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ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

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“YOUR TURN! Teachers for Trade Union Renewal”

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Kick-off Conference

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1. Opening

Christine Blower, ETUCE President, acknowledges the diverse European industrial relations systems in which unions operate, highlighting that despite diversities, unions have a common aim of supporting their members. She explains the need to rise to the renewal challenge also given the high turnover rate in the teaching profession. She explains the project's purpose as an exploration of the labour market challenges, and as an effort to create momentum for education trade unions to share practices and to engage collectively in a discussion on trade union renewal.

Susan Flocken, ETUCE Director, emphasises the European elections, explaining how education trade unions must respond to extremism, nationalism, separatism and populism. The ETUCE campaign, [*Shape the Future of Europe with Teachers*](#), encompasses education trade unions' vision of democracy, inclusion, equality and respect for human rights. The campaign contains four key demands to politicians and governments ahead of the European elections. She explains the project's contribution to ensuring an attractive teaching profession and to assessing ways of organising, motivating, recruiting, retaining, and activating the education staff.

2. Setting the scene and working together

Paola Cammilli, ETUCE Coordinator, recalls the many challenges to teachers and their work and addresses a general decline in union affiliations in the last decades. She presents the project activities, namely the three training seminars in Amsterdam, Berlin and Milan, and the closing conference in Brussels. Starting from the current event, working at European level will allow for exchanging practices and strengthening solidarity so that cooperation among ETUCE's member organisations will reinforce each in all different contexts. The project final conference has the potential of launching a campaign action based on a common narrative which could also challenge stereotypes and media attacks on unions. A research (University of Nottingham) and a multi-media (LatteCreative) expert will follow the project.

3. Trade Union Renewal: What's in it for the education sector

Professor Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham, reiterates the challenges the education sector is facing, including work intensification, wage stagnation and increased expectations on teachers, denigration of collective bargaining, curtailment of trade union rights, intensified competition, and privatisation. The neoliberal education policies frustrate the chance to develop solidarity among workers. Younger professionals might opt to self-organise, while unions rely on an ageing activist-base. This is problematic as pressures on teachers increase, their resources diminish, and this gap requires unions to better use membership resources. The decreasing membership, member participation in union democracy and member participation in union activities, coupled with a shrinking and ageing activist base, point to a need for a union response. He explains three



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strategies identified in his previous research, clarifying that the renewal strategy would be explored, as it shifts unions towards organising, building up members' strength and capacity.

The definition of organising he uses is building the capacity of union members to act collectively to bring about change. He presents five dimensions of organising. Firstly, organising at the workplace, which refers to building members' engagement and connection within the union and to the presence of trade union representatives in the workplace. Secondly, organising around the profession, ensuring that profound issues to members will be treated as trade union issues. Thirdly, organising everyone which implies ensuring that members feel included, and that the union processes are adapted to the diverse membership base's needs. Fourthly, organising beyond the union, as progress can be achieved only if alliances with wider constituencies are made. Lastly, organising around ideas, framing a narrative to create a common sense among members.

Discussion

Participants discuss what services unions offer to members, the importance of new IT-tools in communicating with members, the alliances unions need with civil society movements, parents, students and the community, and ensuring that trade union representatives are present in schools, engaging members personally, listening and reacting to their concerns. The issue of competition between unions is also raised.

4. [Organising around]: Empowering members to promote an active engagement on campaigns

Nikki Wright and David Wilson, NEU UK, present NEU's '*School cuts*' campaign in light of 91% of British schools having their funding per pupil reduced between 2015 and 2019. NEU addressed the issues ideologically, politically and professionally at international, national and school level during its campaign. It developed alliances with trade unions, politicians and academics, and highlighted the extent of cuts through data readily available on their website. This was followed by storytelling, used to empower members to detail their experiences with the cuts. They illustrate the escalating set of actions made available to members, so that they would commit in different capacities to the campaign. The campaign content amassed millions of online views, and empowered members to build connections with the local community and politicians. School cuts re-emerged at the top of the domestic political agenda, and NEU's narrative challenges the neoliberal consensus, as the government pledged to return £1.3 billion to the education sector.

Barbara Grüning and Tito Russo, FLC-CGIL Italy, present the FLC-CGIL's campaign in higher education, '*Ricercatori determinati*', in light of 15000 tenured positions being cut in the past 10 years, worsened working conditions for adjunct teachers, and an increase in the number of precarious workers. Launched in May 2018, the aim was to facilitate precarious researchers' stabilization, as foreseen in other sectors. In partnership with the Italian Association of Ph.D. Students, a legislative proposal was devised, and research on academic precariousness was conducted to gather knowledge and put pressure on political actors. In the course of 2018, protests and local assemblies to disseminate the research results and to discuss findings with the academic staff. They reflect on the campaign empowering precarious researchers' involvement, ensuring active participation of non-unionised researchers, and renewing the government's attention to the higher education sector. They identify as challenging the fact that precarious workers are institutionally, socially and culturally fragmented, but also that academic precariousness' social fluidity makes workers apprehensive to join campaigns.

Suki Sangha and Leah Franchetti, EIS Scotland, present EIS's **pay rise campaign**, a response to teachers' pay being reduced in the past 10 years, hampering retention and recruitment. The campaign's message was built on a vision for the Scottish education system, **emphasising the importance of valuing teachers** if education is valued, uniting 30000 people to march for the campaign in Glasgow, in October 2018. The campaign had three phases to prepare members for industrial action. An initial raising awareness phase through personal interactions with members, and through engaging the wider community via street stalls, social media campaigns, and discussions with parents. A march in Glasgow was held during the campaign's second phase. The



last phase represented a crystallisation of the concrete threat to industrial action if demands were not met. The government agreed to a 13.51% pay increase over three years. They explain how the campaign's success hinged on making national issues relevant locally, focusing on workload issues, and recruiting and building the capacity of trade union representatives. They explain how EIS boosted its presence in schools, ensuring that members were interacting with trade union representatives, and that younger professionals were emboldened to join the campaign and union.

Work Group I

Participants focus on building a message common to all teachers, regardless of their political affiliation. They identify quality education and a quality teaching profession as a way to unite the membership base and counteract the neoliberal ideology shared by governing parties across Europe. They exchange on strategies to ensure that members burdened by their workload can participate in trade union activities. They discuss communication via various types of media to gain public support for campaigns, the importance of engaging members in campaigns by focusing on issues that are relevant for them and making sure that people are aware of their trade union representative and union membership. They discuss supporting members in their engagement, managing the responsibilities and expectations placed on them, and developing trade union representatives and messages that are reflecting their needs. They pointed at the importance of analysing members' needs to raise them to surface and unions represent workers' concerns. Participants wish to better understand what trade union engagement entails, while learning about strategies for deep engagement with their members. They wish to develop knowledge on structuring campaigns in ways that boost the membership base and develop a feeling of ownership among members. They wish to better understand professionalizing union staff and supporting them during campaigns.

5. Job quality and employment terms in the education sector: Practices, Perception and Policies

Ben Egan, ETUC Advisor, presents ETUC's working definition for **quality jobs** as encompassing good wages, work security ensured through standard employment and access to social protection, opportunities for lifelong learning, good working conditions in safe and healthy workplaces, good working time and good work-life balance, and trade union representation and bargaining rights. The definition must be used to counteract the 'any job is better than no job' narrative, and the ideas that employment difficulties result from the markets' insufficient liberalization. He highlights the difficulties to reach such a common definition on quality jobs and for the trade union movement to speak with a single voice that respects all diversities, due to different contexts, diverse roles that European trade unions envision for themselves in the society, as well as different relationships between sectoral unions and confederations. He describes the limited enforceable legislation pertinent to the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the employers' privileged position in the EU-level social dialogue practices, insisting on mainstreaming this definition into economic demands. He explains ETUC's Labour Market Vision 2019 and the steps towards a joint strategy with European Trade Union Federations as ETUC's next steps.

Discussion

Participants highlight the importance to cooperate with confederations where possible and are enthused about ETUC's definition. Despite difficulties, e.g. ideological divides, that can make it difficult to speak with a single voice they propose for the course of the project to develop an own definition of trade union renewal based on the presentation, and to develop a single vision respecting the education personnel's various realities.

6. [Organising around]: Empowering members to promote the active engagement of the under-represented

Dorota Obidniak and Szymon Lepper, ZNP Poland, present ZNP's youth academy, AMZ, which stemmed from the realisation of an under-representation of **young teachers** in union decision-making bodies. Following consultations with young members, and with mentorship offered by AOb, the Dutch education trade union, a training programme to encourage young members'



participation in decision-making bodies was developed. AMZ is dedicated to all ZNP members below the age of 37, with two spots for applicants per district, and it involves three 3-day meetings, weekly personal trainings during holidays, a 5-day study visit in Berlin, and individual work under a mentor's supervision. Some training topics are: the impact of the neoliberal agenda to education, membership recruitment, contemporary educational challenges. AMZ graduates became active trade unionists, as they joined various ZNP committees, they intensely participated in the recent education strike, they created ZNP's Youth Committee in 2016, and they organised trainings and events for young teachers in collaboration with other unions.

Ryan Plocher, GEW Germany, describes GEW Youth, and the framework of **ensuring young members' participation** in statutory bodies at state and federal level. He points towards a survey, addressed to 7000 GEW members under the age of 35, on the barriers preventing them to engage in unions. The answers included limited time or information about involvement, and the difficulty linked to the start of a job/career and family life. Based on these responses and consultations with GEW Youth, GEW developed recommendations on best practices involving new members. Conferences helped bridging young members with the trade union leadership. He raises awareness about providing funds and time to young members to support their engagement, about reflecting on the meeting culture within trade unions, and on recruitment and leadership development. The aim is ensuring that new members feel included, that meetings are tailored to their needs, and that diverse members are represented in union leadership.

Ann Cecilie Bergene, UEN Norway, explains UEN's structure, and Norway's **refugee population**, describing UEN's four priority areas related to **newly arrived teachers**: social responsibility, professional responsibility, solidarity and democracy. Under the first priority, UEN is committed to the universal right to quality education. Regarding the second priority, UEN is focused on a fast-track initiative to authorise and recognise foreign pedagogical education. The final two priorities refer to UEN's efforts to include newly arrived teachers in the union, ensuring the recruitment of union delegates from this under-represented group. She explains UEN's renewed commitment for an inclusive culture, presenting future objectives of systematizing UEN's efforts to better represent diversity, and to collect and disseminate information on policies related to diversity in education, in the labour market and in UEN. To these aims, UEN will conduct a qualitative study on the inclusion of newly arrived teachers, will challenge selected regional and municipal bodies to assume extra responsibility, and will amend its communication approach, to ensure that its terminology does not alienate members from under-represented groups.

Christine Blower and Nikki Wright, NEU UK, present NEU's structure, and its majoritarian female senior leadership. They describe the NEU Women Networks and the existence of union-funded women units in NEU branches. They inform participants about the study on sexism commissioned by NEU in partnership with UK Feminista, an organisation supporting students and teachers for promoting gender equality in classrooms, titled *'It's Just Everywhere'*. Study results were used to develop recommendations to the government, Ofsted, initial teacher training providers and schools on combatting sexism, and to organise around ideas.

Work Group II

Participants discuss training for young members on the labour market and on unions' role. They consider young members' problem-solving approach, and concrete problems (e.g. cost of membership fee, competition for jobs or short-term contracts, etc.). They discuss the need to provide resources, space and freedom to discuss collectively and to engage in issues that are relevant to them, boosting their participation in trade unionism and in shaping union policy. Recalling the slogan *'Nothing about us without us'*, participants support ensuring under-represented members are included in decision-making to define and frame issues relevant to them, though they warn on the risk of 'over categorising'. Participants shared experiences with structural changes to empower the under-represented, and making unions' processes more flexible, to meet young members' needs. Participants exchange strategies to bridge the generational gap, while ensuring that classroom diversity is represented in the union. A narrative within the union based on 'solidarities' across groups (overrepresented and underrepresented) can also be instrumental to



union building, as each group could work in synergy and be helpful for the other. They hope the project can provide them with learning opportunities on how to motivate new teachers to join unions, to instil a feeling of belonging from the recruitment stage, to develop leadership recruitment plans, and to ensure that under-represented members can participate.

7. [Organising around]: Empowering members to promote an active engagement by targeting different contexts/environments

Michael MacNeil, UCU UK, describes the context in which UCU's **workplace organising programme** works: shifts in political economy, reduced funding and increased workloads in UK higher education, prevalence of precarious contracts and UCU's ageing activist base. The UCU programme for workplace leaders aims at building the capacity for effective collective bargaining. It focuses on leadership and strategic engagement rather than skills development. It blends theory and practice using academic research, practitioners' input, and case studies, and it is structured in two 2-day residential modules, project work, and the ability to access high-level advice and mentoring. It challenges participants to engage in critical reflection, exploring mobilisation theory, strategic choice frameworks, trade union leadership, political and economic environment analysis, among others. He describes the long-term effort to change the cultural approach to union activity and bargaining. The programme, however, engages workplace leaders in critical reflection and will hopefully increase acceptance of the need for change. The following steps include bringing the activists and full-time union staff in forums to exchange also on different case studies, reviewing the activist training programme, and increase the capacity to take elements of the workplace leaders approach to branches who have a particular issue. Learning from history and starting from traditional trade union methods, most importantly, collective bargaining, are the basis on which to develop further. He underlines that the project develops in the wake of a shift from passive/mechanistic organising models to politically active manners, of transferring power from elites to workers, of reintroducing political education in unions.

Dorien König, AOb the Netherlands, presents the '**community**' organising context in which AOb organised strikes, campaigns and actions for better pay and reduced workload in the past two years. AOb joined forces with grassroots movements, outside of the union movement, which were garnering support via social media from teachers, including AOb members. By developing alliances with these movements, and other trade unions, AOb managed to have 60000 primary teachers participating in a national strike in March 2019. Parents joined the teachers' cause, sharing stories on the implications of teacher shortages on their children's education. Local schools, teachers from training colleges, and celebrities were engaged via social media to create nation-wide support for teachers. She explains the laborious nature of building these collaborations, of giving and taking, and the compromises made. However, it resulted in pay being raised, workload being decreased, union membership being increased, active engagement being boosted, and AOb's image in the society being strengthened.

Rodrigo Seoane Ruano, FE.CC.OO. Spain, explains the work of the **union within the broader society**, while also explaining social movements in defence of the nature and value of public, inclusive and quality education and national platforms reuniting trade unions with parents' association, political parties and civil society organisations. Their work has become urgent in the Spanish political and socio-economic context, as expenditure on education dropped after the crisis while funding for private education increased, revealing a neoliberal direction for education policies, as unemployment levels were at record high, as teachers' workload increased, as casualisation and fixed-term contracts became more widespread. The platforms facilitate mobilisation, becoming a worthwhile partner for trade unions to build societal support and mobilise people, but he clarifies that unions' engagement offers the credibility needed for these platforms. To date, there is no evidence that union's membership increased by engaging in social platforms work.

Work Group III

Participants discuss the importance of developing members' long-term planning capacities, and the prerequisite of training trade union delegates on how to engage and train members, highlighting



the importance of personal contact between union representatives and other members. Participants wish to learn more about recruitment and training for trade union leadership. They discuss the usefulness of social media tools to help building alliances with other organisations, though content tends to be shared among people who already are trade union members, and human resources for a communication department or social media strategies are limited. They wish to learn about social media's dissemination strategies. They consider the importance of using all tools to engage members but clarify that social media cannot replace personal interaction with members to create solidarity. They discuss trade union presence in the workplace to facilitate members expressing their concerns about their working environment, and to ease the recruitment of leaders from workplaces. The use of a simple language that enables empathy and the need to avoid the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', 'we' and 'you' is also raised. Listening, time, resources and structure to react to challenges are deemed as essential prerequisites to act as agents of change at the workplace, in the community and in society.

8. Communicating on trade union topics and enhancing leadership skills to develop members' engagement and activism within the union.

Helen Jörman, Lärarförbundet Sweden, presents Lärarförbundet's transition strategy from a service-oriented union, leading to a decreased active engagement of members, to renewal as the union's main future-oriented strategy. She explains the renewal strategy developed at their 2014 Congress. Relying on local branches to set up conferences for 30000 participants, Lärarförbundet emboldened its members to develop the union's new vision of promoting a proud profession, united in a strong union, relying on joint forces to build the future. Lärarförbundet refocused on working conditions, unifying the entire profession and becoming proactive in sharing information about union membership in local schools. It facilitated personal contact among union representatives and members. Training programmes to develop union representatives' capacities to recruit, listen and act have been set, ensuring that each school had a well prepared and supported such representative. She presents the online tool developed by Lärarförbundet for teachers, students, and school leaders to assess their union engagement, and to disseminate their vision of working conditions for an attractive teaching profession. The tool facilitates a two-way communication between teachers and the union: it provides data to Lärarförbundet on workplaces' conditions and information to teachers on how to engage. Adopting such an all-encompassing strategy was not easy and the implementation even harder as it touches all traditional areas and organisation of trade union work. However, it enhances teachers' engagement and ownership of union policy and work.

Discussion

Participants discuss Lärarförbundet's strategy and the use of app or IT-tools to support workplace representatives in their role, gather and disseminated information to local branches and use them in collective bargaining negotiations. Participants consider the contextual limits for smaller unions with limited resources, or for unions facing membership competition.

9. Concluding remarks

Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham, thanks participants for their involvement, and for advancing the project research with information, input and direction. He invites them to continue engaging throughout the project lifetime, emphasising the continuous nature of renewal, the long-term strategic planning and the big efforts required from unions and members.

Christine Blower, ETUCE President, recalls that trade union renewal does not mean to become something 'new' or to start from scratch, as unions have strong roots, history and cultures that are the foundation of any strategy needed to face new and challenging contexts, though this might require some struggle. The deep-rooted values of social justice and equality, on which trade unions are built, should prevail and unite trade unionists for the benefit of the teaching profession.

