

Communist Party-Dominated CGIL Makes Waves in European Trade Union Confederation

July 20 (IPS)—In the midst of the most serious Italian political crisis in postwar history, the CGIL—the Communist Party-dominated Italian trade union federation—has been formally admitted into the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). In an action that came as no surprise, following a “straw vote” at May’s General meeting, the executive board of the EUTC last week approved by an overwhelming margin the resolution calling for the CGIL’s admission, over the objections of the West German DGB, the CIA-created Force Ouvriere (FO) of France, and a few newly admitted Catholic unions.

Thus the CGIL has achieved its long-stated goal of equal status and respectability within the European trade union “family,” becoming the first Communist trade union federation to be admitted to what was formerly the European arm of the anti-communist International Federation of Free Trade Unions. It was originally felt, both by Rockefeller and the so-called leadership of the European trade unions, that the CGIL had been housebroken. The best place to keep this pet under control would be in the “radicalized” ETUC. There, it was thought, the presence of the CGIL would add credibility to the ETUC’s planned phony attack against the multinational corporations—a ploy designed to prevent a classwide attack on the multinationals and a political defense of the European working class against Rockefeller’s onslaught.

CGIL Shows Signs of Life

But now, despite repeated assurances by the top-level leadership of the CGIL that they will “play ball” with the ETUC, that they have no “radical program” to put forward in the ETUC, that they would support the “initiatives of member organizations,”—in the context of the present crisis, the CGIL poses a threat. Elements in

the CGIL sympathetic to Labor Committee debt moratorium proposals, leaders desperately groping for clear political direction, may actually bring political discussion into the ETUC—discussion that might disrupt the controlled environment of the so-called European trade union family.

The CGIL is becoming unreliable because of tremendous ferment building at its base. Its leadership will have to respond to members who are refusing union cards for fear of what will happen if the proposed merger of the three Italian trade union federations goes through! Leaders of the Italian UIL and CISL, who had argued strongly for the CGIL’s admission to the ETUC, used the proposed merger as evidence of the CGIL’s abandonment of a revolutionary perspective.

At the General meeting of the ETUC in May, the intervention by a handful of Labor Committee organizers around the Golden Snake proposal for expanded trade with the Soviet Union and a brute force program to develop fusion power, broke the stupefying environment of the conference and contributed to the ensuing deadlock over “the Rockefeller” proposal for a Europeanwide campaign for co-participation with the multinationals.

Warning to CGIL to Stay in Line

The president of the ETUC, Hans Oskar Vetter, head of the West German DGB, has attempted to reinforce the controlled nature of the ETUC in which the CGIL finds itself. As if warning the CGIL not to get out of line, Vetter stated at an executive meeting of the DGB which raised the question of admission into the ETUC that in the future the ETUC should not open itself up to Communist organizations like the CGIL. He had previously stressed the point that the CGIL’s admission was a special case, and that the CP-dominated CGT of France should not expect to be admitted.