

Editorial

Policy-makers in the world economy are obliged to deal with such mega-trends as globalisation, demographic change and the ageing of the population, service-sector expansion, the rapid pace of change in information and communications technology, and the spread of atypical forms of employment leading to the increasing individualisation of labour relations. This gives rise to the need for the constant revision and adjustment of industrial relations systems in order to adapt to these new challenges.

Against this backdrop the paper by Saskia Klosse provides us with a critical overview of the European Employment Strategy, which, at least at European level, is one of the main instruments by which this revision and adjustment can be carried out. By means of a careful analysis the author tackles the difficult question of whether the proposed changes properly address the existing imbalance between the economic and social objectives of the EES or whether another approach is needed. She argues that in future the social dimension of European policy will play a more and more important role in the reconciliation of economic and social interests, flexibility and security.

Reflecting the ILO position, Tayo Fashoyin deals with another instrument essential for the shaping of industrial relations: tripartite cooperation between the social partners and the government. He argues that tripartism represents the optimal form of social dialogue in order to accommodate the increasingly diverse interests of various actors in society. The author draws attention to the fact that in the changing industrial relations context also the role and the structure of traditional labour market actors has changed. Therefore while reserving the leading role for the 'traditional' social partners, the author stresses the need for new approaches creating alliances with other actors in the labour market and a major involvement on their part in labour market-related policies.

Lothar Funk investigates the problem of the erosion of trade union membership mentioned by Fashoyin in his analysis of the role of tripartism. First of all he points to the manifold nature of this process. Addressing this matter in the light of the impact of global mega-trends on the environment in which trade unions operate, the author focuses his attention primarily on the situation in Germany. Finally, he provides some useful suggestions as to how trade unions can increase their influence and credibility by relying, among other things, on a more service-oriented approach to union members, together with a less confrontational strategy in politics.

Rosalind Chew and Chew Soon-Beng provide an overview of labour market provisions in Singapore. By means of an historical analysis the authors demonstrate that the economic as well as the industrial relations context in Singapore has changed over time, and in order to remain competitive on the global market new approaches are needed. As an example they examine wage adjustment policy, arguing that seniority-based remuneration has now become dysfunctional. A flexible wage system is proposed as an alternative though the authors do not overestimate its practical effects, and draw attention to constantly changing government attitudes towards wage policy.

The issue also includes Ockert Dupper's paper offering an in-depth analysis of the problems of race-based affirmative action in South Africa and the United States. The author discusses the notion of affirmative action, the reasons for it and especially its social justification. After careful examination of the pros and cons, Dupper comes to the conclusion that affirmative action can be used as an effective tool for integrating disadvantaged groups into society and for overcoming prejudices towards them (the attitude-changing argument). In his opinion, this is a way towards an inclusive democratic society in which the rights of all individuals are safeguarded.

Finally, in a more country-specific context, the report by Shelley Wallach provides a unique insight into the issue of immigrant workers in Israel. She argues that obsolete and binding legal provisions governing immigration have a harmful effect on the labour market as a whole as they encourage illegal immigration and lead to an overall decline in labour and social standards. Pointing out the deleterious effects of certain measures such as deportation, the author makes some useful recommendations, paying particular attention to the need for the government to safeguard fundamental social rights for immigrant workers in accordance with international conventions.

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