

Organising in the Building and Wood Industries



BWI - BHI - BTI - IBB - ICM

Cover photo

Sanne Los (1974) is a scaffolder for pop music concerts. As an independent, he is often to be found at big concerts and festivals. "When I'm watching tv with friends, I always proudly show what I've built up there." His firm developed out of a student job. "I like working outside. Just what my history studies prevented me from doing." Photo: Jeroen Poortvliet

At its World Congress in Buenos Aires, on 9 December 2005, the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW) and the World Federation of Building and Wood Workers (WFBW) created a new global union federation, the Building and Wood Workers' International - BWI.

The BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors.

The BWI groups together around 317 trade unions representing around 12 million members in 120 countries.

The Headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. Regional Offices and Project Offices are located in Panama and Malaysia, South Africa, India, Burkina Faso, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Kenya, South Korea and Russia.

BWI's mission is to promote the development of trade unions in our sectors throughout the world and to promote and enforce workers rights in the context of sustainable development.

The President of the International is Klaus WieseHügel from the building and forest workers union in Germany. Deputy President is Stefaan Vantourenhout from the building and wood workers union in Belgium and the General Secretary is Anita Normark from Sweden.

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Preface

In many European countries we are faced by the problem of declining member numbers and dwindling political influence. For the European trade union movement and therefore for nearly all BWI affiliates, that trend has become a challenge to their very existence as effective trade unions.

The 2007 annual conference of the BWI European Committee in Palermo on 4-5 October addressed this challenge. This brochure contains the Theses on Member Recruitment and Organising that were prepared for the conference, as well as the statements and papers that they prompted. Our aim is to make the current state of the BWI's thoughts and experiences available to a larger circle of trade unionists, in the hope of stimulating discussions about and the search for new approaches, as well as an exchange of best practices within our ranks and across borders.

At its May 2007 Congress in Seville, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) committed its affiliates to set concrete targets for trade union growth for the years from 2008 to 2010, and required them to implement the measures necessary to attain them. The BWI's affiliates, too, must contribute to that effort, so that, working together, we all achieve the long-desired trend reversal, to the advantage of building and woodworkers everywhere.

Vasco Pedrina
BWI Vice President Europe

Marion F. Hellmann
Assistant General Secretary

Geneva, May 2008

Member Recruitment and Organising

Summary of the most important “rules” for the trade union of the future

In many European countries, trade unions are losing members, strength and influence. As a result, the position of employees in the workplace and society is weakening. There is a need for new union organising strategies and their consistent operational implementation in the field, in order to stem this trend and to re-invigorate the trade union movement. These theses are a contribution to the debate on this challenge to the very existence of the European trade union movement and therefore also of our member organisations in the building and wood industries.

These theses, initially elaborated by Vasco Pedrina, BWI Vice-President Europe, were widely discussed at the Annual Conference of the European Committee of the BWI in Palermo on 4./5.10.2007. They have been amended to reflect criticism and suggestions made there. But on the whole they have met with a broad consensus. It is hoped that they will be disseminated among the union executives of our affiliates and discussed with them with a view to their implementation.

1. Problems and Causes

1.1 Problems

In many European countries, the problems have similar features:

- dwindling membership,
- weakening of the network of union workplace representatives,
- weakening of the link between workplace representation (works councils, staff commissions) and trade unions,
- overburdened leadership,
- lack of young activists,
- declining mobilisation capacity,
- dwindling social and political influence.

1.2 Causes

These developments are caused by various factors. Despite each country's particular circumstances, they are often the same:

Labour market trends

- structural changes such as the rise of the services sector and privatisation,
- increase in and diversification of migratory flows,
- more precarious employment relationships, etc.,
- growing influence of financial capital on the productive sector.

Social and Political Trends

- Consumer society with growing social individualisation and declining solidarity;
- Lack of large social and political movements (as in Western Europe, the 1968 movement and the anti-nuclear movement or, in Eastern Europe, Solidarność, or other such peoples' protest movements), which foster a willingness to join trade unions and produce a new generation of leaders;

- disappearance of inter-generational political links;
- left-leaning political parties and trade unions drifting apart;
- neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, which are calling the traditional social partnership system into question;
- neo-corporatist tendencies (sectoral isolation, abandonment of industrial action) in parts of the trade union movement;
- bureaucratic image of trade unions (especially in Eastern European countries).

2. Factors for a Successful Trend Reversal

A pre-requisite for any trade union success is the existence of a trade union socio-political vision and persuasive strategic responses to deep changes in society and the economy. Beyond that, there is a set of factors that explain a trade union's strength and success (their relative importance can vary from one country to another):

- membership numbers and union density in sectors and companies (level of trade union organisation);
- degree of trade union integration of all social groups, also migrants, women, temporary workers, etc.
- quality and scale of the network of trade union militants in the workplace;
- quality and quantity of trade union leaders;
- sufficient resources within the organisation;
- flexibility of trade union structures in relation to structural labour market changes and the anti-union strategies of employers, many governments and supranational political institutions (see also point 1.2);
- capacity to mobilise workers and to strike;
- negotiating skills and assertiveness;
- capacity to enforce collective agreements;
- political power; i.e., social and political influence;
- strength of international relations network.

3. Towards Successful Member Recruitment and a Reinforcement of Trade Union Organising

3.1 *Developing a grass roots presence*

The revival of member recruitment is achieved through the permanent, systematic presence of trade union reps in the field.

The methods used for member recruitment and union organising vary from country to country. In some countries and trade unions, member recruitment is left to union workplace representatives. Elsewhere, it is a task primarily of trade union officials. But it is clear that, in a context of deep economic and social change, member recruitment cannot be pursued either from an office desk or delegated solely to union workplace representatives and works council members.

Basic action principles:

- Declare member recruitment to be the top priority and consistently implement it through trade union officials, using the management by objectives method.

- Development of a new type of trade union officials, who spend at least 50% of their working time in the field, seek direct contacts with workers at the workplace (building site, factory, office), and commit themselves to a dynamic, combative trade union.
- Training and preparation of the new trade union officials for their grass roots assignment.
- Inclusion in member recruitment of the growing number of migrant workers, women and workers in precarious employment relations and, based on their needs, to adapt the messages and the forms of action to better achieve them.

3.2 *Strengthening workplace reps networks*

Trade union workplace representatives are our direct link to the members and other workers, support us in member recruitment and are the key to sustainable mobilisation capacity.

To complement member recruitment and with a view to better trade union organising, the network of union workplace representatives must be strengthened and developed, and the reps must be specifically trained and encouraged.

Basic action principles:

- In strategic planning, the development of and support for the network of workplace reps must, in all organisational units, be declared a leadership responsibility with a high priority and be implemented effectively.
- Using pragmatic methods, exchanging experience, applying „best practice“, as well as taking account of the realities and the levels of development of the different organisational units, are the keys to success.

3.3 *Developing mobilisation capacity*

More effective trade union organising is achieved not least through enhancing mobilisation capacity at the industrial and political levels.

Basic action principles:

- A trade union is shaped and strengthened by carrying out industrial action and conducting campaigns. Through mobilisation and social struggle members and workers identify themselves with the trade union. Ties are strengthened: open disputes are the best trade union school and prepare the way for successful recruitment.
- Employees, especially workers, learn through common action what solidarity means, not through books or moralising. Such action develops their trade union consciousness. It is a responsibility of trade unions to foster the development and maturing of this consciousness, so that it leads to a lasting commitment and dedication.
- Mobilisation capacity can be achieved only by focussed and continual trade union organising; in other words, through a strong trade union grassroots presence.

- Mobilisation capacity also depends to a great extent on the flexibility of a trade union's structures and on its culture. If a trade union is open to inter-sectoral co-operation and does not make sectoral autonomy – important though it is – its sole credo, it is flexible and can deploy its potential for campaigns and industrial action in a targeted way, adapting it to different sectoral needs and parts of the organisation.

3.4 *Promoting internal democracy*

A trade union's power depends on its capacity to shape members and workers into an open and democratic movement, which uses every opportunity to defend and advance workers' interests. At the same time, it is essential for trade unions to preserve their independence from political parties, particularly in order to enjoy greater credibility in political questions.

Latent dangers are bureaucratisation and a drift towards conservatism. And trade union structures can tend to isolate themselves from the membership, especially where members are rather passive and unaware of their role and rights within the organisation. The organisation and especially its leaders must be aware of those dangers and resolutely counter them.

Basic action principles:

- Trade union structures and activities must encourage the members' participation in decision-making processes; i.e., democratic principles must be observed at all levels of the organisation. At leadership level, there must also be a readiness to assume the risk of industrial disputes – a pre-requisite for successful industrial action.
- An integral part of internal trade union democracy is the principle of diversity in unity, which means that different trade union approaches and tendencies are not bad in themselves, but that, in the interest of active democracy, they must time and again be re-focussed on common objectives.

3.5 *Develop training for union executives*

Trade union strength also depends on the quantity and quality of their leaders; i.e., on the capacity to develop and stimulate them, so that they possess essential leadership competencies. Those include a disposition towards self-development, credibility, self-criticism, being goal-oriented, respect for colleagues at work, team spirit, communication skills, and participatory behaviour. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that all union officials constantly base their activity on the principles of member recruitment, member support and member mobilisation.

Basic action principles:

The challenge is to recruit suitable leaders, to train them to professionally exercise their duties in the movement, and to provide them with essential attitudes:

- strong trade union convictions,
- social ideals,
- sense of (social) justice,
- combativeness,
- development of leadership competencies and support for a participatory leadership style,
- respect for members and workers,
- systematic orientation of trade union action towards member recruitment, member support and member mobilisation,

- and an understanding that a commitment to trade unions is ultimately also a contribution to the construction of the social and just society we all want.

For this reason, our leaders and workplace representatives must undergo further training and participate in debates on policy principles. Their action must be based on basic trade union values, like equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace, and be stamped by the desire for a better society. On this basis, a trade union develops, through action and reflection, its capacity to generate symbols and positive emotions, to build a sense of belonging and identity, and to become more attractive.

3.6 *Modernise the individual services offered*

The individual services offered to members, gradually adapted to the changing realities and aspirations of the world of work, still represent an important element in promoting unionisation.

This is even more so at a time when trends towards “individualisation” often take precedence compared to expectations of an interdependent community. The questions “Why do workers become union members? For what individual and collective benefits are they willing to pay their dues?” are constantly reiterated. In this sense, it seems clear that members, insofar as it concerns individual services, expect more rapid, uncomplicated, non-bureaucratic, competent, professional assistance and support than in the past.

Basis principles for action:

- The individual services offered to members (individual assistance, legal protection, professional training and development, career counselling, fringe benefits) must be regularly reviewed, adapted and renewed in the light of the changing needs of existing and potential members and the specific groups from which they come (blue-collar, white-collar workers, women, youth, migrants, etc.); and this in the context of the changes of the labour market and society. These benefits should be targeted in favour of the objectives of recruitment and retention but without becoming barriers to union activity and mobilisation.
- An analysis of the “economy of union membership” shows that it is in the regions and the industry which have systems of “mutual social fund for the industry” that unionisation rates are generally higher. These funds are used - depending on the circumstances – to (co)-finance systems for monitoring the implementation of collective labour agreements, training systems/further training and/or safety and health measures, as well as early retirement schemes. When at least a portion of the dues paid into these mutual systems – to which all workers in the industry are generally subject - is repaid only to union members, it reduces the actual cost of their union dues and indirectly increases interest in joining the union. Such systems should thus be promoted not only because it is a factor of order and improvement in quality of the industry but also to encourage unionisation. However, it is important, be careful to keep it from becoming a source of union dependence with respect to employers and a soft bed paralysing the ability of the union to mobilise and represent an alternative social power.

3.7 *Building cross-border networks*

Against a background of capitalist globalisation, the construction and strengthening of cross-border trade union networks is becoming a pillar of trade union power.

Basic action principles:

- In its international trade union work, a trade union must be seen by the workers concerned to be a committed and driving force. That means that the trade union officers and officials entrusted with this international activity must also define and fulfil their tasks with a view to member recruitment and organising.
- Our international activities and campaigns must be oriented towards the concrete needs of workers and benefit them. In that way, we also motivate our workplace representatives and leaders to commit themselves to dynamic European and international trade union work as a way to change existing power relationships.
- International trade union work must become a component of ordinary trade union work in the different organisations. To that end, the following fields of action, for example, can directly or indirectly promote trade union organising:
 - Trade union support for European Works Councils and the links with our trade union network throughout the EU and the rest of the European countries must be used to strengthen trade unions and to organise workers into unions.
 - Trade unions and European Works Councils in the home countries of multinational companies play an important role in the initiation, negotiation and implementation of international framework agreements. International framework agreements create a basis for the recognition of trade unions in the factories, offices and building sites of multinational companies, thus clearing the way for trade union organising.
 - Trade unions must commit themselves, at national and international levels, for example at the World Bank and regional development banks, to having government procurement policies designed in a social way (including the right to form trade unions). That makes it possible substantially to improve working and social conditions for workers on building sites and local trade unions have access to sites, enabling them to recruit members.
 - At national and international levels, trade unions must commit themselves to forestry certification. In certified forests, forestry enterprises must guarantee the establishment of trade unions and the right to negotiate collective agreements. That gives trade unions an opportunity to recruit members.
- In training and raising the awareness of colleagues, the usefulness of cross-border co-operation must be systematically integrated into the training system for workplace representatives and leaders.

4. **Removing structural obstacles to trade union organising**

The purpose of trade unions and trade union structures is to defend the interests of employees. In the face of deep changes on labour markets and the anti-

union strategies of employers, many governments and supranational political institutions, they must be flexible but also strong. A great number of parallel trade unions (multi-unionism) in a sector or country can be a structural obstacle to successful trade union organising and has to be overcome through cooperation or mergers.

Basic action principles

- Trade union power expresses itself both in the solidarity of its members and in the unity of trade unions in the enterprise and in inter-enterprise structures: our strength lies in “unity in diversity” and not in organisational fragmentation. That is why trade unions must orient their policies and structures towards achieving that necessary trade union unity, in the interests of their members, in order to act together in relation to employers, governments and supranational institutions.
- In a sector, trade unions should bundle their strength through cooperation or mergers and together press ahead with organising to establish functioning trade union structures in less organised sectors.

Appendix: By way of summary

Main strategy: “member mainstreaming”

The union directs all its processes and activities in a coherent manner for the development of members (acquisition, retention and participation of members) with the aim of working effectively for social justice.



Development of members

All the processes of the union should be directed towards the development of the members, i.e. towards the acquisition and retention

Trade Union Renewal is Well Underway!

New Approaches to Trade Union Organising in Europe

Vasco Pedrina, BWI Vice-President Europe

1. Difficulties and Challenges

The search for new paths to member recruitment and trade union growth is currently a focus in the organising efforts of most trade unions in Europe. Commendable intentions are not easily put into practice. That is particularly true where the purpose is to enhance the capacity to mobilise and the strength to engage in action.

The main reason behind this quest by trade unions in Western and Eastern Europe is the alarming trend in their member numbers. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) consequently decided at its 2007 Congress in Seville to bring about a turnaround in membership trends and declared organising as the most important task over the next four years.

Trade union strength and the state of development of collective agreements, of social partnership and of the social state are usually closely linked to each other. To the extent that the "European social model" has in the past two decades suffered setbacks and seen itself increasingly threatened by rampant neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, it is due partly to faltering trade unions and their dwindling member numbers, their reduced mobilisation strength and their smaller societal as well as political influence.

Between 1995 and 2001, union density in the old and new EU member countries evolved as follows (cross-sectoral figures):

Trade Union Density (in per cent)

| Year | EU | new EU member states | old EU member states (15) |
|------|------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1995 | 32.6 | 42.7 | 31.0 |
| 2001 | 26.4 | 20.4 | 27.3 |

The gap between the country with the highest unionisation rate (Sweden) and the country with the lowest rate (France) increased from 61.1% (1980) to 68.3% (2002).

The decline in membership continued after 2001. Statistics with newer data show that from 1990 to 2003, union density fell in the USA from 15.5 % to 12.4 % and in the European Union from 33.1 % auf 26.3 %. The new EU member countries were most affected by this drop. But also key trade union states in Western Europe, like Germany and Britain, recorded a worrying decline. However, the exceptions deserve to be mentioned too: among others, Italy and Norway have recorded membership increases in the past few years, especially in the building industry. The causes are, on the one hand, economic growth and, on the other hand, an ability to integrate migrant workers into union organisations. Other countries (such as the Scandinavians and Belgium) at least managed to stabilise their member numbers. If one considers that even in countries that apply the Gent System (trade union participation in the management of unemployment insurance), merely a change of government or a revision of the unemployment insurance system, as happened in Sweden, can hit the trade unions with a seven per cent membership loss in a single year (2007), then there really continue to be grounds for concern.

The question of how to reverse the trend is therefore of prime importance and urgent just about everywhere - in recent years, also in the Scandinavian countries, which used to be considered a trade union paradise! The main causes of the reduction in trade union membership are presented in the Theses on Member Recruitment and Organising of the BWI European Committee, and are reproduced in this brochure.

ETUC refers to external influences (high rates of unemployment, profound labour market restructuring, anti-union employer strategies) and internal shortcomings (persistence of conservative attitudes, alienation of trade union leadership from members, etc), and sees developments that are clearly accompanying member trends:

- concentration of members in the public sector;
- feminisation;
- growing proportion of old-age pensioners and unemployed workers;
- young employees and migrant workers less frequently join a trade union;
- increasing proportion of membership in managerial jobs;
- greater individualism among potential members.

According to ETUC, trade unions face a threefold challenge:

- All too often, solely member trends are perceived as a challenge. But if trade unions are to attract different groups of workers and to meet their needs, they must increasingly focus on the employees of small enterprises and on workers whose occupational environment is subject to frequent change. At the same time, it is necessary to combat the tougher resistance of the employers and their various strategies. If new members are to be won, measures must take those aspects into account.
- Member recruitment problems will not be solved unless trade unions manage to integrate and represent the diverse interests and situations of their potential members, especially in the private services sector.
- To offer decentralised and varied services against the backdrop of concentrated company power shows how important it is to preserve and renew the various levels of intervention (local, regional, national and international).

Here are the 2007-2010 ETUC targets aimed at turning around membership trends:

- Supporting national trade union recruitment;
- Identifying, collating and disseminating good practices;
- Exchanging among member organisations information on member recruitment;
- European image campaign;
- Organising a European member recruitment network.

2. New “Recipes” to Boost Member Numbers and to Strengthen European Trade Unions

In looking at what is currently happening in Europe, one sees a variety of approaches. To start with, methods based on North American organising tactics come up against two almost insurmountable obstacles:

- Country-specific conditions: methods must take each country’s characteristics into account;
- The legacy of bureaucratic behaviour: it is difficult to carry out an organising campaign in sectors and under local conditions in which trade union officials, workplace union representatives and works council members have been instilled with the “absolute peace obligation” principle. That also applies to the trade union officials of Central and Eastern Europe, who were socialised and trained during the pre-1989 period of bureaucratic socialism!

Let’s look at some of the stronger points of the current debate and actions.

2.1 «Activist unions» or «service-oriented unions»

A first **big and contentious debate** is that between:

- those who argue that a turnaround in member recruitment, the development of shop steward networks, and therefore also stronger trade unions are to be attained by **embarking on a combative strategy** with a greater and more regular trade union presence in the workplace, as well as with mobilisation and activism;
- and those who – as in the Scandinavian countries – consider that, in the light of increasing individualisation and tertiarisation, efforts should be concentrated on the **provision of a range of modern services**, which would to a greater extent respond to the needs of the more highly qualified current and potential membership.

Since reality is neither completely black nor completely white, there are also those who support both points of view. As an example, one can simply refer to the positive experience of our colleagues in the Dutch building workers’ union, with their combative tradition, who at the beginning of this decade founded a trade union for self-employed and partly self-employed workers, with services customised specifically for this group. With a potential of about 60,000 self-employed workers, 10,000 have so far been organised into this union.

2.2 Organising „new“ categories of workers

Organising poorly-organised categories of workers should be included in these considerations too. They include:

- migrant workers;
- employees in the services sector (including the cleaning and security services sector);
- employees in precarious employment relationships (given the difficulties trade unions have in gaining a foothold in the private services sector);
- youth;
- the unemployed, etc

We restrict ourselves to the first two categories:

A) Organising migrant workers

Some countries, including Switzerland, have a rich record of experience in organising migrant workers into trade unions. However, the evolution of European migration patterns over the past 20 years is compelling many trade unions to reappraise their policies:

- Former countries of origin, such as Italy or Ireland, have become countries of destination (Italy since 20 and Ireland since 10 years). Today, Ireland already has 300,000 Polish and tens of thousands of Chinese workers!
- Some countries – partly also Scandinavian countries – were for a long time hardly affected by migration, but have recently experienced an increase in immigration.
- In countries in which trade unions had nearly exclusively restricted themselves to the recruitment of nationals, as for example IG BAU in Germany, unions must now, in the face of a dramatic contraction of their traditional basis, completely re-consider their policy.

In the building industry, two not uncontroversial model approaches to raise trade union density have been tested:

- The „Swiss, Italian, or Norwegian model“, in which the trade unions create within the existing unions a space for migrant workers in their respective interest and language groups, and their compatriots offer guidance;
- The „German model“, on the basis of which IG BAU launched a separate organisation, the European Migrant Workers Union, with the primary purpose of organising posted workers and other temporary migrant workers from Poland. This interesting and courageous venture unfortunately failed after five years, less because of the recruitment numbers than, much more, because of the venture's enormously high costs.

As a result, the first model has prevailed and is now being advanced. Nevertheless, a joint project has emerged from both approaches: BWI, EFBWW and NFBWW (European and Nordic Federation of Building and Woodworkers) are in the process of constructing a European Migrant Workers' Network, with the following two purposes:

- networking of trade union officials with the same language;
- setting up an Internet platform – first attempt in this medium – with information and advice for those desiring to emigrate for employment.

A) Organising in the services sector

Much inspiration for organising campaigns in Europe, and especially in Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Russia, has been derived from the experience of the US's SEIU (Service Employees International Union) and UNITE HERE, and from Australian trade unions. One of the hubs for the dissemination of such organising strategies is the TUC Organising Academy, itself modelled on the AFL-CIO academy, in the US. In co-operation with that academy, the UK's T&G union has developed a growth strategy, which is based on two pillars:

- an organising strategy through the expansion of the shop stewards network, an active rank and file basis with the capacity to mobilise and campaign;
- mergers with other trade unions, a path also chosen by a number of unions in Germany, Ireland, Switzerland and Norway.

A growing number of trade unions are beginning to show interest in such organising strategies. Suffice it to refer to the example of Germany and the two campaigns conducted by the leading ver.di services trade union:

- the one at the supermarket chain Lidl, which many consider to be the future model for trade unions, and
- the one among security guards in Hamburg.

2.3. Coalition building

A further organising-related **approach** is called **coalition building**. The term refers to a policy of alliances with social movements, whose resources can to some extent be made available to trade union development. As astonishing as it may seem, this is uncharted territory for trade unions in some countries.

Coalition building has become an essential component of any organising project. Importantly, new trade unions that have emerged and flourished in the shadow of the big trade union federations, such as SUD (Solidaires, Unitaires et Démocratiques) in France and, in part, the COBAS (Comitati di Base) in Italy, managed to grow thanks to skilfully using their links to various social movements. The SUD trade union took advantage from the relationship with globalisation critics ATTAC, and the movements for the homeless DAL, the unemployed AC! and undocumented migrant workers.

In the case of the COBAS, it is also interesting to note the response of the big trade union federations to the new opposition, a mixture of the radical left and corporatism: in order to prove their own legitimacy and that of the major collective agreements, those agreements as well as tripartite accords on the reform of the social state were submitted to ratification votes, resulting in more democracy and greater rank and file participation as positive consequences.

2.4. Cross-border networks

Lastly, the growing number of efforts to build **cross-border networks** aimed at member recruitment and trade union development should be mentioned. Such networks enable:

- trade union work in the European Works Councils;
- campaigns within multinational companies such as Nestlé or Coca-Cola;
- cross-border sectoral campaigns, like those of the US, Australian and British trade unions targeting cleaning and security workers;
- or campaigns on the occasion of big events, like our BWI campaign «Fair Games – Fair Play», which we, together with our South African colleagues, are conducting in the run-up to the 2010 Football World Cup, and which already in April 2008 brought in 3,000 new members.

3. Conclusions

As this brief overview shows – something is happening in Europe:

- trade unions are increasingly orienting themselves towards new organising methods;
- trade unions increasingly see themselves as a social movement – as a movement that can (re)gain strength only if it is capable of raising its ability to mobilise and its combative capacity.

However, the road to a sustained trend reversal in member recruitment and in trade union organising is still long. In some countries, one is just starting to consider the issue. And even where much experience has been gained, one comes up against dogged resistance and one has to overcome high hurdles in implementing innovative ideas. But we have every reason to be confident: trade union renewal is well underway!

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The trade union as a movement

Development strategy for the Construction & Industry Sector of Unia Zurich Section, (CH)

Roman Burger, Executive Director, Unia Zurich

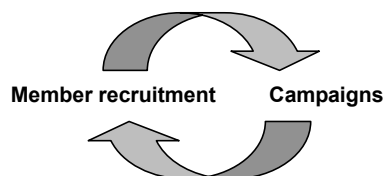
1. A radical change was needed

The Zurich Section suffered heavy losses of members in the 90's. In 1993, the Section still had 5,800 members but this pool shrank by the end of 2002 to 3,750 members. In addition to the negative impact on finances, the Zurich Section also lost virtually all their mobilisation capacity due to the crisis. With this, the political influence of the former union, Construction & Industry GBI (today Unia), increasingly dwindled in the main economic metropolis of Switzerland, a decline into irrelevancy menaced.

At the end of 2002, a new leadership took over the job and implemented a radical change of pace. A strong, sustainable growth in the number of members and the development of a mobilising and assertive union supported by proactive members, were the key targets for the development.

2. The union as a movement - a new strategy

As a union, we are in tough competition for the available financial resources of our (potential) members. To achieve sustainable growth, we need to present our members and potential members with convincing arguments of why it is worth paying the trade union dues. A wide-ranging survey of our base showed that our members primarily expect successful commitment to their concerns as workers. Peripheral services, such as non-union benefits connected to the membership were considered to be of little importance in the opinion of the members. However, trade union success in an increasingly tough economic and social context can only be achieved with a high capacity for mobilisation of active members. Due to these considerations, we formulated the strategy "the trade union as a movement!"



The adhesion of members is the prerequisite for successful campaigns - successful campaigns are the basis for the membership of Unia. With the self-image of a movement in which the members actively participate, Unia revitalises the union and creates the basis for success stories, for and with its members.

3. The main cornerstone of the development strategy

Priority - membership development: Every activity and campaign will be evaluated from the point of view of membership development (attracting new members and retaining existing members). Activities that are not part of our core business and basic commitment will be eliminated and as many resources as possible transferred to the movement (front line). Every post has a (joint) responsibility for membership development; all collaborators have clear personal goals.

We are strong in mobilisation and assertive: Conflicts are selectively taken up in collaboration with the people concerned - we create success stories! We exploit every opportunity at the enterprise and industry level to improve our mobilisation capacity. As a result,

we target our campaigns firmly on the needs of mobilisation; we use the media as a multiplying factor and the general public as an additional means of pressure. The anchoring of union successes in public awareness helps us to recruit new members (also in other sectors) and advances our mobilisation capacity (“we can do it too!”).

We are with the people: All collaborators (except for the Administration) spend at least half of their working time in the field. In this way, we achieve a strong presence on the ground, develop a relationship of trust with the workers and know where there are problems. If necessary, we will fight for free access to the workers on site and not be deterred by bans and notices. We communicate in the native language of those solicited (orally in 13 languages, written in 7 languages) and present a consistent, uniform and distinctive appearance (cars, jackets, T-shirts, bags, helmet, flags, banners, etc.).

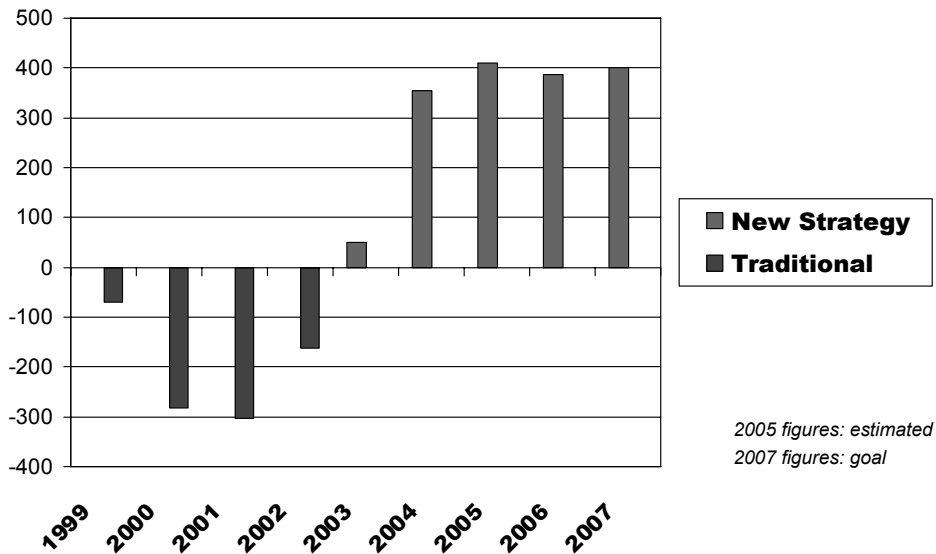
Examples of successfully mediated conflicts and campaigns

- Large demonstration and national strike for the retirement age of 60 in the construction industry (2002)
- Strike at Rutz Kaminbau AG against outsourcing outside the collective bargaining agreement (2003)
- Strike at Isotech AG against outsourcing outside of the collective bargaining agreement (2003)
- Large scale demonstration and strikes for the early retirement of painters and plasterers (2004)
- Strike at Piatti Küchenbau AG against the outsourcing of a company department and deterioration of working conditions (2004)
- Strike threat against Saxer Holzbau AG due to outsourcing outside the collective bargaining agreement (2004)
- Strike of a cleaning team at Honegger AG against a deterioration in working conditions (2005)
- Strike by taxi drivers at Zurich airport for fair wages and a decent sickness insurance (2005)
- Warning to Sersa AG against planned deterioration in working conditions (2005)
- Strike by technicians at the Schauspielhaus Zurich for a fair wage system (2006)
- Campaign for Occupational Safety and Health in the Construction Industry (2006)
- Major demonstration and protest stoppages on construction sites for a substantial wage increase in the construction industry (2006)
- Large demonstrations and strikes for a new collective bargaining agreement in the construction industry (2007 & 2008)

4. Impact of the strategy on the membership figures

The new strategy brought the hoped-for turnaround in the membership figures. There was a slight growth even in the first year, while, since then the Zurich Section has grown in the Sector of Construction & Industry by about 400 members annually. The brand “Unia” and its task today is now recognised by all workers in the construction industry. The high degree of visibility, even among non-organised workers, and the examples of successes achieved has helped enormously in the recruitment of new members. The close link between advertising campaigns and membership increases is very clear. Thus, for example, the mobilisation campaign for early retirement of the Painters & Plasterers led to an increase of 42 percent within one year while in the construction industry, it has grown by more than 35 percent in the last four years.

Membership growth in the Sector of Construction & Industry 1999 – 2007



5. The strategy as an orientation point for comprehensive organisational development

The sustainable success of the strategy requires a high concentration of resources on the work towards the movement (front line). All processes and areas must therefore be oriented to the needs of membership development and made as efficient and effective as possible. The realignment of the work processes also leads to a change in the areas of activity and hence the requirement profiles of individual collaborators. The transformation of the organisation and the management of change processes therefore place very great demands on the management. In accordance with the principle *Structure follows strategy, people follow structure*, the following projects were implemented in the Zurich Section in the past few years:

Professionalisation of the legal service

Thanks to standardisation, we have been able to achieve a clear division of responsibilities between the initial intervention and the specialised case management, the development of a computer program to support the case management and the development of a comprehensive knowledge base which today allows us to run the legal services with fewer resources while offering members greater satisfaction

From administration to a competence centre for members care

Conversion of the administration into a competence centre for member support: corresponding alignment of the work processes of the member support at the counter and phone, establishment of self-image of a professional service being offered to members, standardisation and automation of work processes, building a comprehensive knowledge base, training of collaborators in customer contact and in labour and social security law; goal: take care of 90 percent of all requests at the initial contact on the phone or the counter.

Controlling & Quality Management

Establishment of comprehensive controlling and quality management including the areas of membership development, legal services (e.g. duration of the case, success control, etc.), telephone/counter (e.g. availability, settlement rate, etc.), trade union activist support, as well as introduction of a Balanced Score Card.

6. The team as a key factor for success

A campaign oriented strategy places high demands on the staff. The scope is very diverse and requires a high - even intellectual - flexibility. The success of campaigns is based substantially on the personal involvement, the know-how and the passion of the staff. For this reason, we place considerable importance on personnel development including the following aspects:

Recruitment: The selection of collaborators is a multi-stage selection process. Among other things, the candidates are invited to a trial day during which they are introduced to Unia and various tasks involved in our work. Candidates for a management position must also undergo an additional half-day external assessment. The selection is (also) effected taking into account the aspect of team composition; the best individual workers are not necessarily good team players. The collaborators must complement one another with their characters and work as a team.

Profile of the collaborators: "The future of the union is female!" - In the selection process, we are looking for specific skills, such as assertiveness, power of persuasion, social competence, initiative, creativity and strategic thinking. Due to the high complexity and the large variety of job content, there is now a tendency towards recruiting collaborators of higher education. All of our employees are multilingual. The experience resulting from processing many applications shows that women often offer more of the sought-after skills when compared directly with male candidates. They are also often better educated, eager to learn and quickly involved on the construction sites. The proportion of women in our team is 70 percent, the proportion of migrants (first and second generation), even about 75 percent.

Consistent promotion and development: A training plan and individual promotion measures are determined for all UNIA employees. Clear requirement profiles and regular meetings allow collaborators to obtain a realistic assessment of their development possibilities. As one of the central challenges for the future, we are training a new generation of managers which are difficult to find on the external labour. Unia has therefore launched a special project for potential junior executives.

7. Work in the field of migration

In the Zurich region, the majority of workers in the construction industry are migrants of the first and second generation of different origins. This cultural and linguistic diversity requires a targeted strategy of working with migrants which is an important part of Unia's activities and receives our intensive support. The following elements have been established:

Communication in the mother tongue of the people concerned

- We basically speak to our members in their native language and are therefore multilingual in consulting and in provision of information (13 languages orally, 7 languages written)

Development of language groups

- Establishment of foreign activist groups
- Information sessions in the respective mother tongue
- Unia offers migrants a piece of their homeland and includes traditional elements of the respective cultures (e.g. festivals) in the annual program
- Campaigns with migration issues (such as the abolition of the Schengen visa)
- Networking with other organisations involved with migration

Presence in the media of migration

Regular presence in newspapers and radio broadcasts of migration

Training for migrants

- Organisation of language courses for construction workers (two courses annually, each with approximately 100 participants in 4 classes at varying levels)
- Organisation of PC courses for newcomers

Support of the “no papers” - movement

- Start-up and counselling centre for those without papers (migrants without valid residence permit) in our secretariat
- Involvement of activists of the “no papers” - movement in the language groups

8. Results following five years of development work

In order to establish sustainable membership growth, it needs a comprehensive approach and a multi-year perspective. The corresponding re-orientation of all work processes and activities to membership development is a big change process for the organisation which is gradually being digested. The involvement of internal and external experts in the fields of coaching, team and organisational development, and in the design process was an indispensable element for the successful implementation of the numerous sub-projects.

In order for the available resources to be used efficiently and purposefully, it was necessary to break with the “old customs” (e.g. focus on benefits for members, representation of collaborators in an end-less number of commissions, etc.) in favour of strengthening the work completed on the front line. We have learned from experience that new members need to be won even against initial resistance to such changes. And in those cases where, due to the changes, there are still sporadic departures of militants, the gaps have been quickly filled with a new generation of activists, which we were able to win over in the context of our campaigns and mobilisations for involvement in the union.

A key prerequisite for the successful implementation of the strategy outlined is the willingness and courage of the organisation, the mobilisation of workers to become involved and thus to succeed in collective or operational union issues. The establishment of a real relationship of power can only succeed if the campaigns are geared to the needs of the mobilisation. Each mobilisation is, therefore, for us and our confidants, an important learning step towards development and expansion of our mobilisation capability.

Such a profound transformation of the organisation could not be effected without setbacks and without facing the difficult stages of implementation. The greatest support, which the development project in Zurich enjoys at delicate moments, is that of the responsible national and regional leaders and which is, therefore, a crucial factor for success. The resultant space developed in accordance with the principle “try and error”, is a great innovation and a thrust towards professionalisation which has brought the Zurich Section forward by big steps in recent years.



Participatory Trade Unionism and Organising

IG BAU (Industrial Union Construction, Agriculture, Environment), Germany, undergoing profound change

Frank Schmidt-Hullmann, head of the international relations and European construction policies department IG BAU (D)

The German BWI affiliate IG BAU, whose Chair is BWI President Klaus WieseHügel, has in recent years been confronted by an ever more difficult situation:

- primarily, the halving of employment numbers in the building sector, the largest sector, within ten years has resulted in large member losses;
- in most IG BAU sectors, regular employment relationships have increasingly been replaced with precarious forms of employment and illegal employer practices;
- generally stagnating or even declining real wages and increasingly difficult rounds of collective bargaining at the national and regional levels in many sectors, with the latter development being exacerbated through the flight of employers away from the employer associations that conclude sector-wide agreements with IG BAU;
- declining trade union influence within companies due to a different division of labour in the building industry, with building workers being to an ever greater extent employed by sub-contractors instead of by building companies with large workforces.

These developments have also led to drastic declines in revenue and, as a result, reductions in the union's staff numbers. There was a serious risk of being dragged into a vicious circle, with an ever weaker IG BAU causing more members to exit the union, and thereby further losses in revenue and power. Measures initially taken by IG BAU to reform the organisation failed to break those trends.

Since IG BAU's latest federal congress at the beginning of 2007, a drastic transformation of the union has been taking place under the keywords of "participatory trade unionism" and "organising". A narrow majority of the delegates had, after very contentious discussions, ultimately approved the federal executive board's plans.

The in 2007 decided and already partly implemented measures consist of the following two major components:

- Below the federal level, IG BAU is divided into 13 centrally led regions. All full-time IG BAU officials in these regions are centrally directed by a regional chief, and flexibly deployed, depending on central and regional priorities and campaigns. The regional chiefs are employees of the federal executive board and are centrally managed by the board through continuing planning and control methods. A more systematic approach is generally encouraged in IG BAU, in order to return from reaction to greater action.
- The more than 50 local branches that are directed by a combination of full-time officials and lay member councils will in future be directed by lay officers only. Lay officers have received considerably more powers and responsibility for local activities and are better trained for their duties. The regions and the federal board support them more intensively than before.

- IG BAU is seeking to revive workplace trade union activities, which have tended to be neglected in comparison with general trade union activities, member recruitment and sectoral work. The aim is to create stable trade union groups in large and medium enterprises, who can and should play an important role in company-level and inter-company-level labour disputes and agreement enforcement. Employers should no longer be able to hide behind their associations. Workplace trade unionists are to be more actively involved in member recruitment activities.
- In order to boost IG BAU's clout, poorly organised companies and employee categories that are important for a given sector or region are to be targeted with specially formed organising groups.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is necessary to emphasise that IG BAU has up to now already been very active in member recruitment on building sites and in workplaces. Some of the elements of the methods being internationally discussed under the theme of organising have always been applied by IG BAU. Consequently, it is now above all a matter of acting in a more systematic and strategic way and of attaining a better division of labour between member recruitment on the one hand, and servicing members on the other hand.

All concerned parties at IG BAU realise that these measures must imperatively succeed, in order to stabilise IG BAU in the long term and to ultimately increase its industrial impact for the benefit of its members and the trade union movement in general. In the meantime, there have been first successes in member trends, which make the hopes placed in the organisational reform seem credible.

If you can't beat them, join them!

FNV Bouw and the self-employed in construction in the Netherlands

John Kerstens, vice-president FNV Bouw.

Self-employment is booming in construction; but not only there. We all know it, we all see it, we all talk (mainly complain) about it. But, us unions, we don't think about it; at least not enough. And we certainly do not act on it as we should.

More and more, the factor 'labour' in construction takes forms other than the construction worker having a full-time, 'steady' contract with his employer. New forms of labour, in which flexibility is the keyword, are rising. The most 'successful' among them: self-employment. In construction in the Netherlands, today around 60,000 people are considered to be self-employed. A number that is still rising - rapidly. In good and in bad times. Most new jobs are now being filled by self-employed workers. Why? Because it's an easy way for employers to get flexibility. Because it's very fashionable to 'be your own boss'. And because, if you are skilful, it's easy to start in construction, a sector where, besides that, few investments are needed to get started.

But how 'successful' can a phenomenon be called that also leads to the abuse of people, unfair competition and the loss of regular jobs? Construction in the Netherlands is also the sector that employs the most so-called 'bogus self-employed'. People who loose their jobs during a recession, but can return to their work if they come back to their former employer as 'self-employed'. Also people from 'the New Europe': a lot of new construction entrants in the Netherlands are Polish. For them as well, it's easy to get started as a self-employed worker, since there are no real requirements. On top of that, a lot of 'agencies' have discovered the legal loophole that as long as they place people who are called self-employed 'no rules apply', so: no EU services directive or national sectoral collective agreement. Thus making illusory the principle, in theory agreed by everyone, of "equal pay for equal work". Thus also making cheap labour available to contractors and customers. Cheap labour that denies to people the money they are entitled to or the protection of health and safety standards and working-time regulations, while weakening the position of the traditional employee who is considered 'too expensive', and threatening to pull down the level of protection provided by collective agreements.

Self-employment is increasingly crowding out regular employment

This evasion of collective as well as individual labour law concerns not only bogus self-employment. It also applies to genuine self-employment (which also exists of course, although I wouldn't go as far as those who call it 'the next step in the emancipation of the worker'). One wonders if all the genuinely self-employed realise what it really means to say goodbye to individual as well as collective labour law... I'm convinced the answer is no.

And this evasion doesn't only affect those who are self-employed, bogus or not. It also has broader consequences, sector-wide and even nation-wide. On top of the aforementioned unfair competition, loss of regular jobs and possible erosion of collective agreements, it undermines other provisions that everyone knows are important. Provisions such as sectoral retirement schemes or vocational training. Provisions that can exist only because they are collectively funded. And they are collectively funded not because everyone is naturally willing to pay, but because collective agreements make sure every employer and employee does so. But, as noted earlier, these collective agreements apply neither to the self-employed nor to the contractors who hire them. With the result that, since self-employment is increasingly crowding out regular employment, fewer and fewer people pay in contributions. And that puts the future of such provisions at risk: they depend upon solidarity. That's bad not only for everyone directly concerned and the sector they work in, but also for society as a whole. And society will bear the consequences of less training, and of people who during their career don't put aside enough money for their old age.

Too much self-employment also erodes the sectoral institutions that exist today, by which I mean the continental European model in which organisations of employers and employees together

regulate labour relations for the benefit of more than the individual employer and employee and with a longer-term perspective than that of the next paycheck. Finally, it also erodes the status of the organisations themselves. First of all ours, being traditionally the voice of labour.

This poses a huge dilemma for the traditional, employee-oriented, trade unions. A dilemma that can lead to different reactions, well-known in nature: fight or flight, to ignore or to adapt. Some of us opt to fight self-employment. But the problem with that is that one of the main reasons for its existence, namely the desire for flexibility, is like the Medusa, the mythical multi-headed monster. If you cut off one head, it grows another one. And probably an even uglier one. The same reason makes 'flight', or running away, not an option either. Others choose to ignore it. But that's not a good strategy either, and again for the same reason: self-employment won't go away by itself. That leaves only the option of adapting to the phenomenon.

Form a joint strategy and act together

But what does 'to adapt' mean in this case? In our case, it meant returning to our roots as a trade union. With the result that we went for 'adaptation' not as a negative choice, but as the natural answer. As is generally the case, at least according to Charles Darwin: 'survival of the fittest' doesn't mean the strongest will survive, but the ones who best adapt to change.

We as FNV Bouw want to be the trade union of all the workers in construction, regardless of their types of employment. Because we believe that is the only way to stay on top of developments. That is the only way for us to be the representative of labour in all its forms, its voice. Not only in the eyes of the workers concerned, but also in the eyes of, for example, employers and the government. And that is what we need to do to remain a legitimate source of power in the sector. In the interest of all.

This vision is not restricted to self-employment. It also tells us how to deal with temporary workers, foreign colleagues, and the fact that construction is itself taking on new forms, with more and more work done in sectors that traditionally have not been seen as ours (e.g. as a result of more and more prefab construction, in which the construction site is the place where parts are assembled, but no longer built, since the manufacturing is done elsewhere).

In respect of self-employment, this vision led us, in 2000, to form 'FNV ZBo' (in which ZBo stands for 'self-employed in construction') as an independent union. Independent because it has its own charter and a lot of freedom to act as it deems best, but the union was established and is funded and staffed by FNV Bouw, and it is also a union 'under the flag' of FNV.

From the beginning, FNV ZBo has been very successful. It came up with the answer to looking after the interests of the self-employed before others had even asked themselves that question. It did so by offering them affordable individual services (like discounts on insurances or 'free' legal services) under the FNV brand name, a well-trusted brand in labour-circles. FNV ZBo is now by far the biggest organisation for self-employed workers in construction, with over 9,000 members, a number that's growing day by day. FNV ZBo is, from the perspective of membership growth, today the most successful FNV member (indeed, among all trade-unions).

But to realise our vision that by this kind of adapting we best serve the interests of all workers, we understand that we have to take a further step. And that is to make FNV ZBo a true member of the FNV family. Not only in name, but in 'character' as well. A true FNV union is more than a provider of affordable individual services. It needs to have a collective agenda as well. Together with FNV Bouw, the traditional employee-based FNV union in construction. That's why we decided to form a federation. To form a joint strategy and act together. On topics like 'a good income' (be it in the form of pay or in that of fair, cost-based rates for things like insurance or a pension), so there will be a level playing field, on which one type of labour is not pushed aside by another, cheaper type of labour. Like health and safety, education, retirement schemes and the fight against bogus self-employment and the obscure agencies that exploit people. In the meantime we can show everyone, inside as well as outside the labour movement, that we are united. Because we believe construction workers, in whatever form they may work, ultimately have more things in common than things that divide them.

FNV ZBo: trade-union for sole traders in the building trade and wood industry

Han Westerhof, General Secretary FNV ZBo

Introduction

FNV ZBo (in which ZBo stands for self-employed in construction) was formed in 2000 as an independent union for self-employed workers with no employees (sole traders). The formation of FNV ZBo enabled self-employed in construction to join a trade-union that specifically looks after their interests. FNV ZBo provides members with individual services like for instance free legal services and discounts on insurances. FNV ZBo also has a collective agenda in order to dispel the remaining problem areas for sole traders and to plea for recognition of the special position and the social and economic ads value of sole traders. FNV ZBo has been very successful from the beginning; it grew from 600 members at the start to more than 10.000 members nowadays. This makes FNV ZBo the largest organization for sole traders in construction and the most successful FNV-member from the perspective of membership-growth. As a whole, the FNV consists of sixteen independent unions of which two unions specifically look after the interests of self-employed workers. In total the FNV organizes more than 30.000 sole traders, which makes the FNV by far the largest representative of self-employed workers.

The great majority of sole traders are satisfied with the independent existence. Being able to direct your own development as a professional, able to organize your own time and choose appealing commissions where expertise can come into its own are important components here. Sole traders are content because self-employment grants them self-determination. It is this motivation that is the deciding factor in choosing self-employment. Being successful as your own boss consists of two important components; good craftsmanship and good entrepreneurship. The main focus of the services that FNV ZBo provides is to support members in their entrepreneurship. Members can use a complete service package, such as administration and tax services, information and advice and free collection in case of problems with contractors that refuse to pay for the work done by the sole trader.

Federation

Besides the individual services, FNV ZBo has a collective agenda to look after the interests of the self-employed in construction as a whole. FNV ZBo decided to form a federation with FNV Bouw, the traditional employee-based FNV-union in construction to form a joint strategy and act together. On topics like 'a good income' (be it in the form of salary or in that of a fair price that covers the costs of things like insurance or the building-up of a pension), so there will be a level-playing field in which one form of labour doesn't push the other one aside because it is much cheaper. Like health and safety, education, retirement-schemes and the fight against bogus self-employment and obscure agencies that exploit people.

Structure

Being a democratic trade-union; the members of FNV ZBo have the opportunity to influence and determine the policy and course of their union by taking seat in the council of members. The council of members consists of twenty members and is the highest institution within the union. Election of the members committee is an important task of the council of members. Other authorities are monitoring the members committee and determination of the annual account. FNV ZBo is directed and represented by the members committee which consists of six trade union officials. Activities such as policy development and legal assistance of members are delegated to a professional staff.

Mission

The self-employed worker as an individual and as a company represents full-fledged and emancipated labour. The sole trader aims at quality and craftsmanship. Social responsible business practice means for the sole-trader: high quality craftsmanship at a fair income as a self-employed worker with reliable firm offers in which insurance and pension are incorporated, accurate administration and tax transfer.

The sole trader works with his/her own equipment and tools and is interested in broadening and developing the skills and craftsmanship. FNV ZBo is the qualified organization for labour, turnover, income and social position of the sole trader. By spreading this vision on self-employment on a broad scale, FNV ZBo contributes to the accurate image-forming of the sole trader. FNV ZBo looks after the individual and collective interests of self-employed workers and endorses the principles of the FNV.

Strategic planning

FNV ZBo positions itself as a member of the FNV, with cooperation in the Self-Employed Advice Council (ZAR) and the federation with FNV Bouw. FNV ZBo has an independent position in this cooperation's. FNV ZBo is a democratic organization, with professional guidance of the council members. FNV ZBo develops in the nearby future as a market leader in organizing self-employed workers in the craft industry. In the development of new product FNV ZBo uses the advantage of numbers and economies of scale of the FNV. New products for the craft industry are conditions for quality and guarantee, broadening and intensification of craftsmanship and recognition of acquired competences (EVC). Condition for this strategic planning is membership-growth.

Tactical planning

The aim of FNV ZBo is reinforcement of the position of self-employed workers within the FNV and in particular reinforcement of the self-employed workers in the craft industry within the Self-Employed Advice Council. Key factor in strengthening the position of FNV ZBo within the FNV is reinforcement of the democratic structure, in particular the council of members. Staffing full time trade union officials is essential in order to professionalize the members committee. As a qualified organization of labour, turnover and income of sole traders, FNV ZBo aims at admitting conditions in collective labour agreements in order to regulate labour recruitment and bogus self-employment. FNV ZBo strives for market regulation of suppliers and users in relation to activities of self-employed workers in the craft industry.

Individual services for members

For an annual fee of € 185, which is tax deductible, FNV ZBo provides the following individual services to members:

- Information and advise

Members receive the ZBO guide, a practical manual about everything sole traders need to arrange for the business. It includes a chapter about rates, with calculation support, checklists, etc. For members, FNV ZBo also has a rate calculator. This makes it possible to determine rates easily.

- Legal assistance

For our members, FNV ZBo has a package with model letters and model quotations. This package covers the whole stretch, from first appointment to payment. And if something should go wrong anyway, FNV ZBo can provide free collection and legal assistance.

- Administration

For a fixed annual sum, members of FNV ZBo can hand over their bookkeeping (completely or in part) to financial experts. There are two packages:

Package 1

Checks the administration and draws up the annual accounts

Answers administrative and simple tax questions.

Takes care of the income tax return papers

Package 2

Takes care of the complete administration

Answers administrative and simple tax questions.

Takes care of the income tax return papers and VAT declaration

- Insurance

Members can take out insurance (both for the business and privately) through FNV ZBo.

Members can get discounts, regardless of the number of insurance policies. Members receive expert and independent advice. The following insurances are included:

Business insurance

Companies' liability insurance

CAR-insurance (all-risk construction insurance)

Loss of profits insurance

Private insurance

Disability insurance

Motor vehicle insurance

Accident insurance

- Pension

The FNV ZBo-advisors can help members to arrange a good pension plan. They know the rules that apply to the sector; they know the taxation laws and the different possibilities that exist.

- Courses and workshops

FNV ZBo arranges courses and workshops for self-employed workers. Members receive a discount on the courses and workshops. One of the most popular courses is safety in construction (VCA). This course teaches the participants the regulatory requirements in construction. After a successful examination the participants receive a safety-certificate which proves their safety-knowledge. This certificate is required in order to conduct business with professional contractors in the building trade.



Jordy Kooiker (1989) is FNV ZBo's ten thousandth member. "As my father and older brother work in the building industry as independents, I have already found the courage to form my own company." For the time being, he is working with other self-employed contractors. "In a few years' time, I'll be taking on my own business." Photo: NFP, Marijn van Rij

The Project for a „European Migrant Workers’ Network“

Rita Schiavi, member of the management committee of the UNIA (CH) trade union

At the annual meeting of the BWI European Committee of 4-5 October 2007 in Palermo, the trade unions IG-Bau (D) und Unia (CH) submitted a project proposal calling for the creation of a “network for migrant workers”. The following paragraphs propose to present the project.

1. Situation and Problem Identification

Through the free movement of persons within the European Union, EU enlargement, and the big wage gaps that exist both within the European Union and with neighbouring countries, we observe in many countries, also in those that in the past hardly experienced labour migration, large-scale migratory movements. That results in a new challenge to trade unions. Organizing migrants in a union and making sure they get equal treatment is key to safeguarding the trade unions principle of equality and to maintaining current working conditions and terms of employment and will demonstrate if the unions are able to make further progress.

Before their arrival migrants are generally ill-informed about current working conditions and their rights. Many employers exploit this situation to deprive these workers of the local standards. The migrants must clear hurdles in their contact with the local unions and in their attempt at genuine integration. The hurdles include: the language barrier, short term stays and at times deliberate attempts by the employer to thwart such contacts.

To overcome these difficulties several European trade unions in the building and woodworking sector have adopted different priorities. Some unions have a long tradition of organizing migrant workers while others have only recently stepped up their activity in this area, and in some the migrants account for as many as half the members (e.g. Switzerland and Italy). Other unions have special information campaigns for regular migrants as well as campaigns specifically targeted to posted workers (e.g. Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark) and some are even trying to establish new trade union structures (German, Poland).

Some unions from home and host countries have already agreed on bilateral cooperation, or at least they cooperate informally. In some frontier areas cross-border union advice and information works well (e.g. EURES projects). So far, however, there has been no systematic pan-European cooperation in this area that provides full territorial coverage. We are not making the most of the benefits that sustained recruitment of migrants in one country can have on organizing them in their home or host country (forwarding information about the union member who returns home or moves on).

It remains difficult for the unions in the home countries to provide their members with reliable and legally sound information about working conditions in other countries. Conversely many unions in the host countries are unable to provide advice and representation to the migrants. Cooperation between trade unions in the home and host countries in the area of posted workers can be improved.

To tackle all these challenges trade union cooperation must be enhanced and gradually a European network must be established, and at a second stage it should cover neighbouring regions (e.g. Maghreb, CIS). It remains clear in all this that the trade unions on the spot (at the place of work) must organize migrant workers.

2. Project Objectives

The objective of the „European Migrant Workers' Network“ is both the better protection of migrant workers in Europe and the protection of workers in the host countries against wage and social dumping and thereby also the avoidance of xenophobia among workers.

The process which is to start will be based on the following principles:

- No new structure to be imposed from the top, instead existing work with migrants will be improved and optimized and information exchange will be networked
- Trade union work, recruitment and support of migrants will be carried out by the unions on the spot (where the migrants work)
- Recruit migrants with a view to local expansion of the union
- Raise consciousness within the individual unions

In the sphere of the building and wood industries, a network is to be set up, which will primarily serve information exchange, mutual information on best practices, as well as the information of migrant workers themselves.

In concrete terms, the project's objectives are as follows:

- Coordination of the advice, information and direct support that the local unions provide on the spot. Mutual support in recruiting migrant workers.
- Developing common tools (joint website, with link to the appropriate union; information material; teaching module for union secretaries that covers migration and recruitment issues)
- Exchange of best practice.

3. Project Scope

In order not to overburden the project and first to gain experience, the project is to be divided into stages. A first stage will cover migratory movements from Eastern Europe to Central and Northern Europe. It is to include mainly posted, sub-contracted and undocumented workers. In a second stage, extension to the countries of Southern Europe, including migration from the Maghreb, is planned. Should it prove its worth, the project may later be extended to more geographic areas.

4. Project Contents

The main contents of the project will cover the following five points:

- The trade unions participating in the project are to make a short inventory (two pages max) of current strategy for migrant workers.
On the basis of this snapshot, the project can be firmed up and existing trade union work improved and more effectively coordinated.
- Creation of a network of multi-lingual contact persons in as many member unions as possible. Support will be coordinated through the transfer of know-how and provision of information material (establishing which unions produce what material and how can it be made available). Mutual support in organizing migrants by means of forwarding information about organized members who move on or return home.
- Creation of a joint, multilingual website, with links to the homepages of the different unions. The participating unions construct their own websites with same basic information in several languages.

- Active encouragement of bilateral cooperation between trade unions in the host and home countries. Model agreements on the basis of existing agreements to be drawn up and made available.
- Support in cooperation with existing organizations (EFBWW, NFBWW and BWI), in seeking funds from third parties for local projects and bilateral cooperation. Help with political lobbying at the EU, IOM and OSCE and at bilateral negotiations; existing channels to be used (EFBWW, NFBWW und BWI).

5. Further Action

Since being proposed, this project idea has in principle found approval among member organisations. At the meeting of the presidents of our three international federations, BWI, EFBWW and NFBWW, a joint steering and implementation of the project, as well as proceeding in stages, was agreed. The project is to begin in spring 2008. The objectives for 2008 are:

- Designing a web site for migrant workers, with a test phase with one country/language (Polish)
- Setting up a minimum network of Polish-speaking secretaries (list of addresses, information exchange through electronic communication means).



Wilgo Blokland (1957) loves old houses in Amsterdam, where he often works in renovation work as a bricklayer. After vocational education at the technical school in Suriname, he worked in his father's building firm. In 1979 he came to Holland, where he started as an apprentice building carpenter. Later, he wanted to become a bricklayer, and again went to school. "Anyway, in Suriname bricklaying is done differently, and apart from that, houses are more likely to be made of wood." Photo: Bert Janssen

Migration in the Mediterranean zone

Resolution of the BWI European Committee, Palermo 4-5 October 2007

During 2007 cross-border migration continued to increase in a large number of European industrialised countries, and consequently the subject of human rights continued to occupy a central place in the policies and actions of governments and social bodies of the countries affected by this problem.

In particular, the role of the European trade union in particular, which is fundamental in this battle, was underlined at the recent Congress of the European Trade Union Congress (ETUC), which reaffirmed the importance that human and economic development in the Euro-Mediterranean region represents for the European Union and the world as a whole.

Illegality and exploitation offer no future for any country that seeks to compete in globalization in the field of research, innovation and the quality of products and of the market. But exploitation of the vast labour force which arrives clandestinely on the shores of those countries that border the Mediterranean – starting with Italy – remains an emergency which the European community should strive to address. Just as it is necessary to pursue the objective of creating a multi-ethnic society, inspired by the value of intercultural links, that is able to translate the emergency into the enhanced application of the resources represented by the vast human and professional capital that this migration can make available to the industrialized countries. Similarly the subject under discussion before the European Commission, namely the selection of migrant workers in their countries of origin must be conceived as a correct and legal way of managing the migratory flows, and not as a simple response to the need for labour in the old continent. This is necessary in order to avoid the impoverishment that is caused by the hemorrhage of professional skills and peoples from the countries undergoing emigration. Furthermore, selection must not be transformed into a further act of blackmail in terms of jobs, but must be effected by preliminary procedures of general and specific training in the countries of origin.

Already at the BWI European Committee held in Skopje in 2006 BWI trade unions made clear commitments concerning equal treatment of all workers, support for trade union membership of workers in our sector, ways of integrating migrant workers, overcoming cases of xenophobia still encountered in society, regularization of migrants and the improvement of their legal status, making the employers realise that they are responsible if workers' rights are not respected.

During the course of this year, it was along these lines that the BWI affiliates developed their activities in the respective countries, and the results achieved have in part contributed to progress in providing protection for migrants, but they still represent only a partial answer to an initiative which must involve even more intensely and coherently the institutions and the social parties working in the Mediterranean region.

It is necessary to give stronger backing to the ETUC aim of strengthening the nature and social dimension of the policies of the European Union by intensifying the actions and the instruments that are able to promote social dialogue, a free and frank dialogue that will characterize the contribution and participation of the European trade union in the activities of the Euromed trade union Forum.

In this, the BWI must play its part, by addressing the problems and needs which effectively arise in the sector, indicating at the same time the concrete actions that can help to achieve the objectives that the European Confederation set itself at the Seville Congress in 2007.

The aim is to develop trade union cooperation with the Partner countries of the Mediterranean (PPM), especially as regards professional training, equal rights to this for both men and women and transparent management of the labour market, which acts as a fundamental lever in promoting the rights of workers, both women and men, starting with the immigrants who are residents of the European Union.

Next, the aim is to reinforce the method of concertation between institutions and social partners, in order to encourage participation and involvement of the latter in putting into practice the policies of the social partnership.

Thirdly, the aim is to build, together with the employers' organizations, and using the investments provided by the firms in the Partner countries of the Mediterranean, an advanced experiment in respecting the rules and rights of workers, within the European Union, by developing the practice of bargaining.

It is between these main directions of trade union intervention that the aim towards which the BWI is working is coherently situated, namely **equal rights and obligations for all, irrespective of nationality and legal status.**

For these reasons the Palermo Conference of 4 and 5 October 2007 can only reiterate the commitment of the trade union as a whole to take action over the coming months in order to achieve further results on the platform proposed in Skopje, both when dealing with the European institutions and individual nations, and in the relationship with the employers' organizations by means of social dialogue and bargaining practice.

This platform affirms the principles of humanity and equality as the foundations of legislation in the field of immigration. These principles are being translated into a social statute and into a juridical status on the basis of the applicability of the conditions of economic and regulatory treatment in force in the countries concerned.

For the present, it is necessary that Member States adopt measures aimed at encouraging the involvement of clandestine immigrants in the struggle against exploitation, against underhand and illegal work, avoiding the paradox of expulsion owing to the effect of denouncing a condition of illegality to which the employer often subjects the immigrant worker as a result of blackmail.

In parallel, collective bargaining must always contain references to the specific safeguards for immigrants, such as professional training, intercultural training, reception services, the possibility of availing oneself of services that are guaranteed to all citizens, accumulation of leave and permits to return to the homeland.

BWI commits itself, in coordination with EFBWW and NFBWW, to encourage the establishment of a "European Migrant Network". It is the aim of such a network to improve the exchange of information with regard to migrant issues as well as to provide improved support to the migrant in BWI sectors and to organise.

The Palermo Conference calls upon all the organizations of the BWI to take up these lines of action and objectives and to work, over the coming months, towards achieving further progress, in order to translate into reality the objective of equal rights, irrespective of the nationality and legal status of all workers.

Documentation on Organising Models

Organising: from a representation model to a self-organising model

1. Central Theme

Saul Alinsky, US civil rights activist:

“Don’t do anything for anyone that they can do for themselves.”

2. Definition of Organising

Organising refers to an offensive trade union strategy that aims at motivating and empowering the employees of a company to themselves take action for better working and living conditions. An organising strategy is essentially based on seeking out effective workplace spokespersons and training them to become trade union spokespersons in the industry.

Organising refers to a strategy for member activation and member recruitment and for the achievement of better working and living conditions for employees in companies with low wages, bad working conditions and usually minimal union density.

Organising means, on the one hand, building trade unions up from the workplace, in the sense of and with the emphasis on acting like a social movement. The aim is to anchor the movement as broadly and as deeply as possible in workplaces, as a pre-requisite for effectiveness in the labour and political fields (Dribbusch in: P. Bremme/Ulrike Fürniss 2007:30-34). On the other hand, the organising model refers to “... a collection of varying strategies and tactics in trade union policy-making and campaigning as well as of good practices, which can be applied both in the initial organising of workplaces or in strengthening a workplace presence, and in collective disputes” (ibid 2007:34).

3. Elements of the Organising Model

Organising is a forward-looking model for trade unions. Its various techniques and strategic approaches have, briefly said, been borrowed from organisation and communications theory, from human resources management, and from the proven practices of social work, especially community work. In the following paragraphs, organising is, in broad terms, explained as a practical instrument (Dribbusch in: Bremme/Fürniss (2007): Never work alone, pp. 30-35).

1. Strategic campaign planning and setting priorities

Objective: Weighing up the chances of success as well as longer-term prospects for building up industrial power.

Tasks: Setting points of focus and priorities; that can also require an appropriate redeployment of human and material resources.

2. Drawing up a plan to win, evaluating successes

Objective: Achieving a high degree of commitments. That should make successes and setbacks verifiable and therefore also open to discussion.

Tasks: Develop action plans at the beginning and in the different phases of an organising campaign, which help to define the planned steps and monitor progress in their implementation.

3. Systematic preparation and research

Objective: Investigating how to as effectively as possible bring direct and also indirect pressure on companies that seek to impede trade union organising.

Tasks: Comprehensive and detailed research on the industry’s situation. That includes working conditions, disputes, employee problems and desires; precise research on the business connections of the companies concerned is of great importance.

4. Mapping

Objective: Making the multitude of information that is generated before and during the organising campaign visible and widely shared.

Tasks: As the need arises, various themes such as business relationships, the geographical distribution of jobs, or the trade union's workplace presence are presented in chart the form of charts.

5. Rating (similar to mapping)

Objective: Assessing power relationships, being able to approach employees one-by-one, using working time to effectively deploy organisers.

Tasks: Note who is open to trade union activities in a given workplace, who sympathises, who is neutral, or which employees act as employer informers.

6. Assigning specialised organisers

Objective: Training and motivating lead organisers (usually, full-time officials) capable of leading an organising team consisting of full-time officials and volunteer lay activists.

Tasks: Discover employees who are interested in engaging in trade union activities, motivate them and encourage them to act independently. In this organising model, they are also in charge of the planning and implementation of organising campaigns.

7. Setting up organising committees

Objective: Strengthening the integration of active sympathisers or members, ensuring influence on organising activities, sustaining activation.

Tasks: Exert influence on organising activities, encourage the involvement of employees through their colleagues, support organising from within and from outside the workplace, sustain activation and the broadening of the trade union base. Such a committee is not structured as a small circle, but can, depending on its tasks, consist of many members. In some cases, one distinguishes between an internal and an external organising committee.

8. Extension of the field of action – indirect pressure

Objective: Expanding the field of action, providing the employees concerned with more leverage to achieve their goals.

Tasks: Put not only direct pressure on the company but also indirect pressure through its customers or contract partners. That stems from the conviction that contracting agencies as well as customer companies share responsibility for wages and working conditions in the companies with which they do business.

9. Coalition building

Objective: Garnering sympathy for the organising effort, extending the field of action.

Tasks: Co-operation with other trade unions, inclusion of community organisations, associations, churches, prominent local or national politicians. In that connection, emphasising social justice issues and the right to organise play an important role.

10. Action orientation

Objective: Consciously infringing rules and engaging in forms of civil disobedience.

Tasks: Find forms of action, from wearing a badge at work to a street blockade, from a consumer boycott to a strike. The repertory is strongly inspired by the experience of the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and includes conflictual, confrontational tactics.

11. Demonstrate trade union effectiveness

Objective: Strengthening support for the campaign.

Tasks: Specify interim goals that are considered relatively easy to achieve, and facilitate and publicise their achievement.

12. Professional training

Objective: Educating members and supporters, disseminating and advertising the organising model.

Tasks: Educate and train organising committee members and any temporarily included campaign supporters.

13. Success management

Objective: Developing sustainable workplace self-organising through workplace union representatives (shop stewards).

Tasks: Targeted coaching of shop stewards, provide help in the development of self-organising and integration between the trade union and the workplace.



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