



trade union information

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VIEWPOINTS ON EUROPE BY
COMMUNITY TRADE UNION LEADERS

Interviews with trade union leaders from
the partners of Britain in the
European Community

Produced by the trade union information division

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INTRODUCTION

We have pleasure in presenting primarily to British readers a series of interviews on the European Community given by trade union leaders from other member countries. We informed them that the interviews were intended primarily for a British audience and invited them to give a frank exposition of their organisation's views on the European Community. We believe that the result is a worthwhile information exercise.

In order to avoid any danger of receiving stereotyped replies, we asked slightly different questions in each case. Again, for the sake of variety some of the interviews are not with the general secretary of the national trade union centre but with another top leader.

In certain countries the European Trade Union Confederation has more than one affiliated organisation. We have chosen the organisations with a view to getting a wide range of trade union opinion amongst the interviews. Most of the organisations belong at world level to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (of which the British TUC is the largest affiliate), but one is part of the World Confederation of Labour (the grouping formerly known as the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions) and one is an associate member of the World Federation of Trade Unions (which has over 90 per cent of its declared membership in communist-dominated countries).

The interviews speak for themselves. There are different judgements on the degree to which the Community has been susceptible to trade union influence so far. None of the union leaders thinks that the relationship is perfect, but all of them see the European Community as a valid platform for furthering trade union aims and as an institution which can be made more responsive for the needs and aspirations of work people if trade union pressure is strong and united enough.

The interviews are with:

John Carroll, vice-president of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union

Alfons Lappas, executive board member and treasurer of the German trade union federation DGB

Georges Debunne, general secretary of the Belgian general federation of Labour FGTB

Thomas Nielsen, president of the Danish federation of Labour LO

Arie Groenevelt, president of the industrial workers' union affiliated to the Netherlands NVV

Luciano Lama, general secretary of the Italian general federation of Labour CGIL

Edmond Maire, general secretary of the French democratic Labour federation CFDT

THE IRISH TRADE UNIONS AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Interview with John Carroll, Vice-President, Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and Vice-President, EEC Economic and Social Committee

1. Has the Irish Trade Union Movement, which was largely hostile to the European Community before entry, come to accept Irish membership of the Community as a fact of Irish life?

Yes, the Irish trade union movement has come to accept Irish membership of the EEC as a fact of life. This does not mean that the movement has radically altered its original views about membership of the Community but it does mean that the Irish trade unions are realistic enough to realise that social and economic development in Ireland is dependent in large measure on the resources which the European Community is now making available and will continue to make available to the less favoured areas of the EEC.

Already the influence of Directives, Regulations and Policy Decisions emanating from the EEC has had a marked impact on the Irish scene. This would be particularly true of certain social matters such as equal pay for work of equal value, the introduction of legislation to assure women equal opportunities in the matter of employment opportunities, promotional opportunities, vocational training and related matters. And the possibilities in the area of industrial democracy are also climaxed by the influence of the Community.

2. Does Irish membership of the Community open up new perspectives for Irish trade union action?

Irish membership of the Community does indeed open up new perspectives for the Irish trade union movement because, if nothing else, the broadening of our horizons through involvement with the European trade union movement has helped to condition us to new concepts in interrelationships between the workers of Europe, and, in turn, between them and their employers.

Paramount in this area is the European dimension which is now being brought to the whole question of negotiating contracts with companies which cross national boundaries. In addition, the whole question of the relationship of the European trade union movement, or indeed of any national trade union centre, with multinational companies has also taken on a new perspective.

The Irish trade union movement, through its European involvement, has not alone gained in information and knowledge but is now more aware of the areas which must be tackled by the European trade union movement on a common basis to speed up the process of harmonising the basic rights of workers.

All this has meant, too, that the Irish trade union movement is appreciative of the fact that no national centre on its own can hope to provide the resources and expertise which are essential to dealing with employers in Europe on an equal basis. The possibilities of support by the European movement for action by national centre or individual unions in any particular country are an essential and most valuable contribution to the social and economic evolution workers aspire to.

3. From your viewpoint as Vice-President of the Economic and Social Committee, do you think that the Community is sensitive to the preoccupations of working people?

As Vice-President of the Economic and Social Committee I would accept that the Community is sensitive to the preoccupations of working people but I am not yet convinced that this sensitivity holds a high enough order of priority in the European scheme of things.

My experience to date of European involvement tends to suggest that sensitivity to the preoccupations of working people at Community level is very much an ad hoc thing and only results in appropriate action when the preoccupations in question assume major proportions. In other words, I am not yet convinced that the human face and the social soul of the Community are regarded by the powers-to-be as the core for social, cultural and economic development.

I am not, however, without hope. It would seem to me that the democratisation of the institutions within the Community will enable the ordinary people of the Community to have a more forceful and immediate say in the determination of policies that influence their way and standard of living. If we are not participating in the movement to this end we have little hope from the outside looking in to influence the pace and style of such changes.

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THE GERMAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION DGB AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

by Alfons Lappas DGB executive board member and treasurer,
former president of the Economic and Social Committee of the
European Community

1. Would you regard the efforts of the European Community in the social field as satisfactory?
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One of the main criticisms which the European trade unions made against the EEC was the fact that for a long time the social elements lagged behind the economic goals. In retrospect it has become clear that the neoliberal theoreticians made a mistake in thinking that social progress would automatically result if economic growth went fast enough. Today we are at one with the organs of the Community in seeking to give the necessary importance to social policy. In doing so we recognise that many serious problems are involved, because national traditions and priorities have to be taken into account.

2. The German trade union movement was always an enthusiastic promoter of European unity. This has not prevented it from criticising both the Commission and the Council of Ministers when necessary and to ask for changes. Do you consider that the organs of the Community take sufficient account of your views, or is there room for improvement?
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The German trade unions have always supported the movement towards European unity. Reasons for this lie on the one hand in the fact that after the second world war we considered decisive political changes in Europe as indispensable; on the other hand we found out by experience a long time ago how the ability of national states to intervene in the economy and to tax was reduced by deflection of economic including capital factors by the multinationals. My impression is that European solutions in this respect are increasingly regarded as a precondition for effective trade union work. Naturally we have always criticised the European bodies and their policies and shall continue to do so when necessary. In general however it must be recognised that the Commission and the Council of Ministers make efforts to take our views into account in their work. We expect a decisive improvement to come from a political upgrading of the European Parliament, since the trade unions as opinion-forming mass organisations are geared to parliamentary transparency and control of the decision-making progress.

THE BELGIAN FEDERATION OF LABOUR AND THE EEC

by Georges Debunne, general secretary of the Belgian general federation of labour, FGTB and chairman of the workers' group of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Community

1. As chairman of the workers' group of the EEC Economic and Social Committee, do you think that the European trade union movement sufficiently influences Community decisions?

The Belgian general federation of labour FGTB approved the whole of the programme adopted by the congress of the European Trade Union Confederation in May 1974.

The FGTB wants to see the programme carried out.

For this purpose it considered that a reinforcement of trade union unity in Europe was essential, so as to face the employers and the governments with a real countervailing force on the side of the workers.

This phase has almost ended (in view of the entry into the ETUC of the trade union movements of Europe formerly known as "Christian" and of the Italian communist/socialist trade union centre CGIL) and we can be pleased with this situation.

Now it is necessary to compel the institutions of the Community to open the doors to democracy.

Tripartite confrontations and concertations - employers, governments, trade unions - on great European problems such as employment, inflation, energy, economic democracy and relations with developing countries should give a new impulsion to Europe and allow the workers to pour the European Community into a mould which is more in conformity with their own aspirations.

The organisations affiliated to the ETUC are working on this.

It must be recognised that with the workers of Europe having important problems in common and with the trade union organisations holding frequent contacts, the trend towards common policies and an overall view is growing.

Coordination of action and union demands must represent the first task of trade union strategy in the coming years.

Already now the national organisations are putting pressure on those holding responsibility for political and economic life. But this influence is still fragmentary, whilst not being negligible. It must be strengthened.

2. Can trade union work at European Community level reinforce your daily struggle to improve the situation of workers in Belgium?

Since the Community developed rapidly in a period of prosperity, the need for trade union work in depth at European level did not stand out clearly.

Today difficulties pile up and far-reaching transformations of economic structures are apparent which make European trade union action urgent and indispensable. The situation of Belgian workers, like that of all other workers in the Community, will be improved by European trade union action at the time - which I think is very close - when trade unions and national centres acting at Community level and beyond it will direct the struggles and conflicts of the workers in order to impose their own solutions on the governments and on international capitalism.

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DANISH LEADER STATES THAT EUROPEAN COOPERATION IS BECOMING MORE REALISTIC

Interview with Thomas Nielsen, president of the Danish Federation of Labour LO

Such cooperation can become very constructive if solidarity among the nine countries in attacking serious problems passes the test, according to Thomas Nielsen.

Since enlargement of the European Communities in January 1973, Thomas Nielsen, President of the Danish national trade union federation LO, which has almost one million members, has been playing an active part in the work of the European Community. He is a member of the Economic and Social Committee and the Standing Committee on Employment, as well as Vice-President of the European Trade Union Confederation. In these functions, Thomas Nielsen has, over $2\frac{1}{2}$ years of Community membership, been able to follow closely the evolution of the European Community and to realise the advantages and disadvantages of the European Community for Danish workers.

1. How have things gone?

As far as I can see, the first years of membership have confirmed that what Danish workers wanted from the EEC corresponds to the real possibilities of the EEC.

After a period when Community work was directed towards supranational goals, we have arrived at a more realistic phase, which can be very constructive if everybody will concentrate on the promising perspectives arising from a greater free trade area. In this respect we must realise that the grave new problems of inflation, the oil crisis and unemployment in several member countries call for common solutions and greater solidarity.

It must be emphasized that membership of the European Community has already brought great benefits to the Danish people and to Danish workers, following a sharp rise in earnings from exports both in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

The present employment crisis in Denmark would have reached much greater proportions if we had been outside the European Community.

Moreover, our membership has given access to a series of support measures provided from Community funds, aimed at combatting unemployment in certain sectors and certain regions in Denmark.

Large sums have already been granted for retraining and further training of workers, for the expansion of Danish firms and for the modernisation of industrial structures for example the agricultural processing sector.

To that must be added the favourable loan conditions granted by the European Investment Bank; Danish firms are benefitting from these and in several cases in the last two years new jobs or better jobs have been created for our members.

May I also stress that Denmark's participation in the monetary cooperation inside the Community has moderated our price rises by at least five per cent and that this

cooperation has enabled us to maintain lower agricultural prices than in countries outside the EEC.

2. Does the trade union movement have sufficient influence?

An important question for the trade union movement in Denmark and in the other new member countries is naturally: How big is the influence of trade union organisations on development in the European Community?

In general I can say that in our experience the trade union movement can exercise an important influence on the policies of the European Community, if we understand how to grasp our opportunities and use the appropriate channels.

As spokesman for the labour force of some 100 million in the Community, the trade union movement of the nine countries must participate actively in EEC policy-making and influence the decisions in the EEC institutions in favour of the workers of our countries. That can be done in collaboration with our national governments and collectively we can act through our European trade union movement.

In the coming years many difficult problems will have to be solved. Increased solidarity within our own ranks will be an obvious necessity for the attainment of positive solutions in the interest of workers.

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NETHERLANDS LEADER WELCOMES EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR GETTING A GRIP ON OPPOSING FORCES

A. Groenevelt, President, Industrial Workers' Union in the Netherlands national centre NVV

The Industrial Workers Union of the NVV, of which I am President, is the largest trade union in the Netherlands, with 200,000 members. It was set up three years ago through mergers and this summer will have its first congress since foundation. At this congress our basic aim will be spelled out: a socialist society on the basis of labour democracy.

Formulated positions are necessary, but remain empty words unless based on concrete policies.

My view is that no individual national trade union movement is in a position to achieve structural changes of society. Therefore trade union policy has to be international, even if national organisations have divergent pasts and retain divergent future visions.

In this article I want to make clear the views of the Industrial Workers Union of the NVV about the European Community. It would be easy to fill a page with our complaints against it: the undemocratic character, the one-sided economic set-up, the nationalism which raises its head at the smallest buffeting. Notwithstanding these complaints, one cannot get away from the fact that the Europe of the nine exists and forms a platform from which to get a grip on the forces opposing a socialist trade union movement at the level where these forces have come into alliance. Discussions on a trade union strategy within the European Community level body are making slow progress. People speak cautiously about European collective agreements and one can speak of meagre results of international action. The time is ripe to put on the agenda the question of whether the trade union movement must bear responsibility for standpoints of the European Commission. Would it not be better to keep one's hands free of consultative bodies and where necessary approach the Council of Ministers directly to obtain **decisions**?

One thing is certain: in the discussion of this question the trade union movement from none of the nine countries can be left out. The Industrial Workers' Union of the NVV considers it of great importance in its own country to find a common denominator with the catholic and protestant trade union organisations, to widen international trade union contacts and to intensify discussions of community policy.

THE ITALIAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION CGIL AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Interview with Luciano Lama, CGIL general secretary

1. What importance does the CGIL attach to the European Community?. In other words, what is your attitude to the process of European integration? How do you see its future and what are your objectives?
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At present I would say that for us the Community is an objective rather than a reality. This is not to say that we underestimate what already exists. What I would like to stress is that, on the one hand, the economic and social content and aims of Community policies are far from satisfying the workers' aspirations, and, on the other, these inadequate policies, the institutions themselves and the very existence of a Community are being called in question.

In actual fact, the existence and future development of the Community are based on the assumption that ^{it} is enough to open up frontiers, and remove barriers to trade and the free movement of workers, in order to set in motion a machinery of continuous growth, which will increase the wealth available and make its gradual redistribution possible. Integration of national economies was to be accompanied by a corresponding development of adequate supranational instruments and institutions. But this Utopian dream has been used to conceal the lack of active social policies and the lack of economic policies capable of changing and not merely maintaining spontaneous economic development. I need only mention the problem of underdeveloped regions and emigration. The result was that the Community has found itself with institutional structures, economic and monetary instruments, and an unstable social situation which have been totally inadequate to cope with the crisis which the world has been facing since 1972.

It is now patently obvious that the enormous problem of redistributing resources among the various countries which was brought to the fore by the raw materials crisis, changing as it did the terms of trade between capitalist countries and producers of raw materials as well as the underlying growth and demand patterns, cannot be solved without new economic and social choices being made, and closer international cooperation.

The Community must therefore deal with this crisis quickly by strengthening and democratizing its institutions, setting itself certain key economic and social policy objectives and creating the means to attain them. This will involve above all tackling unemployment by pursuing policies to stimulate production and forms of Community solidarity so as to maintain the incomes of the workers affected. Next the machinery of financial and monetary cooperation will have to be set in motion to sustain this difficult recovery phase. An independent energy policy is also required. Regional policy will have to be backed up by development projects for certain industries, public services and their infrastructures. Agricultural policy must be radically changed so as to promote productive structures and the necessary infrastructures.

It is the kind of development which must mark the Community as well as its international relations and for which sound democratic institutions, capable of meeting the workers' expectations, are needed. Italian workers are fighting for these objectives. That is why we have chosen Europe as our main battleground, and why we have joined the European Trade Union Confederation

2. The CGIL's aim is to radically change the present structure of society. How can you reconcile this basic policy with the present and possible future obligations of membership of the European Community?
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Even before we were faced with a world energy and raw materials crisis, the CGIL-CISL-UIL Federation had made its first priority the basic question of changing the type of economic growth which has characterized our country like others.

To this end, we tried to coordinate our action, procedures and claims. What the Italian trade unions basically want is a reversal of the kind of development that has led to the present situation, where private consumption is promoted while the increasing demand for public goods and services, and investment in industries and regions that really need it is ignored. To achieve this, we must direct investment to such regions and industries thus changing the pattern of public spending; we must redistribute resources among consumers and productive sectors, by attacking wastage, unearned income and parasitical elements.

We must therefore fundamentally change the operation^{of} such vital sectors as education, health, housing, agriculture and the state bureaucracy. We must concentrate our efforts first and foremost on directing productive investment to the Mezzogiorno so as to improve its infrastructure and services. Our demand policies fit into this pattern by according priority to the organisation of labour, seeking to eliminate differences in standards and wages between the various industries and social categories, and by putting relations with private enterprise on a new footing of equality.

In this context, I would remind you of the agreements with many large companies, such as Fiat and Montedison, to direct investment to the Mezzogiorno and certain productive areas, as well as the more recent agreements to cope with the crisis. Of course many of these objectives are specifically Italian but it cannot be denied that in general they are common to all European countries.

The crisis, which I have already mentioned, has in any case made them essential today. No country can now think of finding purely national solutions to the old and new problems of economic development. Thus pursuit of the aims I have outlined and our membership of the Community are not in conflict but go hand in hand. As I have already said, the real question is whether the Community is going to be able to survive and develop. We firmly believe that this is possible and necessary, provided that the Community gives priority to those problems which are inherent in Italian trade union aspirations and are common to the entire European trade union movement, despite differences of historical development and tradition.

We need a properly led, strong and united trade union movement to achieve that result. Yet in many respects, this too is unfortunately not a reality but an objective still to be attained.

EUROPE AND THE FRENCH DEMOCRATIC LABOUR FEDERATION CFDT

by Edmond Maire, CFDT general secretary

The Europe of the common market

The idea of European unity, presented after the second world war as a solution to the conflicts permanently tearing apart the old continent, is in fact an idea whose execution is essentially conceived in the service of the development of capitalism which needs ever more vast markets...

Thus the European Economic Community has evolved distinctly in the direction of a free trade area rather than towards the building up of a true economic community, which going beyond the free circulation of goods, capital and persons requires economic, monetary, industrial and social policies which are common to the nine member countries of the common market.

In this "business Europe" each day sees further implantation of multinational companies, with a majority having their power of decision in the USA, and it is incapable of having an autonomous policy in the face of the will to dominate of the USA. The recent examples of EEC member countries divided in relation to the monetary crisis and the oil crisis are the illustration of this.

The life of the workers, the security of their employment, their standard of living, their working conditions, their housing, their transport ... depend each day more on the good will of the multinational companies and on decisions resulting from a permanent European confrontation between the "technocrats" of the institutions and the ministers concerned, without democratic debate or real political counterweight.

For the workers, Europe becomes thus the new geographical framework in which they are dominated and exploited, subjected to a type of development based on inequality and denying a large number of fundamental needs.

This Europe is however a reality which workers and their trade union organisations have to face up to.

In relation to this expanding capitalist Europe, the trade union movement cannot be content with defensive action.

A new opportunity for international trade unionism

Hence the CFDT has many times affirmed that Europe is not only something which cannot be avoided but should provide a new opportunity for unity and progress of international trade union action.

For the working class the way to technical, economic and political independence for Europe, as well as to giving top-priority support for the emancipation of the peoples of the third world, lies through the elaboration of a strategy for building a socialist and democratic Europe.

The CFDT intends to put its whole weight behind the achievement of these objectives.

The European trade union movement cannot stay boxed up inside each member state, nor can it remain set in its current divisions.

During the last few years we have observed two phenomena which are very positive for the Europe of the workers:

- on the one hand trade union claims are more and more convergent despite national differences or policies proclaimed by one or the other : the struggle against inflation, for the maintenance of purchasing power and priority to increasing the lowest wages, the refusal of all wage controls, the will to transform working conditions through the decentralisation of forms of action and bargaining, the right to employment and vocational training, equality of rights for working women as well as migrant workers, the aspiration to a framework for living no longer forged by profit. Here is a series of key claims which demonstrate a community of struggle and a common anti-capitalist basis among the principal trade union organisations of Western Europe;
- on the other hand the actions undertaken in one of our countries have an ever greater echo in the other countries. The European working class, in its action to transform the reality of the European economic and social system, is engaged in progressively forging its unity.

Progress towards a common and renewed conception of workers' action should also be mentioned.

Thus there is everywhere a will on the part of workers to reduce the distance between themselves and the trade union structures. This will grows with the participation by individuals in the decisions concerned with bargaining and other trade union action. The authoritarian hierarchy which is being contested in firms is fortunately no longer accepted in trade union structures. Democracy makes progress through action and through the trade union conceived as the conscious, organised and democratic assembly of the workers.

This community of struggle is essential not only for the future but for the success of the most immediate claims.

For this reason we must work at the European level for:

- the development of relations and common actions among trade union bodies in firms of the same kind situated in the Europe of the capitalist countries and in the other countries of the world;
- pooling of resources at European level with a view to unification both on a trade and general basis so as to intensify common actions;
- dialogue and confrontation with trade union organisations of the socialist countries of eastern Europe, on the foundation of concrete problems faced by workers whatever the socio-economic regime of the country;
- cooperation between trade unions, institutes, political movements, etc., fighting in Europe for a socialist, democratic and self-governing society.

The CFDT considers that the European Trade Union Confederation, particularly since its enlargement, can contribute in an important way to the construction of a Europe no longer resting on the capitalist foundations of the present time but with economic structures and political institutions allowing men and groups to determine for themselves their individual and collective future.
