

In recent decades the trade unions have been losing influence and members throughout the world. The main causes of this situation include the long dominant neoliberal discourse; the policies of deregulation, privatization and flexibilization derived from it; the massive change in structures of production in the wake of globalization; high unemployment; and the explosive increase in precarious employment. On top of this comes the dilemma that trade unions, while in the meantime beginning to think globally, still generally (have to) act locally. In recent years, the international cooperation and power of trade unions has improved, thanks to the founding of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2006, the closer cooperation between branch trade unions in the Global Union Federations (GUFS), and the creation of the Council of Global Unions in which the work of the ITUC, the GUFS, and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) are coordinated.

It is thanks not least to this cooperation that the trade unions have had a much bigger say in the efforts to cope with the financial and economic crisis. This applies especially to the G20 process, the cooperation between the 20 most important economies in the world, which has developed into a kind of »world government« in the wake of the crisis. This issue of INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND SOCIETY focuses on the global role of the trade unions and their substantive and structural challenges. This links up with the special issue on »The Future of Social Democracy« (4/2010) because social democracy and trade unions are – despite some tensions in recent years – fated to cooperate if anything good is to come out of the crisis and to prevent a revival of the neoliberal paradigm.

DGB chairman *Michael Sommer* was elected president of the ITUC in June 2010. In his interview with IPG he emphasizes the influence of the trade unions on the efforts to deal with the crisis. Nevertheless, Sommer is skeptical about whether the trade unions will continue to have a say in the future: as Schiller put it: »The moor has done his duty; the moor can go« (»Der Mohr hat seine Schuldigkeit getan, der Mohr kann gehen«).

The first part of this issue deals with the substantive challenges facing trade unions. In their article, *John Evans* and *David Coats* emphasize the fact that the global financial and economic crisis has called into question many of the assumptions on which economic policy has been based over the past 30 years. Politicians must take these experiences on board in creating a new economic model. Such a model, according to *Michael Cichon*, *Christina Behrendt* and *Veronika Wodsak*, must acknowledge the human right to social security. The global economic and financial crisis

has brought the significance of a »social protection floor« (SPF) firmly onto the agenda. This issue will play a central role in the ILO's 100th International Labour Conference in June 2011.

Drawing on the political science concept of global governance *Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten* looks at the limits and possibilities of an approach to the regulation of gainful employment in which non-state actors, especially trade unions, participate. The process lacks democratic legitimacy and controls, however, as do the participating actors, who represent only specific groups. An important instrument for international regulation for the trade unions are »international framework agreements« (IFAs). In their analysis *Michael Fichter, Markus Helfen* and *Jörg Sydow* consider the importance of IFAs for the international trade union movement, especially for the GUFs.

In Part Two of this issue we address structural questions. *Christine Bonner* and *Dave Spooner* examine the challenge facing the trade unions of organizing in the informal sector, which has grown significantly in recent decades. Workers in this area are not covered by labor law and women make up the largest proportion of employees with the lowest status, lowest income, and most insecurity. For the trade unions, the organization and support of »informal« workers represents both a practical and a political necessity, if the trade union movement is to remain true to its principles and goals. This problem is evident mainly in the countries of the global South. The European trade union movement, however, faces entirely different challenges. According to *Hans-Wolfgang Platzer* European federations – notwithstanding a number of partial successes – continue to suffer from transnationalization deficits, in particular in the form of a lack of resources and inconsistencies between »European declarations« and »national practice«. European works councils represent one aspect of the strength (or weakness) of European trade unions: beyond that, *Michael Stollt* and *Sascha Meinert* deal with the future of workers' participation in Europe in four scenarios covering the period until 2030. They do not offer ready-made solutions but pose questions and invite people to engage in a constructive dialogue on alternatives, uncertainties, and the question of »what kind of future we would like to live in.« Finally, *Gonzalo D. Martner* considers aspects of the problematic relationship between progressive governments and trade unions, taking the examples of Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.

Two other articles in this issue look at foreign policy problems. Further to his article in IPG 1/2011 *Hans W. Maull* challenges German foreign

policy »in a world of turbulence« to forge coalitions for »effective multilateralism« and to set an example. *Andreas Holtz* addresses an issue little discussed in Germany, namely the role of Australia as a regional power in the Pacific, caught between its close political ties with the USA and its intense economic relations with China.

In the previous issue of IPG we called for responses to the article by Gerd Ganteför which appeared in it, with its provocative ideas on population growth and climate change. As expected, many commentaries were submitted. We publish the first of them – by *Nina Netzer* and *Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker*, which takes issue with Ganteför's article – here. We would be delighted to continue this debate on such an important question.

This issue could not have been realized without the active support of the FES colleagues who are responsible for the coordination of international trade union work. They have taken on a major part of the editorial work, identified and canvassed authors, and supervised the articles. We would therefore like to extend our heartfelt thanks to: Ulrike Ehnes, Sarah Ganter, Julia Müller, Jan-Hendrik Müller, Reiner Radermacher, Ingrid Ross, and Renate Tenbusch.