

TRADE UNIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD: TRACING THE PATH TOWARDS STRATEGIES THAT SUCCESSFULLY MANAGE CHANGE

European trade unions need to strengthen their proactive capacity to successfully respond to the forces of change. The strengthening of this capacity requires trade unions to further develop their ability to anticipate as well as respond to events that affect their members' interests. It also requires trade unions to find additional ways of ensuring that the increasingly specialised needs of their members and potential future members are understood and catered for. Finally, trade unions need to further develop ways of influencing decision making at several different levels: European, national, regional and local. These are just some of the issues to come out of the latest edition of *Transfer*, the quarterly publication of the Research Department of the European Trade Union Institute for Research, Education and Health and Safety (ETUI-REHS), which has just been published.

This issue of *Transfer* focuses on the challenge of change for trade unions and how to manage it. It builds upon the work of the "Trade Unions Anticipating Change in Europe" (TRACE) project (2004-2006) that was set up by ETUCO – now the Education Department of the ETUI-REHS. The TRACE project was carried out in partnership with European unions. The aim of TRACE was to assess how trade unions deal with change at national, regional and local level (www.traceproject.org).

Transfer 02/2007: Accommodating and managing change: trade union strategies in Europe - key articles:

- **Richard Hyman:** How can trade unions act strategically?
- **Colin Crouch:** Trade unions and local development networks.
- **Valeria Pulignano** and **Norbert Kluge:** Employee involvement in restructuring: are we able to determine the price?
- **Olle Hammarström:** Active change strategies for trade unions.
- **Guglielmo Meardi:** Restructuring in an enlarged Europe: challenges and experiences.
- **Steve Walker, Miguel Martínez Lucio** and **Philippa Trevorrow:** Tracing trade union innovation: a framework for evaluating trade union learning projects in a time of complexity.

Some challenges facing European trade unions due to change:

"To save people or to save jobs?": A common dilemma that is faced by trade unions across Europe. Is it the role of the union to defend the existing members' interests as employees of a specific company and as members of a specific union? Or is it to maximize the individual member's future options in the labour market? Or is it to preserve jobs for as many members as possible?

An increasingly diverse membership: How can actual and potential trade union members be encouraged to perceive common interests despite differences and to negotiate the tensions which often exist between their own multiple social identities in a way which is compatible with collectivism? A uniform policy cannot be

mechanically imposed when the average member no longer exists. Increasingly unions need to be discursive or dialogical organisations allowing the explicit negotiation of increasingly overt internal differences. How to achieve 'bottom-up' dialogue which is truly representative of the diversity of rank-and-file opinion is a major challenge.

Trade union involvement at different levels of decision making: A capacity to participate in shaping local economies must be a goal for all innovative unions in the new European economy. The importance of the social issues involved and the democratic deficit of many of the arrangements for managing, for example, major urban agglomerations make it urgent that unions grasp this challenge.

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Transfer is a publication of the Research Department of the ETUI-REHS.

Its principal aim is to stimulate dialogue between the European Trade Union movement and the academic and research community.

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The European Trade Union Institute for Research, Education and Health and Safety (ETUI-REHS) is an international non-profit-making Association established under Belgian law. It conducts research on issues of strategic importance for the world of labour, provides trade union education and training activities and promotes a high level of health and safety protection for workers in Europe.