

Bouwe Hijma

The archives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) at the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam

The IISH is the custodian of the archives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). In 1996 the inventory of these archives was published.¹ In recent years accruals to these archives were received and described. After giving some general information about the IISH and its' history, I will concentrate in this contribution on the documents mentioned in the inventory before closing with some suggestions for further research. It has to be emphasized that only some examples of relevant files in the archives of ERO, ETUS and ETUC are given. There are many more. Today the archives of these trade union confederations cover about 225m from the period (1939–)1950–2000(–2009).²

About the International Institute of Social History and the deposit of the ETUC archives

Today the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam is active in collecting, conserving and making available the heritage of social movements worldwide. The Institute is independent and reliable and therefore a natural depository for the often threatened cultural heritage of the labour movement and other emancipatory groups and movements. The research department of the Institute concentrates on the history of labour relations and organizes international projects in this field. The collections (archives, papers, library and audio-visual materials) cover more than 50 kilometers. The IISH is an institute of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (KNAW), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The IISH was founded in 1935. First aim in the starting years was to rescue material threatened by the political situation in various European countries. For example, the historical archives of the Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), containing the papers of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were acquired. After the Second World War this policy of collecting was continued. The archives of the Socialist International were acquired and also the archives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), based in Brussels, and its forerunners. The first part of the ETUC archives was received in 1991 and from then accruals followed until 2009. Willy Buschak, former Confederal Secretary of the ETUC (1991–2003), argued in favour of transferring the archives to the IISH.

1 Bouwe Hijma: Inventory of the archives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and its predecessors (1939–)1950–1992.

2 See <www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/e/10748348.php> (31.7.2009).

European Regional Organization (ERO) and European Trade Union Secretariat (ETUS)

The European Regional Organisation (ERO) of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) was founded in 1950, covering 20 trade unions from 18 Western European countries and was based in Brussels. General Secretary of the ERO until his death in 1966 was Walter Schevenels. In 1952 the Committee of Twenty-One was set up by the ICFTU-affiliated unions in response to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). This Committee was organized on an international basis both by industry, on the pattern of the International Trade Secretariats (ITs), and by linking national trade unions. The objectives of this Committee were to represent and co-ordinate the interests of union organizations in member countries of the ECSC.

Another important organization to be mentioned is the ERP (European Recovery Programme) Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC), founded in 1948. The ERO, as part of the TUAC, was as the largest trade union organization in Western Europe largely responsible for the functioning of the TUAC secretariat in Paris. In 1948 or 1949 Walter Schevenels was elected as Secretary General of the TUAC. In 1955 the Joint Trade Union Advisory Committee (JTUAC) to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OECC) was founded as successor to the ERP-TUAC. The founding meeting was on 29 March 1955. In this new structure the ERO and the Christian Trade Union International collaborated. Towards the end of 1961 the name changed from Joint Trade Union Advisory Committee (JTUAC) to the OECC to Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

After the signing of the Treaty of Rome and the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, representatives of the ICFTU-affiliated European trade unions from the EEC member countries met in Düsseldorf in 1958 to establish the European Trade Union Secretariat (ETUS) ICFTU – Europäisches Gewerkschaftssekretariat IBFG. This was an independent organization and the Committee of Twenty-One was absorbed into it. Its General Secretary was for many years the Dutchman Harm G. Buijter. Some relevant files in the ERO-ETUS archives:

General

- Documents on the European Regional Conferences of the European Regional Organization of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ERO-ICFTU), starting from the First Regional Conference in Brussels 1–4 November 1950. These conferences were held between 1950 and 1964 (inv. nos. 1–17);
- Documents on the meetings of the European Regional Council of the ERO. 1950–1955 (inv. no. 18);
- Documents on the meetings of the Executive Committee of the ERO. 1950–1969 (inv. nos. 19–41);
- Documents regarding the implications of the Treaties of Paris and Rome for the organization structure of the trade union movement. 1956–1958 (inv. no. 86);

- Documents regarding the meetings and activities of the Trade Union Co-ordination Committee of the Common Market of the Six and the founding of the European Trade Union Secretariat (ETUS) separate of the ERO. 1957–1958 (inv. nos. 87–88).

European integration

- Documents regarding the social and economic integration of Europe in general. 1949–1965 (inv. nos. 226–231);
- Documents regarding the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom). 1952–1960 (inv. nos. 232–237);
- Correspondence regarding the ECSC, the EEC and Euratom. 1957–1967 (inv. nos. 238–239);
- Documents regarding the meetings of the Trade Union Committees of Fifteen and Twenty-One and its Executive Committee on the Schuman Plan and the ECSC. 1952–1960 (inv. nos. 240–249).

And some examples of more specific files

- Documents regarding the situation in Germany and the first ideas on European co-operation. 1947–1951 (inv. no. 254);
- Documents regarding the Treaty of Brussels of 17 March 1948 and the Brussels Treaty Organization. 1950–1952 (inv. no. 256);
- Documents regarding the attitude of the ERO and the national trade unions towards the proposed European free trade area of the six member states of the EEC and the other eleven European member states of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 1955–1958 (inv. nos. 271–272);
- Documents regarding the relations between the member-states of the Six (EEC) and the Seven (EFTA) and the creation of a Joint Trade Union Committee. 1957–1961 (inv. nos. 304–306).

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

In 1969 the ETUS changed its name to the European Confederation of Trade Unions in the European Community (ECFTU). In the same year the European Regional Organization (ERO) of the ICFTU was dissolved. The ECFTU then operated from April 1969 until 1973. After the entry of Denmark, Great Britain and Ireland into the EC in 1973 the ECFTU was transformed into the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) (Europäischer Gewerkschaftsbund (EGB)). In fact the foundation followed a series of meetings of the ECFTU and the Trade Union Committee for the European Free Trade Area (EFTA-TUC), which had existed from 1968 until 1973. Some relevant files in the ETUC archives:

General

- Documents regarding the meetings of the ETUC with the Commission of the EC in Brussels. 1964–1992 (inv. nos. 1470–1491);
- Documents regarding the European Council of the heads of state and governments of the EC and the Economic Summits. 1969–1992 (inv. nos. 1492–1510);
- Documents regarding the relations between the ECFTU/ETUC and the Commission of the EC. 1964–1991 (inv. nos. 1511–1516);
- Documents regarding the Social Partners Office of the Commission of the EC. 1975–1989 (inv. nos. 1523–1525);
- Documents regarding the European Council of the EC. 1978–1992 (inv. nos. 1526–1547).

Particular

- Documents regarding the fusion of the three European executive organs, resulting in the amalgamation of the Treaties of Paris and Rome, and the position and representation of the trade unions. 1964–1969 (inv. nos. 1549–1551);
- Documents regarding the discussions on the Reform of the European Institutions. 1980–1987 (inv. nos. 1557–1559);
- Documents regarding the (Working) Group of socialist members with a trade union background in the European Parliament, later called the MEP-Trade Union/ETUC Intergroup. 1975–1992 (inv. nos. 1618–1623);
- Documents regarding the meetings in Strasbourg of the Liaison Committee between the Council of Europe and Management and Labour (LCML). 1984–1992 (inv. nos. 1691–1700).

Personal papers of Walter Schevenels

Walt(h)er Schevenels played an important role in the European trade union movement in the mid 20th century. Born in 1894, he was a Belgian trade union leader and one of the founders of the Metalworkers' Federation of Belgium. In 1929 he was appointed Assistant General Secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), in 1930 he became General Secretary and held this position until 1945. In that year he became Assistant General Secretary of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in charge of industrial field. Together with the Western European trade unions he left the WFTU and after the creation of the ICFTU in 1949 he became in January 1951 Secretary General of the ERO and held this position until his death in 1966. From 1949 he was also Secretary General of the (J)TUAC. The papers of Walter Schevenels are part of the archives of the ERO.

Relevant are for instance

- Documents regarding history, structure and activities of the ERO and biographical notes on Walter Schevenels. 1957–1960 (inv. no. 89);
- Documents regarding the mission of Schevenels to Greece from 1–5 June 1957 and other documents regarding the situation in Greece. 1955–1958 (inv. nos. 182–183, 186–187);

- Documents regarding the speech by Schevenels in Frankfurt am Main 1 May 1951. 1951 (inv. no. 257);
- Minutes of the meetings of the (J)TUAC and correspondence by Schevenels as secretary of the (J)TUAC. 1948–1966 (inv. nos. 3575–3681);
- Documents regarding the European Recovery Programme and in particular the conferences in London and Rome. 1948–1950 (inv. nos. 3714–3717);
- Correspondence by Schevenels and other documents regarding the withdrawal of non-communist organizations from the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). 1949 (inv. no. 3794).

Other collections

The archives of the ETUC do not only contain documents on trade unions and European integration; the IISH has to offer more. The archives of other international and European trade union organizations enclose a huge amount of materials. Examples are for instance the archives of the Miners' International Federation (MIF), the International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Unions (ICEF) and the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International (PTTI).

Also the archives of the Dutch trade unions Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (NVV), Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV) and Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond (CNV) are important for researchers.

But also some personal papers enclose valuable documents. Examples are those of the Dutch politicians Sicco Mansholt, Alfred Mozer and Joop den Uyl. They were not typical trade unionists, but all the three social-democratic politicians and proponents of European cooperation, integration and perhaps unification.

Sicco Mansholt (1908–1995) was important in the Dutch Social-Democracy and in European politics from 1945 until the eighties. Born in the province of Groningen, he was tobacco planter in the Dutch East Indies and farmer in the Netherlands. During the Second World War he was active in the Resistance. In 1945 he was minister of agriculture and food distribution. From 1958 he was commissioner of the European Communities for agriculture and vice-president of the European Commission. In 1972 he was president for some months until his retirement in the same year. Not a typical trade union man he must mentioned here regarding his role in the European social-democracy and his crucial position during many years in the process of European unification.

The IISH keeps the personal papers of Mansholt from the period (1858–)1920–1995(–2006) (c. 35m).

Alfred Mozer (1905–1979) was also an important person in the field of European integration. Born in Munich, Germany, he was a member of the Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend (SAJ). He fled to the Netherlands in 1933 and went underground from 1940 until 1945. From 1951–1958 he was international secretary of the Dutch labour party and from 1958–1970 he was chief of the office bureau of Mansholt in Brussels. Mozer was a warm protagonist of

European unification and integration. The IISH keeps the personal papers of Mozer from the period 1930–1979(–1986) (c. 3 m).

Joop den Uyl (1919–1987) was party leader of the Dutch social-democrats from 1967 and Dutch prime minister from 1973 until 1977. Born in Hilversum, he studied economics and in his job as director of the Wiardi Beckman Stichting, the scientific bureau of the Dutch labour party, he wrote during the fifties on issues of European cooperation and integration. The IISH keeps the personal papers of Den Uyl from the period (1919–)1927–1987 (c. 50m).

The mentioned archives and papers can be consulted at the reading-room of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Some are free, for other permission is requested.³

Suggestions for research

The archives of the ETUC are interesting for researchers studying the long term development of European integration starting with the European Coal and Steel Community (ESSC) in the early fifties. Interesting issues in the archives are employment, collective bargaining, economic policy, social affairs, youth activities and women emancipation. But also files relating to development (the Lomé Conventions), environment, energy and health and safety are important.

It would be worth while to investigate the role of national trade unions and the confederal trade unions in reducing the distrust between countries and groups of countries in the first postwar period.

The ETUC and forerunners were concerned intensively with the political situation in Greece (inv. nos. 171–191, 1246–1260), Spain and Portugal (inv. nos. 205–217, 1303–1326) and Turkey (inv. nos. 218, 1332–1407) in the sixties, seventies and eighties. How were the relations between the confederal trade union and the trade unions and governments in these countries?

The ETUC and forerunners were founded in the years of the Cold War. The relations with the trade unions in Eastern ‘Socialist’ Europe were marginal and full of distrust. It would be interesting to investigate these hesitant contacts with the new free trade unions in Poland and other Eastern European countries (inv. nos. 1261, 1293–1302, 1429–1444). It was a difficult choice between official and informal contacts. And was it possible to have these contacts parallel?

As a last issue I would recommend the attitude of trade unions regarding migrant workers. Interesting are the files on themes as social security and free movement of migrant workers (inv. nos. 2416–2475).

3 See for further information the website <www.iisg.nl>.