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The European Trade Union Confederation at Forty: Integration and Diversity in the European Labor Movement

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Abstract: *Since its creation in 1973, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has sought to integrate Europe's diverse labor movement within a single organization for the purpose of influencing political developments at the European level. This article examines the ETUC's forty-year history, focusing on internal debates around three fundamental – and contentious – questions: **who belongs** in a European organization of trade unions; **what objectives** should the ETUC prioritize; and **what tactics** will be most effective to advance the interests of workers at the European level? It concludes with an assessment of how enduring internal divisions are likely to limit the ETUC's influence into the future.*

Keywords:

ETUC, EU, Trade unions, International unions, Confederal unions, labor history, internationalism

As the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) passes the fortieth anniversary of its founding, in 1973, it is an appropriate moment to take stock of the organization's evolution and its role – historical, actual, and potential – in the European integration process. The ETUC was created as a regional organization affiliating the various national trade union confederations. In significant ways, the ETUC must be counted a success. It has grown from 17 founding member organizations, representing 14 countries and 36 million workers to an affiliation of 85 national union confederations and 10 European industry federations, representing 36 countries and 60 million members. As such, it is clearly the most representative European-level labor organization. Its input is invited on the eve of the regular summits of European Union (EU) leaders, giving organized labor an institutionalized channel into the highest levels of EU agenda-setting. Mandatory consultation of the social partners (the peak employers' associations and the ETUC) prior to the initiation of any EU-level social policy likewise gives the ETUC institutionalized access to EU policy-making. Furthermore, the social partners have earned the right to negotiate European-level agreements on social policy that are binding across member states. Finally, ETUC efforts to mobilize workers around European issues like unemployment and, more recently, austerity, have rallied increasing numbers of participants. On November 14, 2012, the ETUC's "Day of Action and Solidarity" saw the active participation of some 50 trade union organizations from 28 countries.¹ To mark the day of action, unions unleashed a general strike in Spain and Portugal, more limited strikes and stoppages in Italy and Greece, and a variety of protest actions elsewhere in the EU. One news report called it the "most coordinated pan-continental labor disruption since the euro crisis began."²

Yet, at forty, the ETUC still struggles to channel its numerical strength and formal access to agenda-setting and policy-making into proportionate influence on the EU. Throughout its four decades,

¹ ETUC, *Europe's Leaders*.

² Washington Post, *Protests and Labor Unrest*.

internal divisions have hampered the ETUC's ability to speak with one voice or act in a unified manner. The matter is further complicated because the ETUC's members are themselves confederations that often struggle to reconcile the different European preferences of their own national unions. Within the British TUC, for example, the individual unions have been bitterly divided over the question of whether the United Kingdom should adopt the euro. And while the German DGB has been a driving force in the creation of the ETUC, the head of its largest federation, IG Metall, was notoriously skeptical of the European organization, referring to it as a letter box and skipping the meetings of its Executive Committee.³ As a confederation of confederations, the ETUC is challenged not only by the significant divisions *among* the individual member confederations, but also by differences of perspective *within* the many national confederations.

The nature of the divisions within the ETUC has evolved over time, but today, no less than at its founding, the organization struggles in the face of its pluralistic membership to define itself as an organization. This article provides a retrospective of the ETUC's evolution over four decades by examining its efforts to grapple, in turn, with three fundamental questions about its own identity. There have been no easy answers to these existential questions, and debates among ETUC members over their answers have consumed a considerable part of the organization's energy and continue to limit the ETUC's ability to act decisively and purposefully today.

Existential Questions

The primary question in the first decade after the founding of the ETUC, with lingering significance through the 1990s, was ***who belongs*** in a European organization of trade unions? The creation of

³ Martin and Ross, *In the Line of Fire*, 322.

the ETUC was marked by a fierce debate over whether unions from only the social democratic International Confederation of Free Trade Unions should join, or whether those affiliated to the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions and the communist-aligned World Federation of Trade Unions should also be invited to join. The question of geographical scope also proved divisive, with members (and would-be members) disagreeing fiercely over whether ETUC membership should be restricted to union organizations from “the six” (member states of the then-European Community), or whether organizations from all of Western Europe should be eligible for membership.

While these membership issues predominated in the early years of the ETUC, in time they faded into the background and a second big question took center stage: *what objectives* should the organization pursue? The diversity of interests within the new organization made it difficult for members to agree on the goals the ETUC should prioritize. Indeed, views of the ETUC’s affiliates were sharply divided with regard to the fundamental question of how integrated Europe should become. Given the paralyzing effect of disagreements among the ETUC’s affiliates on the organization’s ability to act decisively, in time the question of the proper relationship between the central structures of the ETUC and its member organizations also became important. Significant developments in the 1980s and 1990s – at the level of individual ETUC members, within the ETUC as an organization, and within the broader arena of the EU – all helped to reshape the ETUC as an organization by century’s end. For a time, the evolution of the EU from liberal market to social project seemed not only possible, but plausible. Affiliates that had once opposed European integration reversed their position,⁴ and it was in this era that the ETUC earned its institutionalized place in EU agenda-setting and policy-making. Through the new social dialogue process, the ETUC

⁴ Mitchell, *From Whitehall to Brussels*.

and the peak employers' associations reached a number of social agreements in the 1990s (Geyer, 2000), and it was possible to imagine that the EU was developing into a neo-corporatist system, where the ETUC would play an important role in defining social policies.⁵

Yet, as the ETUC moved into the twenty-first century, social dialogue stalled and the ETUC's major challenge at present is to determine *what tactics* will be most effective to advance the interests of workers at the European level. Even before the current economic crisis, the prospect of Social Europe had dimmed. The ETUC continues to struggle against the predominant forces of marketization, economic liberalization, and – more recently – against austerity policies as well. But what tools should the ETUC use to advance workers' interests? Should it stick to a primary emphasis on social partnership in the hopes of negotiating policy if ever the employers are willing to bargain? Or, as a peak-level pressure group, should the ETUC refocus and renew its efforts to shape policy by lobbying the EU institutions? Or, as yet a third possibility, should it place less emphasis on the 'insider' politics of negotiating and lobbying and focus more on 'outsider' tactics such as mass protest? Industrial action is, by treaty, outside the purview of the ETUC, but might not demonstrations and other forms of protest be a viable strategy for influencing European-level developments? The question of tactics constitutes the most significant internal division within the ETUC today.

This article examines the ETUC's forty-year history by focusing on the changing nature of its internal divisions. Recognizing that the ETUC struggles with the challenge of diversity is hardly novel; it is a phenomenon frequently noted in studies of the ETUC. But while previous studies focus on a particular era of the ETUC's development or a particular set of issues where the ETUC is

⁵ Falkner, *EU Social Policy*.

active, and note the impact of internal diversity in passing, this article takes a different focus. It puts the enduring, yet evolving, internal debates front and center, using them as a lens through which to chart the ETUC's development over nearly half a century. It proceeds with an examination of the motivation for creating a regional union organization and then, in turn, explores the three existential debates – who belongs? what objectives? what tactics? – that have characterized the ETUC's development over the past four decades. It concludes with some reflections on the ETUC's future.

Why create a European confederation of trade unions?

Despite exhortations in favor of international solidarity (e.g. “Workers of the world, unite!”), the labor movement has always been fragmented.⁶ Apart from the obvious national divisions, there have been significant divisions over ideology (Communist vs. non-Communist), tactics (revolutionary vs. pragmatic), and religion (secular vs. confessional). Compounding these divisions, worker solidarity in Europe was hampered successively by World War I, the Russian Revolution, World War II, and the onset of the Cold War. Furthermore, the post-war settlements that ushered in the new era were based on programs of national reconciliation and, across most of Western Europe, trade unions were integrated into the political economy of their respective nation-states to a greater degree than ever before, thus cementing national allegiances at the expense of international solidarity.

Nevertheless, internationalism remained an ideal for the labor movement, evidenced not least by the impulse to recreate an international union organization so quickly after the war: the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was founded in October 1945. But again, unity proved an unattainable ideal. Fundamental ideological disagreements within the WFTU led to a spectacular rift

⁶ Beever, *European Unity*; Bouvard, *Labor Movements*; Barnouin, *European Labor Movement*, Dølvik, *Redrawing Boundaries*.

when the self-proclaimed “free” social democratic trade unions broke off to form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in 1949, leaving the now-communist-oriented WFTU with only three West European member organizations. A third international organization, the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU, later renamed the World Confederation of Labor, WCL) affiliated the confessional unions.

Against the backdrop of this fragmentation of the labor movement, the first steps were taken toward European integration, with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 and the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958. For the most part, the social democratic and Christian unions were strong advocates for European unification as a means of achieving peace and prosperity for the war-torn continent, and the ICFTU and IFCTU both established regional bodies to coordinate activity related to the ECSC and EEC. The WFTU – and the few West European unions that still belonged to it – opposed European integration vociferously.

Unions from the six founding member states, in particular, recognized the profound economic impact that regional integration would have. For the unions of “the six” – and for the IFCTU and ICFTU more generally, the question was how to ensure that union views were taken into consideration as new European institutions were established and as economic and social policies were put into place that would impact workers across these countries.

Ernst Haas, the most influential early theorist of European integration, expected that, as the central European institutions grew more powerful, groups – including unions – would more or less automatically be drawn to organize across national borders in order to reorient toward this new

locus of power. Indeed, in his foundational *The Uniting of Europe* (1958), he concluded that, “*the unions have no alternative but to unite* in seeking to influence supranational authorities.”⁷

While the neofunctionalist theory of European integration developed by Haas and others later fell out of favor, this view – that unions have no other alternative than to unite if they are to play a role in European integration – proved remarkably enduring, not least among the unions themselves.

Even before the founding of the ECSC, unions began to coordinate on European issues, creating European regional structures within both the ICFTU and IFCTU. Coordination was hampered, however, by a veritable proliferation of regional organizations,⁸ a development which, at best, blurred the lines of responsibility and, at worse, created competition among the various bodies.

There was no consensus about which institution truly represented workers at the European level.

This messy institutional situation was thrown into stark relief by three developments (discussed below), culminating in a widespread sense among the various unions that their institutional arrangements at the European level were “highly inadequate”⁹ and needed to be rationalized.

A first reason for concern about unions’ influence at the European level was their marginalization during the negotiation of the 1957 Treaty of Rome. In contrast to their success shaping the ECSC at its founding,¹⁰ the unions were unable to exert substantive influence over the creation of the EEC.

In fact, not only did the Treaty of Rome fail to incorporate union demands about employment and

⁷ Haas, *Uniting of Europe*, 388, emphasis added.

⁸ Within the IFCTU alone, European issues were taken up, at various stages, by the European Regional Organization, the Committee of Twenty-One, the European Trade Union Secretariat, the European Confederation of Free Trade Unions in the Community (ECFTUC), in ECFTUC Industrial Committees, and the Intersyndicale of the ECSC.

⁹ Barnouin, *European Labor Movement*, 8.

¹⁰ Union influence ensured, for example, that appointments to the newly-created High Authority of the ECSC held labor-friendly views on social and employment policies. Despite union efforts, however, the ECSC did not eliminate cartels or grant significant powers to the Common Assembly (Bouvard, 1972: 45-46).

social policies, but it actually scaled back the forms of labor representation the unions had secured in the ECSC.

A second reason for concern was the growing fear that unions' lack of cohesiveness at the European level would put labor at a disadvantage relative to the increasingly organized employer organizations. In 1957 UNICE (now BUSINESSEUROPE) was founded as a peak European association of private industries while CEEP, representing public enterprises, was established in 1961. The consolidation of industry organizations at the European level provided additional impetus for the unions to seek greater unification to avoid being sidelined in future European-level developments.

And finally, by the end of the 1960s, a political space had opened for significant European-level developments. With the passing of de Gaulle and Erhard from the political scene, the path was cleared for enlargement of the EEC and – although these ambitions were not, in fact, realized – there was a widespread perception that the time was ripe for harmonizing social policy as a counterpart to the economic integration at the heart of the Common Market. In a marked departure from the policies of their predecessors, Pompidou and Brandt spearheaded the EC's Social Action Program (SAP) in the early 1970s. The SAP was a platform aimed at establishing worker protections, reducing unemployment and overseeing economic management, and it initially received broad support across the EEC.

By the early 1970s, these developments prompted unions to place a higher priority on rationalizing and, to the extent possible, unifying their regional structures. Nevertheless, actually *creating* a unified regional organization of European trade unions proved no simple task, especially in the ideologically-charged context of the Cold War. Indeed, the deep political, ideological and religious

cleavages outlined above combined with organizational, institutional and cultural diversity in the labor movement to delay the development of a united European labor movement (Ebbinghaus and Waddington, 2000; Dølvik, 1997a).¹¹

Who belongs?

If there was a growing sense over the course of the 1960s that increased trade union cooperation would be *desirable*, there was also a deep disagreement about how this cooperation should be institutionalized. The question of who rightfully belongs in a regional organization of organized labor was a topic of intense debate. Indeed, the question was actually rooted in two separate debates, a geographical one and an ideological one. Geographically, the question centered on whether membership in any future European organization of trade unions should be limited, most restrictively, to trade union centers from “the six”; or, more inclusively, to union organizations from both the EEC and EFTA (European Free Trade Association) member states; or, most inclusively of all, to unions from all of Western Europe, including those from countries that were neither EEC nor EFTA members. Ideologically, the fiercest dispute centered on whether the Communist-oriented unions should be invited to join. As a result of these debates, several possible membership configurations were considered before a founding membership for the new European organization was ultimately agreed upon. The two debates – geographical and ideological – played out simultaneously, making for an extremely complicated series of negotiations. Here, for clarity’s sake, they will be examined separately, but this should not be taken as an indication that the two were, in fact, discrete or successive issues.

¹¹ Ebbinghaus and Waddington, *European Union Organizations*; Dølvik, *Redrawing Boundaries*.

Geographical scope

From the start, it was understood that the new organization would be a European regional organization. But exactly what *European* meant in this context was the subject of much debate. With the EEC's first enlargement already looming on the horizon while the trade unions contemplated forming a regional organization, the head of the German DGB (and new president of the ECF TU) argued that limiting membership to unions from "the six" would be shortsighted. However, including the unions of the candidate countries – Britain, Ireland, Denmark and Norway – posed its own set of challenges.¹² For example, while the majority of unions in "the six" favored European unity and close cooperation – and even a pooling of authority – within the union movement, unions from the accession countries took quite a different stance. The Scandinavian unions had their own system of political and economic cooperation (institutionalized in 1972 in the Nordic Council of Trade Unions), which they did not wish to see compromised by European commitments. The British TUC, however, proved even more problematic, both because of its position on Europe and because of its size. The TUC opposed British accession to the EC and, by extension, any European political or economic policies that curtailed British autonomy.¹³ Yet the TUC could scarcely be marginalized as a result of its size: its membership nearly equaled that of the EEC's entire organized labor movement.¹⁴

The geographical debate became a proxy debate on European integration itself. To downplay the potential supranational pressures of integration within the EEC, the TUC proposed that any new regional trade union organization should include as broad a European membership as possible – both geographically as well as ideologically. The TUC was hardly alone in the call for inclusive

¹² Norway ultimately declined to join.

¹³ Mitchell, *From Whitehall to Brussels*.

¹⁴ At the time, the TUC had 10 million members while the combined trade union membership of all the trade unions from 'the six' was 11 million. Dølvik, 1997a: 135.

membership (it was backed, notably, by the Scandinavian unions and the Italian CISL and UIL), but not all of them supported including the Communist-oriented unions. The German DGB was the most significant opponent of this TUC-led push for a broad regional organization. Instead, the DGB sought to restrict membership of the new organization to unions from the enlarged EEC, in order to deal efficiently with affairs specific to the Community and to minimize internal diversity.¹⁵

The compromise that was struck in the summer of 1972 restricted membership of the future organization to the ICFTU unions but extended its geographical scope beyond the EEC member states to all of Western Europe. However, the radicalization of the TUC's anti-Europeanism following its September Congress that year, coupled with the Norwegian 'no' vote on accession, stoked DGB fears that the new organization might specifically *avoid* EEC-specific issues, and the DGB thus reneged on its summer compromise over a broad geographical basis for the organization. In the face of DGB insistence that the new organization be restricted to unions from the EEC states, the TUC and the Danish LO vowed to boycott any institution that limited its membership in such a manner. The deadlock was finally broken when the DGB agreed to a broad membership on the condition that only affected unions would vote on issues specific to the EEC.¹⁶ By the end of 1972, then, the geographical debate had been settled and the ideological debate postponed. As a result of the TUC-DGB compromise, the new organization would be limited – at least temporarily – to the “free” social democratic unions affiliated to the ICFTU. The compromise paved the way for the establishment of the ETUC in February, 1973 with a membership of 17 unions, all ICFTU affiliates, representing just over 36 million workers.

¹⁵ Barnouin, *European Labor Movement*, 15.

¹⁶ Dølvik, *Redrawing Boundaries*, 137.

Ideological breadth

But intransigent ideological debates remained to be addressed. The main ideological challenge was what to do with the WFTU-affiliated (“Communist”) unions. But even the (relatively) less controversial notion of bringing together the Socialist and Christian unions was no simple affair, not least because social democratic and Christian unions often competed within the domestic arena for predominance. Indeed, one early strategy to create a European union organization was scuttled precisely because of domestic sniping. The plan (debated in 1970) would have merged the respective European organizations of the ICFTU and the newly-branded World Congress of Labor (WCL), as the IFCTU was by then called. The resulting European organization would thus have united the social democratic and Christian unions but excluded the communist-oriented unions. Yet despite the attractions of a single organization for unions from both organizations, the resistance of key national confederations quashed the plan. The French FO and the Belgian FGTB were engaged in domestic disputes with their Christian counterparts, the CFDT and CSC, respectively. As a result, they refused to approve a merger of the ICFTU and WCL European organizations.¹⁷

While it was possible to postpone grappling with the Europe’s ideologically-divided trade union movement by limiting the ETUC’s founding membership to ICFTU-affiliated unions, the issue resurfaced virtually immediately – at the ETUC’s founding congress, in fact. The debate centered on whether to extend membership only to the Christian unions affiliated to the WCL or, as the British TUC, the Belgian FGTB and the Italian CISL advocated, to also include the Communist unions affiliated to the WFTU. There were no significant arguments against offering ETUC membership to the unions of WCL but a great deal of vociferous protest against extending it to those of the WFTU. Finally the issue was brought to a sort of resolution by an agreement that

¹⁷ Dølvik, *Redrawing Boundaries*, 135.

ETUC membership would not simply be extended to the WCL unions *en masse* (and withheld from the WFTU unions on principle); instead, individual confederations would be invited to apply for membership to the ETUC, regardless of international affiliation, and they would be considered on a case-by-case basis. In the spring of 1974, seven Christian trade union organizations applied for, and were granted, membership in the ETUC.

But of course, this compromise did not resolve the question of what to do if a WFTU union sought membership. Therefore, when the Italian CGIL (which was linked to the Italian Communist Party and a member of the WFTU) applied for membership, the ideological debate was rekindled. The CGIL's ultimate acceptance into the ETUC in July 1974 proved to be an exception to the exclusion of the Communist-oriented unions rather than a sign that the ideological divide had been breached.

There were several mitigating factors in the CGIL case, especially compared with that of the French CGT, which was the other large West European WFTU-affiliate. First, the CGIL had a record of extensive domestic cooperation with the other two (non-Communist) Italian confederations, the CISL and UIL, both of which were already members of the ETUC and supported CGIL membership. Second, the CGIL was not a doctrinaire follower of the WFTU line. For example, while it had initially followed the WFTU in condemning the founding of the EEC, it subsequently moderated its position and, by the late 1960s, the position of the CGIL on European integration was significantly more positive than that of the WFTU. Furthermore, it exercised autonomy from the WFTU in certain important international questions, for example by criticizing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. And finally, in response to ETUC objections to the CGIL's Communist ties, the CGIL unilaterally downgraded its membership within the WFTU (of which, until 1969, it

held the Presidency) and withdrew its representatives from the executive of the Italian Communist Party.

Even with these mitigating factors, the CGIL's application for membership in the ETUC sparked fierce debate. The British TUC along with the Irish ICTU, Belgian FGTB, French CFDT and Austrian ÖGB were in favor of admitting the CGIL. The German DGB and the French FO were particularly strong in their opposition but were supported by the Nordic unions and several Christian confederations. After a contentious election (one-quarter of the votes cast opposed CGIL membership) the CGIL was admitted to the ETUC in the summer of 1974. But this did not represent a general opening of the ETUC to the Communist-oriented unions.¹⁸ Indeed, the membership question was not completely laid to rest until after the Cold War, when the (formerly-) Communist unions from Spain, Portugal, and France were finally accepted into the ETUC,¹⁹ alongside the unions from Central and Eastern Europe.

What objectives?

Given disputes over membership, merely bringing the ETUC into existence was hardly a simple endeavor. But rather than marking the culmination of a difficult process, the founding of the ETUC merely opened the door for the organization's true work to begin – advocating for workers at the European level. The preamble of the ETUC's constitution proclaimed that the organization would,

¹⁸ Indeed, some have interpreted the 1979 membership criteria articulated by the ETUC's Executive Committee as a formulation designed specifically to keep out the communist-affiliated unions (Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, 1993). 39., independence from political parties and not belonging to an international organization that was "incompatible with the principals of free trade unionism", essentially barred such unions from consideration. Whether or not that is the case, in practical terms, it is undeniable that the ETUC remained closed to the Communist-oriented unions. The French CGT, for example, applied for ETUC membership on the eve of the CGIL's accession, in summer 1974, but was not permitted to join until 1999. According to an October 1973 telegram sent from the U.S. Mission to the EC in Brussels to the U.S. Secretary of State (released 2005), "relations with the CGT have been relegated to deep freeze status by French FO resistance. While some ETUC leaders privately express chagrin with the FO's opposition, we tend to believe it is not entirely unwelcome. In fact they may even consider it a convenient pretext for delaying decisions on the question of communist union affiliation with the ETUC [...]" (Department of State, 1973).

¹⁹ Moreno, *Trade Unions without Frontiers*.

“represent and promote the [...] interests of workers at the European level” and “coordinate the activities of its affiliates by means of European programmes of action.”²⁰ Yet the first fifteen years of the organization’s existence were consumed by (largely unsuccessful) attempts to formulate a clear sense of what the ETUC’s objectives would be and how effective action programs could be crafted to advance the ETUC’s aims.

A lowest common denominator approach to ETUC objectives

The ETUC was founded as a “federation of national union (con)federations”²¹ with a limited operating budget that came primarily from affiliation fees. As the largest affiliates by far, the British TUC and German DGB were the most influential voices within the ETUC, but they were miles apart when it came to preferences about European integration. Most of the ETUC’s members were supportive of further integration and some – most vocally the German DGB and French FO – even advocated political unification. But the British TUC strongly opposed European integration in both principle and practice until well into the 1980s and the Danish unions tended to be wary of further integration. The divergent views of the ETUC’s affiliates – especially its two largest ones – paralyzed the new organization in several ways.

For one thing, they prevented the ETUC from weighing in on important European debates. A case in point was the 1976 Tindemans Report, prepared at the request of EC heads of government to explore the question of EC institutional reform. The report discussed social policy at length and laid out the first concrete proposals for workplace representation, European-level social concertation, and recognition of fundamental social rights. While the Report was the most important statement to

²⁰ ETUC Constitution, 1.

²¹ Turner, *Europeanization of Labor*.

date related to workers and the workplace, the ETUC was unable to produce a formal statement on it due to disagreements among its major affiliates.²²

Furthermore, although member organizations increasingly recognized the desirability of tackling issues at the European level and shared a number of common interests (e.g. introducing the European Company Statute, increasing economic democracy, and reducing working hours), they were often unable to agree on *concrete policy proposals* to be pursued through the ETUC. The result was internal conflict and a fragmented strategy.²³ So when, for example, the ETUC proposed a substantive action plan at its 1974 Congress in Copenhagen, disagreements among affiliates over specific points prevented it from being adopted.²⁴ Instead, the members managed to agree only on very general goals such as support for full employment, greater worker participation in workplace management, and equality in the workplace for women and migrant workers.²⁵ The lesson learned was that, since the individual members had differing European objectives, and since any ETUC program required endorsement by the affiliated unions at its then-biannual Congress, the ETUC's objectives needed to be as broadly acceptable as possible. The sacrifice of specificity, however, made the ETUC's program impossible to realize.

Ineffective action programs

The ETUC's constitution committed it to organizing affiliates' agreed-upon objectives into common "action programs". Reflecting the intergovernmentalism of the EC in this era, affiliated unions were then expected to lobby their national governments to advance the action program.²⁶ In practice, this

²² Barnouin, *European Labor Movement*, 47.

²³ Roberts and Liebhaberg, *European Trade Union Confederation*; Kirchner, *Trade Unions as a Pressure Group*; Windmuller, *European Regionalism*; Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*; Abbott, *ETUC: Political Development*.

²⁴ Oesterheld and Olle, *Internationalization of Trade Unions*, 27.

²⁵ Barnouin, *European Labor Movement*, 47; Gorges, *Euro-Corporatism?*, 94.

²⁶ Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*; Abbott, *ETUC: Political Development*.

strategy was ineffective for several reasons. First, because the action programs had to gain broad acceptance among the ETUC's diverse membership, they tended to be either uncontentious overly-generalized statements or, in contrast, laundry lists of affiliates' individual objectives. Either way, the action programs failed to specify concrete benchmark objectives or actions to be taken by affiliates, apart from lobbying their national governments. Furthermore, domestic lobbying as a tactic achieved only moderate success since in some countries – especially France and Italy – trade unions were generally alienated from domestic political processes. They could, therefore, exercise little influence over the governments' positions on European issues of interest to the ETUC. In other cases, where confederations had better access to government, the problem was not so much lack of government influence, but lack of support for ETUC objectives. In the case of the German DGB and, especially, the British TUC, the goals of the ETUC were pursued nationally only inasmuch as they furthered the unions' interests at the national level.²⁷ The ETUC's problems were compounded by resource scarcity, both in terms of personnel and capital.²⁸ The ETUC lacked the budget or the staff necessary to coordinate a more significant program.

As early as 1979, the ETUC recognized the hollowness of its strategy, when its own Congress Report judged that the policies agreed to in Congress “were far from what one could term a real action programme.”²⁹ Indeed, the ETUC affiliates were aware of the ways that internal diversity hampered the ETUC's efforts to advance workers' interests: the topic was debated extensively at the ETUC's Second, Third and Fourth Statutory Congresses.³⁰ Yet it was only with substantial inducement from the European Commission, under President Jacques Delors (1985-1995), that the ETUC's situation began to change.

²⁷ See, e.g. Dorfman, *From the Inside*, 1977.

²⁸ Dølvik, *Redrawing Boundaries*, 161; Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*.

²⁹ ETUC, *Report on Activities 1976-1978*.

³⁰ ETUC, *Report on Activities 1973-1975; Report on Activities 1976-1979; Report on Activities 1979-1981*.

Delors' elevation of the ETUC

Delors took office intent on “relaunching” the process of European integration, which had lost much of its momentum during the two decades from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s.³¹ His agenda for completing the Common Market, laid out in a 1985 Commission White Paper and agreed in the 1986 Single European Act (SEA), reinvigorated the integration process. It set the target of completing the internal market by 1992, creating the effect of a European juggernaut that compelled organized interest groups, private enterprises, and governments alike to consider how they would adjust to the new Europe being constructed. Of course, the ETUC also had to come to grips with how it would operate in this changed environment. In this regard, it had considerable assistance from the European Commission.

During the Delors years, the Commission elevated the position of the ETUC in two ways. First, the Commission expanded its funding of ETUC activities, relieving some of the resource scarcity that had prevented the ETUC from coordinating a more significant program in its earlier years and allowing the organization to significantly expand its activities. While the majority of the ETUC’s operating budget continued to come from its affiliates, the contribution of the Commission grew from less than one percent of the ETUC’s budget in 1985 to thirteen percent by the mid-1990s.³² Furthermore, the Commission provided the ETUC with a range of non-monetary contributions, including free meeting venues, interpreters, travel subsidies and technical assistance (Abbott 1997). This assistance allowed the ETUC to raise its profile significantly and the expansion of the ETUC’s research arm, the European Trade Union Institute, made it possible to develop more detailed policy

³¹ While, in retrospect, the era is often characterized as one of “Eurosclerosis” and a reassertion of the primacy of national interests over transnational cooperation or supranational construction, it is now clear that the legal foundations for a far more integrated Europe were laid during these years.

³² Author’s calculations, based on financial information from Abbott (1994: 273).

programs, often backed by technical research, that not only promote a specific agenda, but spell out the likely consequences for workers, employers and governments.³³

Not only did the Commission under Delors contribute to the organizational strengthening of the ETUC, but it also *promoted* a vision of Social Europe that would institutionalize a key role for the ETUC. Delors backed the creation of a charter of rights for European workers as well as the institutionalization of European-level bargaining between the ETUC and the employers' organizations. Indeed, his address to the ETUC's 1988 Congress in Stockholm, where he laid out this plan for Social Europe, not only underscored his view that the trade union movement was central to the future of the EU, but it also served to rally union support for further integration. Delors' commitment to social "flanking legislation" was credible, despite his overt support for the liberal mission at the heart of the 1992 project, because of his own background as a trade union official in the French CFDT and a member of the French Socialist Party. His proposals were tantalizing offerings for trade unions across Europe and had the effect of infusing the ETUC with a sense of common purpose that had generally been absent in previous years.

The prospect of Social Europe – and especially the prospect of European-level bargaining known as social dialogue – galvanized the ETUC to undertake institutional reforms that would help it to speak with one voice, at least on a range of specified issues. The premise of the social dialogue process was that the European social partners (with the ETUC representing workers) would be empowered by treaty to negotiate binding social agreements to be implemented at the national level. Social dialogue was incorporated into Article 118a of the SEA, and later into the Maastricht Social Protocol

³³ Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*, 477.

(despite a great deal of initial opposition from both the employer associations and the British government)³⁴, and ultimately into the Amsterdam Treaty.

Institutional Reform

In order to maximize the ETUC's ability to negotiate successfully in the social dialogue process, the ETUC undertook a significant institutional reform in the 1990s that strengthened the organization's central structure relative to its affiliates. It was the German DGB, along with the Italian confederations, that requested institutional reform of the ETUC be seriously considered.³⁵ In response, in 1989 the ETUC Executive Committee organized a working group under Johan Stekelenburg (President of the Dutch FNV) to study the question of how the ETUC could be reformed. The so-called Stekelenburg Report (officially titled "For a More Efficient ETUC") indicated that the structure of the ETUC was inefficient, both in terms of the organization's responsiveness to European developments as well as the representation of affiliates' views. It called for the ETUC to "become a genuine confederation with appropriate competencies and tasks", and supported the transfer of certain competences from the national confederations to the ETUC.³⁶

Prior to 1991, the ETUC's central structure was quite weak. Congress, initially meeting every two years, set the agenda and elected members of the Executive Committee, which carried out this agenda between Congresses. Executive Committee members met regularly in Brussels, but were

³⁴ Ross, *Jacques Delors*, 149-51, 183, 191.

³⁵ By the mid-1990s, the DGB faced a serious domestic crisis. The post-reunification spread of the labor movement into Eastern Germany proved expensive even as high unemployment in the East led to a declining union base (and thus shortfalls in membership dues). Virtually all DGB member unions faced budget crises in the aftermath of reunification, translating into a budgetary hit for the DGB, whose revenues come overwhelmingly from the contributions of its members. At the same time, the movement to devolve a number of the DGB's operations to the individual unions undercut its domestic operations (Silva, 1999). The DGB's sudden interest in revitalizing the ETUC must be seen, at least partly, as an attempt to shore up its own declining role. Not all of its affiliates were fully supportive. Indeed, IG Metall, the largest of the DGB's industry federations, had long opposed strengthening the ETUC, preferring to promote bilateral cooperation (e.g. with the CGT) and transnational sectoral cooperation within the European industry federations.

³⁶ Martin and Ross, *European Integration*.

nationally-based. General Secretaries – the nominal heads of the organization – had “the status of underlings”³⁷ compared to the leaders of the large national confederations that dominated both the Executive Committee and the Congress.

In 1991 the ETUC’s Seventh Congress voted to adopt the recommendations of the Stekelenburg Report. The effect of the institutional reform was a marked strengthening of the ETUC relative to its affiliates. For the first time, the (newly-elected) General Secretary – Emilio Gabaglio of the Italian CISL – became responsible for actually *running* the organization,³⁸ aided by a newly-created, Brussels-based Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was designed to serve as a bridge between the Executive Committee and the permanent (but skeletal) Secretariat, and its creation implied a consolidation of the Secretariat’s powers.³⁹ The length of time between Congress had lengthened from two, then to three, and now to four years, meaning that the central structures became more important than ever. On balance, even while the largest affiliates – the DGB and TUC – “retain[ed] their obvious pre-eminence with regard to the Confederation’s operations and decision-making,”⁴⁰ the reforms clarified the division of labor between the ETUC and its national affiliates, freeing the ETUC to act more decisively at the European level.⁴¹

The reforms of 1991 and 1995 strengthened the position of the ETUC, both administratively and financially. In 1995 the ETUC threw itself behind the social dialogue process, and in 1996 the ETUC’s internal decision-making process in this area was clarified: the ETUC Secretariat would lead the bargaining delegation and the final vote would be taken by qualified majority vote, effectively

³⁷ Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, *Europeanization*, 83.

³⁸ Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, *Europeanization*, 82-83.

³⁹ Goetschy, *ETUC*, 239.

⁴⁰ Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, *Europeanization*, 83.

⁴¹ Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*.

removing individual affiliates' vetoes. While consensus was still prized and sought, the ability to take decisions through majority voting allowed the ETUC Secretariat greater autonomy in negotiations. Indeed, both the parental leave and part-time work agreements were adopted by majority only, with major union confederations (the French FO and the German DGB) being out-voted.⁴²

During his tenure as Commission President, Delors helped to elevate the ETUC's status within the EU. The Commission's financial assistance helped the ETUC to expand its role in EU-level industrial relations and provided the ETUC a modest degree of autonomy from its affiliates. And thanks in no small part to Delors' leadership, the ETUC earned an institutionalized place in EU politics. The Treaty on European Union required the EU to consult the social partners prior to enacting any new social policy and, moreover, empowered the social partners to negotiate binding social policies. However, the elevation of the ETUC has not meant the end of its internal debates. Especially in the post-Delors era, as the social dialogue stalled in the face of employer resistance, the question of precisely how the ETUC should seek to ply its influence has become a new sort of existential debate.

What tactics?

In general terms, ETUC affiliates agree that protecting – and advancing – the European Social Model is the primary objective of the organization. They continue to be divided, however, about whether this aim is best pursued through European-level bargaining or through EU legislation. In general, trade unions from the Nordic countries tend to prefer negotiated settlements while those from Southern Europe often prefer legislation.⁴³ However, among the latter group there is substantial disagreement about how the unions might best use their influence to encourage favorable

⁴² Falkner, *EU Social Policy*, ch. 5.

⁴³ Hoffmann, *European Trade Union Structures*.

legislation: some favor using the ETUC to lobby the EU policy institutions while others prefer using the ETUC to mobilize protests and demonstrations. Indeed, the question of tactics has long been divisive even *within* national confederations, where unions have sometimes been fiercely divided. For example, within the DGB, unions favoring social partnership (the “so-called accommodationist unions”, e.g. IG BCE and IG BAU) have long faced off against the “militant” or “activist” unions (e.g. IG Metall, IG Medien) that claimed to act as “countervailing” forces to capitalism.⁴⁴

Officially, the ETUC combines all three elements – bargaining, lobbying, and protest – into a multi-pronged strategy that has been described as “working from within and pressuring from without.”⁴⁵ In recent years, however, even supporters of negotiation have grown disillusioned by the employers’ unwillingness to bargain and there is a growing tension between those who favor “working from within” and those who prefer “pressuring from without”. Each tactic is discussed below, followed by some comments about the challenges inherent in the ETUC’s attempt to pursue this multi-pronged approach.

Negotiation

Early in the ETUC’s history, many hoped that participation in European-level tripartite forums (e.g. the Standing Committee on Employment and the Tripartite Economic and Social Conference) would give rise to Euro-corporatism. However, these aspirations were dashed when it became clear that “neither employers nor governments were interested in serious commitments.”⁴⁶ The ETUC pulled out of the forums in 1978, when they failed to deliver meaningful results, and instead shifted

⁴⁴ Silva, *Every Which Way*, 95.

⁴⁵ Dølvik & Ødergard, *Struggle over the Services Directive*, 78.

⁴⁶ Martin and Ross, *European Integration*, 259.

its focus to institutionalizing its position vis-à-vis the European political institutions – in short it organized itself as a transnational interest group.⁴⁷

However, the prospect of Euro-corporatism looked more promising in the late 1980s, when Delors pushed for European-level dialogue between the social partners. The institutionalization of social dialogue – first in the Single European Act, later (in expanded form) in the Social Protocol appended to the Treaty on European Union, and finally in the Amsterdam Treaty – established the formal right of the social partners to negotiate social policy on the invitation of the Commission. If they reach an agreement, the policy is passed to the Council, where, on the basis of QMV, it can be passed or blocked (but not amended). Alternatively, the agreement can be implemented autonomously, through a series of collective agreements at the national level, in which case, approval from the Council is not necessary.

The institutionalization of social dialogue raised hopes within the ETUC – and some of its affiliates – that the EU was developing into an “emerging island” of Euro-corporatism.⁴⁸ However, given that the two largest ETUC affiliates, the TUC and DGB, themselves had no mandate to bargain at the national level,⁴⁹ it was doubtful whether the ETUC would ever be able to negotiate more than framework agreements. Nevertheless, the ETUC seized on the opportunity to elevate its status, completing a series of important internal reforms in the 1990s in order to strengthen its ability to negotiate.⁵⁰ The employers’ associations, on the other hand, have always been reluctant social partners. During the years of Commission activism, however, negotiation was accepted as the lesser of two evils. If the Commission was determined to legislate social policy, despite the resistance of

⁴⁷ Dølvik, *ETUC and Development*; Gobin, *Consultation et Concertation*, 584-587.

⁴⁸ Dølvik, *An Emerging Island?*

⁴⁹ IG Metall, in particular, was determined not to see bargaining authority transferred to the DGB.

⁵⁰ Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*.

the employers, then it was preferable to pre-empt it by agreeing to negotiate with the ETUC. As a result, the social partners reached several important social agreements in the 1990s, on parental leave (96/34/EC), part-time work (97/81/EC), fixed-term contracts (99/70/EC), telework (2002/14/EC) and work-related stress (2004/37/EC). Another negotiation, on information and consultation rights for workers, stalled and failed but was subsequently legislated by the Commission as the Directive on European Works Councils (94/45/EC).

However, in the years since Delors' departure, Commission activism in the realm of social policy has waned. The employers, no longer compelled to negotiate by the threat of impending EU legislation, are less willing than ever to enter into negotiations over social policy. The combination of (continued) employer hostility to negotiation and a post-Delors Commission whose interests are occupied elsewhere has meant stagnation in the realm of the social partnership for the past decade or more. While the ETUC remains formally committed to advancing workers' interests through social dialogue, there is widespread pessimism – both among ETUC officials and officials from the affiliated organizations – about its utility in current circumstances.

Lobbying

While studies of the ETUC since the 1990s have mostly focused on its role in social dialogue,⁵¹ networking in Brussels and lobbying the European institutions has constituted the daily work of the ETUC since its founding.⁵² Indeed, the ETUC's primary emphasis on influencing European-level decision making has led some to conclude that the ETUC should be considered a pressure group

⁵¹ Gobin, *Consultation et Concertation*; Turner, *Europeanization of Labor*; Dølvik, *An Emerging Island?, ETUC and Development, and Redrawing Boundaries*; Visser, *Learning to Play*; Hoffmann, *European Trade Union Structures*.

⁵² The ETUC *Report on Activities* presented to each Congress (e.g. 1975, 1979b, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003) routinely notes the organization's lobbying activities. See also Turner, *Europeanization of Labor* and Goetschy, *ETUC*.

rather than an orthodox trade union organization.⁵³ Even after social dialogue was institutionalized in the SEA, the ETUC maintained its commitment to organized interest representation. The ETUC's amended (1991) constitution requires it to engage the European institutions in order to strengthen their democratic nature and to ensure that they have a social dimension.

The ETUC's primary target for lobbying has always been the Commission, which holds the sole right to initiate legislation, but over the 1990s the ETUC sought to expand its influence in other institutions. Most significantly, as the Parliament's role in the EU legislative process has increased over time, the ETUC has prioritized the development of networks with MEPs, focusing especially on the members of the cross-party Trade Union Intergroup. The ETUC also attempts to exert influence in the Council, although the enduring significance of nationality means that national affiliates are still often left with the task (of attempting) to influence "their own" representatives in the Council. The ETUC has also established ongoing formal interactions with the European Central Bank.

The formalization of the social partnership has also opened new doors for the ETUC to the EU institutions. As one of the social partners, the ETUC is invited to address the European Council on the eve of its regular summits. The social partners also participate in quasi-tripartite bodies such as the Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment and the Cologne Macroeconomic Dialogue. Finally, in addition to approaching the EU institutions directly, the ETUC has extended an open invitation to representatives of the European institutions to attend its "open house"

⁵³ Abbott, *ETUC: Political Development*; Turner, *Europeanization of Labor*.

meetings, where it provides information on a variety of social, economic, and industrial issues to interested representatives from the various EU institutions.⁵⁴

The ETUC's lobbying efforts have not been an unqualified success. Evaluating the ETUC's enduring efforts to establish influence within the multitude of EU institutions, one observer concluded that, "the Confederation is heard but not widely followed."⁵⁵ More recent analyses point to the high costs to workers of the ETUC's steadfast commitment to European integration, which is the prerequisite of maintaining its "insider" status. For example, Martin and Ross and Taylor and Mathers point to the ETUC's support of European monetary union (EMU) in spite of the negative consequences of the convergence criteria for workers in a number of member states.⁵⁶ However, this is not to say that the ETUC has no influence "from within". Indeed, an analysis of the passage of the 2006 Services Directive shows how the ETUC's (successful) efforts to influence the EP and the Council helped to alter the final content of the directive.⁵⁷

Yet while lobbying remains a key strategy for the ETUC, especially in an era when prospects for social dialogue are minimal, not all affiliates are equally supportive of the ETUC's emphasis on this tactic. CGT officials I interviewed in Paris repeatedly criticized the ETUC for "settling" in order to "work within the [European] system" instead of "really fighting" for workers' rights (personal interviews, CGT headquarters, Montreuil (Paris), 2003-2004). Similarly, a CGIL official from the organization's Brussels office explained in an interview that, "[l]obbying [...] is not in the culture of the Italian trade unions. Even in Rome, the CGIL doesn't do this" (Personal interview, CGIL's Brussels office, March 2004).

⁵⁴ ETUC, *Report on Activities 1995-1998*, 86-87.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, *Europeanization*, 84.

⁵⁶ Martin and Ross, *European Integration*; Taylor and Mathers, *ETUC at the Crossroads*.

⁵⁷ Dølvik & Ødergard, *Struggle over the Services Directive*.

Mass mobilization

While the ETUC's lobbying activities represent its attempts to influence EU legislation "from within", it also pursues a parallel strategy of mass mobilization to exert pressure on the EU political institutions "from without". Because of the ETUC's preoccupation with gaining influence in the European policy process, and because it has no authority to call strikes or instigate industrial action, mass action has generally been overlooked as an important feature of the ETUC's activity. Scholars have instead tended to focus on the ETUC as an interest group,⁵⁸ on the one hand, or as a participant in proto-corporatist bargaining,⁵⁹ on the other. However, between 1975 and 1985 the ETUC organized a number of demonstrations of European workers,⁶⁰ and since the late-1990s – and most especially since the beginning of the current economic crisis – the ETUC has renewed its interests in mass mobilization.⁶¹

Indeed, during the past decade and a half, the ETUC has coordinated a resurgence of trade union action around European issues including employment, social protection/social justice, public services, and restraining the free-market tendencies of European integration. Since March 1997, the ETUC has staged 27 "Euro-demonstrations" in various European cities (see Appendix). And the economic crisis that has unfolded since 2008 had given rise to a sharp increase in ETUC-organized protests. The five-year period from 2008-2012 was marked by more than twice as many demonstrations than any of the three previous five-year periods (see Figure 1).

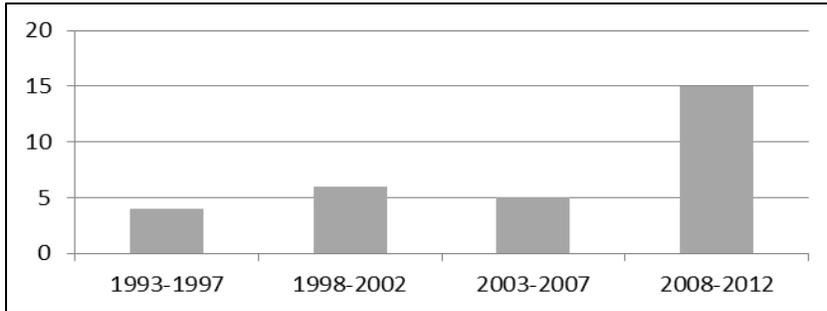
⁵⁸ Goetschy, *ETUC*; Turner, *Europeanization of Labor*; Abbott, *ETUC: Organization*; Ross and Martin, *European Unions Face the Millennium*.

⁵⁹ Dølvik, *Redrawing Boundaries, An Emerging Island?*; Falkner, *EU Social Policy*; Visser, *Learning to Play*; Ebbinghaus and Waddington, *European Union Organizations*; Hoffmann, *European Trade Union Structures*.

⁶⁰ Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, *Europeanization*.

⁶¹ Taylor and Mathers, *ETUC at the Crossroads*; Gajewska, *Emergence*.

Figure 1: Number of ETUC-organized protest events, 1993-2012



Source: ETUC record of Euro-demonstrations.

In addition to staging more numerous protest events, the ETUC also mobilizes a greater number of participants than in the past. The ETUC’s first demonstration (in November 1975) drew 1000 participants to Brussels, a showing that was fairly typical during the ETUC’s first decade of mass action. Only a single demonstration (in Stuttgart in 1983) saw mass participation, with 30,000 participants. By way of contrast, during the more recent period, the ETUC has been able to mobilize more than 30,000 protesters quite regularly (annually or semi-annually). In some instances, for example in the Rome demonstration in 2003, numbers have reached 200,000 participants. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Major ETUC Demonstrations, since 1997

Date	Location	Participation
March 1997	Vilvoorde (Brussels)	70,000
June 2000	Porto	50,000
December 2000	Nice	75,000
December 2001	Laeken (Brussels)	80,000
March 2002	Barcelona	100,000
October 2003	Rome	200,000
March 2005	Brussels	75,000
February 2006	Strasbourg	30,000
April 2008	Ljubljana	35,000
May 2009	Madrid	150,000
	Brussels	50,000
	Berlin	100,000
	Prague	30,000
September 2011	Wroclaw	50,000

Sources: Imig and Tarrow, 1997; Agnieszka, 2006; CNN, 2001; *Agence France Presse*, 2002; EIRO, 2003; ETUC, 2005; *Le Figaro/Agence France Presse*, February 15, 2006; EIRO, 2008; ETUC, 2008, ETUC, 2009; EIRO, 2009; ETUC, 2011.

Increasingly, the protest events are timed to correspond to key votes in the EP (e.g. Strasbourg 2006, 2008) or major agenda-setting or policy-making events, such as meetings of the European Council (e.g. Nice 2000, Laeken, 2001), ECB (e.g. Ljubljana 2008), or Member State Finance Ministers (Budapest 2011, Wroclaw 2011). As Gajewska and Dølvik & Ødergard demonstrate in their analyses of the revised Services Directive, the pressure exerted by these types of manifestations can have a clear effect on policy outputs.⁶² Indeed, it is impossible to explain the Directive's revision without taking into account the ETUC's application of "external pressure by fostering broad public and political mobilisation in key Member States and at European level."⁶³

But just as there is uneven support among the ETUC's affiliates for social dialogue or for lobbying, affiliates differ in the extent to which they support protest action as an ETUC tactic. The CGT, in particular, is active in mobilizing its members around European days of action. For example, of the

⁶² Gajewska, *Emergence*; Dølvik & Ødergard, *Struggle over the Services Directive*.

⁶³ Dølvik & Ødergard, *Struggle over the Services Directive*, 69.

75,000-100,000 demonstrators in the 1997 Brussels demonstration, around 20,000 of them marched under the CGT banner. In part, the high turn-out can be explained by the concerns of French workers over the closing of the Renault plant at Vilvoorde. Yet the Spanish unions, which were also directly affected by the Renault restructuring, sent only sixty workers.⁶⁴ At a March 2005 protest against the EU Services Directive, the CGT mobilized 15,000 to march, while the TUC, which had ten times as many members as the CGT, was represented by no more than 200 members.⁶⁵ It is no surprise that the largest ETUC day of action, which drew around 200,000 people into the streets of Rome in 2003, took place in Italy, where the major unions all have a long history of mobilization.

An uneasy balance?

For some time, the ETUC has attempted to combine three distinct tactics – negotiation, lobbying, and protest – into a multi-pronged European strategy. But the problem the ETUC now confronts is that the three roles are ultimately not compatible. Going forward, it will likely have to choose between its “insider” and its “outsider” status or lose credibility in either role.

The ETUC exchanged its loyalty to the overarching goals of the European integration process for the Commission’s elevation of its status.⁶⁶ The Commission made the ETUC labor’s interlocutor in the newly-institutionalized social dialogue process, granted it privileged access to European-level agenda-setting and policy-making, and allocated Commission funds that allowed the ETUC to expand its operations. The ETUC thus adopted the role of “loyal critic”, for example by carefully

⁶⁴ Imig, Douglas R., and Sidney G. Tarrow. “From Strike to Eurostrike: The Europeanization of Social Movements and the Development of a Euro-Polity.” *WCFLA Working Paper* 97, no. 1 (1997).

⁶⁵ Figures are from an ETUC internal document projecting participation figures in the “More and Better Jobs” demonstration.

⁶⁶ Martin, *European Institutions*.

balancing its support for the principle of EMU with criticism for the restrictive fiscal policies required to achieve it.

However, it has become increasingly difficult for the ETUC to maintain that European integration is good for workers. The constraints on national governments of the EU's ever-stricter fiscal requirements (exemplified initially by the EMU convergence criteria and the Stability and Growth Pact and more recently by the Fiscal Compact) have significant social effects and put the ETUC's careful balancing act at risk. Public opinion data charts a significant rise in Euroskepticism across much of the EU, and the ETUC's pro-European message is increasingly at odds with popular sentiment. Between 2007 and 2013, favorability toward the EU has dropped nearly ten percentage points in Germany and the United Kingdom, 20 percentage points in Italy and France, and 34 percentage points in Spain.⁶⁷ If the ETUC is to be (come) relevant to workers it may need to reconsider its unconditional support for EMU in particular and for the trajectory of European integration more generally. Yet if the ETUC is to become a more active critic of the integration process, this may require foregoing "presents" from the Commission.⁶⁸ Going forward, it is going to become increasingly difficult for the ETUC to juggle all three roles – social partner, lobbyist, protest movement. Yet because individual member confederations (and in some cases, the individual unions that comprise these confederations) tend to favor one tactic over others, any ETUC choice for one or the other strategy is likely to exacerbate internal divisions and alienate certain members.

⁶⁷ Pew, *New Sick Man*, 24.

⁶⁸ Martin, *European Institutions*.

Conclusion: The future of the ETUC?

The ETUC has come a long way since its founding in 1973. As the voice of some 60 million workers in Europe, its representative status is undeniable. Important developments over the 1990s gave the ETUC new influence over EU policy-making, through the social dialogue, tripartite concertation, and Commission consultation. Yet there are two major challenges facing the ETUC as it looks to the future.

First, the ETUC's now-institutionalized role in EU agenda-setting and policy-making is tightly constrained by employers' reluctance to negotiate, by a lack of initiative on the part of the post-Delors Commission to advance a labor-friendly agenda, and by the relative unreceptiveness of the various EU institutions (European Council, EcoFin, the ECB) to the unions' demands. As a result, the EU has continued to privilege liberal market-based priorities. As a result, at least some of the ETUC's affiliates (and some academic observers as well)⁶⁹ wonder if the ETUC is tying its hands by linking the fate of the European labor movement so closely with the integration project. Seen from this perspective the ETUC's commitment to playing the role of "loyal critic" actually undercuts workers' interests, which are better served by a more militant response to unemployment and fiscal austerity. Since joining the ETUC in 1999 the CGT, in particular, has pushed for greater ETUC mobilization against the neoliberal objectives at the heart of European integration. As discussed above, mass demonstrations organized by the ETUC have become a more common feature over the past few years. Former ETUC head John Monks characterized this as the emergence of an activist transnational labor movement, but some of the Nordic affiliates in particular find this characterization alarming (personal interview in Brussels office of LO/TCO/SACO, March 2004)

⁶⁹ Martin, *European Institutions*; Taylor and Mathers, *ETUC at the Crossroads*.

while others are simply skeptical about the accuracy of these claims (personal interviews in Brussels office of DGB, March-April 2004).

Second, there is the enduring problem of the ETUC's internal diversity. While broad opposition to deregulatory and austerity policies gives ETUC affiliates a shared objective, there is less agreement about what the ETUC is *for*, apart from defending an undefined European Social Model.

Furthermore, there are deep and enduring disagreements among the ETUC's affiliates about the best tactics for exerting influence at the European level. The Nordic unions prioritize European-level bargaining, the TUC and DGB emphasize lobbying, and the Italian unions and the CGT prefer demonstrations. Even the ETUC's regular "days of action" (see Appendix) mean different things to different unions. During an interview, the head of the Swedish unions' office in Brussels quipped that, "In response to a European day of action, the French and Italians will send a million people into the streets and the Swedes will organize a seminar" (personal interview with head of the LO/TCO/SACO office in Brussels, March 2004). This may be a caricature, but it is not far off the mark. To give just one example, and one that is fairly typical, this is how four key ETUC affiliates responded to the 1997 day of action around the theme "Europe Must Work": In Britain, the TUC organized a media campaign and a half-day conference at its national headquarters on the topic of social Europe. In France, the CGT helped to organize a mass demonstration in Paris with about 80,000 participants. In Germany, the DGB organized a conference on Europe and Employment in Frankfurt, the home of the ECB. And in Italy, the CGIL staged a series of sit-ins and protests with the other Italian unions.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ EIRO, *ETUC Organises, TUC Social Europe Conference, ETUC-Organized Demonstration*.

Furthermore, there are not just divisions *among* the individual confederations, but often *within* them as well. The membership of the Swedish LO was divided on the very question of whether Sweden should join the EU.⁷¹ Within the TUC (as well as the French FO and CFDT) there are divisive debates over the issue of national sovereignty. In the DGB there are fundamental disagreements about appropriate tactics – antagonistic or cooperative – for achieving economic and social developments.⁷² As a result, even in a future where the ETUC may again have opportunities to negotiate social policies and provide guidance to a Commission seeking to advance EU social policy, the ETUC will continue to have real difficulties speaking with one voice and acting with purpose. Its influence, therefore, will be diminished to the extent that affiliates cannot find common ground.

⁷¹ Mahon, *Yesterday's Modern Times*, 159.

⁷² Groux, Mouriaux, and Pernot, *Europeanization*, 91.

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Appendix: ETUC Euro-demonstrations 1993-2013

Date	Location	Theme/slogan
April 2, 1993	Brussels	Together for employment and social Europe
March 16, 1997	Brussels	Opposition to the closure of Renault
May 28, 1997	Brussels	Europe must work
November 20, 1997	Luxembourg	Europe for employment
June 19, 2000	Porto	Full employment in Europe
December 6, 2000	Nice	Employment in Europe and social rights
September 21, 2001	Liège	The euro arrives... and employment!
October 19, 2001	Ghent	Social Europe and solidarity
December 13, 2001	Brussels	Europe: that's us!!
March 14, 2002	Barcelona	Europe: that's us!!
March 21, 2003	Brussels	A democratic citizens' Europe
October 4, 2003	Rome	Social Europe
April 2-3, 2004	European Day of Action (various locations)	Our Europe / Europe: that's us!!
March 19, 2005	Brussels	More and better jobs
February 14, 2006	Strasbourg	Quality services in Europe
April 5, 2008	Ljubljana	More pay, more purchasing power, more equality
December 16, 2008	Strasbourg	Priority to workers' rights, not longer working hours
May 15, 2009	Madrid	Fight the crisis: put the people first
May 15, 2009	Brussels	Fight the crisis: put the people first
May 16, 2009	Berlin	Fight the crisis: put the people first
May 16, 2009	Prague	Fight the crisis: put the people first
September 29, 2010	European Day of Action (various locations)	No to austerity. Priority for jobs and growth
December 15, 2010	European Day of Action (various locations)	No to Austerity for everyone and bonuses for a happy few
March 24, 2011	European Day of Action (various locations)	No to Austerity plans in Europe
April 9, 2011	Budapest	No to Austerity / For Social Europe, for Fair Pay and for Jobs
June 21, 2011	Luxembourg City	Action and Information Day in Europe
September 17, 2011	Wrocław	Yes to European Solidarity, Yes to jobs and Workers' rights, No to Austerity
February 29, 2012	European Day of Action (various locations)	Enough is enough! / Alternatives do exist / For employment and social justice
May 23, 2012	Brussels	Growth and investment for jobs / No to deregulation
November 14, 2012	European Day of Action (various locations)	For jobs and solidarity in Europe / No to austerity
March 14, 2013	Brussels	Youth: Together for a better future / No to austerity! Yes to jobs for young people!