

trade union information

No 1 APRIL (I) 1974

INTRODUCTION

"Trade Union Information" is a fortnightly journal produced by the Community's Trade Union Information Division. It aims to provide brief, up-to-date news to the trade unions about European Community decisions affecting the conditions of workers in the nine countries. It will give reports on activities of the European trade union organisations and also on national trade union events having a wide European interest.

With limited means at our disposal we shall not be able to give a comprehensive coverage in the fields mentioned above and we shall give priority to items which the general press has not dealt with or has treated inadequately from the trade union point of view.

We hope that editors of trade union journals will find "Trade Union Information" useful as a source of material for their own publications and we should welcome the diffusion of items to a greater trade union readership in this way.

"Trade Union Information" will appear in English, French and German, and its contents take into account the need to avoid duplication with other Community publications and documentation for the trade unions.

CONTENTS

1. Commission publishes social report for 1973
2. Enlargement of the European Trade Union Confederation
3. ETUC calls for genuine European energy policy
4. Proposal for European Metalworkers' Day
5. European steel unions plan joint action
6. Irish unions sign new national wage agreement
7. Italian union agreement with FIAT
8. Italian CGIL Seminar on Community Regional Policy
9. Belgian CSC wants workers' councils

COMMISSION PUBLISHES SOCIAL REPORT FOR 1973

A detailed survey of employment, working conditions, housing, social security and social services in the countries of the Community is contained in the European Commission's "Report on the development of the social situation in the Community 1973", just published.

In 1973 the number of employed increased throughout the Community and total unemployment figures fell in most member states. On the other hand there was an increase in the shortage of skilled labour almost everywhere. Opportunities for developing skills through vocational training were expanded, and paid time off for study was granted on an increasing scale.

The introduction of the 40-hour week continued in most industrial sectors and should be general by 1975. The movement towards a fourth week of holidays with pay has intensified.

On wages, the Report notes a continuation of recent trends to increase low wages proportionately more than the average. A second trend was a wider application of the principle of linking wages automatically to rises in the cost of living.

In 1973 member states faced the same problems concerning housing, namely rapid rises in the price of building land and rapid rises in costs of house construction. Social housing at acceptable rents remained in short supply.

There was a decentralisation of social welfare in various Community countries, notably Italy and France - in the latter country much was expected from economic and social advisory committees being set up in every region. The system of migrant workers' advisory councils attached to municipal councils, which was pioneered in Belgium, spread to Germany and the Netherlands in 1973, so far on a small scale.

Despite all efforts there was scarcely any reduction in the number of industrial accidents throughout the Community in 1973.

From 1974 onwards the Community will have an increasing influence on the development of social policy in the member countries, in addition to the influence which it has had on employment and conditions of work through Community economic decisions. The Council of Ministers in 1973 approved a social action programme to be carried out over three years. Special attention is given to active employment policies including the requirements of vulnerable sections of the population such as women in employment, migrants, the handicapped, the elderly and school-leavers seeking employment.

ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Acceptance by the European Trade Union Confederation of ten new member organisations represents an important step towards intensified union action at European level.

The ETUC Executive Committee, meeting in Brussels on 7 March 1974, accepted into affiliation eight trade union centres associated now or in the past with Christian political tendencies and grouped in the European organisation of the World Confederation of Labour. The affiliations followed discussions between the ETUC and the European Organisation (WCL), in which it was agreed that members of the latter would have all the rights and obligations laid down in the ETUC constitution on joining and that the European Organisation (WCL) would cease to exist. The trade union centres concerned are from Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain (Basque Workers' Organisation) and Switzerland.

Two further organisations accepted into affiliation were the Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö (SAK) of Finland, a long-standing member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, which had hitherto not formed part of any international trade union grouping.

ETUC CALLS FOR GENUINE EUROPEAN ENERGY POLICY

Coordinated action on the energy crisis at European level was called for by the European Trade Union Confederation at a special conference held in Luxembourg on 15 and 16 March 1974. Coordinated action should take particular account of the less favoured social groups, so that they are not once again the principal sufferers from a crisis situation; it should encourage the development of the countries of the third world, whether or not they have oil resources.

The conference considered that it was essential

1) to realise economies in the utilisation of energy; 2) to initiate a vast programme of research and development; 3) to organise the necessary recourse to nuclear energy within a framework established by the public authorities; and 4) to review immediately European coal policy in the perspective of diversification of resources. The whole energy policy should be carried out in the spirit of a public service, particularly the oil sector, where the multinational companies have managed to retain excessive powers.

... / ...

The ETUC called for two European conferences to be held. A social conference, to plan measures to safeguard employment and living standards of the workers, should take place as quickly as possible. An extraordinary energy conference, grouping Community institutions, member states, employers and trade unions, should constitute a first step towards the creation of a permanent commission for European action on energy problems, in which the trade unions would play a full part.

PROPOSAL FOR EUROPEAN METALWORKERS' DAY

The repercussions of the energy crisis on employment and on the wages of workers were discussed by the Executive Committee of the European Metalworkers' Federation at a meeting in Brussels on 13 and 14 March 1974. The EMF represents over 5½ million workers in the European Community and the Scandinavian countries. Four British members were added to the Executive Committee at the meeting, and Hugh Scanlon was confirmed as British Vice-President.

The EMF Executive Committee noted the conclusions of the special conference on energy of the European Trade Union Confederation and decided to draw up concrete demands which would be made known during a special "European Metalworkers' Day" in the different countries.

The EMF timetable of activities, which was approved by the Executive Committee, includes preparatory meetings with management of multinational corporations (Philips, Fokker-VFW, Unidata, Europ-emballage, Continental Can, AEG-Telefunken-Zanussi). There will also be meetings of trade unions concerned in multinational projects in the European aerospace industry (Airbus, Concorde) and the European automobile industry (Klöckner-Humboldt-Deutz-Saviem, DAF and Volvo).

EUROPEAN STEEL UNIONS PLAN JOINT ACTION

Closer trade union cooperation among the different plants of multinational steel companies in the European Community was decided on by a meeting of the Steel Trade Union Committee of the Community countries which met in Witten, Germany on 18 and 19 March 1974. The meeting agreed to prepare a "European steelworkers' statute" on the basis of which trade union demands could be coordinated.

All nine Community countries are represented in the Steel Trade Union Committee. It met at the same time as the Executive Bureau of the Coal and Steel Trade Union Committee of the Community, which reviewed the current situation for workers in these fields.

IRISH UNIONS SIGN NEW NATIONAL WAGE AGREEMENT

A new national wage agreement for workers in the Republic of Ireland was agreed by a special Delegate Conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, held in Dublin on 7 March 1974. This is the third successive national agreement signed with the Federated Union of Employers, the first having been agreed in December 1970.

Like the first two agreements, the new agreement gives higher percentage increases to lower-paid workers. A worker earning £15 a week will receive an increase of £3.70 in two instalments (a 24.7% rise), while one earning £60 a week will obtain £8.30 (a 13.8% rise). Arrangements in the agreement intensify the drive towards equal pay "where men and women are doing the same or similar work or work of equal value".

A cost-of-living "threshold" provision allows for a 1% increase in basic pay for each 1% increase in the consumer price index over 10% in the period from November 1973 to November 1974.

Much flexibility is built into the agreement. On the one hand a procedure is laid down for special discussions in cases where firms and industries consider that they are unable to apply the terms of the agreement and remain viable. On the other hand trade unions can make claims with a view to removing what they consider to be anomalies in pay between different groups of employees; also new incentive payment schemes, productivity agreements and flexibility agreements may be introduced "on the basis of agreement between the parties and not through any form of industrial action or unilateral enforcement. Such schemes must make a direct contribution towards raising productivity and efficiency".

The agreement runs for only a short time, up to June 1975, and takes into account the need to eliminate wide differences which exist in the terminal dates of industry and company agreements, so that any future national agreement can be simpler in nature.

ITALIAN UNION AGREEMENT WITH FIAT

After long and difficult negotiations, the three Italian trade union centres have signed an overall agreement with FIAT having as a new feature a commitment by the Turin company to invest in the Mezzogiorno.

For a long time the CGIL, the CISL and the UIL have been trying to get the large Italian companies to sign agreements not only about wages and working conditions, but also about location of investment,, particularly the Mozzogiorno.

Moreover, the agreement contains articles concerning the investment plan of FIAT, aimed at intensifying the production of public transport vehicles compared with the production of private cars.

The agreement also gives the workers in FIAT plants improvements in conditions of work and transport facilities.

ITALIAN CGIL SEMINAR ON COMMUNITY REGIONAL POLICY

At a seminar organised by the Italian trade union centre CGIL (Communist/Socialist tendency) on regional policy of the European Community (Potenze, 14 March 1974) it was emphasised that the growth of a strong European trade union movement was the indispensable pre-requisite for European progress towards new economic and regional policy objectives. A European trade union policy should contain three elements: the elimination of ideological discrimination, autonomy on the basis of the homogeneous conditions prevailing in European countries and the capacity to exercise pressure to get the role and the nature of the Community reviewed in the light of the interests of workers.

BELGIAN CSC WANTS WORKERS COUNCILS

The Belgian trade union centre CSC wants to replace existing joint works councils in Belgium by workers' councils. This move, decided on at an extraordinary congress on 9 March 1974 in Brussels, follows the CSC's appraisal that the present joint councils, on which both sides of industry are represented and which have only an advisory role, serve little purpose.

The proposed workers' councils would be composed of workers' representatives only and would have powers of decision, particularly on social questions. The employer would be compelled to obtain the agreement of the council on all decisions concerning the closure of a plant or particular sections, the modification of work regulations and the application of collective dismissals.

The councils would be composed of workers elected from lists presented by representative trade unions in the firm.

OFFICE ADDRESSES

Dublin : 41, Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2, Ireland

London : 20 Kensington Palace Gdns;
London W8 4QQ, England

X/167/74-E