

CLR

Newsletter 2/2004

The CLR-London Office is a platform linking CLR activities at EU and GB levels as well as trade union and academic work in GB in the field of Construction Labour Research. It will support related initiatives specific to GB.

Introductory Note

There is a lot to report on and to look forward to.

On two subsequent days, 18/19 March, we had a Seminar organised with the University of Westminster and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as well as the CLR Annual Meeting. We are giving an extensive report on the Seminar, the first of a series, because it was an event prepared with the CLR-London Office. The detailed report on the CLR Annual Meeting will be published in the next issue of CLR news and an abstract must suffice for our Newsletter.

In the meantime preparations have gone ahead for the opening of two more regional CLR-Offices. Both events are organised as international conferences:

- CLR-Regionalbüro Dortmund, 2nd April 2004, Die EU-Osterweiterung und die Vertragsverhältnisse am Bau (EU Enlargement and employment relations in Construction)
Enrolment by email:
wolfgang.richter@fh-dortmund.de
- CLRdenmark in Copenhagen, 20th April 2004, EU Enlargement and the Free Movement of Labour – migration of construction workers after May 2004
Enrolment by email: sannihansen@sid.dk

Associated with CLR our Swiss colleagues have set up the 'Initiative Group Thinknet' (Initiativgruppe

Denknetz, info@denknetz-online.ch) which "observes increasing social inequality and a trend towards decreasing solidarity within society. It aims at better understanding of this dynamic and at exploring and discussing alternatives. ... Thinknet

- Promotes exchange of ideas and the cooperation between researchers, political and trade union activists and institutions within and outside Switzerland,
- Connects research results with political practice and suggests ideas for research projects,
- Develops impulses for political orientation on current topics, without directly intervening in the political debate."

Thinknet will have its first international conference 26th June 2004 under the heading 'The new shine of equality' (Der neue Glanz der Gleichheit) in Bern/CH, where the new trade union UNIA will have its headquarters. You can enrol by email: tagung@denknetz-online.ch

We are looking forward also to the next seminar in the series 'People in Construction' 27th May 2004 at the University of Westminster (see events). In the autumn we intend to hold a CLR-London Annual Meeting which will be announced in the next Newsletter.

We wish you happy Easter holidays and look forward to seeing you ,

George Fuller, Jörn Janssen.

Women in Construction

ESRC Seminar Series: People in Construction
University of Westminster
Thursday 18th March 2004

Agenda:

- 10.30 Registration and coffee
- 11.00 Welcome by Prof. Len Shackleton, Head of Westminster Business School
- 11.15 Linda Clarke, Elisabeth Michielsens, Barbara Susman (all University of Westminster) and Christine Wall (University of Cambridge)
Why aren't women in construction? Or are they?
- 12.15 Elsebet Frydendal Pedersen (Technical University of Denmark)
Painters in Denmark: a woman's trade
- 1.00 Lunch + *Transnational Tradeswomen* – film in progress, produced and introduced by Vivian Price (Room CG 78)
- 2.00 Jill Wells (ILO, Geneva)
Women in construction in the developing world
- 2.45 Susan Eisenberg (former electrician, Boston, USA, author of 'We'll Call you if we Need you'), *Still waiting after all these years: women in the construction industry in the USA*
- 3.30 Tea break
- 4.00 Discussion panel introduced by Jean Lambert MEP with: tradeswomen -Jacky Clarke, Jo Devenish, and Lone Thrane (tbc); employers Trevor Jee (Keepmoat Construction); employers' association – Odette Repellin of the French Construction Employers' Association (Fédération Française du Bâtiment); trade union – Sylvia.Honsberg of the German Construction Union, IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt
- 5.45 Drinks: launch of the book 'Women in Construction'
- 6.15 Exhibition of photographs, films (Room CG 78 – *Reja* –Women builders – produced and introduced by Margaret Dickinson, followed by another chance to see *Transnational Tradeswomen* by Vivian Price; interactive CDs - on Italy)
- 8.00 Finish

The participation of this seminar was truly impressive, an audience of about one hundred, the majority women, including from Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and USA. They represented employers' federations, trade unions, training institutions etc. Their backgrounds were as mixed as possible: tradespersons, academics, trade unionists, employers, professionals, and politicians from a wide range of different disciplines, professions and trades.

This packed programme including discussions spanned theoretical thought and practical experience, different approaches and aspects concerning women's participation in a male dominated sector.

After the complimentary opening words by Len Shackleton, the Head of Westminster Business School, *Elisabeth Michielson* started the introduction to the seminar with statistics and the institutional framework and legal situation in Britain and Europe regulating equal opportunities and gender (in)equality as well as the diverse results of a survey on collective agreements, activities, and policies of the construction sector social partners in EU countries.

Barbara Susman, on the basis of the same survey, looked at provisions for women in collective agreements which showed a very mixed picture across Europe. She demonstrated the poor support and obstacles for the employment of women in the different EU countries pointing out what is needed to give women access to construction: improved employment and working conditions, mechanisation of production, good training provision, and promotion of gender equality.

Linda Clarke gave an historical outline on gender division related to productive systems which showed the ups and downs in the employment of women in construction in England and Britain since the 1349 Statute of Labourers. She showed how the craft system, dominant e.g. in Italy and Spain is even more impermeable for women than the more industrial systems of production such as in the Netherlands and Germany. She concluded emphasising the importance of political regulation for women's participation in the industry.

Chris Wall focused on the development of women's employment in construction in Britain since World War II. She denounced how, both in the first and second world wars, women were recruited to substitute for men engaged in military service and how they were rejected as soon as the soldiers returned. She then turned to a new initiative which started with the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, giving rise to the campaign group 'Women and the Manual Trades', WAMT, still active to date. She showed that women came to be employed in particular in some Direct Labour Organisations in London. She pleaded for campaigning rather than legal support for women.

The discussion was kicked off by a most provocative question put forward in a most naïve way by one of the male participants: What is so great about working in construction? There were loads of responses from women, e.g., because you have the satisfaction to see what you have done. It was reminded that appalling working conditions and casual employment are an offence to both men and women. Some of the participants appeared so incensed by the presentation that they decided to leave before the lunch break.

Elsebet Frydendal Pedersen had the privilege to report on a stunning success story of women in a construction trade. Almost 40% of painters in Denmark are women. This rise of female employment occurred only in the last decades. Strangely, also, it is an isolated phenomenon among construction trades in this country. One explanation for this conquest in a male dominated territory is the relatively low pay of this branch. Interestingly, in terms of occupational health women seem to do better than their male counterparts.

Judging from the intense debates around the buffet, lunch was probably the most interesting time of the whole day. This is where new contacts were made and addresses exchanged.

Jill Wells, ILO, opened up the view beyond the scope of old Europe. In developing countries, as formerly in Europe, women are heavily involved in construction, in particular in Asia. With a focus on India no less than 30-50% of operatives on sites are women. However, they are not admitted to training and predominantly come as helpers with their husbands, crushing stones and bricks and carrying materials. In this function they are not even on the pay roll and, thus, without any rights to e.g. maternity leave or other social protection.

Susan Eisenberg, a former electrician from Boston/USA and poet, painted a wide panorama of issues concerning the life of women working in construction, their discrimination and resistance. Typically, women's representation is higher in apprenticeship (4%) than in the production workforce (2.5%). This confirmed the research finding from EU-countries, that in more industrialised industries access for women is through skills.

The final panel discussion featured one male against seven female experts. The man was a regional director of a construction company who was lined up with three tradeswomen, a representative of the French 'fédération du bâtiment', an official of the German construction trades union (IG BAU), a member of the European Parliament, and an academic researcher as chair. Interestingly Jean Lambert (MEP) reminded the audience of the much higher rate of female employment in Central and East-European countries, a socialist heritage which is about to be abolished. Odette Repellin (FFB) had good news from France with regard to initiatives to recruit female trainees. Jo Devenish (electrician in London) told how it was difficult to find a job as a woman. Relating to East Germany, Sylvia Honsberg also highlighted how women lost their jobs with integration into the capitalist world. Trevor Jee (Keepmoat Construction) advocated the need for improvements in working conditions in construction, welcoming the side effect of facilitating the employment of women. Lone Thrane (carpentry trainer in Denmark) warned that even in Denmark women are most at risk of becoming unemployed and often

change career when they have children. Jacky Clarke (carpenter in Britain), enjoying the privilege to be employed in the public sector, pinpointed a number of disadvantages for women: piece rates with competition at the workplace, the demonisation of women and the institutionalised sexism in construction trades.

The final discussion displayed the variety of approaches to the subject of the seminar. Most encouraging and convincing were contributions from the floor by women working in construction, as these were expressed without any great pretension: "I enjoy the job and meeting people." Or another voice: "I prefer working as an electrician, it is boring to be a waitress." Jean Lambert (MEP) summarised the "huge job for the government": abolish bogus self-employment, enforce health & safety inspection, schools to introduce the students to workplaces. Before the chair closed the session Jacky Clarke had the last word: "Instead of University, go into the trades and join the union!"

The ceremony of launching the book 'Women in Construction' was introduced by the provost of the University of Westminster, Martin Everett. Titus David (carpenter and cabinetmaker) made the speech which cleared the way for the drink and cheers for the book and the seminar which closed with two films, by Margaret Dickinson and Vivian Price.

The book

Linda Clarke, Elsebet Frydendal Pedersen, Elisabeth Michielsen, Barbara Susman, Christine Wall (eds), *Women in Construction*.

CLR/Reed Business Information, Den Haag 2004. ISBN 9059013034 (retail price 32.50 Eur)

can be ordered at the special price of £ 17 from Linda Clarke, email: clarkel@wmin.ac.uk

CLR-Studies

CLR-Studies are publications of work by the European Institute for Construction Labour Research and its network of academics and practitioners, and open to related contributions from all sources.

Series editors: Linda Clarke, Jan Cremers, Jörn Janssen
Publisher: Reed Business Information, Den Haag

Two books have been published hitherto:

Linda Clarke, Jan Cremers, Jörn Janssen:

EU Enlargement: Construction Labour Relations as a Pilot. (30 Eur)

Linda Clarke, Elsebet Frydendal Pedersen, Elisabeth Michielsen, Barbara Susman, Christine Wall (eds),
Women in Construction. (32.50 Eur)

The books can be ordered directly using the publisher's website: elsevierhr.nl/frames.php?cat=arbeidsmarkt

CLR-London Events

Information and Consultation

Wednesday 28th April 2004, 1³⁰ – 4⁰⁰ p.m.

Organised by the Institute of Employment Rights
at the NATFHE Centre,
Britannia Street, London WC1

At this seminar leading representatives of the TUC,
IER and GMB will critically assess the new regulations
of the Government on *Informing and Consulting Employees*,
their limitations and the likely impact on the UK
workforce.

Speakers:

- Sarah Veale, TUC, Head of Equality and
Employment Law
Final regulations: the good, the bad and the ugly.
- Kathleen Walker Shaw, GMB, European Office
*Putting theory into practice: the challenge of developing and
protecting agreements.*
- Keith Ewing, IER: *International Standards and UK
Law: do the Regulations meet the challenge?*

Institute of Employment Rights, 177 Abbeville Road,
London SW Institute of Employment Rights SW4 9RL
email: office@ier.org.uk

Historical Change and the Future of Construction Trade Unions

Thursday May 27th 2004

This seminar will be concerned with understanding
significant changes in the nature of labour in the
industry through looking at trade union activity,
roles and structuring, in order to help us
understand the future of the construction trade
unions. The seminar will include British and
international contributions, and an assessment by
leading trade unionists. It will conclude with a
discussion on policy today.

Suggested speakers:

Justin Byrne, on the bricklayers of Madrid at the turn
of the 19th century;
Janet Druker, on the history of UCATT;
Ursula Weis on the construction process in Germany
1919-33;
George Henderson (TGWU) (tbc)
Lou Lewis (UCATT) (tbc)

To Our Readers

The CLR-London Newsletter is the main organ of
exchange for CLR in Great Britain. In order to fulfil
this function it will depend on the cooperation of its
readers. The editors ask everybody who is interested in
construction labour to contribute with information and
commentaries. Please send your suggestions, articles,
information, letters, material etc. to

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