

**THE PAST, PRESENT AND POSSIBLE
FUTURES OF LABOUR :
CAN WE MEET THE CHALLENGE ?**

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OVERVIEW

- the past : Polanyi's 'great transformation'
- 'Rhineland capitalism', social solidarity and organised industrial relations
- the ambiguities of 'Social Europe'

- the present : the unbearable lightness of social rights ?
- key challenges to solidaristic industrial relations in Europe
- post-decommodification ?

- the future : re-inventing 'Social Europe' ?

THE PAST : 'RHINELAND CAPITALISM' AND ORGANISED INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

- **'stakeholder capitalism' : limits to regulation by market**
- **'labour is not a commodity' : employment protection legislation**
- **bias to collective regulation**
 - **multi-employer bargaining and extension of agreements**
- **institutionalised workplace representation**
- **'social solidarity' and 'social partnership'**

THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE 'EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL'

- **'Social Europe' has always been inherently ambiguous**
- **social models must be understood in the plural : regulatory regimes differ significantly across countries (or regions)**
- **meanings of 'Social Europe' are contested : iconic status as an abstraction, but no consensus on content**
- **often largely cosmetic : the rhetoric of 'social Europe' has served as a disarming accompaniment to Euro-liberalism**

THE PRESENT : THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF SOCIAL RIGHTS ?

- where do employment rights come from?
 - social consensus or class struggle?
- contingent historical balance of forces : labour rights were achieved as *negotiated* accommodation, and/or concession to dampen protest
- institutionalisation of rights was a major social achievement
 - but formal rights are never sufficient
 - their meaning is constantly reconstructed and renegotiated
 - it is easier to erode their practical effect than to abolish their formal existence

KEY CHALLENGES TO ORGANISED INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

- **economic**
 - rise of multinational financialised capital
 - EMU and 'divisive integration' (Lehndorff)
 - erosion of the 'normal' employment relationship
- **political and ideological**
 - neoliberalism, eclipse of social-democratic project
 - impact of EU enlargement
 - 'market mind-set' as emerging Euro-consensus
- **juridical : '4 freedoms' and CJEU**
- **from crisis to austerity**
 - commodifying decommodification : social protection redefined as a 'productive factor'
 - Troika and 'new economic governance'
 - assaults on key industrial relations institutions

THE FUTURE : RE-INVENTING 'SOCIAL EUROPE' ?

- the ETUC has called for a 'social progress protocol' : but what is progressive ?
- 'European Pillar of Social Rights' : rhetoric, not policy
- beyond Bismarck and Beveridge (and Ford) :
 - to defend social Europe, we must (re-) invent it
 - what social models fit the needs and aspirations of workers and citizens today ?
- in many countries, right-wing nationalists have captured the initiative
- it is necessary to challenge the dominant paradigm, not just negotiate within it
 - hence we need an alternative, progressive narrative and discourse
- the future of labour demands strategic imagination – from both scholars and activists !