1877, setting in motion the First International, were to fail, until 1889 when the Workers' Socialist International or **Second International** was created (1889-1914).

At the strictly trade union level, initiatives by the English to bring national organisations closer together came to nothing. Only the Scandinavian trade unions succeeded in establishing international cooperation, after 1886.

At the sectoral level, trade unions from the same craft or industry took initiatives aimed first of all at mutual assistance. These were consolidated with the creation of federations or **International Trade Secretariats - ITS**. Between 1880 and 1893, International Trade Secretariats were created by the tobacco workers, hat-makers, cobblers, miners, glassmakers, typographers, tailors and metalworkers.

FIRST MULTI-SECTOR UNION GROUPS

The first group of multi-sector national unions was formed in Copenhagen in 1901. At a Scandinavian trade union conference, it was agreed to convene an international trade union conference. The national delegates present decided to create an **International Secretariat of National Trade Union Federations - ISNTUF**, which constituted the trade union counterpart of the Second International. In 1913, the secretariat became the **International Federation of Trade Union Federations (ITUF)**. The latter voluntarily restricted its activities to an exchange of information on wages and the economic situation in liaison with its member unions, and

the organisation of international assistance for workers involved in major strikes.

The creation of the Third International (communist) also saw a split between its member parties and those who were to join the Socialist International in 1923. The labour movement was from that time divided into two competing political tendencies: socialism and communism. A parallel split took place in the socialist trade union movement: in 1921, in addition to the social-democrat **International Federation of Trade Unions**, the communist **Red Trade Union International** was created.

A BRIEF MOMENT OF TRADE UNION UNITY IN THE POST-WAR YEARS

From 1943, after the USSR joined the war, contacts were established between the British and Soviet trade unions, and a world conference to unite the international trade union movement was held in London in 1945. The AFL of the United States did not attend because of the participation of the Soviet unions, but the other US organisation (the CIO) was present and served as mediator between the former members of the Red Trade Union International and those who remained faithful to the spirit of the International Federation.

Shortly afterwards, at the Paris Congress, the **World Federation of Trade Unions - WFTU** was founded, stating as its principal aims: "the fight for the extermination of all fascist forms of government and all manifestations of fascism, against war and the causes of war, help to all measures taken to further industrial development and the full use of developing country resources".

In reality, the WFTU was soon divided, owing to three main factors: the action of the AFL, that remained outside the WFTU, and led a vigorous campaign against it; the refusal of the International Trade Secretariats to belong to the WFTU because they considered that it was "an instrument of soviet imperialism"; and strong dif-

ferences of opinion over the Marshall plan of United States aid for the reconstruction of Europe. From 1949, the socialist trade union movement was again divided into two internationals: the World Federation of Trade Unions - WFTU, and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions - ICFTU.

Created in 1949 at the London Conference, the International Confederation of Free Trades Union - ICFTU - brought together 53 national centres for "Bread, economic security and social justice for all; Freedom, through economic and political democracy, and Peace, with liberty, justice and dignity for all".

THE CHRISTIAN TENDENCY

At the end of the XIX century, a trade union movement with a Christian ideology developed in Europe in parallel to the socialist tendency. A principally Catholic movement, the Christian unions took a stand on "the anti-clericalism of the labour movement which counters the stand taken by the Church which, other than a few exceptions, sides firmly with the bourgeoisie"; and on "the Church which wishes to promote social Christian institutions (in the educational field for example), to convert and bring morality to the "working classes, the dangerous classes".

The Christian trade union tendency organised first at the national and then at the international level, both out of a desire to remain separate and as a rejection of other organisations, anti-socialism being another characteristic of the Christian unions.

The Christian trade union movement arrived later than the socialist tendency on the international scene. The **International Christian Secretariat - ICS** was created in **1908**. Its principal task was to facilitate an exchange of information between the different national centres. It was not until **1920** however that the national German, Belgian, French and Dutch Christian unions formed the **International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU)**. At first, the Christian trade union movement (at the national level) was composed of mixed unions that remained small: the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical (1891) seemed to prefer mixed (worker-employer) associations or corporations to workers' unions.

Re-formed in 1945, the IFCTU remained autonomous partly because it felt the conditions imposed by the WFTU, and then the ICFTU, for joining them were unacceptable, and partly because it had little interest in joining another international. As the IFCTU developed, it paid particular attention to the countries of the Third World. In the mid-1960's, it began a process of desecularisation which led to a change in the organisation's name and more fundamental changes in ideology. **In 1968, at the Luxembourg Congress**, the IFCTU became the World Confederation of Labour - WCL. The new WCL's priorities for action were: the fight against multinational companies, development policy, the renewal and restructuring of the international trade union movement, and human rights.

4.6.2. THE WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR - WCL

The WCL is based in Brussels. At the beginning of the 1990's it claimed a membership of 15 million workers from 86 national organisations in 82 countries. Its membership is far smaller than that of the other two world confederations. It is the only one to have more members in the third world than in the industrialised

countries. In Europe it only represents a handful of national centres, the largest of which is the Belgian Confederation of Christian Trade Unions - the CSC.

At the sectoral level it has eight International Trade Union Federations - ITUF, which together

form the World Committee for Professional Action WCPA, a body that specialises in developing the WCL's action in this field. The WCPA has a World Secretariat for Professional Action, WSPA, that forms part of the WCL secretariat. Unlike the ITS which enjoy a high level of autonomy in relation to the ICFTU, the ITUFs

are WCL organisations: the Congress and the Confederal Board make decisions on the policy proposed by the World Committee for Professional Action, itself composed - in addition to one representative per ITUF and two per regional organisation - of the WCL Executive Committee.

4.6.3. THE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS - WFTU

After the split in 1949, the World Federation of Trade Unions - WFTU lost nearly all its western organisations, leaving it with a membership that consisted principally of unions from the countries of Eastern Europe. Its action was also marked by the cold war and its autonomy was greatly reduced owing to its subordination to the Party. The Soviet Union was to dominate the Federation throughout its existence.

Like the other internationals, the WFTU set up regional structures on the different continents. In Latin America it established a Permanent Congress of Trade Union Unity of Latin American Workers - PCTUU-LAW, and in Africa the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF).

Its "trade secretariats", the Trade Union Internationals (TUIs), were created, it would seem, mainly to play the role of a "transmission belt" for WFTU policies at the sectoral level.

Through their affiliation to the TUIs, some trade unions, particularly from the Asian and Latin American countries, that were not members of the WFTU, were represented on the federation's governing bodies.

The major changes that have taken place in the last few years in the countries of central and eastern Europe have affected trade unions just as much as they transformed society. The WFTU has been greatly weakened as a result, but still exists, and continues its activities. Its November 1990 congress showed that its existence is in the balance and that its future depends on how the trade union movement evolves during this period of transition in central and eastern Europe. Several of the new organisations to have emerged in these countries have joined the ICFTU or the WCL and/or are in negotiation with the European Trade Union Confederation - ETUC.

4.6.4. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS - ICFTU

At its last Congress, held in Caracas from 17 to 24 March 1992, the ICFTU had 155 affiliated organisations in 109 different countries, with a total of approximately 99 million members. The ICFTU is a confederation of national trade union centres, each of which groups together the trade unions of the particular country. In some countries, more than one national centre may be affiliated to the ICFTU.

The ICFTU gives expression to workers' international solidarity. It organis-

es and directs campaigns on issues such as the respect of trade union rights and workers' rights, the fight against apartheid and the protection of the working environment. The ICFTU plays an active part in the International Labour Organisation, where it has consultative status. It also represents its members in international conferences, in the United Nations and its specialised agencies such as UNCTAD, UNIDO and the FAO, as well as in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and GATT.

To carry out various tasks, particularly that of giving active assistance to the development of trade unions in the Third World, the ICFTU has established regional organisations, each consisting of the affiliates from that region. They enjoy a wide measure of autonomy and have their own Executives, Presidents, Secretaries and Offices. These organisations are:

APRO: the Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation, with headquarters in Singapore

AFRO: the African Regional Organisation

ORIT: the Inter-American Regional Organisation of Workers, with headquarters in Caracas (Venezuela).

In Europe, the ICFTU works in close collaboration with the European Trade Union Confederation, based in Brussels, Belgium.

Finally, while the ICFTU is composed of national centres, it is also closely associated with the International Trade Secretariats (ITS) which state that they are "part of the same international trade union movement". The ITSs group together national unions from a particular trade or industry at the international level. The ICFTU maintains close relations with these federations and very often speaks on their behalf in international bodies. It cooperates with them in the fields of education and organisation in the Third World and ITS representatives attend ICFTU Executive Board meetings. THERE ARE 15 ITS:

- International Federation of Building and Woodworkers (IFBWW)

- International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET)
- Universal Alliance of Diamond Workers (UADW)
- International Secretariat for Arts, Mass Media and Entertainment Trade Unions (ISETU)
- International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)
- International Graphical Federation (IGF)
- International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Unions (ICEF)
- International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
- International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF)
- Miners' International Federation (MIF)
- Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International (PTTI)
- Public Services International (PSI)
- Education International (EI)
- International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF)
- International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)

(Sources: "Dossier du CRISP". P.Blaise. No.32. December 1992. Brussels; ICFTU documents).

V. FREE AND DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONISM

Theory

5.1. VOLUNTARY...AND PERMANENT ASSOCIATION

A union therefore is first and foremost a voluntary movement of workers who join forces to present their common demands, and to defend what they believe are their rights. But these rights have never become permanent; the problems facing workers at the workplace or elsewhere are never solved once and for all. As well as being a voluntary movement, whose strength lies in the support of its members, a union must also be a permanent organisation, promoting its demands in the long term. This is what distinguishes trade unionism from one-off mobilisations for short-term aims.

The permanence of the organisation is necessary for another reason: situations and people may change, while the need for trade union action remains the same. The employer may be public or private, they may pursue profits or social objectives, the government may be labour or conservative ... whatever the context, the reasons and principles that form basis of the trade union movement still exist, and are as important as ever. In every society, workers need to protect themselves against injustice, arbitrary decisions, harassment, abuses of power... They need to fight to improve their status, their rights and their standard of living. All of this is impossible without collective, permanent and democratic organisation.

5.2. INDEPENDENCE FROM ALL OTHER ORGANISATIONS

This is so true that today there are few companies that can afford to ignore the trade union movement. The fascist movement was quick to develop its own mass organisations, primarily to control trade union organisations whose mission was to meet, hand in hand with the employers, the needs of the national economy; Stalinism developed its theory of "transmission belt" unions, that passed on to the workers the objectives (both economic and ideological) that the communist party alone defined; and many companies, in order to avoid having to deal with autonomous workers' organisations, created their own unions, "national" unions under government control and "house" unions run by managers at the orders of the employer. These unions have nothing to do with democracy, obviously. Quite the opposite, in fact. But they do demonstrate just how much the trade union movement is rooted in our social fabric. They also underline just how strongly the question of autonomous trade unionism is linked to the democratic running of society as a whole.

5.3. AN ORGANISATION NECESSARY TO EVERY DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

In most countries, however, the trade union movement is an established fact. For employers, the discussion of social and economic questions with workers' representatives, and the settlement of problems, has become part of the normal running of an enterprise, and reduces the number of unforeseen incidents in which workers express their discontent

through sudden outbursts, through "wildcat strikes" or other forms of action. In relation to society as a whole, regular social dialogue between employers' and workers' representatives can be seen as a vital part of the social machinery without which it cannot run smoothly. Its aim, fundamentally, is simply to promote the necessary consensus on development priorities, the distribution of the fruits of growth, and the fostering of the solidarity essential between all categories of workers, as well as towards the unemployed. For this to work, of course, the other social actors, the employers and government, also agree to play the game of democracy and dialogue.

It is a fact that in social democracy as elsewhere, a battle is never won once and for all. It was by pursuing many different battles, in its daily work, that the trade union movement succeeded in proving that the workers were a force to be reckoned with. The major victories of social history however are not protected from changes in power relations, from the return of authoritarian structures that believe society should be run on the basis of market forces alone. Consigning the trade union movement to the past, claiming that economic efficiency is to be achieved through the removal of social "rigidities", the first of these being trade unionism, setting the right to individual freedom against the defence of collective rights...there is no shortage of reasons, in some quarters, to justify attacks on the trade union movement today, and to override the demands of economic and social democracy that are now recognised, in most developed societies, as the indispensable counterpart to political democracy.

5.4. ORGANISATIONS FOR THE WORKERS, RUN BY THE WORKERS

Hence the importance of a trade union movement that is itself fully democratic. A union is an organisation of workers; it is for them and them alone to define the objectives and form of their action. This applies both externally (relations with employers' organisations, the State, political parties...) and internally: equality among all members (a union groups all workers regardless of race, sex or religion and grants equal rights to all), the control of elected members (elected representatives usually have to stand for re-election by members at more or less regular intervals or can have their mandate withdrawn; these representatives cannot at any time become a new bureaucratic ruling class), the process of deliberation and decision making (at regular general assemblies, congresses, each member has an equal right to participate in the choices that will guide the union's action).

Practice

5.5 GOVERNMENT AND EMPLOYER CONTROLLED UNIONS

Although workers' freedom of association was, in the beginning, quite simply banned (in France the famous "Le Chapelier" law, passed on 1 October 1795, declared illegal any "coalition", perceived by the legislature as pursuing the sole objective of "artificially raising the price of labour") later authoritarian regimes found it more practical to "organise" workers directly, by creating "ad hoc" trade unions controlled by the employers or the political authorities. In Italy, for example, Mussolini developed corporatist trade unionism, binding workers to their sector of activity, and therefore to the industrial interests of the sector. The whole aim of the operation was to create a framework in which workers had no opportunity to express their own interests, but rather were dragooned into serving the production-oriented interests of the State.

Below we give two contemporary examples of this distortion of trade unionism: that which prevailed in the Soviet Union, under a regime in which unions were not only conceived as "mass organisations", "transmission belts" at the service of the communist party, but were, furthermore, responsible for ensuring the growth of productivity within the enterprise; in a completely different society, in Central America, the desire to maintain a cheap, malleable and highly exploitable workforce by any means, led to the invention of the "company workers associations", veritable war machines directed against the trade union movement. The heads of big companies (above all the multinationals) and governments worked hand in hand, imposing the "Solidarismo" movement the sole purpose of which is to directly control the workers, and therefore to prevent any attempt to question the "social peace" imposed by the use of brute force.

Read the two presentations below. Make particular note of:

- **the differences in the social and economic structures within which these two means of controlling the workers were created;**
- **the ideological background of this type of organisation;**
- **how these two types of "trade unionism" succeeded in attracting the workers, other than resorting, directly or indirectly to repression, which can only ever be limited and selective.**

Are similar forms of "controlled" workers organisations conceivable irrespective of the support of the political and moral authorities of the countries in which they are established?

5.5.1. THE SOVIET TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

"In the USSR and in people's democracies, the trade union was one of the mass organisations. In Soviet Russia, over 99% of workers were unionised. In other countries of eastern Europe, the rate of unionisation was slightly lower: 96% in Bulgaria, 92% in the Democratic Republic of Germany...

Affiliation to the union was considered voluntary but those who did not belong would find themselves deprived of certain material advantages directly linked to their membership: cut-price holidays, certain social allowances....Above all, remaining outside the union was considered by the official bodies as an expression of hostility to the established political and social order.

Soviet-style trade unionism therefore played many roles. One particular role was the part it played in the negotiation and implementation of the standards set by the central State Plan. Within the enterprise, participation in the elaboration of the plan was conceived essentially as a

means of mobilising the different trade union bodies and the staff as a whole; the purpose was to secure their commitment to taking all the necessary measures to carry out the plan; this was consolidated by the signature of company-wide collective agreements containing a series of obligations with regard to the fixed targets.

In practice, the implementation of the plan required constant mobilisation. The union's job, in liaison with management, was to "stimulate initiative and the spirit of competition" by stimulating the sense of commitment of either individual or teams of workers, to the objectives of the company's plan: improving quality, removing bottlenecks...To extend this commitment across the whole company, the union could organise competitions between teams, workshops..."

(Source: CFDT Information. Unions in the World. Paris. 1979).

This idea, that was very specific to the Soviet Union, was no more than a response to pragmatic demands. Lenin was explicit about this when theorizing about trade unions in 1922, assigning them the following mission:

"THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN A SOCIALIST SOCIETY"

"The proletariat is the social class foundation of the state accomplishing the transition from capitalism to socialism(...). The trade unions must collaborate closely and constantly with the government, all the political and economic activities of which are guided by the class-conscious vanguard of the working class - the Communist Party. Being a school of communism in general, the trade unions must in particular be a school for training the whole mass of workers and eventually all working people, in the art of managing socialist industry (and gradually also agriculture).

Proceeding from these principles a trade unions' part in the activities of the business and administrative organisations of the proletarian state should, in the immediate period, take the following main forms:

1. The trade unions should help to staff all the state business and administrative bodies connected with economics: nominate their candidates for them, stating their length of service, experience, and so forth. Right of decision lies solely with the business organisations, which also bear full responsibility for the activities of the respective organisations.

The business organisations, however, must give careful consideration to the views on all candidates expressed by the unions concerned.

2. One of the most important functions of the trade unions is to promote and train factory managers from among the workers and the masses of the working people generally. (...) The trade unions must much more carefully and regularly than hitherto keep a systematic register of all workers and peasants capable of holding posts of this kind, and thoroughly, efficiently and from every aspect verify the progress they make in learning the art of management.

3. The trade unions must take a far greater part in the activities of all the planning bodies of the proletarian state, in drawing up economic plans and also programmes of production and expenditure of stocks of material supplies for the workers, in selecting the factories that are to continue to receive state supply, to be leased, or to be given out as concessions, etc. (...) In addition to participating in all cultural and educational activities and in production propaganda, the trade unions must also, on an increasing scale, enlist the working class and the masses of the working people generally for all branches of the work of building up the state economy; they must make them familiar with all aspects of economic life and with all details of

industrial operations - from the procurement of raw materials to the marketing of the product; give them a more and more concrete understanding of the single state plan of socialist economy and the worker's and peasant's practical interest in its implementation.

4. The drawing up of scales of wages and supplies, etc., is one of the essential functions of the trade unions in the building of socialism and in their participation in the management of industry. In particular, disciplinary courts should steadily improve labour discipline and proper ways of promoting it and achieving increased productivity; but they must not interfere with the functions of the People's Courts in general or with the functions of factory managements.

5. It is most important, in order to restore the economy and strengthen the Soviet system, deliberately and resolutely to start persevering practical activities calculated to extend over a long period of years and designed to give the workers and all working people generally practical training in the art of managing the economy of the whole country."

(V.I. Lenin. The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions under the New Economic Policy. 12-17 January 1922).

5.5.2. "SOLIDARISMO" IN CENTRAL AMERICA

"Solidarismo" masquerades as a working-class movement and doctrine. In fact it is nothing of the kind. Within its ranks are to be found the most reactionary elements of the South American Catholic church, multinational companies and local firms. Solidarism offers paternalistic benefits to those who join, such as holiday centres, help with housing and shares in the enterprise. Workers who resist joining are being intimidated, and sometimes dismissed. The aim of Solidarism - to break the power of the free trade union movement - is hidden behind a spurious argument that the interests of the workers coincide with those of their employer.

DEVELOP SOLIDARISMO. BAN TRADE UNIONS.

It's in its stronghold, Costa Rica, however, that Solidarismo has caused the most damage. According to official figures, there are about 1,300 associations with a total of 140,000 members, equalling trade union

membership. Guatemala and El Salvador appear to be the new targets of the Solidarismo movement. In Guatemala trade union sources say that the movement has been behind the closure of many companies that later reappear under other names, with "associations" as the sole workers' representation. In El Salvador, the national association of private enterprises and the Chamber of Commerce are trying to relaunch the idea of Solidarismo, taking advantage of the newfound peace in the country. In fact, Solidarismo is well and truly established, but often exists under very different names, a tactic used throughout the region. Other countries such as Venezuela, Colombia and the Dominican Republic, have not escaped the solidarista offensive.

The development of Solidarismo is of course strongly encouraged by the political authorities. A law passed in 1984 gives the solidarista association an advantage in terms of size over the unions. While 20 members are required to form a trade union, a solidarista association can legally be created with only 12, which is a Godsend considering that most Costa Rican companies have less than 20 workers. The law also allows solidarista associations to carry out profit-making activities (which is prohibited for trade unions). As a result the associations have been able to set up veritable goldmines, giving the movement a comfortable financial base. A solidarista association in the railway sector with only 1,000 members recently admitted that it had assets worth nearly one million dollars and a monthly income of over 40,000 dollars, barely a quarter of which came from members' fees. The principal sponsors of Solidarismo in Costa Rica include the banana plantation bosses, the government,

through subsidies, and the US government agency, USAID.

ORGANISATIONS CONTROLLED BY THE EMPLOYERS

Employers showed immediate interest in the movement supported by the most conservative sectors of the Catholic church. "Solidarismo" enables employers to break the unions, avoid collective bargaining and, by turning them into so-called "shareholders", exploit workers to the full. Most of the time they are run on workers' money, since the employers' contributions to the Solidarista associations are simply their legal contribution to the company redundancy fund. The most marked intrusion of the associations into trade union activity however is without doubt the "direct agreements" between management and the "permanent committees" controlled by the solidaristas. These agreements replace collective bargaining with the unions and in general terms are more favourable to the employer. It is therefore not unusual for an association to be established shortly before the negotiation of a new collective agreement, for the trade unionists to be thrown out and an agreement passed with the new association. The advantages offered to workers such as loans, consumer goods, canteens, etc. are always inferior to those obtained by the unions through negotiation and the sole purpose of them is to strengthen the ties between the worker and the enterprise, thereby undermining any counterforce. Many witnesses reported the different forms of pressure exerted on workers to join solidarista associations (and therefore leave the unions), such as threats to dismiss the relatives of union representatives, transfers to harder tasks, ill-treatment, etc. Black lists circulate among the solidarista companies to prevent the employment of unionised workers. They are also used to detect workers with health problems or a record of absenteeism.

WHEN WORKERS PROTEST

Criticised by the unions, Solidarismo is also beginning to experience its first setback and internal tensions, sparked off by a dispute within an association in 1989. In January of that year, workers at the "Tres Rios" textile firm discovered that management was embezzling their association's funds. At first, the workers tried to take control of the association (the employers had always had their henchmen within it) and get shopfloor workers elected to run it. Management refused, censored the association's journal and finally dismissed the worker who had revealed the embezzlement of funds. For the first time 800 "solidarista" workers went on strike. As a result, 200 workers were dismissed. New elections organised by the management took place some time after these events, but of the 800-strong workforce barely 100 took part. This first blow to Solidarismo was to have its repercussions. Despite some support in the conservative press, cases of embezzlement of associations funds were exposed with increasing frequency, and even some of the movement's supporters joined the critics.

Tensions also surfaced between the two main "Solidarismo" tendencies in Costa Rica. The Solidarista Union whose members come mainly from the industrial sector, and the Jean XXIII Social School active in the plantations. The Union opposed the use of "direct agreements" and open confrontation with the unions, an option rejected by the executive director of the XXIII School, Catholic priest Claudio Solano. Resentment against the behaviour of the movement is growing. A recent report indicates that many disillusioned workers are beginning to leave Solidarismo.

Finally, the government also seems to be taking its distance from a movement increasingly criticised both locally and internationally. It recently withdrew from financing the construction of a Solderist centre in San José. Criticisms by the International Labour Office have no doubt had something to do with the Costa Rican government's change of heart. However, most of the recommendations formulated by the ILO following the ICFTU complaint have yet to be implemented.

(Source: "Free Labour World". ICFTU. November 1992)

5.6. TRADE UNIONS, POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND DEMOCRACY

What do you think of the position developed in the following text? What role did your trade union organisation play, or still plays, in the establishment of democracy in your country? What are the main forms of discrimination in your country, obstructing the establishment of genuine democracy? How does your trade union organisation see its relations with your government?

FREE TRADE UNIONS LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST TYRANNY

"Free trade unions are therefore bastions of democracy because they cannot properly undertake their role in society without the protection of laws established and administered by democratic process. The failure of dictatorships politically and economically is releasing a democratic wave which is sweeping around the globe. This is welcomed and supported by the ICFTU whose affiliates have often

been in the forefront of the struggle against tyranny. However, democracy remains a fragile creation in many countries. The web of institutions which make for a full-fledged and stable democracy still has to be built and strengthened.

Democracy is by definition a universal concept. Participation in the political, economic and social life by

all groups is essential if governments are to represent and balance all interests in society. Systems which discriminate on grounds of sex, religion, ethnic origin or other factors will therefore always be criticized by trade unions. In many cases, a formal equality in the treatment of citizens will not be sufficient to avoid discrimination. Many groups, of which women are numerically the largest, must be enabled to overcome past discrimination and achieve a real equal access to the institutions of society and, in particular, all levels of employment. Apartheid in South Africa is an outrage to human rights which must be done away with. It is the most extreme and institutionalized form of racial discrimination. However, racial discrimination also exists in many other countries in all parts of the world and trade unions everywhere will need to be active in pursuit of policies to prevent its divisive effects on the political process. Here again international standards are a point of reference which can protect and promote equality of opportunity.

GOVERNMENTS AND TRADE UNIONS

Where international standards on human and trade union rights are observed the concept of democratic government can be developed and strengthened into, if not a perfect political system, the best amongst all those other forms that have been tried from time to time. In democracies trade unions find themselves in a variety of circumstances. Sometimes they are unable to agree with the direction of government policy and must campaign publicly for change. In other cases they may be able to

develop a close cooperation. However, the characteristic of free trade unions is that because of their independence from political parties they are able to relate to government on the basis of the merits of its policies for their members and working people, whether unions and their members supported, opposed or took no side during the electoral contest.

The ICFTU for its part must leave to its national affiliates the judgement of how they organise their relationship to democratic governments and the political parties, with the sole caveat that unions' policies must be determined by their members if they are to be eligible for affiliation. The ICFTU will, however, staunchly oppose governments including those elected by democratic process if they undermine or attack internationally-recognised standards concerning human and trade union rights. We stand by these principles because they guarantee the rights of free trade unions and are also the foundations for the democratic process itself. Democracies are only able to function where there is a very broad consensus over the basic rules of the political process, in which minorities and disadvantaged groups are protected and trade union rights assured. These rules are constantly evolving but at an international level are best expressed in the Universal Declaration, its associated covenants and the Constitution of the ILO and its Conventions on Freedom of Association.

(“Free Trade Unions for a Democratic World Order: The Role of the ICFTU”. Background document to the ICFTU 15th World Conference. 17-24 March 1992.)

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