

## The European Trade Union Committee for Education: Opening the Door to Social Dialogue

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Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick\*

## **The European Trade Union Committee for Education: Opening the Door to Social Dialogue\*\***

*The European Industry Committees are receiving increasing attention because of their crucial role in the Social Dialogue within the European Union, which was strengthened by provisions of the Single European Act. Yet much of their work remains undocumented and inaccessible to the general public. This paper concentrates on the policies and programmes of one of the two Industry Committees operating in the public sector, the European Trade Union Committee for Education. Workers in education, like those in the public sector more generally, were excluded from many of the provisions of the Treaty of Rome because of their special status as state functionaries; education itself, like many other public services, was considered the proper concern of Member States and lay outside the competence of the European Community. This has never prevented trade unions in education from acting at the European level, however, and new provisions of the Treaty of Maastricht have widened opportunities for their common action within Europe and a more significant role in social dialogue.*

*Mit der Einheitlichen Europäischen Akte gewannen die Europäische (Industrie) Gewerkschaftsausschüsse für ihre Rolle im sozialen Dialoge der Europäischen Union zunehmend an Bedeutung. Allerdings ist ihre Tätigkeit immer noch wenig dokumentiert und für die Öffentlichkeit zugänglich. Die vorliegende Studie behandelt einen der beiden Ausschüsse, die im öffentlichen Sektor angesiedelt sind, und zwar das Europäische Gewerkschaftskomitee für Bildung und Wissenschaft. Beschäftigte im öffentlichen Dienst bzw Arbeitnehmer im Erziehungswesen sind aufgrund ihres besonderen Dienstverhältnisses von den EU-Mitgliedsstaaten als spezielle Arbeitnehmergruppe angesehen wurde und von vielen Regelungen der Römer Verträge ausgeschlossen. Dies hat allerdings die Gewerkschaften der Bildungsarbeitnehmer nicht davon abgehalten, auf der europäischen Ebene aktiv zu werden. Hierfür haben die Regelungen des Maastrichter Vertrages nicht nur eine bessere Voraussetzung geschaffen, sondern die Gewerkschaften der Bildungsarbeitnehmer können, mehr als zuvor, nun aktiv am sozialen Dialoge teilnehmen.*

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## 1. Introduction

Much attention has focused in recent years, in both academic and trade union circles, on European social dialogue and the possible future development of some form of European collective bargaining system (ETUI 1992). This attention is enhanced by the revised provisions introduced by the Single European Act and especially by the Maastricht Social Protocol (Hall 1994). Social dialogue has already brought some results, particularly at inter-sectoral level (Carley 1993) and there have been a few precedents for European collective bargaining, for example in the framework agreements for the European transport and telecommunications industries (ETUI 1993).

The significance of social dialogue and the extent to which it approximates the pattern of relations between representatives of employers and workers at the national level remains imprecise and unclear, however. One reason is that the meaning of industrial relations itself varies between sectors and countries. It is easy to demonstrate that social dialogue does not resemble the classic model of collective bargaining based on the conflictual power of trade unions to withdraw their labour (Keller 1994), but not all industrial relations systems follow this model (Hyman 1995). On the contrary, some countries, in particular the Benelux countries and others that have institutionalised interest representation (Crouch 1993), and some sectors, in particular the public sector in a number of countries, have developed what could be termed a social dialogue system at their own level, based on state intervention and regulation of the negotiating process, and requiring both parties to wield political as much as industrial power to win their goals (Jensen, Madsen and Due 1995).

When viewed in this broader perspective, the role of the trade unions in pursuing social dialogue at the international level parallels the pursuit of their objectives at national and sectoral levels. In many countries, traditional means of trade union action have been blocked, through legislation or as a result of economic crisis. Unions throughout Europe have been striving to develop new forms of action, often through the use of political influence and broad-based campaigns (Hyman 1994). A greater focus on trade union organisation and action at the international level has often formed part of this new strategy, and especially a belief in the possibilities of winning tangible benefits through action within the social dimension of the EU (ETUC 1995b).

The development of European social dialogue has been in no small part the result of the ground-breaking work, over several decades, of the European trade union movement itself. Since its inception, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), alongside many of its affiliated organisations, has created or institutionalised internal structures to act as social partners at a European and sectoral level; has brought together diverse interests in order to develop common positions and priorities at both sectoral and inter-sectoral level; and has often set a precedent, through work within individual transnational companies, industrial sectors, and on

economy-wide issues, for joint action of the trade unions with the social partners at a European level.

Employers' organisations have also sought to work together at European level, particularly on specialised issues such as education and training and equality of opportunity and treatment (Schmitter and Streeck 1992: 226). They have been fraught by divisions between countries and sectors, however, and have not always seen it in their interest to develop a common position on more sensitive issues. At the inter-sectoral level, neither UNICE (Union of Industrial Employers' Confederations of Europe) nor CEEP (European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation) is represented in all member states of the EU. At the sectoral level the position is even worse, as not all industrial sectors have a corresponding employers' body, and the public services are especially under-represented. This lack of a similar institutionalised body to represent employers is one of the major obstacles to the development of European collective bargaining. For these reasons, a search for the meaning of social dialogue can most fruitfully focus on the trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

At the forefront of European trade union efforts to further social dialogue are the 15<sup>2</sup> European Industry Committees (EICs), sectoral organisations affiliated to the ETUC (ETUI 1993). To varying degrees, all are recognised by European Community (EC)<sup>3</sup> institutions, national governments, and the international trade union movement as representatives of the workforce. For this reason, they are already the accepted partners in social dialogue and would be the obvious choice to represent the workforce across the bargaining table should European collective bargaining take off.<sup>4</sup>

Despite growing recognition of their importance, there have been few detailed studies of the EICs and their work (exceptions are Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992, Streeck 1993 and Keller and Henneberger 1995). Even within the trade union movement, national unions and their members are frequently unaware of the extent of the committees' activities, and are rarely familiar with those outside their own sector. There are a number of reasons for this, the most important being the relative scarcity of materials published by the committees and available to the general public, and the informal and hence undocumented nature of much of their internal work. Furthermore, the origins and composition of many of the committees are complex,

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<sup>1</sup> The lack of an employers' organisation for education, and the obstacles to organising employers in the public sector, could be an interesting basis for further research.

<sup>2</sup> A sixteenth organisation coordinates unions representing workers within the European Coal and Steel Community; however all these unions are affiliated to the sectoral EICs for mining or metal-working.

<sup>3</sup> Following the Treaty of Maastricht the official title has become European Union (EU). In this article the two names are used interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> However, not all European Industry Committees are totally representative: As the committees are linked to the ETUC, many national unions that are affiliated to confederations that are not ETUC members, such as the French CGT, are not members of the Industry Committees. This is also the case with some national unions that are not members of a national trade union centre.

and vary considerably from sector to sector. In a number of cases, these committees began life as largely 'amateur' efforts and have only recently transformed themselves into 'professional' full-time operations and been able to expand their work.

This paper focuses on the work of one of these committees, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE). As one of two committees representing workers and their unions in the public sector, ETUCE differs in many ways (its composition, the issues it must face, and the institutional framework for its action) from the 13 committees in the private sector. Its role in social dialogue and any eventual introduction of European collective bargaining is conditioned by its status as a public sector committee.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, the public sector in many countries has developed a form of interest representation different from the collective bargaining model, to a large degree as a result of the nature of the state as employer and the status of public sector workers as public servants. This has required a different and more political model of action by the trade unions. At the same time, employers have not organised in the same manner in the public sector as in private industry. At European level, employers of teachers are represented by ministries of education acting together and not by an employers' organisation as such. Finally, the status of teachers as professionals, like many other public sector workers, has had a significant impact on how they act together to formulate common policies, and how they are seen by other sectors of the labour movement and by outside bodies. Under these particular circumstances, as we shall see below, it is interesting to observe the extent to which ETUCE has been able to develop a common position and act as a platform for the demands and concerns of trade unions in education throughout Europe, to make these concerns known to the relevant EC institutions, and to work toward an opening of social dialogue in this sector.

How this has been achieved, in the context of internal and external constraints (political, institutional and practical), is the main focus of this paper. After a presentation of the background to the work of the committee - the special place of the public sector, the institutional setting, and the role of the trade union movement - the policies and actions of the committee will be examined. Finally, some important theoretical issues will be addressed: the meaning of social dialogue in this sector, not least as perceived by the trade unions themselves; how social dialogue is shaped by the nature of public employment and its characteristic forms of industrial relations systems and trade union action; and the implications of this interpretation of social dialogue for any future European system of collective bargaining.

The research methods on which this article is based reflect the unusual nature of the subject. As mentioned above, little academic research has been carried out on the EICs, and their own internal documentation is far from voluminous. It was therefore necessary to rely extensively on analysis of unpublished documents, interviews with

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<sup>5</sup> See the article by Berndt Keller and Fred Henneberger on the European Public Services Committee in the previous issue of this Journal (1995, *IndBez* 2: 128-155). I am grateful to Berndt Keller for showing me an earlier draft of this paper.

participants, and observation of meetings of ETUCE itself and of other national and international trade union organisations.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The Significance of the Public Sector

The special nature of the public sector is of particular relevance to the work of the Industry Committees in education and the public services for a number of reasons:

- Education, alongside many other vital public services, has been considered a matter of national sovereignty outside the competence of the EC. It was therefore deliberately left out of the Treaty of Rome and has been included under the provisions of the Treaty of Maastricht in only a strictly limited form (Articles 126, 127, European Single Act). For this reason, there has been no institutional basis for social dialogue in this sector, unlike such sectors as agriculture or coal and steel, where the EC's competence was accepted from its inception and which were therefore the first to form Joint Committees with full representation of the social partners (ETUI 1992).
- Workers in education, like many others in the public sector, often hold a particular legal status as civil servants, which in many national systems means that they are formally excluded from collective bargaining and the right to strike.

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<sup>6</sup> For this reason, much of this paper relies, not on published sources, but on a series of interviews conducted with officers of the Industry Committee in question, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), and other informed sources. Regrettably, representatives of the European Commission declined to be interviewed. A full list of the names and positions of those interviewed is at the end of this article. Wherever possible, statements from particular individuals are attributed to them. Many general observations, however, are based on a synthesis of the views expressed by several persons and have not been attributed to a single individual. Any errors in quoting, directly or indirectly, the statements of any individual are the full responsibility of the author.

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Regrettably, representatives of the European Commission declined to be interviewed; and as noted above, no employers' organisation exists at European level in this sector. This has no doubt led to a partial view of the subject, but the intention is to contribute to the understanding of how the trade unions themselves perceive the importance of their international work in the European Industry Committees, as well as to pave the way for future research on social dialogue.

The author thanks the officials, members of the executive and staff of ETUCE for their cooperation and assistance, including Doug McAvoy, George Vansweevelt, Louis Van Beneden, Paul Bennett, and especially Alain Mouchoux. I would also like to thank Maria Helena André (ETUC), Ulf Fredricksson and Peter Dawson (EI), and Lilli Poulsen (ETUI), as well as Mark Hall, Michael Terry, David Winchester, Thomas Murakami and Richard Hyman at Warwick.. Finally, special thanks to Berndt Keller, who originated the idea for this article.

This applies to Beamte in the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, a group which includes most teachers. Under these circumstances, teachers and other public servants faced with similar restrictions have often developed a form of interest representation based on lobbying, where wage increases and other trade union demands have been met more through political influence and demands for improvements in pay and conditions comparable to those negotiated by unions in the private sector.

- Teachers and other civil servants were initially considered exempt from EC policies on the mobility of workers. Recently, however, several cases brought before the European Court of Justice have led to rulings that teachers should not be prevented from working in another member State on this account (personal communications, Alain Mouchoux and Ulf Fredriksson). While the revised Treaty does not rescind the provisions restricting the mobility of civil servants, the encouragement of the mobility of teachers and students implicitly affirms the right of workers in education to work in another member state. (It is understood, however, that member States have the right to require that any teacher intending to work there should be fluent in the language of instruction in their country.)
- As the national circumstances and status of teachers and other public sector workers vary considerably, it is not always easy for their unions to formulate common demands and policies across Europe. Variations in training, qualifications, remuneration and the organisation of work are particularly apparent in education, as are differences specific to the sector, between public and private, secular and religious education and the organisation of educational systems (ETUCE 1994).
- The organisation of employers is particularly difficult in the public sector. As already noted, while public sector trade unions are by now almost all represented in the EICs, there is no straightforward equivalent social partner on the employers' side. The European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP), despite its general willingness to engage in social dialogue, is by no means representative of public employers across Europe and does not include the education sector (Schmitter and Streeck 1992). Nor can European associations of local authorities be considered representative, both because they do not have affiliates in every country and because education is not everywhere in their remit. In education, as in many other public sector occupations, it is in the end government ministries themselves that would have to act as the appropriate social partners in any future social dialogue or collective bargaining in Europe (personal communication, Alain Mouchoux), and their willingness to act in this capacity would depend entirely on the policies of their respective governments.
- Finally, education and other public services have been adversely affected by the greater facility and speed in the agreement of the member States on measures concerning economic and monetary union as opposed to those concerning 'social Europe' (ETUCE 1992). This is entirely in keeping with the original

intention of the Treaty of Rome, which clearly favoured measures of an 'economic' character (Van Beneden 1992). To ETUCE's president, Doug McAvoy, education frequently appeared to be 'last in line' under the provisions of the original Treaty, but the provisions agreed at Maastricht have created new possibilities for action.

### **3. The Institutional Setting**

The role of education since the foundation of the EC presents an initial paradox: Education is considered one of the most important policy areas for national states, the general public, and the Community itself. There appear to have been a multiplicity of E programmes dealing with education in all its forms. Yet general education was from the start excluded from the provisions of the Treaty of Rome, while vocational education and training were included in only a restricted form, with measures of cooperation and incentives being deemed appropriate at the European level, but not any efforts aimed at 'harmonisation' of existing national systems or any binding measures that could be considered to infringe on national sovereignty (ETUCE 1992). To a great extent, the exclusion of general education was in keeping with the strong emphasis on the economy in the original framework of the EC: vocational education and training were valued in so far as they encouraged economic growth, the mobility of workers and services, and employment (Van Beneden 1992). Indeed, almost all EC-sponsored educational programmes, such as ERASMUS and LINGUA, fell under the category of vocational education and training (and occasionally research), even when, as with LINGUA, it is workers in general education who were directly affected (Rainbird 1993).

The EC provisions regarding education altered significantly under the revised Treaty of Maastricht. The articles of the Treaty of Rome concerning vocational education and training were retained, and reinforced by new measures (Article 127, Treaty on European Union) going beyond cooperation and encouragement toward the implementation of a Community vocational training policy in its own right, and paving the way toward to a more formalised social consultation in the sector (ETUCE 1992, personal communications, Alain Mouchoux and Maria Helena André).

Most significantly, general education has been included for the first time in its own right and not under the mantle of vocational training (Article 126 of the Treaty on European Union). In the words of one of ETUCE's vice presidents, Louis Van Beneden, 'education has now been removed from the economic sphere' (Van Beneden 1992: 6). While stressing the principle of national sovereignty in education, and still rejecting 'harmonisation', Article 126 'encourages cooperation between Member States' to develop 'quality education', and envisages Community action aimed at 'developing the European dimension in education'; 'encouraging the mobility of students and teachers'; 'promoting cooperation between educational establishments'; 'encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors' and other related measures. Measures that can be taken on education under Article 126 are in effect one step behind those that can be



taken on vocational education and training under Article 127, which have moved from encouragement and cooperation toward the development of a common policy.

As a result of the inclusion of education in the area of competence of the EU, a new Directorate General was set up in January 1995, with specific responsibility for education. The creation of DG XXII removes the previous anomaly, whereby a Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, originally set up by DG V, acted for many years as a de facto Directorate General. This new measure should clarify responsibilities within the Commission and give greater weight and resources to the education (personal communications, George Vansweevelt and European Commission Office, London).

A number of bodies - both official and unofficial - were already set up under the provisions of the Treaty of Rome to facilitate social dialogue, and opportunities have been expanded under the revised Treaty. The most important of the formal institutions is the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), established under Articles 193-8 as a consultative body with full representation of the social partners. Its role was previously restricted to considering proposals that had already been drawn up by the Commission, but has been expanded under the Treaty of Maastricht so that it can meet and issue opinions on its own initiative (Carley 1993: 106-7). The European Commission has also acted as a facilitator to consultations by the social partners themselves on matters of common interest, which have sometimes led to the creation of standing programme committees such as the ETUC-UNICE-CEEP committee on social dialogue, training and education (personal communication, Maria Helena André).

The adoption of the Protocol on Social Policy by 11 of the 12 member States will have a major impact on social policy by encouraging and formalising social dialogue and opening the way for European collective agreements (although such vital concerns to the trade unions as freedom of association and the right to strike are deliberately excluded) (Social Protocol, Articles 2-4). It is not yet clear how the Social Protocol will affect trade unions in education and the public sector more generally, but it will surely encourage further initiatives along the lines of the tripartite programme committees, especially for new EU programmes on education (personal communication, Alain Mouchoux).

The institutional setting for action by unions in education at the European level is in the end not only the EU, its treaties and institutions, but also and indeed predominantly the individual member states and the social partners. Their willingness to participate in social dialogue varies considerably from one country to another and within countries and sectors. The refusal by one Member State to be a party to the Social Protocol indicates the problems inherent in this process. Indeed in recent years it has frequently appeared that the employers' organisations were more willing to participate in social dialogue than some governments. This can be seen in the inclusion in the revised Treaty of the recommendation of the social partners of 31 October 1991 that agreement on EU social policy should be sought through deliberations of the social partners before resorting to legislation (CEC 1993). While

this form of decision-making may also prove cumbersome - because European employers' organisations tend to operate on the basis of unanimity, the hesitation of employers in one country is enough to block an initiative - the general interest in reaching agreements on specialised issues like education and training, if not the thornier question of remuneration and working conditions, bodes well for the future (Schmitter and Streeck 1992).

As more and more policies are developed at European level by the Commission acting with the social partners as well as the Member States, the trade unions perceive openings that may remain blocked at the national level.. As stated by the one member of ETUCE executive, Paul Bennett, 'social partnership is about addressing issues at whatever level the power lies.' - though their power as a social partner must be based on the ability to develop a common position and strategy.

#### **4. The role of the European trade union movement**

At both national and international levels, education is a matter of great interest to the trade union movement, for two overlapping but essentially separate reasons. It encompasses vocational education and training, which are widely perceived as among the most effective measures to combat unemployment and promote equality in the workforce, and which frequently provide a basis for agreement between the social partners when other trade union demands, in particular wages and working conditions, appear intractable in a recession economy (Rainbird 1993) At the same time, the terms and conditions of work of members of the teaching profession are the fundamental concern of trade unions in education, which are among the largest and best-organised unions in the public sector in many countries (EI 1993).

While these two views of education are essentially separate - one looking at the impact of education in the economy and on the workforce as a whole; the other focusing on the sectoral interests of workers in education as a specific category of workers - they are not necessarily incompatible.<sup>7</sup> Trade unions as such, and still more their national centres, are based on an amalgamation of interests, and their task has always been to develop a common strategy for an often diverse membership (Hyman 1994). Nevertheless, in an era of shrinking membership and resources, and in a frequently hostile political and industrial climate, trade unions and their national centres are forced to set priorities, and an issue perceived as being of general interest to the membership will often take precedence over another perceived, perhaps mistakenly, as of interest to only a particular sector. Furthermore, internal rules to assure the representation of all affiliates within national centres may limit the role played by teachers' unions in committees or other official bodies dealing with such issues as education and training, because the rule of the majority tends to counteract any influence based on specialist expertise (personal communications, Peter Dawson and Doug McAvoy).

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Mike Terry for first bringing to my attention the issue of the relations between vocational education and training and the concerns of teachers' unions.

The situation at international level closely parallels that at the national. As the leading body representing national trade union centres at the European level, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) must deal with essentially the same issues and tensions as its national affiliates while seeking to achieve a full representation of a large number of national affiliates with diverse interests. The composition of its standing committees is carefully determined so that each country is included, as well as a representation from the Industry Committees. The representatives chosen by national affiliates do not necessarily come from the sector most closely connected with the particular committee - this is rarely the basis of selection - but the Industry Committees are able to choose on which committees they wish to sit (personal communication, Maria Helena André). The committee on employment, education and training, for example, includes representatives of approximately ten national affiliates, as well as two Industry Committees, of which one is ETUCE.

In addition, ETUCE is generally included in ETUC delegations to EU institutions whenever educational issues are being discussed. Most importantly, ETUCE has been part of the ETUC delegation to ECOSOC and to the tripartite ETUC-UNICE-CEEP Committee on Social Dialogue, Training and Education, which has reached more than ten joint opinions since 1986 (CEC 1993); similarly, ETUCE has made an effort to include the ETUC in its own deliberations and actions involving issues of common interest. At a recent meeting of the ETUC Executive with the then President of the Council of Ministers of Education of the EU, the ETUC's Confederal Secretary with responsibility for education and training, Maria Helena André, was included in ETUCE delegation (ETUCE Info, 1, 8.9.94).

According to Maria Helena André, cooperation between the ETUC and ETUCE is increasing all the time, in particular as a result of the increasing importance being attached to education by the confederation's national affiliates, as well as by the EU and its Member States. General education is now no longer seen as separate from vocational education and training, as in many countries the boundaries between the two educational systems are being dismantled. Education is now seen as vital for the life of society as a whole and for the fulfilment of individuals, and not just in terms of its contribution to the economic sphere. For all these reasons, the trade union movement increasingly considers that there is 'a continuum of education, vocational training and working life' and that any earlier tendency for the trade unions to concentrate on training at the expense of general education has now been put to rest.

When examining the role of the trade union movement in education, it is also necessary to look beyond Europe to the international level. All 15 EICs work in close cooperation not only with the European trade union bodies but also with the international organisations grouping trade unions in their sector. The relations between the Industry Committees and the Internationals vary considerably, from close organic links to more detached cooperation. In education, relations between ETUCE and Education International (EI) and the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT) are close, but often marked by tension over overlapping responsibilities and a

confusion of roles. This is no doubt inevitable, as both internationals also have European regional organisations. In practice, the work of EI's regional organisation (EIE) focuses on the regions of Europe outside the EU, leaving ETUCE to concentrate on relations with the EU and its institutions; but this does not resolve all problems. Recent conferences of both EIE and ETUCE have addressed this issue, with the aim of working together more efficiently by avoiding duplication and overlap (personal communication, George Vansweevelt). At the same time, while ETUCE may seek to work more closely with the internationals, it cannot consider merger into either one as long as it draws membership from both.

## **5. The European Trade Union Committee for Education**

Today, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents more than 2.5 million members in 64 affiliates from 19 European countries, most of them in the member states of the EU ('A New ETUCE,' ETUCE Bulletin, 1, Jan.-Feb. 1994). It ranks fifth in membership among the 15 EICs (ETUC 1995b: A 22). The context in which ETUCE now operates is in many ways more propitious than in the past, for the reasons outlined above, but also as the result of changes in the teachers' unions themselves and developments in their international organisation. This section will present the origins, development, policies and present structure and actions of ETUCE in order to assess its effectiveness as a social partner and actor at the European level in the pursuit of its objectives.

The origins and early development of ETUCE are unusually complex, mainly because of the organisational and ideological divisions in the international teachers' trade union movement at the time of its foundation (ETUI 1993) as well as divisions among and within national unions. Yet this complexity in its origins may have led to a form of organisation that was unusually representative and facilitated the future work of the committee.

In the 1970s, when leaders of European teachers' unions perceived that the time had come to strengthen their cooperation and develop a form of representation with the EC institutions (personal communication, Doug McAvoy), they were obliged to take account of the divisions within the international teachers' union movement. This was then split between four international bodies: the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions (IFFTU), linked to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU); the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT), linked with the largely Christian-Democratic World Confederation of Labor (WCL); the World Federation of Teachers Trade Unions (known by its French acronym FISE), linked with the largely Communist World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and the independent World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) (ETUCE Bulletin, n.1, Jan- Feb. 1994). These divisions, mirroring those which hampered the post-war trade union movement as a whole, could be seen as especially significant for teachers' unions as a result of the intensely ideological nature of education itself, whose structure and content raise fundamental issues of moral choice, religious or secular orientation, and social equality.

There were other difficulties in the early years of the committee. Many national affiliates were in competition for members and influence, a rivalry reinforced by strong ideological divisions. Moreover, a large number of teachers' unions - such as the French Syndicat National des Instituteurs (SNI-PEGC) - were not then members of a national labour centre and were therefore not represented in the European trade union movement or familiar with international work (personal communications, Peter Dawson and Louis Van Beneden). Teachers' unions in northern and southern Europe often held conflicting views, with many southern European unions feeling under-represented. Finally, national teachers' unions themselves were divided between teachers in primary, secondary, higher and vocational education, divisions often linked to gender and status. All these tensions were reflected within ETUCE and hindered its effectiveness.

At the time of its foundation in 1975, ETUCE membership was largely restricted to the European affiliates of the IFFTU and the WCT and a few independent unions, such as the SNI-PEGC, which also provided one of the first chairs of the committee (personal communication, Louis Van Beneden). The ETUC, which eventually recognised ETUCE as the official EIC for the sector, initially expressed concern over the large number of teachers unions that were not members of its own affiliated national centres, and had to be convinced that the committee was truly representative (personal communication, Louis Van Beneden.)

Following long and often fraught discussions beginning in 1979, ETUCE decided in 1981 to accept affiliates of the WCOTP into membership. This move greatly extended the base of ETUCE, and also called for careful adjustments in its structure to assure the representation of each of its component parts. At this time, a tripartite system of governance was adopted: two representatives of each International were designated by these organisations to form ETUCE executive (personal communications, Louis Van Beneden, Doug McAvoy). At this time, the national unions had no direct control over the nomination of representatives. Any staffing needs were met by officials of the internationals or of individual unions, who were either seconded to ETUCE or worked for the organisation part-time.

One long-time participant, George Vansweevelt, referred to the committee in these early years as a 'band of amateurs', with participants obliged to snatch time from their full-time national posts for a fledgling committee without permanent staff support. Yet the degree of personal involvement of officials of national unions that was called for by this arrangement may have helped secure the future role of the committee in other than purely practical ways. It is significant that teacher trade unionists, as professionals, often had greater language skills than most trade unionists, and that the nature of national negotiations generally called for political lobbying skills as much or more than skills in collective bargaining. At the same time, the heavy involvement of officials from Belgium, France, and other countries with a tradition of 'social dialogue' meant that they were better able to grasp the importance of this concept at the European level. All these qualities were well suited to the work of a EIC.

Despite the enormous difficulties of operation and the conflicting ideologies and interests in its formative years, ETUCE was able, on the basis of its carefully representative structure, to develop common perspectives and to take a number of common actions. Several core issues emerged that remain important to this day: the mobility of workers and the free movement of persons; the inseparability of vocational education and training from general education; and the role of education in promoting equality and a European identity.

- On mobility, the committee argued that the goal of the free movement of workers across Europe depended above all on the qualifications and the educational attainment of the workers, particularly in the area of modern language instruction, that the mutual recognition of professional qualifications presupposed an equivalent quality of education in all the member states, and that teachers themselves should have the right to work in another member state if they so desired, provided that their knowledge of the appropriate language of instruction was adequate (personal communication, Alain Mouchoux). At the same time, ETUCE opposed any obligatory mobility of teachers, or the employment of teachers from another country in order to make up for the failure of a national educational system to attract enough recruits to the teaching profession (personal communication, Doug McAvoy).
- On the relation of general education to vocational education and training, the committee affirmed the inseparability of the systems of general education and vocational education and training at the level of member states and the Community, pointed out that ‘teachers are the ones who train the trainers,’ in the words of Alain Mouchoux, and opposed the extension of vocational training at an early age to the detriment of general education (personal communication, Doug McAvoy).
- On the role of education in creating a European identity and promoting equality, ETUCE stressed the importance of education in the struggle against racism and for a greater tolerance of other cultures, both among member states and around the world; and called attention to the ways education could promote equality of men and women and the need for special measures to be taken to achieve the equality of women in the teaching profession (personal communications, Louis Van Beneden and Ulf Fredriksson).

These issues allowed ETUCE to act on the concerns of the teaching profession at European level despite the formal exclusion of education from the competence of the EC. On these issues, particularly those involving mobility, the recognition of qualifications, and training, it also frequently found common ground with the employers' organisations UNICE and CEEP, even though neither body represented the education sector. Indeed, many of the joint opinions agreed by the social partners at the level of the EC have concerned education, most notably the joint opinion on education and training of 19 June 1990 (CEC 1990) and the recently adopted joint opinion on the future role and actions of the Community in the field of education and training (ETUC 1993). The benevolent interest of the employers gave ETUCE

additional leverage in its search to place education on the agenda of the EC and to pursue social dialogue.

From the beginning, ETUCE sought informal consultations with representatives of EC institutions and the social partners and strove for a greater role within bodies such as the ETUC, ECOSOC, and EC study groups and committees. It quickly succeeded in establishing an informal working relationship with the European Commission, in particular DG V and its Task Force on Education, Training and Youth.

At the same time, ETUCE carried out research, organised a series of colloquia on issues ranging from multi-cultural education to the working conditions of teachers, submitted commentaries on Community proposals and reports to trade union and EC institutions, and acted as an expert or observer on a number of consultative bodies, including ECOSOC and the ETUC-UNICE-CEEP Committee on Social Dialogue, Training and Education. While not always formally represented itself, ETUCE was able to provide a key role in ETUC delegations, as in the discussions on vocational training by the Committee on Social Dialogue, Training and Education's sub-committee on vocational education, on which George Vansweevelt represented the ETUC (personal communications, Peter Dawson and Maria Helena André).

Political control of European education policy lay, however, in the hands of the Council of Ministers of Education, which was frequently less forthcoming in its relations with ETUCE than the European Commission or other bodies. ETUCE approached each incoming President for informal discussions, and later, for more formal and structured dialogue. As early as April 1984, the committee met the then President, the French Minister of Education, Alain Savary, to discuss a European statute on training (personal communication, Louis Van Beneden). The responsiveness of subsequent Presidents has varied greatly (see below). In the absence of a European employers' organisation for education, it is the Council of Ministers of Education that would play the role of interlocutor in any future European-level negotiations with ETUCE. Thus, the informal and unreliable nature of discussions with presidents of the Council of Ministers could be said to have hindered the efforts by the committee to build a social dialogue.

In its initial phase, it can therefore be concluded, while ETUCE was able to formulate issues and push for its own role in the process of social dialogue within the European institutions, much of its work remained amateur, informal, and consultative in nature. It was further hampered by its reliance on the goodwill of the divided teachers' internationals in the implementation of its aims, and by the continuing divisions in the world teachers' trade union movement which were reflected in the committee.

ETUCE, and the conditions under which it operates have since changed significantly: in 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht was adopted; in 1993, two of the international organisations of teachers' unions, the IFFTU and WCOTP, merged to form Education International (EI); and in the same year, the constitution and structure

of ETUCE itself were revised (ETUCE Bulletin, 1: 2-3). The significance of the changes which included education in the Single European Act have already been discussed, but some of the most important changes grew out of the restructuring of the international organisations and of ETUCE itself at the behest of its members.

The merger of two of the four teachers' union internationals, IFFTU and WCOTP, the result of many years of negotiations, had a decisive impact on ETUCE, removing many internal practical and political tensions and facilitating the renewal of the organisation. An internal ETUCE working group set up in 1991 (the McAvoy group) had already come to the conclusion that its structure and constitution must be modified in order to keep up with the increasing demands from affiliates and to respond more effectively to the opportunities created by the revised European Single Act (personal communication, Doug McAvoy). One of the first measures taken to strengthen the committee was the appointment of a regular half-time general secretary, which was achieved by WCOTP allotting one-half of a staff member's time to the post. The first general secretary nominated in this way was Luce Pépin, formerly of the French Fédération de l'Education Nationale (FEN), followed by Peter Dawson, former general secretary of the British union NATFHE. The appointment of a dedicated general secretary coincided with and greatly facilitated the implementation of the changes recommended by the McAvoy group, which Peter Dawson now estimates took approximately a year and a half to carry out.

In 1993, a new constitution was adopted, providing for the direct election of representatives to the Executive by the national affiliates at the time of the annual general assembly, in place of the previous appointment by the teachers' internationals. The guaranteed representation of all tendencies under the former system was retained in a modified form, assuring at least two representatives of the minority World Confederation of Teachers alongside those of the newly-founded Education International. The new structure also created the post of a full-time general secretary, employed directly by ETUCE and no longer seconded from one of the internationals or a national affiliate, as well as additional administrative back-up.

As the result of the appointment of the first full-time general secretary, Alain Mouchoux, formerly of the FEN, and the devotion of greater resources to ETUCE, the committee has been able to intensify its work in a number of important respects. For the first time, from the autumn of 1993, regular newsletters have been published, in English and French, for distribution to the affiliates and other interested bodies. Reports have been issued more regularly, and of a higher professional standard.

One of the most ambitious ETUCE projects to date, its 'Report on Teacher Education in Europe' (ETUCE 1994), provides the first comprehensive overview by the trade union movement of the current situation of teacher training throughout Europe and issues a series of recommendations for action at both national and European levels. In the view of Paul Bennett, who served as secretary of the Teacher Education Working Group, this type of project, by providing detailed information and insights of use to national unions and policy-makers in national governments and



European institutions, is one of the best means for ETUCE to be taken seriously as a social partner and to promote the objectives of its members.

At the same time as ETUCE has worked to increase its professionalism, it has sought to increase the involvement of affiliated unions and their members - both are considered vital if the committee is to increase its influence and play a greater role on the international stage. Detailed reports such as that on teacher education in Europe address issues that touch many individual members in the course of their working lives. Colloquia bring together members from different countries, often alongside representatives of professional associations, employers' bodies and the European Commission; the most recent of these, on quality in higher education, was held in February 1995 in Bruges. Delegates were able to compare initiatives taken in their respective countries regarding assessment and quality control, and consider the most appropriate response. While they adopted a common position on the issue, and supported further action, quality assessment remains an issue for national and local authorities; so no action can be taken at European level in the immediate future, beyond the exchange of information leading to a greater awareness of the problem.

Other issues do have a more specific European dimension, however. Indeed, it is in large part because of concerns expressed by many members in the potential impact of European integration, and the interest they have shown in such programmes as ERASMUS and LINGUA (now grouped together in the Socrates programme), which they have been able to observe in operation at the level of their schools, that many national unions have taken up or expanded their work on Europe and within ETUCE (personal communications, Doug McAvoy and Paul Bennett).

The single greatest opportunity to date for the participation of ETUCE and its affiliates in social dialogue may well be the creation of consultative bodies to oversee the implementation of the two new programmes of the EU in education: Leonardo, concerning vocational education and training, and Socrates, concerning general education. In 1995, these two programmes took over from pre-existing EU programmes in the area of education. From the start, ETUCE has demanded to be included in any consultative bodies relating to Leonardo, and especially Socrates, as the social partner representing workers in education (personal communications, Alain Mouchoux and Doug McAvoy). Initially, the Council of Ministers of Education turned down the request, stating that it did not wish to include the social partners in the consultative bodies. ETUCE and ETUC jointly protested at this decision. At the end of 1994, the then President, K. H. Laermann, showed a more positive approach, expressing his hope that 'a compromise could be reached on the representation of the social partners on the Committees which would enable the trade union representatives to act as "active observers"' (ETUCE Info, 8.9.94). At the time of writing, consultative status for ETUCE has been granted for the advisory body set up to oversee the Leonardo da Vinci programme (personal communication, George Vanswevelt), but has not yet been agreed for Socrates. The ETUC has played a major role in obtaining a trade union input on Leonardo, and supports a similar role with Socrates (ETUC 1995b: 24-5).

A second important EU initiative may likewise create fresh opportunities for ETUCE: the creation of DG XXII. While for many years the Task Force on Education, Training and Youth acted as a de facto Directorate General on education, it clearly had more limitations on its resources and influence than a full DG. The creation of a dedicated DG, and especially its assignment to a sympathetic commissioner, the French Socialist Edith Cresson, should greatly facilitate ETUCE's work with the Commission. Indeed, it has been announced that Cresson will receive representatives of ETUCE as early as June 1995 (personal communication, George Vansweevelt). There is therefore every reason to expect that the good relations ETUCE built up over a number of years with the Task Force, in particular with its Director General, Thomas O'Dwyer, and its Director, Domenico Lenarduzzi, should continue now that they hold similar functions in the new DG.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that the long-run effectiveness of social dialogue in education depends at least as much on the attitude of the Council of Ministers of Education as with the Commission or the social partners. A key aim of ETUCE, in the long term, is (in the words of Alain Mouchoux) 'to open the door to regular meetings' with the Presidents of the Council of Ministers of Education, the Commissioners responsible to them and their staff. They remain, as was stated above, the most appropriate partners in any conceivable future social dialogue with the recognised social partner representing teachers, ETUCE. In the last few years, the ETUCE general secretary has often had to show great tenacity in establishing contact with the successive Presidents, whose willingness to engage in social dialogue varies in keeping with the policies of their national governments. In one case, ETUCE organised a demonstration to protest at a last-minute decision by the then President, the British Minister John Patten, not to meet the committee, whose representatives had assembled in London for that express purpose (personal communications, Alain Mouchoux and Peter Dawson). The attitude of the British President, in keeping with the stand of the UK government, was exceptional, however. One of the most recent Presidents, K. H. Laermann, granted ETUCE an audience on 8 September 1994 and 'stated his deep commitment to social dialogue... and his intention to engage in regular cooperation with ETUCE' (ETUCE Info, 1, 8.9.94).

On the whole, in the view of ETUCE executive and the ETUC, the possibilities for an expanded role of ETUCE, both as a platform and catalyst for trade unions in education and as the social partner representing workers in education within the EU, are likely to continue to expand in the coming years. The growing professionalism of the committee, its increasingly close links with the membership, its formal acceptance as a social partner by several key bodies within the European Commission, all contribute to this positive view of the future (personal communications, Doug McAvoy, Louis Van Beneden).

## **6. Conclusion**

Since its creation in the mid-1970s, ETUCE has grown from a largely amateur organisation with little impact on national unions, governments, international and EU

institutions into a professional body respected as the social partner representing workers in education. Internally, ETUCE has demonstrated an ability to bring together often divisive organisational and ideological interests to build common policies and programmes. It has asserted its role as the representative for teachers within the ETUC and other trade union bodies, and has reinforced the importance of education within the strategies of the trade union movement as a whole. However, while general education has increased in importance, it is still regarded within the trade union movement as less important than vocational training and education, and the influence of teachers' unions within national and international labour bodies remains limited. The continuing division of the international trade union movement and the co-existence of several European organisations of teachers' unions have further created both organisational and ideological problems for ETUCE that are far from resolved. At the same time, it is only natural for separate and sometimes competing interests of workers in different educational sectors and countries to persist despite the best efforts to subsume them in a common policy: this may hinder efforts by ETUCE to develop more ambitious strategies and actions on more sensitive issues.

At the institutional level, ETUCE has responded rapidly to the opportunities created by the inclusion of education in the competence of the EU in the Single European Act. It has expressed the views of its membership at every opportunity and at every level. While its opinions are respected and sometimes solicited by these institutions, its participation remains nevertheless, after years of concerted effort, of a largely consultative and informal nature, still to a large extent dependent on the attitude of whatever functionary or office-holder it is obliged to deal with. The political and lobbying nature of its work may closely resemble that of many national unions in representing the interests of their members to governmental and legislative bodies, but a formalised institutional setting for the representation of interests and agreements of employers and workers in education is still lacking. Furthermore, even were regular official consultations of the social partners to be set up for the education sector - and this is not impossible, in the light of recent agreements on consultation of the social partners for one of the EU's new programmes on education - it is by no means clear whether any agreements reached would have the status of legislation and would have to be implemented by Member States. It is more likely that joint opinions of the social partners would be considered examples of best practice, to be implemented in individual countries through political influence, negotiation, or legislation by the social partners or governments. Social dialogue, in this sense, approaches the political model of trade union action, but falls short in relation to its institutionalised character. It remains primarily a form of persuasion and indirect influence.

If there is a way forward toward greater influence for ETUCE within the European institutions and with national governments, it lies in the growing importance of education at both national and international levels. The status of education within the EU remains complex and contradictory, in part because of the

nature of decision-making in the EU itself. The search for common policies must always be balanced against the principles of subsidiarity and national sovereignty; but in the context of a perceptibly increasing power for the European Commission and Parliament, this conflict of principles has been particularly acute in education. At the same time, the competence of the EU remains limited to encouragement and cooperation on general education, but has moved beyond this to the search for a joint policy on vocational education and training, with full consultation of the social partners. This could result in a 'two-tiered' progress on social dialogue in education: a faster pace toward regular, formal consultations on vocational education, possibly leading to European collective agreements; a slower and more circuitous route toward full social dialogue for general education. This may change, as the divisions between general and vocational education become less pronounced. That the two sectors of education are moving in the same direction, however, is clear: education has become such an important area of interest for workers, employers, governments and EU institutions that a greater role for the social partners in education through social dialogue is the most likely outcome.

What then is the meaning of social dialogue in this context, and in particular what does it mean to the trade union movement? If it is perceived that the EU institutions, and the employers' organisations, are more willing to engage in dialogue than many of the Member States, and that more decisions are being taken and more resources are being devoted to these institutions, the trade unions will concentrate their efforts on influencing these institutions. This is precisely what has occurred in the case of ETUCE.

It has been seen that social dialogue in education, and in the public sector more generally, requires a type of trade union power very dependent on lobbying, campaigning, and influence on public opinion and with government. Trade unions in education and other public services, and unions more generally in countries that practise a form of institutionalised social dialogue, are particularly qualified to engage in this process.

Social dialogue in education at the international level, however, has not yet acquired the degree of institutionalisation required for agreements between the social partners to be reached and implemented within the Member States, in large part because of the issue of the competence of the Union in these matters and the absence of a recognised employers' organisation in the sector. Trade unions in education cannot yet envisage a situation where they could address the substantive demands of their members through European social dialogue. They may soon be able to do so on certain specific issues - those regarding the European dimension of education, such as the recognition of qualifications or language teaching, or vocational education issues more generally - but not on general questions of remuneration or working conditions.

The role of social dialogue in education therefore remains primarily one of best practice, lobbying, and the power of example, to be used as a negotiating tool by unions acting within their national contexts. It may well develop into a more formal institutional form of consultation of the social partners, initially on issues of

vocational education, but even here the degree of implementation at national level is still unclear. Social dialogue has also served the trade unions in the development of their own common actions and strategies, to be used in their various countries and unions to reinforce national union action and to increase their influence. Teachers' unions in Europe have grounds for evaluating positively the experience of, and prospects for, social dialogue in their sector.

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### **Interviews**

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- Ulf Fredriksson, Education International (EI)
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- Alain Mouchoux, General Secretary, ETUCE
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