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Construction in the year 2020

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Note

from the editor

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Early September we mailed some of our dedicated authors and stakeholders this request:

'Dear friends, at the end of 1992 the European Institute for Construction Labour Research started with the publication of CLR-News. The first issues of our quarterly contained several articles on the future of the construction industry, mainly in reaction to a study that had been commissioned by the European Commission to the WS Atkins consultancy. 20 years later we want to do something similar. The EC has just published a vision on the future of the construction industry, construction as "a driver for sustainable growth" (attached). We want to dedicate a special issue of CLR-News to the vision of some of the academics, trade unionists and other readers who we have worked with in the past or who know about our work. Our deadline is 3 December 2012. Imagine that you have to write a contribution that starts with: "1 January 2020, in three days I have to contribute to a conference on the present situation in the construction industry. This is my rough out-

line..." Thus, our request: would you be willing to write a short contribution (an essay, a scenario, a vision paper - up to 1200 words) about the future of the building industry?'

In fact, we requested the potential authors to gaze into the crystal ball. It didn't take long before we received reactions, ranging from 'I will enjoy doing this' to 'a tantalizing invitation'. In this issue of CLR-News you will find the contributions of those who took up the gauntlet. Some authors try to give the European Institutions a helping hand with regard to the future policy that is needed to keep the construction industry healthy and competitive, based on qualifications and investment in people, skills and quality. On the other hand we also have sceptical contributions that can be read as warnings.

In the opening 'Twenty years in hindsight' I have picked up two items that have been prominent on our agenda. The first is about EC-policy related to the future perspectives of the construction industry. Over the years, several

authors have criticised the EC-approach that has often solely focussed on low cost and competitiveness. The second item is the clash between economic freedoms and workers' rights, notably in the temporary cross-border posting of workers. With the enforcement Directive of posting rules on the agenda, this is a topical item, as also demonstrated by the EFBWW-leaflet included.

Gerhard Bosch comes up with scenarios for the industry that can be read as an update of his book 'Building Chaos', written in 2003. According to Bosch, construction is very much at the crossroad between a model that is driven by fragmentation and cost reduction and a model that is based on cooperation and quality. The specific nature of the construction industry and the failure of the market to provide the necessary skills make it necessary to regulate the construction industry more highly than most other sectors of the economy. In his opinion only a cooperative model is qualified for producing high quality.

EFBWW general secretary Sam Häglund has listed the lacunae of rights in the EU. Starting with the Atkins-study from 1993 that concluded that exceptionally low labour costs are counterproductive, he observes a growing precarisation. In the end,

social dumping practices deprive workers of wages and social rights, expose them to health and safety hazards and are distorting the market since serious bona fide companies have to compete with mala fide companies. They deprive Member States of tax income and employ authorities in legal proceedings targeting companies which have often ceased to exist.

Colin Williams contributes with an outlook on undeclared work in construction. The proportion of all undeclared work in construction has increased over the last decennia. However, according to him, there is a positive way out. First, given that undeclared labour is used to circumvent the shortcomings of formal sector suppliers, solid improvements are required in the availability, speed and quality of formal sector supply, such as by widely introducing accreditation of craftspeople and the use of 'kite marks'. Secondly, and to tackle the social and redistributive reasons for using undeclared labour, a 'softer' approach is required that indirectly tackles this phenomenon by encouraging a greater commitment to tax morality.

A rather pessimistic view or better said realistic if you look at the experiences that he refers to, is

Note from the editor

sketched out by Charles Woolfson. He calls his description of the radical recalibrating of labour rights across the European space, in the name of restoring flexibility in the labour market and competitive dynamism to the European economy, a 'warning parable'. There is a lot of work to do to out-argue his scepticism.

Under the Discussion heading, we have included an article from Lutz Luithlen that fits very well in this issue. We have had several other contributions in the recent past that dealt with sustainability and, even without looking at 2020, his hope that environmental issues will rise to the top of the political agenda can be endorsed.

Finally, we have our reports, in this case one report on the ProBE-exclusion seminar, and two reviews on recent labour migration publications. The report and the reviews fit in the priorities that we have formulated in recent years: free movement of workers, decent work and the rights of workers with vulnerable labour market perspectives.

These items not only fit in the CLR-agenda of the past, related activities will certainly be part of our future work. As ever, input and feedback are welcome.