EUROPEAN TRADE UNIONS AND ‘PRECARIOUS’ WORKERS

ETUI-ETUC CONFERENCE
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Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick
Birkbeck, University of London
OVERVIEW

• Introduction
• Research background
• varieties of ‘atypical’ and ‘precarious’ employment
• trade unions: challenges and responses and examples of action
• concluding remarks
BACKGROUND: 10-COUNTRY PROJECT

- 3-year grant from Danish Social Science Research Council
- 10 west European countries, 4 varieties of capitalism
- focus on trade union strategic responses to globalisation and other challenges, including young workers and precarious workers


Gumbrell-McCormick R and Hyman R (2013, OUP) Trade Unions in Western Europe: Hard Times, Hard Choices

Precarious Work affects us all
VARIETIES OF ‘ATYPICAL’ AND ‘PRECARIOUS’ EMPLOYMENT

- part-time
  - precarious - not necessarily!
- temporary
  - but what is ‘permanent’ ?
- agency (Temporary Agency Work)
- subcontracting / outsourcing
- dependent self-employment
- posted workers
- ‘informal’ or undocumented work
- cross-national variation in regulation and deregulation
- employer strategic choice
## LABOUR MARKET INDICATORS (% 2012)

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TRADE UNIONS: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

• threat and/or opportunity for unions
• almost universally low unionisation rate of these workers - why? workers, unions, or both?
• key strategic choice: exclude or include? historical dimension and ideological difference
• recruitment, representation, mobilisation
• new forms of organisation, incl. separate unions
• campaigns and alliances
• political pressure for improved regulation and protection
• EU dimension
TRADE UNIONS: TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF ACTION

• selective adaptation of ‘organising model’
  ➢ NL: Schiphol strike 2009-10
  ➢ DE: ver.di and supermarkets

• redefining interests and constituencies
  ➢ UK: migrant workers and ‘Justice for Cleaners’
  ➢ IT: ‘atypical’ workers and separate unions
  ➢ FR: CGT and sans papiers

• public campaigning
  ➢ PL: campaign on ‘junk contracts’
  ➢ DE: IG Metall campaign on apprentices ‘Operation Übernahme’
Sauberkeit hat ihren Preis!
CONCLUDING REMARKS

• complex picture: variations across countries depending on types of unions, role of employers, state and regulation
• parallels / interaction of atypical work with age, gender, ethnicity
• union responses: resist, control, include
• organising workers or regulating work: will, capacity and resource allocation
• but some success stories!