

The Netherlands:
*Developing Equality and Inclusion through Social
Regulation and Trade Unions*

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PROJECT FUNDED BY THE LEVERHULME TRUST

Manchester 2012



The University of Manchester The Leverhulme Trust

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the individuals we interviewed. In terms of our advisors we have sought advice from Professor Nelarine Cornelius at the University of Bradford's School of Management who has been useful in helping us frame some of our understanding of BME groups gain contacts. Steve Craig (TUC Tutor and UCATT project worker) and Deborah Littman (UNISON) have been important in advising and guiding us at key points. With regards to the three unions we are gratefully for the dialogue with, and advice from, Mohamed Haidor and Manuel Riesco of the Spanish CCOO union, and Jorge Aragon of the CCOO's First of May Foundation. Dirk Kloosterboer in the Dutch FNV has been a very useful link-point and basis for further insight into Dutch union renewal strategies. Mustapha Laboui was a key advisor of the project as the FNV specialist on the area. Whilst the ideas expressed in this report are ours, and we are responsible for them, the advisors have been a constant source of support and engagement. We would also like to thank Andrea Oates for copyediting the report and to Pat Gorham of the Manchester Business School for supporting us in administrative terms.

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The Netherlands: Developing Equality and Inclusion through Social Regulation and Trade Unions

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1. Introduction

The question of union responses is an important one when it comes to the areas of immigration and social inclusion. The issues that migration gives rise to for immigrants and for the employment relation system more generally are broad. Questions of workers' rights, human rights, personal development, regulation and representation are just some of the areas that are affected by questions of migration and the way employers and the state relate to them. The nature of social exclusion is such that it gives rise to problems for immigrants in terms of their working conditions, their levels of pay, their personal security and dignity and their identity in ethnic and social terms. Trade unions find that in the current context, where employment relations are relatively disorganised and the economy is more fragmented in terms of the structure of the firm and the nature of work organisation, some sections of migrant communities constitute an increasingly vulnerable workforce, subject to high levels of exploitation by employers and difficult social circumstances. Hence there is a need to study how unions address these issues through a variety of practices and strategies.

It is clear that traditional union work plays a role, for example, the role of bargaining in enhancing the conditions and pay of workers including migrants. However, these practices work across a collective body of organised workers and consequently affect workers involved in that bargaining unit, whether migrant or not. Another example is where trade unions have lobbied for an enhancement of universal welfare services. Hence outlining the role of unions in enhancing the economic and social conditions of immigrant communities is difficult because many established activities tend to affect individuals within the constituency represented irrespective of their social background. Hence we focus on a range of activities in relation to migration: institutional relations with the state, the role of organising as a campaign of revitalisation, the development of Living Wage campaigns, the role of learning and training, the development of self organisation, and the role of anti-racist activity more generally.

2. Background to Migration and Industrial Relations

Migration

The Netherlands had already experienced immigration before the Second World War. However, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards emigration to the United States (US) and later to Canada, New Zealand and Australia was also significant. For a period, the Dutch government even encouraged its citizens to emigrate, due to the belief that the Netherlands was an overpopulated country. It was only at the beginning of the 1960s that immigration exceeded emigration. The picture of immigration in the Netherlands is quite complex. According to Penninx and Vermeulen (2000), four different groups of immigrants have been distinguishable since the Second World War. The first group is comprised of the so-called 'repatriates' or 'fellow citizens' from Indonesia and New Guinea, who started arriving in the Netherlands after

Indonesian independence in 1949 and the decolonisation of the 'Dutch East Indies'. Most of these immigrants had Dutch nationality and consequently solid legal status in Dutch society. This group also comprises South Moluccans, mainly ex-soldiers from the Royal Dutch East Indian Army and their families. They arrived in the Netherlands in 1951 with the intention of returning once a 'Free Republic of the Moluccans' had been established (Smeets and Veenman, 2000).

A second group of immigrants is comprised of so-called 'guest workers' from the Mediterranean regions. Their immigration was encouraged by labour shortages during the period of post-war reconstruction and regulated by recruiting treaties with the sending countries. Such treaties involved Italy (1960), Spain, Portugal and Turkey (1964), Greece (1966), Morocco (1969) and Yugoslavia and Tunisia (1970) (Roosblad, 2000b). A third group is comprised of immigrants coming from Suriname, which gained independence from the Netherlands in 1975, and from the 'Netherlands Antilles', dissolved in October 2010¹. For a long period, 'fellow citizens from overseas' enjoyed free entry to the Netherlands. This immigration was small in scale and made up mainly of middle class immigrants from Suriname and students from Antilles. For this reason it was not considered a problem by the Dutch government, at least until the 1970s. The last group is comprised of refugees and asylum seekers who came initially from Eastern Bloc countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia. This phenomenon grew over the course of time and involved more and more countries including Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and Ghana.

Despite the variety and continuity of immigration, the central idea in the post-war period was that the Netherlands should not be a country of net immigration (Penninx, 2005). Labour migration was commonly perceived as being only a temporary phenomenon. In a *Document on Migrant Workers (Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers)* written in the 1970s, foreign workers were encouraged to retain their identity and culture of origin, with a view to returning to their home country. This idea was also applied to Moluccans, for whom the government designed specific policy interventions aimed at safeguarding their separate identity².

After the oil crisis of 1973, the Dutch government implemented 'repatriation policies' in the form of agreements with sending countries, to encourage the repatriation of labour migrants from the Mediterranean region. These policies, however, did not achieve the desired results. Within a context of worsening economic conditions and rising unemployment, an awareness that migrant workers were no longer 'temporary' started to grow. This led to a turning point in Dutch immigration policies, and here began the divide between entry policies and integration policies. On the one hand, in fact, the 1979 *Memorandum on Aliens Policies (Notitie Vreemdelingenbeleid)* stated that there needed to be more restriction on entry. On the other hand, however, the importance of integration policies was reasserted, resulting in the *Memorandum on Minorities (Minderhedennota)* of 1983. The central idea was that restrictive immigration policies were required to make the integration of those who had arrived in previous waves of immigration possible: "The Dutch tradition of hospitality should no longer be manifested in admitting larger quantities of foreigners", but rather "by setting up immigrant policies of good quality for those who are in the country already" (*Notitie Vreemdelingenbeleid* 1979: 8 quoted in Roosblad, 2000: 99).

From the end of the 1970s, therefore, while entry policies had a markedly restrictive character, integration policies were strongly supported. During the 1980s ‘the basic rationale ... was that specific groups in Dutch society that combined a low socio-economic status with being perceived as ethnically and/or culturally different would run the risk of becoming permanently marginal groups in society’ (Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.*, 2007: 15). Integration was considered to be a two-sided process. The instruments to prevent the formation of marginal groups were envisaged as emancipation through political participation, cultural and religious equity and socio-economic equality. The basic idea was that the development of an individual and group identity would result in the individual’s emancipation within the community and have a positive influence on the integration process. Hence participation in all spheres of society, including the political one, was to be encouraged.

During the 1980s, anti-discrimination legislation was reinforced and structures for reporting and consultation were established. In particular the *Independent National Bureau against Racial Discrimination (LBR)*, committed to reporting on and working against racism and discrimination, was set up in 1985. Furthermore, active and passive voting rights for ‘alien’ residents were introduced, and the presence of ‘elected representatives of immigrant background’ in the national parliament and in the cities was supported. The Dutch nationality law was modified to make it much easier for immigrants and their children to become Dutch citizens. In the religious domain, minority policies stressed the importance of equal facilities. The government incorporated particular representatives from minorities into policy deliberation and implementation practices. This process was influenced by the Dutch tradition of pillarisation: “Just as the ‘old’ Christian and Protestant pillars had their own state-sponsored, semi-autonomous institutions in education, health, welfare and the public media, such rights cannot be denied to the new cultural and religious minorities of migrant communities.” (Koopmans and Statham, 2001: 79.)

In the socio-economic domain, policy mainly addressed the labour market, education and housing. Only in the housing domain, however, did such policies result in successful outcomes. These policies prevented a homogeneous ethnic concentration and focused on the creation of low-rent social housing for immigrants from different backgrounds and Dutch citizens who shared the same socio-economic characteristics (Penninx, 2005). The most unsuccessful policy area has been integration policies related to the labour market. Even in periods of economic growth the unemployment rate of ethnic minorities has remained around three times as high as among indigenous workers (Van der Meer and Roosblad, 2004).

Significant differences persisted among colonial immigrants, who often speak Dutch before they arrive and are more familiar with Dutch society. While the position of Indonesians improved, Surinamese, Dutch Antilleans and Arubans remained in a less favourable position (Zorlu and Hartog, 2001). Among ‘guest workers’, Southern European migrants such as Italians, Spanish, Portuguese, Greeks, and Yugoslavs progressively improved their working conditions, while Turks and Moroccans remained in a more unfavourable position in the labour market (Lucassen and Penninx, 1997; Van Ours and Veenman, 1999).

Despite some failures in specific domains, the Netherlands did have a progressive ‘multiculturalist’ policy for a time. However, in the 1990s public and political

discourse started to look critically at ethnic minority policies. It was considered that little progress had been made as a result of undue attention given to cultural aspects and subsidising organisations, discouraging individual participation in education and the labour market. The principle that the obligations of immigrants should be more balanced with their rights was embraced in the *Counternnota* of 1994. This policy “was characterised by a more ‘republicanist’ character, focusing on ‘good citizenship’ of individual immigrants” (Penninx, 2005: 6). More adaptation to Dutch norms and values was demanded. The terms ‘assimilation’ and ‘newcomers’ were introduced and the expression ‘ethnic minority’ was substituted with the term ‘*allochtonen*’³. During this period, the idea that immigration should be treated as a technical matter and not the subject of political rhetoric started to decline. Explicit and diverging political stances challenged the earlier political consensus, marking the shift of the public and political debate on migration issues from de-politicisation to ‘polarisation’ (Penninx, 2006).

According to Penninx (2005), three major factors account for this change. First, as mentioned above, was the failure of ethnic minority policy in the area of the labour market and education. Second, was the change in the perception of the Islamic religion. The third factor was the so-called ‘asylum crisis’ – an increase in the number of asylum seekers that the government was not able to manage. This resulted in more undocumented immigrants that, in turn, helped to enforce the perception that immigration was out of control.

More restrictive entry measures were introduced. The Alien Labour Law (*Wet arbeid vreemdelingen*), which regulates the employment of foreigners, was passed in 1995. The principal rule is that migrant labourers are entitled to a residence permit only if there is a shortage of employees from member states of the European Union (EU), Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Employers are obliged to report any vacancy and wait for a minimum of five weeks before employing a foreigner. Hence, this Act discourages labour immigration, which is only allowed where a foreigner has unique skills and qualifications. The law was successively amended in 2000 to improve its implementation and enforcement. In 1998, the Linking Act stated that only immigrants with residence permits could obtain social security and other social benefits.

Restrictive measures have also been implemented with respect to family formation and reunification. From the 1990s, family migration started to be seen as an obstacle for individual integration, and hence a menace to society (Van Walsum, 2002: 143). Since the modification of the Aliens Resolution (*Vreemdelingenbesluit*) in 2000, Dutch residents are required to have stable employment, be at least 21 years old, and earn at least 120 per cent of the minimum wage in order to bring a foreign partner into the Netherlands. Finally, the Netherlands has also introduced measures to speed up the process of asylum applications, resulting in a significant reduction in successful requests. The Foreigners Act (*Vreemdelingenwet*) of 2001 introduced temporary status for the first three years, a limitation on the right to appeal, and an obligation on the part of the rejected asylum seeker to leave the Netherlands within 28 days to ‘return to their home country’. It has been underlined how this law could produce a further increase in illegal residency (Van Amersfoort, 2004).

At the end of the 1990s, the conviction that multiculturalism was failing became stronger. Amid general social discontent, the centre-right VVD party (*Vereniging voor Vrijheid en Democratie*), appealed to populist positions on migration and integration (Penninx, 2005a). Islam and the integration of Muslim migrants were identified as being especially problematic. The terrorist attack of September 11 2001 reinforced this social concern. The two key issues in the 2002 parliamentary election campaigns became public security and immigration, thanks particularly to a hugely effective campaign by Pym Fortuyn, the leader of the LPF party (*Lijst Pym Fortuyn*) and his right-wing populist followers. “Fortuyn profiled himself with harsh statements on criminality, direct democracy, immigration and integration. He pleaded for ‘zero migration’, argued that ‘the Netherlands was full’, and called for ‘a cold war against Islam’” (Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.*, 2007: 19). It was asserted that immigration, particularly from Arab countries, might conflict with established ‘cultural’ institutions, such as equality between the sexes and gay rights. Shortly before the elections, Fortuyn was assassinated by an ecological activist, but his LPF party gained 26 of the 150 parliamentary seats. The murder of Pym Fortuyn and the assassination of the film-maker Theo van Gogh in 2004 contributed to a worsening social climate and generated a violent debate in the Dutch media. The Dutch Monitoring Centre in the Netherlands reports that racist violent acts increased every year between 1996 and 2000. Political discourse also changed. The liberal VVD strongly enforced populist thinking on migration and integration (Penninx, 2005a: 43). Many proposals to limit the rights of foreigners to levels below those of Dutch people were discussed in the Dutch House of Representatives, although they were not implemented because of the significant inequality any legislation would have resulted in.

The centre-right governments that came to power after 2002, including the Liberals, the Christian Democrats and initially the LPF, took the lead in formulating the ‘New Style’ Integration Policy of 2004. This policy followed the paradigm of the 1990s as regards the lead concepts of ‘citizenship’ and ‘self-responsibility’, although stronger emphasis was given to the cultural adaptation of migrants to Dutch society (Penninx, 2005b). Furthermore, integration policy had become clearly linked to immigration policy; it facilitated the prior selection of migrants and restricted new waves of asylum seekers, family reunion and marriage migration.

“In 2004, less than 10,000 people applied for asylum in the Netherlands, a 30 per cent drop from 2003. This signified the lowest number of asylum applications since 1988. At the same time, some rather emotive discussions are still taking place on how to handle the planned expulsion of 26,000 rejected asylum seekers.” (Marinelli, 2005.)

In the field of family reunification, the law provided instruments aimed at the early integration of newcomers, including a compulsory test of language skills and knowledge about Dutch culture and society before entering the Netherlands, and civic integration courses once the migrant had entered the country⁵. The renewal of temporary permits was made dependent on the successful completion of these courses: “Nearly all of the recent new measures of that policy do have a strong symbolic, political message. I call them symbolic, because in most cases the government does not have adequate instruments to implement them. The tone of policy management is authoritarian and policies are more and more mandatory, laying the burden of integration unequally on the shoulders of immigrants.” (Penninx, 2005b: 11.)

The latest Law on Integration and Citizenship (*Wet Inburgering*), effective from 1 January 2007, led to substantial changes for the municipalities as they were made to be more responsible for supporting immigration guidance. Hence Dutch policies underwent remarkable change in a relatively short period: “While for a long time the Netherlands was celebrated for the success of its multiculturalist approach, there is nowadays an increasing emphasis on integration and adaptation to Dutch norms and values. In this regard, the Netherlands is one of the most striking examples of countries that have renounced the multiculturalist approach” (Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.*, 2007: 3). Despite this trend, the Netherlands continues to experience a significant amount of new immigration, especially since the 2004 EU enlargement. In 2009 the percentage of residents with foreign background in the Netherlands was 20.3% of the total population. People with a Western foreign background constitute 9%, among which Poles are the most numerous group. Residents with non-Western foreign backgrounds constitute 11.2% of the total population, among which the biggest minority groups are Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese (CBS, 2010). About half of Turks and Moroccans belong to the second generation, while for Surinamese this is over four in ten (CBS, 2010).

The Dutch Industrial Relations System

The Netherlands has been considered as an example of corporatism ‘par excellence’ (Lehmbruch, 1979: 165). According to Windmuller (1969), Dutch corporatism was characterised by three mainstays: strong reliance on organised consultation, a high degree of centralisation within interest organisations, and a primary role for the state in shaping social and economic policies. These mainstays shaped the ‘harmony model’ of political economy, suggesting a high degree of consensus, cooperation and coordination among responsible ‘social partners’ of organised capital, organised labour, and the democratic state (Hemerijck, 1995). According to Visser (1998a), the consensual attitude has been directly promoted by the ‘pillarisation’ that traditionally marked Dutch society – a sharp differentiation between Catholic, Protestant and Socialist pillars, all with their own associated political parties, trade unions and social welfare funds: “this system of pillarisation was paradoxically a source of social cohesion: first because it prevented any simple polarisation between capital and labour; but second, because the organised status of the different ‘pillars’ made a system of institutionalised compromise almost unavoidable” (Visser, 1998a: 283).

The harmony model experienced a period of relative conflict during the 1970s due to external and internal factors: on the one hand, two oil-shocks and intensified international competition; on the other, de-pillarisation and the resurgence of class conflict (Hemerijck, 1995). In 1982 the Wassenaar Accord signed the beginning of a new consensual phase in Dutch industrial relations. A stringent system of wage determination became the ‘core domain’ of Dutch corporatism. The government, rather than being a leading actor in negotiations, cast a ‘shadow of hierarchy’ (Scharpf, 1993) over the bargaining table. Since the Wassenaar Agreement and until recently, the national government has pressed for wage restraint but has not interfered directly in wage bargaining (Slomp, 2004).

Despite the current challenges, this consensual system still endures. At the central level there are six key associations – three representing employees and three representing employers. Representing employees are the three main federations: the

Confederation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) with 1.2 million members representing 62% of all union members, the Christian-National Union Confederation (CNV) with some 350,000 members, and the Union of White Collar Workers and Senior Staff Association (VHP) which is about half the size of the CNV. Party-political affiliation does not exist, but the FNV is closest to the Social Democrats (PvdA) and the CNV to the Christian Democrats (CDA). The VHP orientation is close to liberal positions in Dutch politics. On the employers' side, the General Confederation of Dutch Businesses, VNO-NCW (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Ondernemingen-Nederlands Christelijke Werkgeversvereniging*) represents large and medium-sized firms in industry and services; the Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Businesses MKB-Nederland (*Midden- en Kleinbedrijf-Nederland*) small and medium-sized businesses; and the Farmers' and Horticulture Association LTO-Nederland (*Land- en Tuinbouworganisatie-Nederland*) agricultural interests. The three organisations cooperate in the Council of Central Employers' Associations ROC (*Raad van Centrale Ondernemersorganisaties*). The VNO-NCW was founded in 1995 as a federation of the general and Christian organisations of Dutch business. It is currently the strongest and most professional association and, together with FNV, is a key signatory of any central agreement or social pact. VNO-NCW comprises 150 sectoral affiliates and some 250 direct company memberships, and claims to represent 80,000 of the 330,000 firms in the Netherlands. Formal contacts between the social partners are frequent, but informal contacts play an even more important role. These contacts find an 'institutionalised' place in some bipartite and tripartite bodies. The president of the FNV of VNO-NCW co-chaired the Labour Foundation STAR (*Stichting van de Arbeid*). This joint business-trade union body is the place where employers and trade unions prepare each new round of collective bargaining, and where the negotiation of central agreements occurs. STAR is recognised by the government as an official partner in deliberating on budgets, wages and social policies. The other corporatist body, the SER (*Sociaal Economische Raad*) heads the three-tiered (national, sectoral, company) consultation system. It includes eleven employers' representatives, eleven trade union representatives and eleven members appointed by government (usually professors of economics, the President of the Central Bank, the Director of the Central Planning Bureau (CPB) and, in recent years, a number of former politicians). It is the main advisory council of the government on wage policy and the organisation of the welfare state even if, over the course of time, it has become more a means of delaying difficult decision (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997).

The government and the 'social partners' interact through these two institutions for tripartite as well as bipartite/labour *overleg*. *Overleg* is a central concept in Dutch labour relations, defining a "harmonious interchange that may range from consultation to bargaining with the sincere intent on both sides of compromising without conflict. In the Netherlands, no collective bargaining-related activities are undertaken of whatever kind, without previous *overleg* with those involved." (Slomp, 2004: 38). These consultations occur on the basis of leading economic predictions made by the Central Planning Bureau (CPB) twice a year. In the autumn *overleg*, which occurs in STAR, all the parties discuss the outlook and their initial responses to it. Sometimes the social partners make an agreement or a 'statement of intent' which tends to stress the need for wage moderation, to be compensated by working time reduction, extension in training facilities or other improvements in secondary labour conditions: "The main function of the central accords and recommendations is to

influence the 'bargaining climate' and creates an atmosphere of goodwill" (Visser, 1998a: 306). Hence policy concertation is an essential feature of the Polder model.

Annual or biennial rounds of collective bargaining at industry and enterprise level are held on the basis of bipartite and tripartite agreements and recommendations. The arrangements made by the employer and employee organisations in the Labour Foundation are not binding on the (local) negotiators of collective agreements, although they do influence the negotiations, the outcome of which, in fact, is always a compromise between the two negotiating partners, namely the employers and trade unions.

The 1927 law on collective agreements leaves employers free to decide whether and with whom they will bargain. If they conclude an agreement with a union, they must apply its conditions to all comparable employees, including those who belong to other unions. All agreements are legally binding. The 1937 law on Extension and Nullification of Collective Agreements allows the minister to extend a collective agreement, in whole or in part, to employers who are not members of the signatory associations if the agreement covers a substantial majority of the industry (55 per cent coverage rate). Where this is not the case, the Product and Industry Boards may lay down minimum conditions. Extensions do not affect companies that have already negotiated a company agreement. Since 1994, the minister has used the option of not extending agreements as a way of reaching policy objectives, in particular the creation of entry wage scales (near the minimum) for low-skilled workers with little training (Visser, 1998b). Under the 1970 Wages Act (amended in 1980) collective agreements must be registered at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This Act allows the minister, after consultation with the STAR, to order a temporary suspension of a new agreement. These legal principles give firms an incentive to join the relevant association and help explain the high level of collective organisation among employers and the high coverage rate of collective agreements. Unions are in a more ambiguous situation: on the one hand the legal system prevents competition between union and non-union firms; on the other hand, it removes incentives for workers to join (Visser, 1998a). Compromises are facilitated by the broad range of subjects covered by collective bargaining: social security benefits, employee participation, employability provisions, childcare facilities, training places for apprentices, jobs for ethnic minorities and the effects of production on the environment (Slomp, 2004). In some cases negotiations are breached and the unions may announce industrial action, but strikes are rare. "As a rule collective agreements contain a peace clause, and strikes are in breach of contract during their currency. While the right to strike is not otherwise regulated by law, the Courts have tended to accept their legality if used as a means of last resort when contracts have expired and efforts to negotiate a new one have demonstrably failed" (Visser, 1998b: 276). However, even in these cases strikes are not common, and this places the Netherlands at the bottom of the international strike league, next to Switzerland and Austria. Since only signatory unions are bound by a peace clause, employers are normally keen to involve all unions with significant memberships.

Agreements with only one union or without the FNV are rare. On the other hand, unions prefer to be included, because only the signatory unions gain the union representation rights established through collective bargaining, setting minimum terms and conditions of employment in non-organised workplaces within the area of

employment they cover. “This configuration has a built-in bias towards moderation of demands, since the most radical party on either side runs the largest risk of exclusion” (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997: 84). This risk is also fuelled by the fact that there is no exclusive jurisdiction in the Netherlands; hence unions belonging to different federations must cooperate with each other in collective bargaining. Single-table bargaining with employers is the rule. Any union can enter the contest and try to secure a place at the bargaining table, and strikes for this purpose are permitted. “In the absence of legal right of recognition for unions and given the threat of exclusion, coalition building is the only remedy.” (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997:183.) That implies a convergence on a common view that excludes radical attitudes within unions. Furthermore, union divisions work against the union whose views deviate most strongly from the employer’s initial position (Rojer, 1996 in Visser, 1998b).

This system has proved to be stable even in face of current changes. Deregulation and decentralisation of collective bargaining, for instance, are now widely discussed. Employers try to obtain more flexibility in the labour market, and there are some pressures to decentralise sectoral collective agreements. However, most employers still embrace centralised negotiation, and only a few larger companies have signed their own collective agreements with trade unions. In a study of decentralisation in Dutch industrial relations in the period 1980–2000, Tros (2001) confirmed the existence of a decentralisation process from national level to sectoral level. However, he observed that some specific aspects of labour management became more centrally regulated than before. “It appears that policies to promote decentralisation and deregulation may have led instead to further centralisation and regulation.” (Poutsma and Braam, 2004; p. 164.)

In 2004 the social dialogue came to a halt. The matters of contention between the government and trade unions were the conflict over early retirement and pension reform, the government’s decision to accelerate the ongoing reforms by introducing a new life-long savings scheme with the opportunity for workers to ‘opt out’ of existing and future collective schemes, and reforms of the disability, sickness and unemployment schemes (Van der Meer, Visser and Wilthagen, 2005). The trade unions staged several protests and demonstrations in opposition to government policies. After nearly a month of secret negotiations, the union federations accepted a wage freeze in exchange for a softening of social security retrenchments. This episode ended in November 2004 with a new Social Pact, which was ratified a month later by a membership referendum of the FNV. Since then there has been a moderate resurgence of social dialogue with some follow-up agreements on specific issues.

Trade unions

The Dutch union movement mainly developed along the guidelines laid down by Henri Polak, co-founder of the Dutch confederation of Trade Unions (NVV) in 1906. During his residence in England, Polak became enthusiastic about the organisational principles of ‘New Unionism’, which were used as a model for the socialist NVV (Van der Berg, 1995). These principles entailed a central organisation, strong internal discipline, full-time paid officials, high membership fees to finance strikes and insurance funds to be allocated only to members. This can be considered an outright revolution in a trade-union movement characterised by the absence of craft tradition.

Dutch trade unions, in fact, originated outside the firm. At the turn of the century the country was little industrialised, and because there were no large industries, large concentrations of labour did not exist. Before 1900, therefore, the union density rate was very low. Only skilled workers, who constituted one third of the workforce at that time, were union members. This socio-economic situation did not favour the formation of class-consciousness among wage-earners. “Due to a scarcity of work they lived in such straitened circumstances (bad housing, bad health, little or no education) that they completely resigned themselves to their fate.” (Van der Berg, 1995: 29.) The attitude of workers was mostly characterised by submissiveness and a willingness to co-operate with employers.

After the foundation of the NVV, Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders stimulated the formation of labour organisations with a religious identity to discourage Christian workers from joining socialist unions. This can be considered the beginning of ‘pillarisation’ (Van der Veen, 1996). Religious ideology traversed Dutch society, creating a peculiar social-political situation. For instance, the workers’ union CNV and the employers’ association NCW were both Christian-based, and this led to the formation of vertical coalitions, with the two organisations considering each other as natural allies. The same dividing lines were apparent in the political system, with the two organisations voting for the Christian Democratic Party. That explains why in the Netherlands the divide between employers and employees was not the only and fundamental divide: “The history of Dutch labour relations has not always simply been an issue of employers versus employees.” (Van der Veen, 1996: 305.) The division of the labour movement promoted a further centralisation of the unions outside the workplace (Visser, 1993).

The religious and ideological divide between the two major union federations has narrowed in recent years and cooperation has increased. Leaders and members of both confederations share similar goals: “Job growth through wage moderation and working hours’ reduction, the prevention of large earning differentials across firms and sectors, and the defence of an accessible and adequate social security system are the main objectives shared by FNV and CNV.” (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997: 84.)

In the Dutch trade-union movement, the growth and decline of membership have succeeded each other for a variety of reasons,⁶ some of which reside in social changes. “Research 30 years ago, when Dutch society was marked by a rigid ‘pillarisation’, found that there was often pressure from colleagues, friends and family to join the union attached to one’s ‘pillar’. Today, this is weaker and so are the social pressures towards membership, while many recruits consider trade unions in instrumental terms, expecting individual services.” (Visser, 1998a: 294.) Other reasons are the economic conditions and changes in the labour market. In the 1980s unions had lost one-fifth of their members, partly as a consequence of severe job losses in heavy manufacturing industries. Among the remaining members, almost one-quarter was outside the labour force or unemployed (Visser, 2002). Today the membership rate stands at about 20%, which is very modest by international standards.

“Sometimes employers publicly voice concern that unions may become too weak to continue their much praised role of stable, reliable and reasonable bargaining partners, but there are no examples of relations being broken off.” (Visser, 1998a: 298.) Union

legitimacy has usually come under attack when unions claim a new and stronger role in the labour market, but employers have never tried to destabilise the unions or to create a union-free environment (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997). Dutch unions, in fact, are reasonably well-financed and staffed, and they enjoy wide recognition from the other social partners; and their embeddedness in the corporatist institutions gives them stability and power within the system. This weakens the drive for mobilisation and antagonistic relationships: “With the exception of a handful of (mostly US owned) firms, union recognition is hardly ever an issue and in most cases not dependent on actual membership, a show of strike power, certification or elections. In conclusion, the Dutch case exemplifies a highly institutionalised union movement, with considerable political support and influence, stronger in national arenas than in the workplaces.” (Visser, 2002.)

As already mentioned, the FNV is the largest trade union confederation in the Netherlands. It was formed through the merger in 1976 of the Netherlands Federation of Trade Unions (NVV) and the Catholic Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (NKV), the formal process being completed in 1982. The FNV is an umbrella organisation representing affiliated unions, rather than workers directly. Becoming a trade union member, in fact, is only possible through a trade union. There are 18 unions affiliated to the FNV, with a million members in total. Affiliated unions are generally recognised and directly or indirectly (through their confederations) represented in all advisory, consultation and policy-implementation bodies of Dutch corporatism. Besides formulating policies and bargaining guidelines for sectoral unions within the corporatist bodies, the FNV acts on matters that go beyond the boundaries of individual sectors, such as consultation with government and employers, publicity (such as joint press releases) and promotional activities (such as image campaigns). The Confederation also coordinates action with a common interest, such as campaigns against government measures that affect its members. There is a shared strike fund that complements the union strike funds. Although not linked to any political party or movement, the FNV tries to influence political decisions during the decision-making process.

The supreme body of the FNV is the *Federatiecongres* (Congress). This consists of delegations from the affiliated trade unions; the number of votes for the delegations is related to the trade union’s membership figures. Every four years, the Congress elects the members of the Executive Board (*Federatiebestuur*) and outlines the FNV’s policy. The *Federatiebestuur* (Executive Board) is entrusted with the day-to-day management of the FNV’s affairs. It prepares the decision-making process for the Confederation Council and Congress, and is responsible for implementing the decisions taken. Moreover, the *Federatieraad* (Confederation Council) is sometimes called the ‘parliament’ of the FNV and constitutes the most important link between the FNV and the affiliated unions. It is, in fact, composed of the chairs of the affiliated trade unions and the members of the Executive Board. The Council takes decisions on all policy areas covered by the FNV, while also deciding on the annual budget and related plan of action. The FNV has several advisory bodies, called *Secretariaat*, that give the Executive Board advice, prepare policy memos and develop all activities aimed at their specific target group.

As already mentioned, the FNV has the task of coordinating the action of affiliated unions, which however, are autonomous in developing policies on the basis of

sectoral specificities. FNV-Bondgenoten is the richest and biggest union in the Netherlands (with nearly half a million members) and has the strongest capacity to take strike action. It was formed in 1998 by a merger among the *Industriebond* (industrial sector), *Dienstenbond* (shop assistants, clerical workers), *Vervoersbond* (transport workers) and the *Voedingsbond* (agricultural and food workers). The union has 15 industrial groups, which are divided into sectors. Members of the same group will usually be covered by the same collective labour agreement. The FNV-Bondgenoten industrial groups comprise the following sectors: transport, metalworking, information technology and electrical engineering, the chemical and paper industries, textiles, clothing, leather and plastics, financial and commercial services, retail and wholesale trade, food and agriculture, and finally, benefit recipients and older people. It has suffered a serious setback in membership and finances both before and after its foundation. In 2002–2003 it went through a profound crisis of leadership, identity and membership, compounded by a serious threat to its financial survival.

The union has more than 15,000 unpaid active trade-union members (*kaderleden*)⁷ and negotiates over 700 collective agreements on terms and conditions of employment (CAO) and a large number of redundancy programmes at company and sectoral level. The union council (*bondsraad*) is predominantly composed of members elected locally from the union's activists. This body meets several times a year, and it is a channel of upward communication, acting as a control mechanism in regard to national officials. Policy is defined by the management board (*hoofdbestuur*) and the executive committee (*dagelijks bestuur*) assisted by a technical staff of academics and other experts. *Adivisie commissies* can be established by union bodies to provide *ad hoc* advice about specific issues, target groups or professional groups. Each *advies commissie* is under the responsibility of the body that has created it. The management boards (composed largely or entirely of union executive officers) have considerable powers and carry considerable weight in consultations with the union council. Below this central national level, the union is divided into districts (and below these into local branches), each headed by a district union executive officer. This officer represents the link between the central level and the district and local branch levels, and is responsible for representing the union within the area concerned and assisting the local branches.

There is little union activity at workplace level. Employees' representation at that level is mainly carried out by works councils, which are company and not union bodies. Union representative structures in workplaces, in fact, have never succeeded. When in the late 1960s unions began to organise a network of plant representatives, these overlapped to some extent with the works councils presence, and caused some tension.⁸ "They were highly dependent upon the support of full-time district union officials, and in all but a few cases they were 'in search of a role' which was not already occupied by union officials and work councils." (Visser, 1993: 77.) After the discovery that there was no space to develop union bodies, union plant committees were pushed into a secondary role, and there was a shift in union strategy to the councils.

There is a strong legal division of collective bargaining, which is under the exclusive jurisdiction of trade unions, and employee participation within the enterprise through elected works councils. Formally, works councils do not have the right to discuss

matters covered by industry or company agreements or to call for strikes, since that would intrude on trade-union rights. Informally, however, many works councils are involved in the negotiation of company agreements (Slomp, 2004). The advent of works councils as employer-led bodies characterised by a paternalistic and instrumental vision of management made it difficult to entertain constructive relationships with trade unions. The trade unions, in fact, considered works councils to be employer-dominated bodies, and therefore obstacles against the development of the trade-union movement (Van der Berg, 1995). On the other hand, most works councils tended to protect their autonomy from the unions. Reciprocal relationships thus became controversial over the course of time, exhibiting a variety of 'boxing and dancing' strategies (van Klaveren and Sprenger, 2005). However, especially in large firms, works councils also constitute an indirect channel of union influence in the workplace, because the majority of works councillors are at the same time trade unionists.

3. Research Methods

This report draws on data from a three-year Leverhulme Trust funded project on the development of trade union responses in relation to migrant populations. As well as looking at national level responses in the UK, the Netherlands and Spain, the research also aims to understand to what extent trade union responses are coordinated at the European level. The methodology is qualitative, with a focus on semi-structured interviews and participant and non-participant observation. The research is based on over 120 interviews with trade union officials and activists from various levels within the union movement and a number of interviews with voluntary sector organisations, particularly those working in the area of migrant rights and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) issues. The research for this report draws on over 50 interviews with trade union officials and activists from various levels and sectors within the Dutch trade union movement as well as participant observation of union meetings and conferences. The research was carried out between 2008 and 2011.

*4. The Historical Context of Trade Unions and Immigration*⁹

As mentioned in the previous section, after the Second World War a significant wave of immigration to the Netherlands consisted of labour immigrants from the Mediterranean regions. Such immigration was encouraged by labour shortages experienced during the period of post-war reconstruction, and it was established through a recruiting treaty between the Dutch government and the sending countries. Recruitment agreements were established with Italy (1960), Spain, Portugal and Turkey (1964), Greece (1966), Morocco (1969) and Yugoslavia and Tunisia (1970) (Roosblad, 2000b; p. 169). These 'guest workers' were largely employed in unskilled or low-skilled jobs and their presence was considered temporary. The attitude of Dutch trade unions towards the government's recruitment policy was positive until the first half of the 1960s. Trade unions, in fact, agreed with the government and employers' positions on the need to recruit temporary workers in order to satisfy the surplus demand and to increase economic production. However, they also feared that an increase of labour immigration could result in 'unfair competition' and in a general decrease of wages. For this reason, Dutch trade unions argued that an 'equal treatment' policy was necessary. While improving the living conditions of foreign workers, this policy also had the effect of limiting their recruitment, since it made such recruitment more expensive for employers (Roosblad, 2000).

The positive attitude of Dutch unions towards government recruitment policy changed in the second half of the 1960s due to the rise of labour immigration and to the economic recession of 1966–67. Although a number of foreign workers returned to their countries of origin, the crisis had little effect on unemployment. This showed that foreign workers had occupied segments of the labour market characterised by unskilled and heavy manual jobs that Dutch workers were not willing to fill anymore. This fact became even more evident during the oil crisis of 1973. Although the Dutch government began a number of programs to facilitate the repatriation of foreigners, a significant number remained in the Netherlands. The increase in unemployment and the mass redundancies following the economic crisis increased the tensions between national and foreign workers. The Dutch trade unions jointly demanded restrictive entry policies, measures to encourage the repatriation of foreign workers and the establishment of equal rights and obligations between Dutch and foreign workers. The focus of Dutch trade unions on the protection of national employment and national workers was clear. Trade unions "protected virtually none of the interests of foreign workers, and no attempt at immigration policies were made at that time" (Roosblad, 2000: 96). The defence of foreign workers was mainly carried out by religious and welfare organisations.

In the first half of the 1970s, the Dutch unions supported the restrictive immigration policies started by the government and actively lobbied within the SER to limit the number of foreign employees. Government initiatives such as the 'return bonuses' or support to set up small businesses in their countries of origin were strongly supported by the unions. However, such initiatives had little success. Foreign workers were largely settled in Dutch society and had no intention of leaving. The growing awareness that immigration was not a temporary phenomenon influenced a change in government policies: "It was argued that 'The Dutch tradition of hospitality should

no longer be manifested in admitting larger quantities of foreigners', but rather 'by setting up immigrant policies of good quality for those who are in the country already'." (Roosblad, 2000: 99.) More restrictive entry policies were flanked with a first attempt to formulate integration policies for ethnic minorities.

This change in the government's attitude also influenced a revision of the trade unions position. Trade unions also declared an intention to focus on ethnic minorities including colonial immigrants, rather than on foreign workers alone. Attempts were made to convince foreign workers that trade unions were willing to defend their rights, and that joining a union was in their own interest. During the 1980s Dutch unions started to formulate minority policies. In 1982, the FNV presented a memorandum 'Together rather than Separate' as a framework to stimulate discussion and formulate detailed minority policies. This memorandum focused on issues such as housing, education and social integration, while little attention was given to union action aimed at improving the labour market position of ethnic minority workers. The memorandum raised criticisms from Dutch members who believed that migrant workers enjoyed more favourable conditions and who strongly opposed the implementation of affirmative policies.

From the second half of the 1980s onwards, the trade union federations acquired a visible role in defending the social rights of ethnic minority workers within the tripartite debate. They promoted several initiatives against racism and discrimination both internally and in the social sphere. They also decided to expel members who openly supported racist organisations and extreme right wing parties, and in 1993 formulated a 'non-discrimination code'. During the 1990s, both the FNV and the CNV established special bodies on ethnic minority workers with the task of producing advice for the trade union executive. Despite these initiatives, the labour market positions of ethnic minorities did not improve during the 1990s. In addition, the level of unionisation and presence of members with an ethnic minority background within the unions remained quite scarce.

5. Trade Unions and Immigration

a) National Union and State Relations

One of the instruments used by the FNV to promote labour interests, including those of migrant and ethnic minority workers, is its involvement with other partners and actors in the corporatist bodies – the tripartite SER and the bipartite STAR. Through these bodies, the FNV participates in the policy-making process. The formal and informal agreements reached within these bodies represent the official common position of the social partners on important matters related to the economic and labour spheres. These agreements also constitute official FNV guidelines which, even if not legally binding on affiliated unions, frame further policy developments.

Formal and informal agreements and policy guidelines are regularly issued with the intention of achieving better equality in the labour market between indigenous and *allochtonen* workers. The specific goals are the promotion of labour-market participation of young ethnic minority workers, the reduction of youth unemployment (which is estimated to be three times higher among ethnic minorities than among national workers) and the general improvement of the labour-market position of

ethnic minority youths. These goals are considered not only as ways of promoting integration and social cohesion, but also as a way of investing in the human capital represented by all young people, and anticipate future labour shortages. Specific measures in this field consist of education and training opportunities for young people with low levels of education through the development of a dual track (school and work), or addressing low literacy levels in society and in trade and industry (STAR agreement 2007–2015).

Measures specifically addressing discrimination and racism are rarely promoted directly in the tripartite debate, although many measures are implicitly informed by concern for such issues. For instance, the FNV largely supported the enforcement of anonymous job applications to avoid ethnic minority applicants being discriminated against when seeking work. Furthermore, the FNV promoted the drawing up of an anti-discrimination checklist, guidelines to help employers in the recruitment of foreign employees, and the organisation of meetings between employers and employees. Such initiatives are often supported by external organisations (such as LBR – Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie – National Bureau against Racial Discrimination – and the multicultural institute FORUM) with respect to both planning and implementation.¹⁰

Bipartite agreements in this field are meant to be implemented through sectoral bargaining, which is a specific task of affiliated trade unions. Guidelines for sectoral bargaining are directly informed by tripartite and bipartite discussions. Nationwide sectoral agreements and company agreements, therefore, include special clauses on labour-market entry, career mobility, education and vocational training of ethnic minority workers, and on closing the pay-gap. Specific clauses also concern language courses during working hours and provisions on annual leave for people with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Special measures against discrimination on the factory floor are also negotiated in formal or informal agreements with employers. There is a general consensus on policies and measures related to the labour market inclusion of ethnic minorities among the social partners.

However, the debate on labour migration has been characterised by a lower level of consensus. In contrast to the VNO-NCW, the FNV is not in favour of promoting labour migration as an instrument to solve structural problems in Dutch society, such as an ageing population. The FNV declared itself in favour of the free movement of workers from the new Member States, but it actively focused on the need to both combat undocumented employment and increase inspection activities so as to ensure decent terms of employment and working conditions. According to the FNV, in fact, while the mobility of workers contributes to a better economic performance, workers in the Netherlands should all be subject to the same working conditions.

In March 2006, the Dutch government decided to formally open its borders to Eastern-European workers, applying a transitional arrangement for the introduction of a less stringent work permit until January 2007. Employers believed that this arrangement was unnecessary, while the unions were in favour of introducing a trial period. The unions maintained that the transitional agreement could only be abolished when the government had established efficient control mechanisms to combat undocumented work, low pay and false self-employment. Improving working conditions and enforcing minimum wage levels should make the hiring of

undocumented workers less attractive for employers¹¹. The FNV is also concerned that increased immigration might undermine plans to combat unemployment among young people. The FNV often argues that too little has been done to counteract underpayment and undocumented labour. According to the union, in fact, even in an organised sector like metalworking, foreign workers were being paid less than the minimum wage. The FNV directly focused on organising atypical and undocumented workers and supported the unionisation of 'illegal' migrant workers, claiming that "every worker is a worker, regardless of legal status".¹² An example of this policy is provided by 'undocumented' sex-workers in Holland, who have been able to join the sex-workers' union (*De Rode Draad*) affiliated to the FNV since the 1990s.

b) National Strategies

Beside its involvement with social partners in the planning of tripartite and bipartite policies, the FNV also promotes autonomous initiatives at national level. These are often organised in the form of campaigns which mobilise the federation and the affiliated unions for the achievement of specific goals. These campaigns usually have a double aim. On the one hand they are meant to lobby government and employers' associations when a consensual decision has not been reached at central level. On the other hand, they often provide information to trade union members to improve their awareness on specific matters. Also when campaigns address sensitive issues for migrant and ethnic minority workers, they are usually addressed by all trade unions members.

One example is the 'Equal Work, Equal Pay Campaign'. This campaign, organised in a strict collaboration between the Dutch unions (and especially the FNV-Bondgenoten) and other European trade unions, was launched with the aim of obtaining the same wage and labour conditions for nationals and migrant workers. This campaign addressed national governments and employers' associations, the aim being to gain improvements in the law. On the other hand, it focused on collective labour agreements at both sectoral and workplace levels in order to introduce special clauses on this matter. The 'Equal Work, Equal Pay Campaign' became particularly relevant following the increase in immigration from Eastern European countries, in fighting against the exploitation of new migrant workers and limiting the problems of social dumping.

Another important campaign focused on the General Retirement Act-gap (AOW-gap). In the Netherlands the state pension (AOW) is accumulated between the ages of 15 and 65. People who have not spent all of their working lives in the Netherlands have their state pension reduced by 2% for each missing year. According to union data, 380,000 people out of 2.5 million on the AOW have a pension gap. This issue involves both migrant and indigenous workers who have lived abroad. The FNV and affiliated unions were very active in this field and carried out an information campaign aimed at raising awareness of these issues in relation to ethnic minority workers. Meetings were organised through the mosques or during ethnic minority workers' festivals and brochures in foreign languages were distributed in communities.

The FNV efforts were also directed at supporting anti-discrimination activities in workplaces. This issue became especially relevant after the murder of the film-maker

Theo Van Gogh in 2004, which was followed by a period of increasing social hostility towards foreign workers. The FNV was concerned about a worsening relationship among different groups of workers in workplaces, and to tackle this actively promoted the *Gesprekken op de werkvloer* (dialogue on the work floor) project. This project consisted of a series of dialogues between indigenous and *allochtonen* workers conducted in workplaces with the aim of improving reciprocal understanding and building common solidarity. FNV officials directly joined affiliated unions in workplaces when the meetings were held.

In the 2009 Congress, the FNV also presented a resolution on ‘Decent Work for All’ aimed at improving the labour conditions of workers employed through flexible contracts and guaranteeing them a decent level of social security. This campaign is being developed over the period 2009–2013 by strengthening contacts with international unions, lobbying for improvements in the law and by negotiating specific clauses in sectoral collective agreements.

The FNV also promotes social debate through conferences and meetings together with external associations. Examples are the discussions organised together with Catholic organisations on globalisation and social justice, globalisation and labour migration, values and social coherence, and solidarity between young and elderly people. The FNV collaborates with anti-discrimination associations like the previously mentioned LBR and FORUM, which also advise trade-union bodies on specific activities for migrant and ethnic minority workers.

c) Engaging with Diversity

The diversity approach was officially embraced by the FNV at its 2001 Congress. The FNV underlined the need to recognise cultural differences among both groups of employees and the individuals belonging to those groups. Within this view, real equality can be achieved if differences are taken as the basis for the development of labour relations. Within the trade union debate the expression *doelgroepen* (target groups) remained. However, in the unions’ view, the expression *diversiteitsbeleid* (diversity policy) offered more scope to fight against different types of discrimination, while also avoiding stigmatising groups. ‘Diversity’ thus broadened attention to all the factors responsible for discrimination, such as sex, health, educational level and age. As a consequence, opportunities had to be offered not on the basis of group characteristics, but on the basis of individuals’ qualities.

Diversity has been, and still is, the most important policy framework for initiatives related to migrants and ethnic minorities (as well as towards women and young workers). This framework was reconfirmed as central in the 2005 and 2009 Congresses. In the early years, diversity policies and projects were mainly run by ad hoc-commissions both within the federations and the affiliated unions. However, recently the FNV has opted to abolish these bodies and to mainstream diversity within the union. The basic idea is that diversity has to be a common concern of all the union departments to avoid the problem of separatism and isolation of migrant and ethnic minority issues from the rest of the union. Within the FNV, as well as within affiliated unions, policy advisors on diversity currently monitor the implementation and outcomes of diversity policies across the different union departments.

Many initiatives have promoted diversity both externally and internally. Specific policies have been adopted to encourage employers to support and respect the interests and rights of an increasingly diversified workforce. For instance, several measures addressed basic individual rights, such as the freedom of speech and the opportunity to express personal belief. In order to stimulate equal treatment and equal opportunities, the social partners also agreed on the *NVP-sollicitatiecode* (recruitment code of the *Nederlandse Vereniging van Personeelsmanagement & Organisatieontwikkeling*).¹³ Other initiatives related to problems related to workplace health and safety, such as stress and bullying. Furthermore, trade union action has addressed the problem of low participation and involvement among workers with foreign backgrounds in workplaces, with the aim of achieving multicultural representation. FNV-Bondgenoten and FNV-AbvaKabo, for instance, have produced a brochure entitled 'Together at work, together in the works councils', aimed at explaining to trade unionists in the workplace how to increase migrant employees' involvement in works councils. Furthermore, the FNV has provided trade union officials with practical suggestions on promoting diversity during representative elections.

Several measures have also been aimed at increasing diversity within the trade unions themselves. The aim was to incorporate target-group members within the boards of both the Confederation and affiliated unions through work experience placements and traineeships. A specific project, the '*Op weg naar de top*' (On the way to the top) was created with this goal in mind. At central level, two projects aim to get more ethnic minority women in top-union positions. The first project, 'A place with FNV', resulted in twenty ethnic minority women being incorporated in middle management positions. Since February 2009, the FNV has been training another 25 ethnic minority 'top women' for executive positions on the boards of affiliated unions within a project called 'Campaigning for Influence'. The training programme for ethnic minority women is a collaborative initiative between the unions, associations (the FORUM multicultural institute) and the government training institute (ROI).

The FNV has also organised 50 information meetings in collaboration with immigrants' organisations, successfully lobbied to lift unnecessary restrictions on elderly immigrants who receive social assistance, and substantially increased the diversity of FNV-appointed representatives on the boards of Chambers of Commerce.

d) Broader Communication Strategies

The development of strategies to communicate with members and workers, as well as with society as a whole, is a point of major concern for the FNV. The tools used by the FNV to communicate range from the development of websites and blogs to the publication of brochures that provide information or report the union initiatives and outcomes. Furthermore, the FNV participates actively in community events like, for instance, the Kwakoe Summer Festival, the largest multicultural festival in the Netherlands.

In recent years FNV communication strategies have developed further, become more professional and have embraced a stronger symbolism. Equality and diversity, for instance, are often promoted by using a biographical approach. The emphasis on migrant workers' and members' life or the achievement of single individuals

constitutes a powerful way to link diversity issues to everyday life. Such an approach is also visible in the 'Power to' media campaign. This initiative is essentially a marketing/advertising campaign to enhance public awareness of particular groups of workers. The campaign was initiated in 2008 by the FNV and two affiliated unions, FNV Bondgenoten and the civil servants' union, Abvakabo FNV. It was initially called 'Power to the working people' campaign, and the basic aim was, at that time, to communicate the significance of trade unions for working people more clearly and in a more modern way. Among the key concepts are giving people the power to create their own opportunities, while the trade union negotiates clear-cut labour terms and conditions. The FNV aimed to recruit new members among the working population in general. This campaign proved successful and was extended to include 'Power to' campaigns for more targeted groups of workers such as 'flexible workers', 'youth' and 'cleaners'. This campaign was very relevant to migrant workers since they are over-represented in many of these vulnerable groups. It has been able to raise awareness of the potential benefits of FNV membership for these groups.

These campaigns are also directed at different sections of the workforce— youth, women and migrant workers for example – so that the union is seen to be intervening and remoulding its image. There have been a series of campaigns running alongside these which have involved the use of performance artists in the main trade union congresses – each representing a different type of worker and worker narrative. These aim to sensitise the union to a range of multiple identities within the workplace and Dutch society. They have been part of a cultural strategy to bring a greater realisation of the different needs and demands of the workforce into the centre of the trade union. They are relevant to the study of the union and its relation to migration as these types of approaches are beginning to communicate the internal process of reflection and broader renewal that unions are capable of – they can be part of the modernising process. More specifically, there have also been a series of texts and touring exhibitions in relation to migration, which tried to bring to the fore narratives and biographies from within the range of migrant communities. These were linked around individual stories and histories of migrant workers in the country. Most studies of unions and migration tend to be less concerned with the cultural dimension – perhaps because of the nature of the academic industrial and labour relations tradition and its focus on rules, regulation and structures. The development of such campaigns in the Dutch context does raise some issues, given the legacy and external perception of (advanced) welfare rights and multiculturalism, but given the political changes in terms of the rise of a more xenophobic right wing, they are understandable.

Such projects and initiatives have a strong top-down character. Most of these policies were developed at confederation level by special advisory bodies and departments and then disseminated to affiliated unions to be further elaborated and implemented. Other initiatives were developed directly by affiliated unions but, again, within specific central departments. Although addressed at migrant and ethnic minority workers, their direct participation was a challenge in the development and implementation processes. While being able to improve the condition of migrant and ethnic minority workers at the workplace and to increase diversity, especially within the union, these actions alone cannot increase the level of participation and unionisation of groups of workers at the edge of the regulatory process and working in sectors not protected by collective agreements. This weakness became a central issue in the union debate during the early 2000s as a result of contextual and internal union changes. However,

these communication campaigns can assist the trade union in the manner in which it presents itself and engages with broader constituencies. It can enhance its role as a legitimate voice for the narratives and experiences of working people through these symbolic forms of representation. The challenge is then linking them into other activities and legitimising them.

e) Connecting with the Workforce through Organising

In April 2005, the FNV published the results of a study on trade-union innovations in a report entitled '*De vakbeweging van de toekomst: Lessen uit het buitenland*' (The Trade Union Movement of the Future: Lessons from Abroad). The intention was to provide new inputs into Dutch unions, which were trying to 'redefine themselves'. This research resulted in a booklet that was translated into English for the international debate on innovative trade-union strategies to counter union decline. The booklet asserted the importance of organising new groups of people, among whom were ethnic minorities and immigrant workers, the young, the unemployed, workers in the service industry and atypical employees.

In order to build union membership and develop member engagement, Dutch trade union activists were influenced by the organising approach adopted by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in the US. This influence extended to developing links with the SEIU and receiving training and coaching from SEIU activists based in trade union offices in the Netherlands. The FNV's search for ways to improve union membership came at the same time as the SEIU was looking to develop international links. In 2004 the SEIU launched a strategy to form sustained, international coalitions in the service sector, building on previous campaigns with British and Danish unions against firms such as Group 4 Securicor and FirstGroup. The SEIU strategy involved dedicated partnerships with selected unions, most notably the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G – now UNITE) in Britain and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU – now United Voice) in Australia. In order to build stronger ties with partner unions, the SEIU employs local union officials who act as bridge builders between the SEIU and local partner unions. It invests significant resources in regional offices and organisers in Australia, Britain, South Africa, India and Poland. In addition, membership and leadership exchanges are organised, in order to connect campaigns to the rank-and-file. Through the international services union UNI, the SEIU set up an international initiative to organise cleaners and security staff and has also invested several million dollars in organising campaigns that target international food service, cleaning and security employers, and has assigned staff to Australia, Poland, Britain, India, France, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, South America and South Africa. Following the example of the SEIU's 'Justice for Janitors' campaign, similar campaigns have been launched in these countries, for example, the 'Justice for Cleaners' campaign in Britain, the 'Clean Enough' (*Schoon Genoeg*) campaign in the Netherlands and the 'Clean Start' campaign in Australia.

In the Netherlands, leaders from the service sector union FNV-Bondgenoten, and the public sector union, FNV-AbvaKabo attended SEIU conventions. One official from FNV-Bondgenoten, responsible for the cleaning sector, undertook a training course on organising in America in 2006 and was charged with bringing back the organising approach to the cleaning sector in the Netherlands. Other activists have been to

London to follow the London Citizens campaign – which has brought together a range of organisations in relation to economic and social justice in the city – and built up links and networks with organisers working in the ‘Justice for Cleaners’ campaign in London. Visits and leader exchanges appear to have had an important influence on the support given to the organising approach and the intensity to which it has been implemented in some sectors. When asked what the catalyst for organising was in the Netherlands one Dutch organiser said that it was seeing the success of the SEIU campaigns. When union officials went to SEIU conventions they wanted the power they saw for their own union. It was also apparent that organising was engaged with because it appealed to a group of trade union activists who saw a moral and meaningful – and even dynamic – dimension to it in a context of institutionalised and sometimes predictable approaches to employment relations.

The organising approach was embraced especially by FNV-Bondgenoten, the most militant of the affiliated unions. In 2007 the union launched a campaign in the cleaning sector which culminated in prolonged strike action in 2010 for improved pay and working conditions. The cleaning campaign was framed around two issues, fighting for an increase of ten euros an hour and for respectful treatment of cleaning workers by employers. In the beginning the union concentrated high levels of resources in the cleaning sector and also encouraged self-organisation and the development of workplace leaders. The cleaners’ campaign was launched during a meeting at Schiphol Airport attended by five hundred cleaners. In the following months, organising committees were created in Maastricht, The Hague, Utrecht and at Schiphol Airport. Migrants’ organisations, churches, mosques, social movement groups and others pledged their support. The campaign itself was considered unique for the Netherlands. A combination of grass roots organising, direct action and broad coalitions applied pressure on employers and their contractors. The approach adopted in the cleaning sector in the Netherlands, the ‘organising’ model, has been directly influenced by the SEIU and the tactics used in the successful ‘Justice for Janitors’ campaigns. In our research we interviewed an SEIU activist based in the Netherlands, who had come to Amsterdam in 2007 to help train activists around organising. The union activists used tactics and strategies of organising common to campaigns used in other countries – not only ‘Justice for Janitors’ in the US but ‘Justice for Cleaners’ in the UK – which included mapping workplaces and targeting and ‘shaming’ client companies of cleaning contractors. In Amsterdam, the campaign involved direct action against client companies, including banks and airports. The cleaners and activists accompanied by a samba band and ‘rebel clowns’ stormed bank headquarters. They also went on ‘millionaires tours’, visiting the richest bosses of cleaning companies. The campaign produced results after just one year when in 2008 cleaners won higher wages as a result of the ‘10 Euro’ campaign. In early 2008, cleaners reached an agreement on higher wages, vocational training, language courses and a more transparent collective agreement. These outcomes were clearly celebrated and referenced so as to instil them within the forward momentum of trade union activity in this area and the changing experiences of the workforce.

In early 2009 FNV-Bondgenoten began a new campaign to organise cleaners in Schiphol airport. The union recruited over half of cleaning workers in the airport and the activists were able build on the success of the 2007/2008 campaign to mobilise workers to try and achieve better working conditions. The union was again successful, and after four days of strike action, the cleaners won travel expenses, job security and

a 50 Euro bonus. They also managed to negotiate a one-off bonus for all Dutch cleaners of 0.5 per cent of their yearly income. The campaign continued until 2010 and culminated in prolonged strike action concentrated in key areas of the economy, mainly the airports and the railways. The cleaners won further concessions from employers and were able to negotiate sectoral level agreements in the cleaning sector. The campaign resulted in improved working conditions for the cleaning sector and led to the development of a core of union organisers in the mainly service sector-based trade union FNV-Bondgenoten¹⁴.

A key feature this campaign was the high level of commitment of union organisers and high level of resources concentrated on building up self-organisation among the cleaners. Our research shows that the organising approach was the outcome of active individuals in the union who established a community of interest and networks around organising. Among some Dutch trade union organisers there is an almost cult-like status attached to organising – which was reflected in our research by one organiser having ‘organise’ tattooed on his forearm. Many of the activists appeared to have been inspired by their training from the SEIU activists. In the run up to this strike action we observed meetings of cleaner activists where union officials and organisers applied techniques used in organising campaigns – for example, the ‘escalator’ approach towards direct action. The success of the campaign was built on an ability to empathise and engage with the workforce in new and novel ways. In meetings during and after the campaign a very positive and supportive approach to new activists was apparent as a close set of mentoring and strategic relations were established between the organisers and the new representatives.

In 2009, FNV-affiliated unions recorded increases in membership – with FNV Bondgenoten growing by 2,500 members in a three-month period. The assertive campaign in Schiphol airport led to over half of cleaning workers becoming members of FNV Bondgenoten.

f) Migrant Voice and Direct Engagement

Most of the union projects and initiatives have a strong top-down character. Policies are often developed at confederation level and then disseminated to affiliated unions to be further elaborated and implemented. Other initiatives are developed directly by affiliated unions but, again, through the work of central departments. Hence, although aimed at migrant and ethnic minority workers, such policies did not envision their direct participation either in the development or implementation processes. While being able to improve the condition of migrant and ethnic minority workers at the workplace and able to increase diversity, especially within the union, such actions alone have not been able to increase the level of participation of groups of workers at the edge of the regulatory process and working in sectors not protected by collective agreements. Although the organising strategy has been able to empower vulnerable (migrant) workers and increase their unionisation, it has not promoted the formation of an internal space for migrant and ethnic minority workers within the union.

As already mentioned, specific bodies for ethnic minority workers were present within the FNV and are still active within some affiliated unions. FNV-Abvakabo, for instance, has specific platforms for ethnic minority members called *Sectorbestuur Migranten* (Migrants’ Sectoral Board). FNV Bondgenoten has also established a

group called *Nieuwe Nederlanders* (the New Dutch) consisting of officials, negotiators and policy advisors. However, these structures also have a central nature and are not comparable with the experiences of black and minority workers' sections in other national trade unions. Data suggests that a process of self-organising of these groups of workers has not developed in the Dutch case. The centralised nature of the Dutch unions and the relatively low presence in workplaces might help to explain the lack of structural and continuous links with (foreign) members.

6. Contributions and Challenges: Evaluation

Policies and strategies developed within a framework of strong and fruitful relationships have allowed Dutch trade unions to provide benefits to ethnic minority workers in terms of employability, training and labour-market participation. Although a gap between indigenous and ethnic minority workers still persists, Dutch trade unions have shown a strong commitment to promoting the inclusion of migrant and ethnic minority workers in the labour market over the last twenty years. Anti-discrimination policies have been carried out within a well-defined diversity framework both in the labour market and workplaces. However, the Dutch unions have been less able to build up relationships with migrant and ethnic minority workers and include them within the organisation both as members and activists. Although precise data on the unionisation of migrant workers is not available, unionisation rates have been estimated to be very low. The presence of migrant and ethnic minority workers in workplace representative structures has also been reported to be scarce. Such outcomes seem to be influenced by the centralised structure of the Dutch unions and by their relatively low presence within workplaces and at the decentralised level in general. Such features have made it difficult to establish contacts and build up a systematic dialogue with migrant and ethnic minority members. The low level of participation of migrant and ethnic minority workers in union activities, as well as the lack of attempts at self-organising within the union, are also partially explained by a certain 'distance' between the union organisation and the union rank and file.

The organising approach is considered an opportunity to strengthen the participation of migrant and ethnic minority workers in union activity, and also as a way of strengthening the defence of vulnerable groups of workers. Whilst the organising approach appears to have delivered results, there are several tensions in the approach adopted by the Dutch trade unions. Firstly, there are tensions between unions in different sectors as organising presents a departure from less confrontational strategies traditionally employed in the Dutch trade union movement. There is, therefore, an initial tension that emerges from the way in which social partnership and longer term relations are established between employers, managers and union 'officials'. The manner of the campaigning in the cleaning sector, for example, actually questions the proximity between union officials and management through partnership relations, and introduces a more conflictual element. This is especially the case where the social partnership is embedded. In fact, during the research the social gains of regulation and policy in the Netherlands were not always that clear to the various interests propagating the organising model. However, what was clear was the failure to extend many gains into new areas of work and new groups of workers such as migrants.

Secondly, organising campaigns have been concentrated around low-wage work, but it has been difficult for unions to transfer the organising model into more traditional

areas of the economy, such as nursing or ports and chemicals, for example. The cleaning campaign has inspired follow-up campaigns in other sectors of the Dutch economy, such as in domestic work, agriculture and the retail industry. Furthermore, it has inspired other trade unions, among them the FNV-AbvaKabo, to take up an organising approach in the workplace. However, there has been scepticism from union officials in traditional sectors about organising. In the public sector union FNV-AbvaKabo, the union executive agreed to a pilot project in order to test out the organising approach. The project was to organise nurses at a university hospital. The campaign focused around a specific issue, which was that the hospital needed new equipment. The campaign succeeded, but the activists found that the nurses were quite loyal to their employer and patients, and it was felt that organisers were not seen as being relevant in the public sector, but were more suited for the market or private sector (interview with union organiser, FNV-AbvaKabo, June 2010). The regulatory process in the public services still retained a form of institutionalism.

Thirdly, there is the broader question of the sustainability of this approach, as the cleaning campaign was framed around achieving a particular result, and the literature on organising shows that there is a tendency for 'single issue' organising campaigns to dissipate once the desired result is achieved. Organising and its systematic support and follow-through brings a need for sustained organisational strategies and some type of bureaucratic underpinning (albeit progressive) and this case shows some of the challenges of this once the initial campaign has been successful. Linked to this is the extent to which members are really in control of the campaign – and even if organising campaigns have led to securing better conditions of employment, there is a question as to the extent to which there has actually been more democratic unionism with more grassroots participation within the structures of the union, rather than just the organisational spaces of specific campaigns.

Despite these dilemmas, the organising approach is acquiring a greater measure of consent within the official union debate, and several projects aimed at promoting union presence and activism at local level are also emerging in affiliated unions not directly involved in organising campaigns. Such projects, inspired by organising principles, have the goal of promoting structural changes, moving beyond the problem of 'single issue' campaigns. The extent to which organising principles will be able to promote organisational changes in terms of structure, culture and activity, as well as the eventual effects of such changes on the Dutch Industrial Relations model, remain open to question. Organising as a way of transforming a trade union more broadly in its purpose and objectives is not a given. However, the introduction of the organising approach already constitutes an important novelty in the union debate. One interesting development has been that of research into organising by FNV-Bondgenoten and the increased support and resources being concentrated in organising. The SEIU, clusters of motivated activists and officers, and a new generation of leaders appear to be forming a coalition of interest that is steadily creating a tapestry of cases, struggle and new organisational memories that can assist in broader renewal.

7. Conclusion

The Dutch case is important in any study of immigration and industrial relations due to the long history and legacy of the former in the country. The Dutch model is seen as being one of the most progressive and inclusive in relation to most of its European

counterparts. The model of industrial relations is one which has focused on the welfare dimension. This neo-corporatist approach means that key issues related to migration have been responded to in a formal and at times cohesive manner. Whilst there are debates about the actual efficacy of the model and the experience of migrants since the Second World War, the embedded nature of employment regulation means that migration has been 'organised' within industrial relations in a systematic manner. This was more feasible at a time when migrants entered regulated and organised aspects of employment. However, in recent years the experience of migration has changed in terms of source, nature and industrial and employment focus. This has happened at a time when Dutch employers have been using 'decentralised' approaches to employment (agency work and subcontracting). Hence, there is an experience of migration which in significant aspects resides on the margins of organised employment relations. We have drawn attention to this challenge to the more formalised system of employment regulation. Areas such as cleaning, domestic work and agriculture are increasingly prone to poor working conditions and more decentralised employer and management practices.

This has led to an internal reflection with trade unions and a general concern with the methods needed to engage with the workforce. From our research there is evidence to suggest that the formal adherence to the organising model, as formulated in the 2005 FNV Congress, has resulted in the actual implementation of organising strategies, and in the adoption of more confrontational views at decentralised levels. Such novelty has found supporters in the trade union executive boards of affiliated unions and sympathisers in the FNV, likely to create some friction within the union. In fact, Dutch unions have traditionally acted as agents of social regulation, with formal and informal agreements reached within corporatist bodies aimed at promoting inclusion and anti-discrimination. We could argue that the introduction of organising constitutes, using Schmitter and Streeck (1981) categories, a move from the logic of influence to the logic of membership. Furthermore, it has also resulted in the adoption of more bottom-up strategies alongside the traditional top-down approach of the Dutch union movement.

Inevitably the question of migration is important, not just as a pressing social issue but as a development which tests the regulatory efficacy of the industrial relations system, even those that have been deemed to be some of the more robust in Europe. The Dutch case shows how formal and institutional approaches to the question are being paralleled by new cultural and mobilising strategies that endeavour to rethink the organisational and symbolic link between (new) workers and the union movement. There is no reason why these should be at odds with each other, as seen from the experience in other countries. However, in the Dutch case the identity and processes of industrial relations are the subject of union debate. The challenge of balancing equality and state-oriented approaches of a formal nature with new approaches to class and engagement represents the basis of renewal. The emergence of new forms of activism and activists – along with an engagement with external organisations such as the SEIU and UNITE in the UK – mean that inevitably democratic and organisational issues of an internal nature will increasingly emerge.

Footnotes

¹ After the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius and Saba became three special municipalities of the Netherlands referred to as 'the Caribbean Netherlands'. Curaçao and Saint Maarten became constituent countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Aruba, instead, had separated from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986.

² Moluccans remained essentially marginalised by Dutch society (Abell *et al.*, 1985:18) and integration policies only began in 1978 after a series of terrorist attacks by young Moluccans highlighted their marginalised and poor living conditions (Smeets and Veenman, 2000).

³ The term *allochtonen* (used by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)) refers to anyone with one or both parents born outside the Netherlands. A distinction is made between first and second-generation newcomers. A first-generation *allochtoon* is a person living in the Netherlands but born in a foreign country, and who has at least one parent who was also born abroad. The 'country of origin' is the country the person was born in. A second-generation *allochtoon* is a person born in the Netherlands with at least one parent born in a foreign country. When both parents are born abroad, the 'country of origin' is taken to be that of the mother. If one parent was born in the Netherlands, the 'country of origin' is taken to be the other parent's country of birth.

A further distinction is made between 'western' and 'non-western' *allochtonen*. A non-western *allochtoon* is someone whose 'country of origin' is or lies in Turkey, Africa, Latin America or Asia, with the exception of Indonesia (or the former Dutch East Indies) and Japan. "The change in terminology suggested that those who had hitherto been treated as 'minorities' were first and foremost from a different background, language and culture than the Dutch and that this was a primary reason for the difficulties that they faced. The emphasis of policy should thus be to help them 'integrate' within that culture rather than continue to nourish separateness in the name of multiculturalism." (Virginie Guiraudon, Karen Phalet and Jessika ter Wal.)

⁴ He claimed that "Islam was a threat to liberal democracy and a hindrance for integration of immigrants and that immigrant integration should be handled with more courage." (Penninx, 2005; p.7).

⁵ In a first draft proposal, then rejected, the Minister for Aliens' Affairs and Integration, Rita Verdonk, extended such mandatory courses to all migrants aged between 16 and 65, regardless of the time spent in the country, and even if they were naturalised Dutch.

⁶ Ebbinghaus and Visser (1999) show how a decline in union membership is due to the intersection of several factors: cyclical factors (i.e. political-economic changes), structural factors (social changes) and configurational factors (contexts that shape the conditions under which unions act).

⁷ According to the statute of the FNV Bondgenoten, *kaderleden* are members that fulfil one or more functions on behalf of the union. They can be paid by the union itself or not.

⁸ During the 1960s, trade unions had neglected and lost contact with rank-and-file members owing to their excessively centralised position. However, some attempts were made to reverse this trend. During that period, organisational structures at workplace level were developed. Members were organised into workplace branches and groups of local union activists were formed. Both bodies were composed of unionised employees of the enterprise assisted by a full-time official appointed and paid by the union. Through these structures the unions hoped to improve communication with their members, increase participation in union activity at this level and exert more influence on employers' policies.

⁹ This paragraph is widely based on: Roosblad, 2000.

¹⁰ FORUM (Instituut for Multiculturele Ontwikkeling – Institute for Multicultural Development) is the largest non-governmental actor in the field of integration policy in the Netherlands and is especially concerned with ethnic minorities. LBR (Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie – National Bureau against Racial Discrimination) is also an important NGO organisation especially active in the field of education.

¹¹ The FNV claimed to be against illegal employment, but not illegal workers. According to the FNV unionising illegal workers might result in a decrease in illegal employment.

¹² Obviously, the FNV drew a clear distinction between the illegal status of migrants and the criminal records of migrants, who in this second case were excluded.

¹³ The *Dutch Association for Personnel Management and Organisation Development* is a network for HR professionals with over 5000 members. The stated purpose of the *NVP-sollicitatiecode* is “to provide a norm for a transparent and fair recruitment and selection procedure” (NVP official website).

¹⁴ The campaign also recently won the international award for the best union campaign by the global services sector union UNI. Increasingly unions are attempting to use benchmarking exercises to allow for innovative practices to be shared.

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