

Still Embedded in Euro-corporatism? European Trade Unions Within the New European Economic Governance Regime

Friday, 17 September 2021 12:30 (30 minutes)

The developments since the outbreak of the 'Great Recession' led to increasing EU's commodifying interventions in wages and workers' rights. What was therefore the strategy followed by organised labour vis-à-vis the EU's new economic governance (NEG) regime?

Historically, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has been in favour of further European integration. Jacques Delors' pledge to complement the process of market integration with the construction of a 'Social Europe' was fundamental for getting the support of trade unions to the renewed process of EU integration (van Apeldoorn, 2002). Since then, the ETUC has constantly supported European integration while continuing to ask for a greater EU social dimension (Horn, 2012), in a sort of 'symbolic Eurocorporatism' (Bieling and Schulten, 2003).

The outbreak of the 2008 economic crisis, followed by the establishment of a commodifying NEG regime (Erne, 2015; Jordan et al., 2020) seemed to lead to a change in the strategies of ETUC and its affiliates. For the first time in its history, the confederation rejected an EU treaty (the 'Fiscal Compact'), while promoting European counter-mobilisations. This led some scholars to wonder whether the ETUC had finally shifted its approach away from symbolic Euro-corporatism (Horn, 2012). Yet, already towards the end of the Barroso II Commission, the ETUC became increasingly embedded in new mechanisms of EU economic governance such as the European Semester.

Using a combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis, this paper aims to describe the trajectory followed by the largest European trade union confederation vis-à-vis the new European economic governance framework. It does so through a multi-level research design which looks at the European level and at two country cases, Ireland and Italy.

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Session Classification: 5.2

Track Classification: Track 2