



**trade union information**

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

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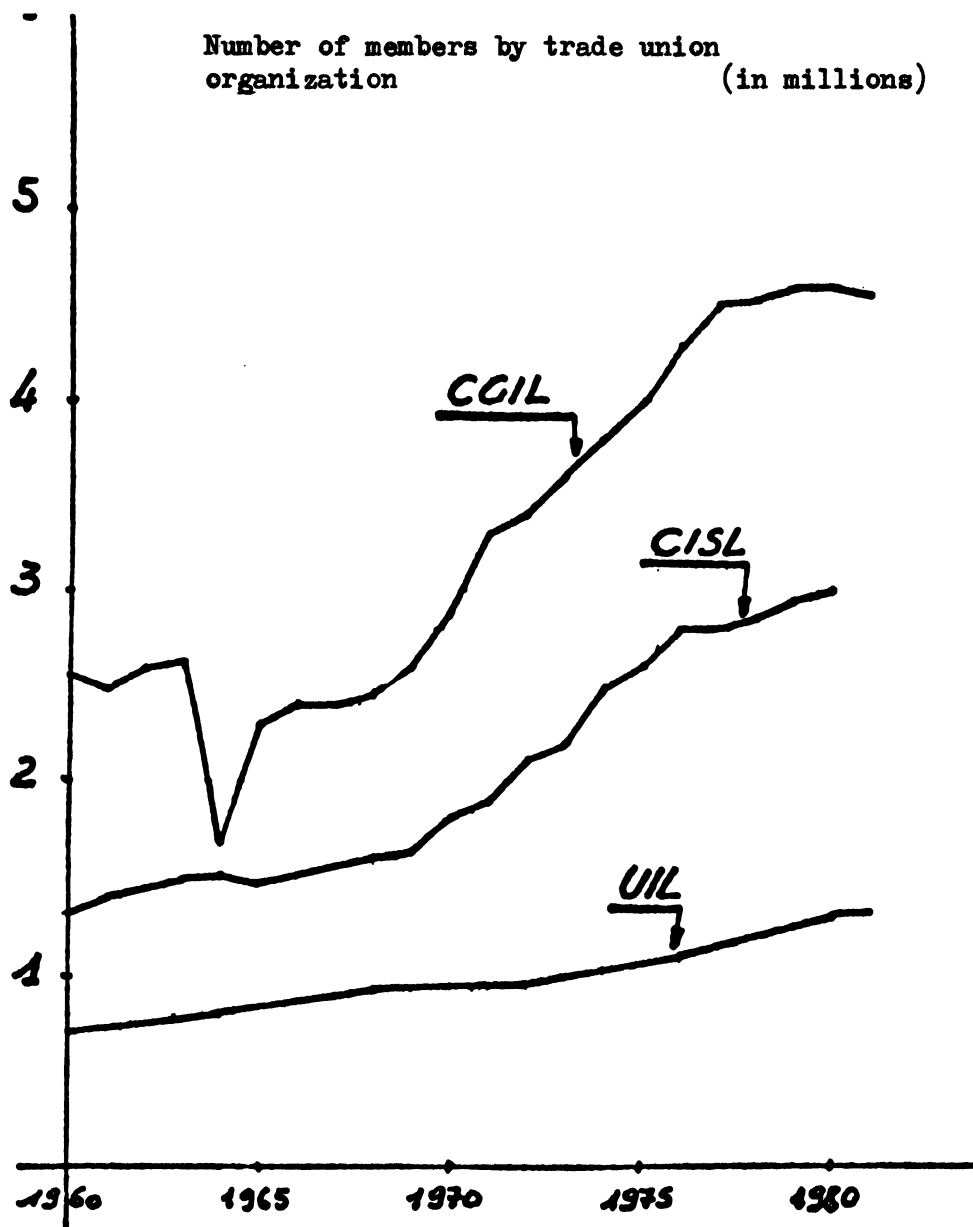
TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS IN ITALY

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Source: Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL)  
Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL)  
Unione Italiana Lavoratori (UIL)

## TRADE UNIONS IN ITALY

The origins of the trade union movement in Italy can be traced back to the workers' and peasants' mutual assistance societies.

As in the other countries in Europe, the emergence of the industrial society engendered trade clubs or societies, regional and national workers' federations, the struggle for trade union recognition, wage agreements, strikes and collective bargaining agreements.

As in most industrialized and democratic countries today the trade union movement is one of the more potent forces in society in Italy and national circumstances have led it to take action both in the factory and outside where it has become engaged in the reform of the structures of society and the defence of democratic and republican institutions.

### I. Birth and development of the Italian trade union movement

The first trade unions proper appeared towards the middle of the nineteenth century. From being friendly societies they quickly became involved in the organization and protection of workers' interests which is typical of contemporary trade unions.

This progress is best illustrated by the history of the workers in the printing trade whose first associations go back to 1848. In 1872, about 30 associations formed a national federation aimed at ensuring that pay scales were observed, providing assistance for the unemployed and sick, establishing conditions of employment and the admission of apprentices and maintaining contact with affiliated organizations.

At the same time, in addition to the print workers, the bakers, construction workers and in particular the masons were most often to the forefront of the trade union struggle. Under the influence of the burgeoning Socialist movement, workers in agriculture, particularly in the Po valley, contributed to the development of the organization of labour.

The unification of Italy and the development of mass production processes and communications led to the expansion of the labour force and gave economic activity a national dimension. The trade union movement was aware of what was at stake during this time of change and responded by placing its local and regional organizations on a national footing. It was assisted in this task by the two major ideological factions: the Socialists and the Catholic church.

Following the French example of the "Bourses du Travail" (association of various trade union members), the Socialist movement advocated the organization of workers in local trade union committees and workers' associations with a view to emancipating members by improving living and working conditions and socializing the means of production and distribution. The first "Camera del lavoro" (workers' association) was set up in Milan in 1891.

Unlike a number of its members, the Catholic church had not entered the fray. This was remedied in 1891 with the publication of the encyclical, Rerum Novarum, which while preaching cooperation between the social classes recognized private property as a natural right and invited workers to form organizations to defend their own interests. Thus the Rerum Novarum constituted a point of reference for Christians wishing to become committed in the cause of labour and society and favoured the constitution of trade unions with a Catholic bias in both Italy and the rest of Europe.

This division of the world of labour was never really accepted and the history of the Italian trade movement is remarkable for the many attempts at reunification.

At the instigation of the metal workers, the reformists, the socialists and the republicans created the first real trade union body, la Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (CGL) (general labour confederation) which was mainly socialist and reformist in conviction.

Although its statute asserted the independence of the organization with respect to the political parties, an agreement was concluded with the Socialist Party under which the trade union had the power to organize economic strikes and the party was responsible for the political guidance of the labour movement. Political strikes had to be decided on by common agreement.

However, this association of the trade union movement with the Socialist Party did not meet with the approval of all the workers nor all the politicians and the question of the division of responsibilities and the independence of the trade union organizations in relation to the political parties soon came to the fore.

The Christian trade union movement developed under the impulse of the Catholic organizations committed to social action. Their activities intensified from the time of the Rerum Novarum and in 1909 a Secretariat-General of trade associations was set up to coordinate the Catholic mutual societies. A central Catholic-inspired trade union body was not set up until 1917, the Confederazione Italiana dei Lavoratori (CIL) (Italian workers' confederation). It drew its members mainly from agriculture, textiles, telecommunications and the civil service. This put an end to socialist hegemony in the trade union movement.

In keeping with the spirit of the Rerum Novarum, the CIL had no wish to incorporate other elements and wished to remain independent of the political parties. It rejected the class struggle, revolution and collectivization and came out in favour of cooperation between the classes while observing reciprocal rights and duties. It supported State intervention in social legislation and the development of collective bargaining between workers and employers.

Many sharp clashes involving workers and peasants took place in the period after the First World War, particularly in the north of the country with varying support from the central trade union bodies.

When widespread strike action broke out in 1919, the Catholic trade unions opposed it or abstained from participation which earned them the epithet of "white" as opposed to "red" unions. The CIL, however, took part in the land occupation movement which was particularly significant in the Po valley and known as "white Bolshevism". At the same time the CGL opposed the creation of works councils elected by workers to control production and sought to restrain the rebellious metalworkers in Turin.

The Italian employers' power had increased considerably during the war years, both inside and outside the factories, and they saw the establishment of works councils as a threat comparable to the Soviet revolution and rejected them outright. In the more industrialized parts of the country this gave rise to many strikes and industrial action which was stamped on and frequently accompanied by lock-outs. The workers were defeated on many occasions.

The CGL and the Socialist Party were sharply divided over the question of works councils and the fear of Communist revolution. These differences were exacerbated by the employers' uncompromising stance, the severity of police repression and the inability of the political and trade union forces to find a solution to the serious economic and social crisis overwhelming the country.

A majority in the CGL and the Socialist Party came to believe that in the prevailing conditions it was impossible to lead the entire working world along the road to revolution and split away from a minority of its members who wished to introduce works councils and set up a Soviet-type regime in the country. Becoming ever more isolated in the Socialist Party, the partisans of works councils decided to leave the party at the 17th congress in January 1921 and gave birth to the Italian Communist Party. The unity of the Socialists was irretrievably shattered. An important page in the political and trade union history of Italy had been turned. Thereafter the Catholics, Socialists and Communists were ever to the forefront in political and trade union matters, apart from the Fascist period.

In the first twenty years of the century the workers established central trade union bodies and there was a sharp increase in the numbers joining the trade union movement. In 1920, the CGL and CIL had 2 200 000 and 1 200 000 members respectively. However, the advent of Fascism in 1922 found the trade union movement politically divided and ideologically weakened at organizational level. By 1925 the Fascist régime and the connected violence had succeeded in dismantling the trade union organizations and democratic political parties. A number of leaders were maltreated, imprisoned and sometimes put to death. Others left the country and later actively contributed to the fall of the Fascist régime.

In spite of Fascist vigilance and repression, many workers and trade union and political leaders managed to keep alive the ideals of free trade unionism, democracy and the concept of organized labour in clandestine or semi-clandestine circumstances abroad or from within Fascist prisons. This constituted the human and organizational reserve which when the time came was to nourish the resistance, provoke general strikes, precipitate the end of Fascism and supply the personnel and leaders needed to reorganize democratic society.

## II. The post-war years

After the collapse of the Fascist régime trade unionism was able to get back on its feet. Its rebirth coincided with the reappearance of political groups in national life and the introduction of freedom and democracy along new lines.

There were two main stages during this period: in the first, up to the 1960s, post-war trade union unity disintegrated and three politically and ideologically distinct federations were formed: in the second stage, the three main bodies tried to act as one and to reconstitute trade union unity.



#### A. Disintegration of trade union unity

Having fought Fascism together, the Socialists, Christian Democrats and Communists set up one trade union federation on 3 June 1944: la Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) with over five million workers. It was based on the broadest democratic principles, freedom of expression and independence from all political parties. It was heavily dominated by the Communist component and was under the leadership of three Secretaries-General, each representing one of the three political parties.

This unity was of short duration. It was the result of the will of the three main political parties, but as soon as cooperation between them ceased trade union unity was called into question for political reasons. For a number of signatories, the Pact of Rome - which sealed this unity - had been the product of the joint anti-Fascist front. Once this danger had been overcome it lost its raison d'être. Some even feared it would lead to the advent of a Communist society in Italy, or that the Communist party would play a preponderant role.

Accordingly, anti-Communist feeling led a number of members of the Socialist Party to leave the federation in January 1947 and led by G. Saragat they founded the Social Democrat Party while the majority of the Socialist Party which had followed P. Nenni maintained the alliance with the Communist Party. A few months later, for political reasons, the Christian Democrats broke with the Government coalition of Socialists and Communists - who were pushed into opposition - and formed a new cabinet with the Social Democrats, Republicans and Liberals.

The trade union movement was organically linked to the political parties and suffered the same divisions and confrontations which affected the political world and which were further accentuated by the beginnings of the cold war. Motivated by anti-communism and the need for unified action by all Catholics, the Christian Democrats and the ecclesiastical authorities urged Catholic workers to leave the CGIL and form their own organization. A crusade was mounted against trade union unity in the name of a free

society with a choice offered between freedom and dictatorship, freedom and religious oppression. Catholics were appealed to not as workers but as citizens and particularly as believers. Catholic workers succumbed to the pressure from above to support this "schism" even at the cost of their immediate interests. They nevertheless maintained a certain distance, at least in principle as regards the social doctrines of both the Church and the Christian Democrat party.

The first to break away were the Christian Democrat leaders who set up the Alleanza per l'unità e l'indipendenza del sindacato in 1948. It was formed jointly with two other minority groups - Social Democrats and Republican. A few months later, the Christian Democrat and Social Democrat trade unionists set up the Libera Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (LCGIL).

In May 1949 the Social Democrats left the LCGIL, the Republicans left the CGIL and together formed the Federazione Italiana del Lavoro (FIL). The LCGIL and the FIL stated that they were prepared to promote the unity of democratic workers and all free and independent trade union forces. Following this announcement the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL) was founded on 1 May 1950. The Socialists and groups belonging to the FIL, however, were opposed to union with the LCGIL and founded the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) in the same year.

This ended the tormented saga of trade union unity that had begun with the Pact of Rome and which left the UIL with 400 000 members, the CISL with 1.5 million and the CGIL with nearly 5 million.

The CISL set out to be a new, modern, efficient and non-denominational organization open to all democratic and non-Communist elements, independent of political parties and public authorities. It believed in the benefits of economic growth and technical progress and regarded trade unions as a factor for modernization and rationalization. Accordingly, in these years it chose to give support to the restoration and development of the economy in general and productivity in particular, opting in particular for linking wages to productivity. Although it was opposed to any form of co-management and association of workers in the management of firms, it was very suspicious of social agitation and strikes. It believed that social problems would be solved through dialogue between the parties present in the firm and the long-term spin-off from economic growth and technical progress.

It was opposed to overall claims of a political type and favoured signing collective agreements at national level first, then at regional and finally at company level to supplement the first agreements and at the same time obtain further advantages for the workers. In the international field it opted for Europe and the West. The trade union was based on the American model of the time, particularly in the motor vehicle industry.

Being in favour of productivity and collective agreements, the CISL followed the line of Christian Democrats regarded by the United States on the one hand and the Vatican on the other as the only party able to build up a solid barrier against the Communists in Italy. There was a majority of Catholic Members and in its anti-Communist campaign among the workers the CISL tended to adopt a rather Messaianic approach to economic policy seeing it as the means of achieving peace in industrial relations. Secondly, thanks to its practical approach, the qualities of its leaders and the concrete results obtained through organized collective bargaining, it succeeded in taking root and established a solid position in various sectors of production and the services.

All the same, the CISL lacked an overall view of the political world, society, its own organization and what was at stake. And it found it difficult to accommodate a series of demands from the working world, such as those relating to living and working conditions which came to a head in the 1960s and forced it to review its position in part and bring it more into line with the realities of workers' lives. This change subsequently facilitated joint action by the three main bodies.

The UIL sought to present itself to the workers as a democratic, non-religious movement, reformist in tendency. Organization was based on the model of Scandinavian trade unionism. It had to struggle to establish its identity in contrast with the other two central bodies which had a much sharper political and ideological image. Nevertheless, it succeeded in establishing strong points and obtained a firm foothold in the services sector and in Fiat.

While its approach differed from that of the CISL it also opted for collective bargaining. Although it claimed to be independent of political parties and governments, its Socialist, Social Democrat and Republican elements maintained close ties with their respective parties.

Although reformist in tendency, the UIL did not hesitate to decry the inadequacy of the social and economic policies of the governments of the time, to defend the workers' right to strike, to claim legal force for collective agreements and advocate an integrated economic programme to resolve the serious economic and employment difficulties of the country. Their top priorities always included improvements in workers' living and working conditions and the defence of their purchasing power; in this connection the UIL called for a reform of the taxation system and extension of the indexing of wages to workers in the public sector and agriculture.

From the beginning of the 1950s, the UIL came out in favour of joint action with the other two central bodies to reinforce union pressure on the government. Although it was critical of the capitalist system, from the outset it supported Europe (ECSC, EEC) and the West.

Although weakened by the departure of the Catholics and a good number of the non-Communist members the CGIL was still beyond question the workers' principal organization. The Communists had been in the majority in 1944 and became even more preponderant after the "schism". Its line of action is consistent with its political and ideological position and it is frequently accused of being pro-Soviet and anti-American by the other two central bodies which also criticize the CGIL for excessive use of political strikes. In fact, each had a different view of the type of society to be constructed and therefore of the role of trade unionism, its means of action and the pattern of its relationships with political parties and public authorities. These differences were accentuated when the Christian Democrats obtained an absolute majority in the 1948 elections and by the beginning of the cold war.

The CGIL claimed that it was the only organization that defended the workers' interests. It regarded itself as the spokesman for those who had been left out of account after the reconstruction in both the urban and rural environments. In 1949 it put forward its employment plan containing an overall and structured solution to the serious economic crisis and high unemployment affecting the country. The plan was designed to promote industrial reconstruction and economic development in the Mezzogiorno. It entailed a series of nationalizations and neo-Keynesian policies, particularly as regards public works, infrastructure, energy, housing, agriculture, health and education. The method and content of the reform of structures contained in the plan reflected an overall economic development model that differed markedly from that of the other two central bodies.

Initially the CGIL was opposed to the "articulated" collective agreement but finally accepted it at the end of the 1950s, particularly under pressure from the Socialist members. This facilitated the subsequent unified trade union action which it had always favoured. Although it was a member of the WFTU, in 1956 the CGIL condemned what was going on in Hungary and gradually became more sensitive in regard to European and Western matters.

The 1950s were very difficult years for the Italian trade union movement because it was torn by ideological and political divisions. The three central trade union bodies frequently indulged in polemics and were in competition with each other. This confrontation was a positive element in the development of each body and stimulated ideological and organizational regeneration. Without betraying their original position, each of the three organizations enriched their original contributions by drawing on the experience of the other two bodies, amending them and adding new proposals which resulted in the conditions that made joint action possible from the 1960s.

B) From unified action to the unification process

The early 1960s was the time of the Italian economic miracle. Economic production expanded fast, at the cost of low wages and bad working conditions, reforms were overdue in the area of transport, health, education and a full employment policy was unheard of.

The employers were not going to yield unless forced to so it was not long before industrial conflict broke out. It was a spontaneous joint movement motivated by the same interests against the one adversary. The workers, in particular the metalworkers, were aware of the strength of their unity and called for organic unity of the three trade unions.

The unions could not run the risk of being overtaken and left behind by this strong impulse for unity from the grass-roots. On the other hand, the new political climate (invitation to the Socialists to join government coalitions) and the end of the cold war had considerably attenuated the national and international attitudes that had doomed hopes of trade union unity in the post-war years. The CISL insisted that the trade unions must be independent of the political parties and their ideological differences before it would join the unification process. A unified approach to the renewal of collective agreements in particular was the first significant joint action by the three central bodies.

(a) The system of multi-tier bargaining

During the 1950's relations between trade unions and employers were virtually non-existent and where tripartite bargaining was involved contacts were at national level: trade union confederations, employers and government for the purpose of renewing national collective agreements.

From the 1960's things were to change by the adoption of the principle of "multi-tier bargaining" by the CGIL at its fifth congress in 1960, which made possible unified action by the three confederations, notably at plant level. Multi-tier bargaining makes it possible to adapt and amend national agreements at provincial or plant level.

Collective agreements are renewed every three years, and the process may sometimes be a fairly lengthy one. It proceeds in three stages which can be described roughly as follows:

- immediately prior to each renewal of the collective agreement the workers decide as a body on a set of demands, by industry, at plant, regional and national level. The draft then goes back to the rank-and-file membership for final adoption;
- talks at national level with the employers, backed up, if need be, by industrial action. In the event of a breakdown, the government is called in to act as go-between so that negotiations may be resumed on broader bases;
- talks by industry at regional and plant level.

Such a bargaining system makes for considerable participation by the workers and represents the implementation of a system of upward-oriented democracy in which the rank-and-file play a key role in deciding on demands and in appointing their representatives. Moreover, this system of multi-tier bargaining makes it possible to keep in closer contact with the various situations as they arise in practice in firms and thus enables workers to involve themselves at the time and on the terms which they deem best. At national level, it offers the advantage of improving the position of the weaker sectors on the strength of the model agreement negotiated by the stronger sectors, such as the metalworkers.

The adoption of multi-tier bargaining by the trade union movement, together with the fact of staggered renewal dates for collective agreements in the various sectors of industry, meant that the country was constantly in the throes of intense trade union activity and frequent confrontations with the employers.

During the 1960's worker militancy was to increase. The stormiest contract renewals were those which took place at the end of 1969 ("the long hot autumn") which saw the victory of more than five million workers by the signing of sixty national collective agreements, won after thirty-eight million working days lost in strikes. These were struggles which have also been called "the delegates' movement".

The widening of the conflicts reflected not only the need for an improvement in workers' living and working conditions, but also a need for direct democracy for which the traditional structures of the trade union movement were ill-adapted. The needs prompting action were to produce others which would constitute the framework for a form of trade unionism which some were to call new style trade unionism.

(b) A new kind of trade unionism

This decade of struggle, which was necessary to resolve a number of contradictions, not only within the trade union movement, but also within its structures, had led to a new connection being made between conflicts and their content.

During these years spontaneous action by workers in terms of demands and participation expressed itself, in the case of many workers, outside the organizational and traditional structure of the trade union movement, which soon fell into disuse to give way to other structures e.g. factory meetings, delegates' meetings and factory councils.



The key figure is the plant delegate. Elected directly by the workers on the shop floor or the assembly lines, whether or not they are members of a trade union organization; he is the spokesman for the workers in collective bargaining on the basis of the demands drawn up by the factory council - which brings together all the factory delegates - in close collaboration with the workers' assembly. While he can be dismissed at any time by the rank-and-file, the plant delegate plays a vital role in initiating action and he will come to represent the lynch-pin of a trade unionism forged in the fires of action and which some have described as new-style trade unionism.

It was only after several years of hesitation and discussion that these structures for debate, action and representation were to be accepted and assimilated by the trade union organizations. This operation brought to the trade union movement not merely a new dynamism and greater democracy in terms of organization but also prevented spontaneous action - deprived in the long term of a structure to sustain it - from degenerating into corporatism by plant or by category. The adoption by the Italian Parliament in 1970 of the Law on the Workers' Statute was to confirm the existence and power of trade union organizations within the plant and was to guarantee workers a number of rights relating to health, freedom of action and expression, the right to trade union information, job protection or protection against unfair or anti-trade union action on the part of an employer and freedom to exercise trade union activity.

This trade unionism appeared new to outside observers not only in organizational terms but also in terms of the substance of claims and of the strategy adopted to attain these objectives, by an unprecedented development of contractual power and the pressure exerted on governments to implement a series of reforms which had in some cases been demanded for decades.

The strength of contractual power was to be reflected in the signing, between 1969 and 1976, of 300 industry-wide agreements and 8 000 plant contracts covering some 8 million industrial workers, 7 million workers in the public services and public administration and 2 million workers in the agriculture sector.

At plant level, collective agreements covered in particular the improvement of working condition, organization of work, the protection of the worker's health, pay, the extension of vocational training and recognition of the right to study: 150 hours paid by the employer, granted to any worker who wishes to undertake studies outside the factory. Pay claims were to centre on the introduction of a single wage scale at national level, a reduction in the number of pay categories and an across-the-board increase in incomes. Action at plant level was also aimed at safeguarding and creating jobs, particularly by reducing hours of work, the channelling of investment - some of this having to be channelled towards the creation of new jobs in the south of the country by decentralizing production - defending purchasing power and reforming the structure of wage costs and geographical and occupational mobility. Outside the plant, the struggle was to centre on the practical problems arising in the everyday life of workers, such as the question of public transport, reviewing the education system and the right to study for all, assistance to all those sections of society excluded from the arena of social struggle, such as the physically and mentally handicapped, the development of the Mezzogiorno, the fight against terrorism, the reform of the State, a policy of full employment and economic planning, reform of the tax system, health, housing and measures to safeguard and improve the social security system.

The worsening of the economic crisis has merely served to heighten the dramatic aspect of these issues which were included on the agenda for the congress which each of the three trade union confederations held in 1981 and which are included in the demands adopted by the CGIL-CISL-UIL General Councils in February 1982.

(c) The incompatibility of mandates

Once they became aware of the power of united action, the rank-and-file workers called during the 1960's for the organic unification of the three Italian trade union confederations. This would be a very difficult operation to carry through for a number of reasons, the most important of which was the impossibility of reconciling the simultaneous holding of trade union and political mandates and, hence, also, the question of autonomy of trade union organizations in relation to political parties and public authorities.

This is an old chestnut which, while it is not peculiar to the Italian trade union movement, has occupied a particularly important place in the life of that movement. It was already an issue in 1906, at the time of the General Confederation of Labour, by virtue of the links which bound the latter to the Socialist Party of the period and it was to have a determining influence on Italian trade union life over the next forty years and was constantly to prove a highly controversial issue.

In 1948 the unity of the trade union movement was shattered for political reasons, and it was to take time and a sea-change in national and international political conditions before the three trade union confederations succeeded in attaining some degree of de facto autonomy in relation to the political parties to which they were most linked. At the beginning of the Fifties, of the eleven members of the CGIL's committee, four were leading members of the Italian Communist Party, since the CGIL allowed political and trade union mandates to be held simultaneously at various levels. At the same time, of the nine members of the committee of the CISL, five were at the same time leading members of the Christian Democrat Party.

However, the mid-1950's was to see a turning-point regarding this issue. In 1955, at its second Congress, the young leaders of the CISL raised the problem of the incompatibility of political and trade union mandates as a major factor in ensuring trade union independence of the political parties. In 1956, at the fourth Congress of the CGIL, its Secretary-General rejected the conception of the trade union as being the fighting arm of a political party. However, he did not receive the support of the majority of Congress. Nevertheless, a few months later, the CGIL took a different stance from the Italian Communist Party by condemning the events in Hungary.

1969 was to signal formally the autonomy of the three trade union confederations in relation to the political parties at the respective congresses which each of the three organizations was to hold that year. Up until its seventh Congress (June 1969), political allegiances were officially recognized within the CGIL. That Congress not only instructed the organization's General Council to do all in its power to bring about the severance of political allegiances within the organization but, also, approved the principle of the incompatibility of parliamentary and elective mandates and the duties of trade union leaders. The General Council was charged with applying this principle.

For its part, the fifth Congress of the UIL, held in October 1969, by amending the organization's articles of association established the principle of incompatibility between executive functions within trade union organizations, on the one hand, and managerial functions within parties, parliamentary mandates and public mandates in regional, provincial and local elective bodies, on the other; an exception was made in the case of areas which were not provincial capitals and had a population of less than 30 000 inhabitants.

The CISL, whose articles of association already contained a provision declaring public and trade union functions to be incompatible, had made the greatest progress in this direction. At its sixth Congress in July 1969 it confirmed the total incompatibility of executive functions within trade unions and parliamentary and elective mandates at national, regional and local level. This incompatibility concerned all management functions within a trade union, at whatever level.

Two years later, the matter was still not resolved. While the CISL and UIL were affirming the total incompatibility of trade union and political functions, at whatever level, the CGIL had some difficulty in emulating them. However, it declared that it could overcome this obstacle if this was to be the only one standing in the way of organic unity between the three confederations. In 1974 the CGIL amended its articles of association and endorsed the position of the other two confederations with regard to the incompatibility of trade union and political mandates.

The debate on the incompatibility of mandates was always considered a necessary condition for the pursuit of the organic unity of the three confederations. It was not, however, a sufficient one. At their respective Congresses last year the three confederations stressed the importance of preserving and of exploring further the issue of the autonomy of trade union organizations in relation to employers, government and political parties in order to improve representation of the interests of workers - to attain a more advanced stage of unity of action and trade union unity.

(d) On the road to unity

Trade union unity and division have never commanded unanimity either among the workers or their leaders. Each has always had its fervent supporters and opponents, and it was to be the quirks of national and international conditions in particular which would arouse hope, now in the one camp, now in the other.

Once post-war trade union unity was achieved, the supporters of unity just waited for the first opportunity to put their ideas forward once again. The initiative came from the fourth Congress of the CGIL in 1956 at which its Secretary-General made an appeal to the UIL and the CISL to discuss the issue of trade union unity among the three confederations. The time was not yet ripe, however. The CISL replied that, in this matter, it was amenable only to democratic trade union forces. For its part, the UIL of the period dreamed of only one reunification, that of the various non-religious and socialist forces scattered throughout the various confederations.

This initiative having failed, the call for trade union unity was to come from concerted action by the workers, the first of which occurred during 1957, the protagonists being the workers of the Monfalcone naval shipyard, the agricultural workers of the Po plain and the workers in the steel industry striking nationally. The way was clearly marked out. The concerted strikes of the Sixties and the entry of the socialists into various government coalitions meant that the question was also posed at political and organizational level.

The CGIL took up the cudgels again at its fifth Congress in April 1960. Setting the unity of the trade union movement as a goal to be attained, the Congress called upon the other organizations to make united action a reality in as systematic a manner as possible.

Hand in hand with the development of united action at plant level, the debate on trade union unity eventually asserted itself in the ruling councils of the three confederations. In this connection, the activities of the Christian Workers' Movement (ACLI) should be noted, since, from the beginning of the sixties, this movement had shown itself to be particularly open-minded on the issue. In 1963 their ninth Congress declared that every effort should be made to further the process of unification. In 1964 the ACLI promoted a study seminar on the problems and prospects of modern and democratic trade unionism. In 1965 its National Council again appealed for trade union unity and posed the question of the incompatibility of political and trade union mandates.

The idea of trade union unity had had difficulties to surmount among the trade union confederation despite the forward thrust of the Christian Workers' Movement and of the powerful Federation of Metalworkers. Again in 1965, at the annual press conference held by the three Secretaries-General, the UIL still declared itself in favour of the creation of a socialist trade union and the CISL declared itself amenable to the notion of the union of all democratic forces, excluding the Communists. However, the situation was resolved in subsequent years, and the secretariats of the three confederations found common ground first of all in the area of issues which were capable of formulation into demands, only later to tackle the issue of trade union unity which inevitably created problems within each of the three confederations.

The knottiest problem which the CGIL had to resolve was the issue of the incompatibility of political and trade union mandates and the issue of autonomy in relation to the political parties. This was a difficult matter to deal with thoroughly, since, although it is relatively simple to settle the issue of the mandates, autonomy in relation to the political parties remains a matter of individual judgment. With regard to the UIL and the CISL, they had strong internal centrifugal movements to contend with, which on several occasions placed great strain on the very unity of the confederations.

Opinion varied not only as to the advisability of creating trade union unity but also on what structure to give it. For some, a clean sweep should be made of the existing confederations and a new one built out of the unified basic structures. For others, it was necessary merely to unite the three ideological components of the workers' movement, while maintaining the right of expression. The former approach was adopted by the metalworkers, the latter by the three confederations.

It proved to be in the industrial sectors that matters were to make most progress. In the metalworking industry, to begin with, the national conference of the metalworkers' federations (FIOM, FIM, UIIM), held in September 1972, gave practical expression to the process of unification, which had been under way for some time in that sector. It approved the creation of a united Federation (the FIM) bringing together the three federations without dissolving them. Decisions concerning a single headquarters, coordination of the receipt of subscriptions, coordination of the press and other trade union activities were taken; they were added to subsequently by the introduction of a single trade union card. As from that date, there has been no strike or collective agreement concerning workers in the metalworking industry which has not been conducted jointly within the framework of the FIM.

In various other sectors (chemicals, textiles and building), unified organizations have been gradually created - except in agriculture - and all decisions are taken on a concerted basis and demands are worked out jointly.

At supra-federal level, progress was made, but not to the point of achieving genuine organic unity. In 1971 agreements had been concluded in Florence between the CGIL, the CISL and the UIL providing for the holding, in September 1972, of national congresses of the confederations with a view to their dissolution by February 1972 at the latest, and the calling of a congress to constitute a single confederation.

That congress never took place. Various national and international vested interests did not want to see organic unity between the three confederations, who signed in July 1972 a "federative pact" creating an inter-occupational federation which brought together the three national confederations without dissolving them. This CGIL - CISL - UIL Federation is decentralized at regional and provincial level in respect of occupational and inter-occupational structures. The three confederations delegate power to it in important areas such as contractual policy, reform policy, economic and social policy and the extension of these policies at international level.

Since July 1972, there has been no strike or collective agreement or bargaining with the government which has not been conducted jointly within the unified CGIL - CISL - UIL Federation.

At the time, the Federation had been set up only on a temporary basis, the ultimate aim being to bring about organic unity among the three confederations. In 1982 it still exists and no additional powers have been transferred to it in the meantime. The three confederations regularly emphasize the need to achieve organic unity in the trade union movement and renew their commitment in that direction. The congresses held in 1981 by each of the three confederations were not remiss in this task. However, for a number of reasons, among them those concerning trade union autonomy in relation to the political parties or reform of the system of indexing wages - the march towards organic unity now seems to be faltering, and in the opinion of many observers the repeated statements of the three confederations on this issue tend to be expressions of a will to consolidate the results gained in progressing towards this objective, in anticipation of more propitious times for pursuing the aim itself.

Notwithstanding this, it is still true that, despite the fact that the process is still incomplete, in Italy trade union unity has reached a more advanced stage than in the other European countries where trade union pluralism exists and that many results in the area of safeguarding purchasing power, safeguarding and creating jobs, etc. would not have been achieved over the last few years had it not been for the unified action of workers and the existence of the unification process among the three trade union confederations CGIL, CISL and UIL.

It should also be said that the features exhibited by the Italian trade union of the Eighties owe much to the three confederations since unity of action first of all and the "federative pact" subsequently encouraged a process of osmosis between the three confederations such that, while remaining the CGIL, the CISL and UIL in their mutually differing situations, they now have a great deal in common.

### III. The European policy of the Italian central trade union organizations

Today the CGIL, the CISL and UIL are all members of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and support the idea of building Europe but it has not always been so, particularly in the case of the CGIL.

#### A. Italian central organizations and European construction

There is a clear "Western" bias to the construction of Europe, particularly in economic matters as it is founded on the market economy. The UIL and CISL had a Western bias from the outset and supported the constitution of both the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 and the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957.

The CGIL was consistent in its political and ideological choices at the time and sharply opposed the Marshall Plan in 1948. A few years later its position vis-à-vis the EEC was not so clear-cut. The CGIL expressed its fears as regards the damaging effects the EEC might have on the development of the country but nevertheless it recognized the overriding advantages of European integration.



At its Third congress in 1959 the CISL emphasized that the EEC did not threaten the stability and economic development of the country and might even promote economic growth and social well-being for the workers.

Following several other European trade union organizations the CISL and the UIL agreed to sit on a number of advisory committees set up by the ECSC and the EEC with a view to maintaining liaison with the European institutions and placing more emphasis on the social dimension and enhancing the democratic aspect of the Community process. The need to act as spokesman and thus defend workers' interests led the trade unions of the Member States to set up a number of coordination committees; one was the CESL (Confédération européenne des Syndicats libres) which was followed by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), of which the CISL and the UIL were founding members.

Since the EEC was established at a time when the world economy was expanding, significant social and economic changes occurred in the member countries in the space of a few years. While it did not alter its general assessment of the European integration process, the CGIL soon realized that it could not afford to keep away from this new area for trade union action. Therefore in 1962 it set up an information office to maintain liaison with the Community and in 1966 a Standing CGT-CGIL Committee was given the task of representing these bodies to the Community institutions. It was mainly on account of its links with the FSM that the CGIL had adopted a different attitude to that of the CISL and the UIL. Nevertheless the CGIL gradually modified its position over the years.

In June 1969, the Seventh congress of the CGIL stated that the time had come to act to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the unified trade union movement in Western Europe and called on all the Italian trade union forces to work together to reinforce trade union action by workers at European level. The Fifth congress of the UIL affirmed that the organization would continue to strive for European unity in which the democratic countries of the North of Europe should also participate and should also play a part in promoting the social and

political advancement of the working classes, it should be an instrument to develop solidarity with developing countries and act as mediator between the two super-powers. At the Sixth congress the CISL affirmed that while continuing to respect the decisive role played by the international workers' movement it believed in a political Europe accessible to the democratic countries of the Continent, and that in the framework of the European Confederation of Free Trade Unions the CISL would disregard differences between national central organizations and would continue to campaign at European level for the unity and independence of all European trade unions.

In 1981 a congress of each of the three Italian confederations took place. Discussions on European matters related to the economic crisis, the need to reform the Community as it was at present, the place that a united Europe should occupy in the world, the role it should play, particularly as regards détente and disarmament, the establishment of new North-South relationships, particularly in the framework of the Lomé Convention. In other words, the CGIL, the CISL and UIL expressed their interest in building Europe and their wish to see the Community play a well-defined international role.

At its Tenth Congress (16-21 November 1981) the CGIL underlined the importance of renewing negotiations on disarmament between the two super-powers and the construction of a new international economic order. It stated that Europe should play an active and dynamic role to promote the security and disarmament within its frontiers, in the Mediterranean and to establish peace in the Middle-East. It called on trade union and democratic forces to develop a new role for Europe in the North-South dialogue with respect to social, agricultural, industrial and monetary policies. The congress also considered that the own resources of the Community should be increased, that it should contribute to relaunching the European economy and expanding employment, and that a series of Community policies - among them agriculture - should be radically reformed. Thus the Tenth congress of the CGIL acknowledged the EEC as an economic body of primary importance to be supported, reinforced and reformed and at the same time hoped that it would play its political and diplomatic part in the concert of nations.

At the Eighth congress (10-14 June 1981) the UIL noted that the role of the European Community was not confined to trade and economic growth but extended to international relations and was assuming a specific geopolitical function. It recognized that the Community could contribute to solving problems such as procedures for informing and consulting workers in firms with a complex structure, in particular multi-national firms (proposal in the Vredeling Directive) and that it provided a forum for working out concerted industrial development policies to meet the needs of restructuring and resource allocation in an advanced technological framework. At the same time the UIL considered that as presently conceived there was too much emphasis on Europe as a market place to the detriment of the well-being of the people and the workers, that it had aggravated regional differences and should therefore be radically reformed while giving itself the means to carry out its policies.

One of the 48 resolutions adopted by the Ninth congress of the CISL (7-12 October 1981) deals with relaunching the Community integration process and calls on Europe to play a new role in the world. It starts by expressing serious concern regarding the present paralysis of the Community and stresses that no economic and social problems can be adequately solved at national level. It goes on to emphasize the urgent need for relaunching a large-scale effort to promote Community integration so that a united Europe is in a position to handle crucial questions connected with the economic crisis and the new international division of labour, while playing an independent and active role to foster détente, peace, and restore the balance in the North-South dialogue. The congress was also in favour of increasing the Community's own resources so that it could implement new Community policies, particularly in the area of industrial restructuring, energy and technological innovation, social and regional policy. It was also in favour of a radical reform of the common agricultural policy and developing cooperation with the third world in the framework of the Lomé Convention. The CISL also observed that these topics should be central to the discussions at the next meeting of the ETUC in April 1982.

The above shows that the idea of Europe is an integral part of the thinking and activities of the Italian trade union movement as regards its economic, social and institutional aspects as well as its impact on peace, freedom, justice and democracy. On account of the value they attach to these aspects and aims, the CGIL, CISL and UIL have supported the proposal to relaunch the European integration process, and has indicated areas and content of reforms for the Community. They have also joined the ETUC in order to participate actively in the formulation and implementation of these policies.

**B. The three Italian unions and the European Trade Union Confederation**

When it was set up in February 1973 only the CISL and UIL were among its founder members. The CGIL did not join the ETUC until 1974. This was a significant move in the eyes of observers of the European trade union movement for this was the first (and so far the only) time that a trade union with a large Communist membership had become a member. Membership had been made possible by the far-reaching ideological evolution and changes in organization in the CGIL after the rift between the unions and the fact that the CISL and UIL which were already members of the ETUC, supported its application.

We have already described the significant effort and changes in thinking in the CGIL in regard to ideological and organizational matters connected with Europe. Inevitably this innovative process was relevant to and influenced the international choices and policies of the organization, including its affiliation and relationship with the FSM.

At the time of the 'schism' in the FSM in 1949 and the creation of the CISL (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), the CGIL had remained affiliated to the FSM. However, it was not long before differences regarding the kind of society to be built, trade unionism and its national and international functions divided the CGIL and the FSM. These differences had already been present at the Fourth congress of the FSM in 1957 and the gaps continued to widen in the following years. In 1956, with two other Italian unions, the CGIL condemned events in Hungary; this was repeated in 1968 in the case of Czechoslovakia and more recently in the case of Afghanistan and Poland. In 1973 at the FSM congress at Varna, the CGIL broke off its affiliation with the world trade union organization, requested and obtained the status of associate organization and disbanded the liaison Committee it had established with the French CQT in Brussels.

During these years the CGIL concentrated on questions arising from dialectical discussions with the other two Italian central bodies. On several occasions either alone or as part of a joint delegation it met other European trade union organizations and submitted its application for membership of the ETUC in 1974 which was accepted by the Executive Committee on 9 July 1974. In March 1978 the CGIL cut off all organizational links with the FSM. At present it is not affiliated to any other international body. Nevertheless, it is part of a large network of bilateral and multilateral relations. In the context of the Federation to which it belongs the CGIL often makes common cause with the other two Italian trade unions on international matters.

With its 8.5 million members the Federation of the CGIL-CISL-UIL represents 20% of the membership of the European Trade Union Confederation today.

Within the ETUC, the action of the Italian trade unions like that of the other member organizations has been governed by a number of internal and external and structural factors and circumstances which affect all international organizations.

One of the internal questions was the need to establish a European action programme for the ETUC, to overcome national trade union prejudices and develop a European spirit and approach in trade union affairs. It was not always easy to decide on certain applications for membership nor to overcome certain ideological conflicts between organizations. Sterile and paralysing conflicts - occurring in each member organization to a different degree - between those wishing to give European workers other than national weapons and means of action in the various areas of concern to them, and on the other hand those who are legitimately convinced that the workers' present and future is, and should continue to be, determined at national level.

Among the external questions affecting the ETUC there is the persistent economic crisis - with the immediate consequences of a resurgence of nationalism and a freeze on the Community decision-making process - and the absence of spokesmen representing governments and employers in Europe who have the power to make decisions and negotiate.

In this connection, various tripartite conferences organized by the Standing Employment Committee have been resounding failures. The participation of workers' representatives on numerous European advisory committees, the most important being the Economic and Social Committee have not had a real influence on the adoption of or failure to adopt decisions in the Community.

The various opinions delivered by the ETUC on economic, social, agricultural or regional policy, to combat unemployment or improve working and living conditions etc. often remain a dead letter for a variety of reasons, particularly those listed above.

Many observers consider that the ETUC is at a crossroads: either it must overcome its internal difficulties and develop the means to combat the external difficulties facing it or it is condemned in the long-term to become a European appendix to the national organizations, to disappoint expectations and in some sense betray some of the fundamental interests of the workers of Europe.

The three Italian central trade union bodies consider European trade union action as a natural and essential extension of their action at national level that complements but does not compete with their own activities carried out in collaboration with other regional or world bodies. The discussions and instruments adopted at their congresses last year leave no doubt in this regard.

At its Tenth Congress the CGIL maintained that faced with the pressing problems associated with the crisis in Europe since 1973, the ETUC had played a key role in building up a platform and common strategy for the European trade union movement. Consequently, the trade union struggle for full employment, against social and territorial imbalances are in favour of a reduction in working hours, an improvement in work organization, an extension of trade union rights and economic democracy should continue. The CGIL emphasized that at its next congress (April 1982) the ETUC should improve its own capacity for action in respect of problems relating to the control of new technology, investments and programming, in order to develop specific methods of coordination and ways of directing the struggle in all countries in Europe. The ETUC should also continue to be an independent trade union force, should increase its budgetary resources, rise above ideological issues in connection with applications for membership and establish closer relations with the trade union committees.

At the Eighth Congress of the UIL emphasis was placed on the importance of specific aspects of trade union action at European level. The Congress noted that the ETUC was going through a difficult and complex phase and that its problems were linked to its structure for it was born of the need to draw up a programme in response to the economic integration of the Community, establish joint goals for the workers of Europe and co-ordinate their efforts. The confederation had to make a qualitative leap to become the workers' chief representative and thus a social partner at the level of the European Institutions; it should become a political authority responsible for the formulation and synthesis of a common strategy for the Western European trade union movement. The Congress also hoped that ideological issues would be disregarded when considering applications for membership, that differences between the Central European, Northern and Mediterranean areas would be attenuated and disappear and that closer contacts with the trade union committees would be established.

At its Ninth Congress the CISL stressed that never in their history had the workers of Western Europe had the benefit of an instrument of progress and change as potentially effective as the ETUC. Therefore, every effort should be made to exploit its potential but they were still far from the objective of turning the ETUC into a genuine trade union confederation of European dimension able to bring to bear the weight of 40 million organized workers to combat the repressive policies of the employers, the institutions and governments in Europe.

At the congress the CISL acknowledged that the ETUC had indeed organized various activities to promote employment on a European scale. Among the most important and most recent, mention was made of the European Action Day in April 1978, the campaign in the spring of 1981 and on the occasion of the European Council in Venice in 1980 and in Luxembourg in 1981, and it had also succeeded in drawing up a programme of actions for itself. But the decisive question still before the ETUC was that of translating the common demands and declarations of intent into action so that the trade unions should react consistently and together to the crisis and its consequences, while seeking to make the ETUC perform the functions of a trade union organization rather than merely acting as a liaison committee. The ETUC should be able to establish common goals, coordinate claims and direct the struggle to achieve them. Accordingly, the ETUC should be reinforced, while maintaining its existence as an independent organization capable of uniting the workers of Western Europe.

The Italian trade unions are therefore in favour of the continuation and reinforcement of a European trade union movement - in the context of wider international, bilateral and multilateral relationships - not only as an ideal solution but because the fundamental values to which they are attached can only be preserved through determined and unified action by the workers of Europe, for there are several economic and social questions that cannot be solved other than by concerted action at European level; the *raison d'être* and mission of the European Trade Union Confederation.



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