de Spiegelaere, Stan

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Prof. Dr Stan De Spiegelaere
Universiteit Gent, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration

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Contents

Abstract

Belgium is one of the few EU-15 countries with no system of involving employee representatives in the strategic management of a company. The post-second World War social pact created extensive institutions for information, consultation and collective bargaining at the company, sector and country level but did not envisage, for example, employees on company boards. At the same time, one of the two large trade union confederations (the ACV-CSC) with its historical links to the long-time dominant Christian democratic party, has been in favour of such a system for a long time. In this working paper, the post-war views of the ACV-CSC on workers on the board and economic democracy are presented and discussed. When considering the different periods of debate and activism, clear evolutions in thinking are evident. Ethical arguments in general and arguments drawn from Christian teaching decrease markedly in importance, while economic and pragmatic argumentation becomes more prominent. Further, the Belgian Christian trade union's recent rejection of the idea of codetermination is a rupture with its previous positions, but it seems that these positions never really enjoyed the support of most of their members anyway.

1. Introduction

'A company is a community of capital and labour. (…)
It follows that the property of capital does not entail the property of the legal and economic entity of the company' (ACV-CSC, 1947).[1]

Just after World War II, the Belgian Christian trade union ACV-CSC (Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond/Confédération des Syndicats Chrétien – Confederation of Christian Trade Unions) spoke in no uncertain terms about the need for employees to take a role in the running of companies. Between liberals wishing to give all the power to employers and socialists wanting to nationalise whole industries, the Christian trade union developed a midway alternative: codetermination.

On the face of it, the Christian trade union remained in favour of codetermination until 2015. Yet while some legal initiatives were taken, and while the Christian union became the largest confederation in 1958 (surpassing the socialist confederation ABVV-FGTB (Vandaele Forthcoming), Belgium is still one of the few countries (along with Italy and the UK) in Western Europe that does not have a legal system guaranteeing employee codetermination or board-level employee representation in private companies.[2]

Of the 27 European member states, 14 have developed systems of codetermination and 5 have limited forms of codetermination in mostly state-owned companies. Belgium, together with eight other countries, does not have any regulation on employee codetermination (ETUI and ETUC 2017:64).

As such, Belgium skipped several waves of reform in Europe that gradually introduced and extended codetermination systems. The more recent discussions in the UK and the extension of the codetermination system in France also passed by largely unnoticed in Belgium (Lafuente-Hernandez and De Spiegelaere 2018). In fact, at the 2015 congress of the Christian trade union, the membership downvoted several resolutions on codetermination, meaning that the ACV-CSC, just like the socialist unions, is *no longer in favour* of codetermination.

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1. 'De onderneming is een gemeenschap van kapitaal en arbeid (…), er vloeit uit voort dat het bezit van het kapitaal niet het bezit medebrengt van de rechtskundige en economische entiteit, welke de onderneming is' [A company is a community of capital and labour. (…) It follows that the property of capital does not entail the property of the legal and economic entity of the company] (ACV-CSC 1947: 26).

2. As a result of European legislation on Cross-Border Mergers and European Companies (SE's), some Belgian workers' representatives are, however, members of company boards. Also, in some public companies forms of codetermination are established (Van Gyes and De Spiegelaere 2019). The number of Belgian workers' representatives on company boards totals fewer than 10.

This working paper aims to dig deeper into the history of this strange non-advent of codetermination in Belgium by focusing on the proposals and debates in the ACV-CSC union. The guiding questions in this paper are: what was the position of the ACV-CSC on codetermination, did it result in any legal progress, how did they argue their positions and, ultimately, what can be learned from their experiences for the future, and for the broader European context?

To help address these questions, this working paper mainly draws on literature research using various sources such as congress documents, articles written in De Gids op Maatschappelijk Gebied (the main forum of broad ideological debate of the Christian workers movement) and other literature. Additionally, the working paper is based on the author's participation in the 2015 ACV-CSC congress, formal interviews and frequent informal conversations with people from the union.

2. Approach and context

Before covering the historical evolution of the debate on codetermination in more detail, three points of context are appropriate: first, the Christian trade union, second, Belgian industrial relations and third, the wider context of Christian thinking and teaching on labour issues.

This working paper focuses almost exclusively on the evolution of the debate on codetermination within the Christian trade union of Belgium, for three main reasons. As of 1958, i) the Christian confederation ACV-CSC is the largest in Belgium, surpassing ii) the socialist confederation ABVV-FGTB and iii) the liberal ACLVB-CGSLB. Currently, the first numbers roughly 1.55 million members, the second 1.5 million and the third about 300 thousand (Vandaele Forthcoming).

Second and related to that, until recently the Christian trade union had strong links with the Christian democratic party in Belgium, which dominated the post-war political landscape for decades. Between 1947 and 1999, the party was (with some brief exceptions) always part of the governing coalition, often as the largest partner. The party delivered 37 of Belgium's 53 prime ministers. Through the larger Christian labour movement, the ACV-CSC confederation had an organic link with the party, allowing it (at least in theory) ample opportunities to push its codetermination agenda.

Third, there is a clear evolution in the thinking on codetermination within the Christian trade union. Over time, the union went from unequivocal support to opposition, passing through periods of moderation and radicalisation. At the same time, the position of the socialist trade union towards the issue of codetermination was largely stable over time. While there is much to say about the internal evolution of the debate within the socialist trade union, the official position has always been one of principled opposition to board-level employee participation and/or codetermination. The ABVV-FGTB favours workers' control: through institutions of contestation, workers and unions should have the ability to control and, if necessary, oppose management decisions while ruling out any co-responsibility. Other publications provide a broader overview of the Belgian debate on codetermination (Dermine 2022; De Spiegelaere Forthcoming).

As this paper focuses on the Christian trade union, ample references are made to Christian/Catholic social teaching, more specifically the Catholic doctrine on issues related to labour and social matters. This teaching developed over time through a series of papal encyclicals. The first and arguably most important one is *Rerum Novarum*, published by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 as a reaction against liberal

capitalism on the one hand, and the idea of class struggle on the other. For the first time, the Church talked not only about charity, but also about justice in relation to labour issues (Gerard 1991:77). The encyclical argued for fair wages and a form of codetermination, and provided support for Christian trade unionism.

The 1931 *Quadragesimo* Anno written by Pope Pius XI in the aftermath of the 1929 Great Depression further developed the topic, condemning Wall Street's financial capitalism. On the issue of company organisation, the encyclical advised some form of employee-employer cooperation. As such, Pope Pius XI advised that 'so far as possible, the work-contract be somewhat modified by a partnership-contract' (Rooney 1963).

Pope Johannes XXIII wrote two encyclicals titled *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963) which reiterated papal support for systems of codetermination. Employees should contribute to the efficient running of the enterprise so that companies are run in the interest of all its members, was the essence of the communication. Pope Johannes Paulus II also supported codetermination and joint ownership of the means of work in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. In short, Christian social teaching, through the main encyclicals, has generally supported forms of codetermination and joint ownership of companies, which influenced the positions and argumentation of the ACV-CSC on the issue.

A third point of context refers to the background of Belgian industrial relations, against which this discussion on codetermination is set. Without going into unnecessary detail, it has the following relevant characteristics: labour union plurality; broadly spread representative institutions, with limited impact; a strategic focus on the sectoral level for economic codetermination and an overriding immobility since the post-war period.

The first relevant characteristic for this working paper is the labour union plurality that exists in Belgium. Largely determined by the post-war social pacts, Belgium has three representative trade unions, divided along ideological lines: a Christian confederation, a socialist one and a liberal one. In recent decades ideological differences have become blurred, but in the immediate post-war era the differences were more clear-cut. One of the main distinguishing features was the issue of codetermination, with the socialist ABVV-FGTB being opposed to any form of co-responsibility without full control. On the other side, the ACV-CSC was mostly (see below) in favour of codetermination, seeing it as a third-way solution between the socialist statist and liberal free market options.

The second important characteristic is the presence of disparate representative institutions with little impact on company decisions. Through compulsory social elections in companies of a certain size (i.e. 50 employees), the presence of some kind of representative institutions is guaranteed in many companies. However, the institutions (such as the health and safety committee and works council) have few competences beyond information and consultation. The Belgian company-level institutions are weak compared to their counterparts in Germany or the Netherlands, for example. Also, unlike Germany and the Netherlands, employee

representatives in company-level representative institutions are necessarily trade union members, as only representative trade unions can submit lists of candidates for the social elections.

The relatively weak company-level institutions are related to the third characteristic of importance for this paper, the strategic focus on the sectoral level for economic 'steering'. In Belgium, an obligatory and strict system of sectoral-level collective bargaining was established in the post-war era. Every company belongs to a sector that engages in state-facilitated collective bargaining. The importance of the sectoral level relates to a strategic choice of unions to try to steer the economy and working conditions through sectoral negotiations and, at the same time, keep the company-level participation limited to information and consultation.

Lastly, it is important to note that since the implementation of the post-war social pacts, Belgium's system of industrial relations has been relatively stable, not to say immobile. The different institutions have developed additional competences, but far-reaching reforms towards more or less participation, trade union rights or codetermination have been absent.

3. Historical overview

To address the question of codetermination, an historical overview of the positions and proposal of the ACV-CSC union over time is presented below. As a starting point we take the post-World War II period, since the foundations of the current system of company-level participation were established in that era. It is, however, interesting to briefly consider the position of the ACV-CSC before this period as it was then an openly corporatist union calling for unity between capital and labour. Being established as a genuinely anti-socialist union, the ACV-CSC supported peaceful and loyal cooperation between employers and employees (Gerard 1991: 87–90).

3.1 1945-1960: taking the middle road in a post-WWII environment

In the post-World War II era, the groundwork was laid for Belgian social dialogue. Two important pacts in this context are i) the pact on social security (1944) and ii) the productivity pact (1954). The first pact (which was never signed) mapped the overall structure of post-war industrial relations, including the establishment of works councils and sector-level bargaining, as well as social security. The second consisted of a general compromise whereby the labour movement accepted the market economy, the authority of employers and the need to cooperate for the growth of the economy and productivity. At the same time, employers accepted the role of the unions in the economy and the company, agreed to distribute productivity gains fairly and to negotiate working conditions at the company, sectoral and national level (Van Gyes and De Spiegelaere (eds.) 2015).

In this period, the main institutions of participation at the company level were established: the works council (1948) and the union delegation (1947). The first is a body for information and consultation of employees constituted on a parity basis. The members are elected by all staff and considered as employee representatives, but only union members can run as candidates. The union delegation is the official representation of the trade union in the company. Members are appointed by the union. The role of this institution is to make claims and to negotiate agreements. While the first institution is to embody the cooperation in the firm, the second is focused on the differences in interests and the wish to find negotiated solutions (van Griensven 1997).

In this context, the 1947 ACV-CSC Congress had as its main topic ‘codetermination’ (*medebeheer*) which was a general plea for involvement at the national, sectoral

and company level. Concretely, the ACV-CSC proposed to include two workers representatives on the boards of companies. This came to be seen as the first step towards full-parity company boards. Through codetermination, companies would be run in the interest of all parties and in this way wage-labour issues would be resolved. In essence, the role of capital was put on an equal footing with the role of labour.

The argumentation is almost exclusively moral and based on the idea of personalism and Christian teaching. Personalism states that the ultimate goal in life is to fully realise human potential. For this, people require a degree of autonomy and the right to take their lives into their own hands.[3] The organisation of the firm is to enable such self-accomplishment and cannot be reduced to a mere economic relationship. Employees, in other words, need to fully co-determine their economic life.[4] The organisation of the firm was to respect 'the economic value and the higher dignity' of the worker (Lagae 1986a). References were made to Christian teaching and more specifically to the *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), which aimed to temper wage relations through consultation, responsibility and social solidarity.

Democracy was also used as an argument. The worker receives voting rights, but as the economic sphere provides meaning to the worker, these democratic principles should be extended to the company.[5] In the congress texts, the proposal for codetermination was explicitly mentioned as a midway between the excessive power of capital and excessive state-intervention, essentially a settlement between liberalism and socialism.[6]

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3. '…de volledige erkenning van de arbeider als onafhankelijk mens, die gelijk is in rechten en waardigheid, die een eigen doel heeft waaraan alles in ondergeschikt, die begaafd is met een vrije wil en zijn heil door zichzelf te verwezenlijken'. [(…) the whole acceptance of the worker as an adult human being, who is equal in rights and dignity, has a proper purpose to which everything is subordinated, who has a free will and can attain salvation through self-accomplishment]. (ACV-CSC 1947: 32).

4. See Dereau (1947: 190): 'De voltooiing en ontvoogding der arbeiders maakt hun volledige deelneming aan het beheer van het sociaal-economisch leven noodzakelijk' [The accomplishment and emancipation of the workers makes the full participation in the management of the socioeconomic life necessary'].

5. Hulpiau (1947: 450): 'De sociaal-economische democratie vormt een geheel met de politieke democratie. Het medebeheer in het economisch leven en, meer bepaald, in de onderneming is de normale voorzetting van de politieke democratie en de logische consequentie alsmede de voltooiing van de democratie 'tout court'. Het medebeheer is de spontane evolutie in de toepassing van het democratisch beginsel en de geleidelijke verwezenlijking van de totale ontvoogding.' ['Socioeconomic democracy forms a unity with political democracy. The codetermination in the economic life and, more specifically, in the company is the normal continuation of political democracy and the logical consequence and completion of democracy, in short. Codetermination is the spontaneous evolution in the application of the democratic principles and the gradual accomplishment of total emancipation].

6. 'Wij komen op tegen de overdreven macht van het kapitaal dat de arbeid onder de knoet houdt, maar wij trekken eveneens ten strijde tegen een vooropgezette etatisatie en willekeurige staatsinmenging, die een andere vorm van machtsmisbruik is. Tussen het machtsmisbruik van een enkeling of een groep en dat van de etatisatie weigeren wij te kiezen.' ['We resist the total power of the capital which keeps labour under control, but we equally struggle against the envisaged nationalisation and random state-intervention, which is another form of abuse of power. Between the power abuse of an individual or a group and that of nationalisation, we refuse to choose.'] (ACV-CSC 1947: 580).

Interestingly, the union was conscious of the responsibilities that codetermination would entail and did not shy away from them. They thought of themselves as a leading societal organisation, which meant that one had to take responsibility, not only make demands. In the words of the union, their members should 'abandon their exclusively demanding mentality, their oppositional attitude as a pressure group, to adapt to their role as a national group, leading and responsible'[7] (Arcq 2014: 17).

Ideas on codetermination initially found their way to the legislative arena where the Christian democratic party worked on legislative proposals. As such, the first post-war initiative came from the co-founder of the Christian democrat party (CVP/PSC), August De Schryver in 1948. He envisaged company boards with employee representatives and independent members as means of improving information for employee representatives (Beke 2005: 242–244).

This proposal met with opposition from the employer's side, which contested the practical feasibility of codetermination. The proposal, finally submitted in July 1947, was hardly discussed as it conflicted with the ongoing debates on works councils, which were seen as a priority (Beke 2005: 243–246). Feeling the time was not ripe and knowing the opposition of the socialist trade unions, the ACV-CSC had to compromise. During negotiations between the presidents of the Christian trade union and the Christian employers organisations, the union settled by giving works councils the competence to receive economic and financial information that could be analysed by company auditors (Mampuys 1991: 231). In the eyes of the ACV-CSC this would have been a steppingstone towards codetermination. While in early versions of the works councils law this idea was clearly mentioned, it was nowhere to be found in the final version.[8]

The initial enthusiasm for codetermination waned in subsequent years. The newly established works councils did not live up to early expectations and doubts surfaced about the responsibilities that real codetermination would entail (Lagae 1986a: 670). The idea that codetermination could be a much sought-after middle way between liberalism and socialism was met with doubt and confusion, amplified by papal statements (Pius XII) that codetermination was not a natural law. In his understanding, the right to property implied a denial of a natural law to co-ownership (Rooney 1963).

Accordingly, the 1951 ACV-CSC congress was much more reserved regarding codetermination and focused on the need to educate its own members before

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7. ACV in Arcq (2014 : 17) : les travailleurs syndiqués « doivent abandonner leur mentalité exclusivement revendicative, leur esprit d'opposition comme groupe de pression, pour s'adapter à leur rôle de groupe national, dirigeant et responsable. »

8. As such, the establishment of the works council was seen to be a first step towards more participation, also according to the Christian employer association. 'De ondernemingshoofden zullen aan de ondernemingsraden inlichtingen van economische aard verstrekken (…) ten einde de geleidelijke deelneming van de arbeiders aan het Beheer der Onderneming te verzekeren' ['The company head will provide to the works councils economic information (…) as to gradually assure the participation of the workers in the management of the company.'] (Brouwers 1974).

taking legal action. Nevertheless, the union was officially in favour of (almost) parity codetermination and defended a fundamental rethink of the structure of the company (ACV-CSC 1951: 101; Lindemans 1968). In the 1958 congress the picture was even bleaker as a proposal for work council codetermination was downvoted. The idea of codetermination was, in their words, about to become extinct in the trade union movement (Lagae 1986a: 672). A couple of years later, the debate would re-emerge but with a much more radical approach.

3.2 1960-1968 – revival of the debate: codetermination through control

The 1960s started with one of the largest (and most violent) strikes in Belgian history, against the *Eenheidswet*[9] (Unitary law). It was mainly the socialist union that organised general strikes and demonstrations, which resulted in violent clashes with the police and the death of four demonstrators. This did not stop the government from passing the law. The rest of this period was marked by relatively benign economic conditions and a change in the power balance between the socialist and Christian trade union, with the latter becoming (and remaining) larger than the former, albeit with important regional differences. As such, the socialist ABVV-FGTB remained the largest union in the Walloon region for a longer time.

In the mid and late 1960s the defining events were the student revolts of May 1968 and the tendency to develop more critical thinking about society and capitalism. The revival of the debate on codetermination came not from the ACV-CSC itself, but from the associated organisation KWB (*Kristelijke Werklieden Bond*, Christian Workers Association). This organisation was traditionally an education and training institute for the Christian workers' movement and never discussed socio-economic issues. In the 1960s however, they published a draft manifesto on the 'the search for a new company structure'. The publication was quickly renamed the 'red book' both for its colour and its content. The publication of the book went together with a remarkable information and consultation effort on the part of the members. More than 13 000 members participated in study groups, or about 12% of its total membership (Lagae 1986b: 780). The KWB proposed a brand-new form of codetermination that actually included co-ownership. Non-working capitalists (financiers) were to be avoided. The view was that the company should be in the hands of the workers, as should all the benefits stemming from its functioning.

Fired up by the KWB, the ACV-CSC took up the subject of codetermination in its 1964 congress dedicated to 'the company and unionism' (*onderneming en syndicalisme*). The headline 'cooperation in codetermination through control' clearly indicated that codetermination should not curb the contestation power of the union. This is a remarkable evolution in their views compared to earlier

9. The Unitary Law (eenheidswet) was proposed by Prime Minister Eyskens in 1960. It included significant increases of taxes on consumption, wage moderation for municipal workers, tightening of criteria for unemployment benefits and more controls on sick- and invalidity benefit recipients.

periods when the increased responsibility that came with codetermination was readily accepted. It moved the ACV-CSC position closer to that of the ABVV-FGTB on workers' control as it refused to participate in company management in a minority position. It also demonstrated that the union did not want to go too far in its critique of capitalism and did not question the 'necessary authority of the employer' (Pasture 2003: 144). In this congress the ACV-CSC again problematised the fact that all power in companies stems from capital and that companies are not focused on the common good and the self-accomplishment of their workers.[10]

The ACV-CSC proposal as accepted in its 1964 congress envisaged a kind of codetermination on social issues without actually proposing a concrete plan (Lindemans 1968). It did distinguish between 'active' and 'passive' codetermination. Passive codetermination refers to the authority of employee representatives to control and approve received information and company policies. In active codetermination, employee representatives will not only approve policies but be involved in the definition of these company policies. While the union was in principle in favour of the active version, practical considerations regarding co-responsibility were raised. A middle way could be found by providing active codetermination rights on social issues and passive codetermination rights on economic issues.

To smooth relations between the KWB and the ACV-CSC and to come to a unified position, a working group was set up to discuss the issue jointly (Gerard 1991: 249). In 1967 this working group proposed the establishment of a supervisory board involving employee representatives and representatives to protect the 'common good' (Gerard 1991: 249). In this way, they wanted to combine codetermination with the right to protest and to mobilise in trade unions. This was to be combined with 'work consultation' on the workplace level in institutionalised organs which are democratically elected.[11] In the ACV-CSC congress of 1971, this proposal was adopted as an official demand (Mampuys 1991: 249). More precisely, four concrete demands were put forward: i) improve the economic and financial information given by the employer, ii) introduce systematic (self-managing) work consultation, iii) changes to the company law and iv) improve works councils. This forms the groundwork for the concrete demands of 1974 discussed in the next part.

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10. 'Het Congres vraagt dat deze studie een zeer speciale aandacht zou besteden: aan het feit dat het gezag in de onderneming thans uitsluitend voortvloeit uit het kapitaal; dat elke werkelijke hervorming van de onderneming veronderstelt dat deze laatste afgestemd zij op het algemeen welzijn en de volledige ontplooiing mogelijk maakt van alle personen die er samenwerken. Bovendien en in elk geval dient er een synthese gevonden van de verantwoordelijkheden, verbonden aan de medezeggenschap der arbeiders in de nieuwe ondernemingsstructuren en het economisch leven enerzijds en de eisende houding van de syndicale beweging anderzijds.' ['The congress asks to pay very special attention to this study: to the fact that the authority in the company now stems solely from capital; that any real reform of the company presupposes that the latter is geared to the common good and allows the full development of all those who work together. Moreover, and in any case, a synthesis must be found of the responsibilities associated with worker participation in the new corporate structures and economic life on the one hand and the demanding attitude of the trade union movement on the other.'] (ACV-CSC 1964: 134–135).

11. In 1971, the report 'Democratisering van de onderneming' was finally accepted after heated debates.

After difficult and lively debates, the ACV-CSC adopted a report on 'the democratisation of the company' in 1971, which proposed self-government as the ultimate goal of the Christian labour movement. In doing so, it considered the whole system of social dialogue based on parity as a mistake as, in practice, management continued to hold all leverage in the company (Pasture 2003).

Being a workers' organisation (and thus not a union), the KWB based its pleas for codetermination mostly on ethical arguments. Capitalism, according to them, was destroying workers: their subordinate position resulted in a 'loss of personality' and did not allow the sought-after self-accomplishment. Rather, it was argued that all workers should be seen as full citizens. The document went quite far along this line, stating that everybody had a right to possess the means of production; that this was a law of nature. Codetermination should thus take the form of co-ownership. Additionally, however, more pragmatic arguments were deployed regarding recent company closures, over which the worker had little or no influence.

As for the ACV-CSC, ethical and moral arguments were combined with insights from the social sciences. The work of Argyris (1964), for example, argued that companies should treat their workers as adult human beings and provide autonomy so that they could develop and in the meantime be more productive (Lagae 1986b).

The ethical and social science-based arguments were meant to be mutually reinforcing. Experiences with codetermination and self-management abroad were used to demonstrate the feasibility of the proposals. In-depth research was carried out into the Yugoslav experiments in self-management (Claeys 1967), the German system of codetermination and some Italian experiments (Pasture 2003).

Christian teaching was used to substantiate the demands by referring to *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963). The resulting argumentation sounded radical: justice would be evident in the distribution and production of wealth. Any organisation or economic theory in which the dignity of man is suppressed, his responsibility limited, and his free initiative negated was seen as unjust (Lindemans 1968). Yet there were far fewer direct references to the Christian sources in the congress material than was the case in the immediate post-war period, when a discussion can be observed regarding the place of the Christian teaching and the confessional character of the Christian labour movement (Lagae 1986b). As indicated by Coenen (2005), some events like the Vatican's position on contraception[12] and the refusal to publicly support the imprisoned Brazilian Catholic workers' youth[13] spurred the secularisation (deconfessionalisation) of the labour union.

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12. In 1968 the papal encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* reiterated the Catholic view that sexuality and procreation were two sides of the same coin, meaning that any kind of contraception using condoms or hormonal pills was prohibited.

13. The KAJ-JOC (*Katholieke ArbeidersJeugd- Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*– Catholic Workers' youth) was actively targeted by the Brazilian Junta of Castelo Branco.

The ambitious and radical proposals produced few concrete results. While most could identify with the criticism of capitalism, there was much more discussion about the concrete proposals for change (Lagae 1986b: 782). The KWB did invite all trade unions and political parties to state their position on the proposal, but this also had little effect. Moreover, even an internal evaluation concluded that the proposals for codetermination did not enjoy the full support of the rank and file (Lagae 1986b: 791).

3.3 1968-1980: a revolution in evolution

After lengthy discussions in the 1960s about necessary changes to the capitalist system, the ACV-CSC agreed on the broad lines of their company-level demands in 1971. In 1974, these broad lines were operationalised in a concrete offensive demand for the establishment of a 'workers council' (as opposed to the already existing works council) in the companies. This council was described as 'a first step to self-government; it gives workers the possibility to organise independently and express themselves. Moreover, the workers council will be an important instrument for workers' control'.[14] Interestingly, the proposal of the ACV-CSC was no longer a stepping stone towards codetermination but towards the genuine self-government of workers (Pasture 2003; Dermine 2022).

In the critical atmosphere after May 1968, the established institutions were considered to be failures. More specifically, the works council which was (and still is) presided over by the management also seemed to be dominated by the management. The ACV-CSC therefore proposed to set up a workers council that consisted only of workers' delegates. This council was to have codetermination rights (veto rights) on staff and employment issues and greater competences in terms of economic and financial information and strategy. This new demand was to be combined with previous demands regarding a supervisory board with an equal representation of shareholders, employees and representatives for the common good. It was also combined with the demand to introduce forms of 'work meetings' between workers to plan, execute and control their work independently. The plan of the ACV-CSC thus spanned from the job level, the management level to company ownership.

The main argumentation was based on a rather bleak evaluation of the current system of works councils with only information and consultation rights. Given the weak works council rights, they were dominated by employers and gave phoney responsibility, with no influence or control. Moreover, they risked putting a distance between the workers and their representatives. The alienation of the

14. '… een eerste stap is op weg naar het zelfbestuur; het biedt de werknemers de kans om zich zelfstandig te organiseren en uit te drukken. De werknemersraad zal daarenboven een belangrijk instrument worden tot arbeiderscontrole.' ['…a first step to self-government; it gives workers the possibility to organise independently and express themselves. Moreover, the workers council will be an important instrument for workers' control'] (ACV-CSC 1974: 16).

workers and the imminent consumer society were also evoked as reasons to invest work with more meaning.

This mirrored the age-old argument about the self-accomplishment of workers.[15] Reference was made to concrete experiences abroad such as German codetermination and the Yugoslav experiments. For the first time, reference was also made to developments in the European Union where discussions were ongoing about the establishment of European Works Councils and the participation of employees in large companies. Christian teaching (*Mater et Magistra*) was still used to substantiate the demands for democracy (Lagae 1986b).

This critical discourse found its way into the ACV-CSC debates where hard evaluations were made about the dysfunctional works councils and 'sardonic' capitalism and the lack of long-term perspectives (Lagae 1986b: 792). A certain ideological rapprochement between the Christian and socialist trade unions is observed and many of the socialist arguments were taken over and more radical proposals were heard in terms of workers' self-government. Self-government should be seen as the goal, and the first step towards that goal was the establishment of a works council German style (a works council with only employees and with information, consultation and codetermination rights).

However, internal discussions on the topic continued, attributed by many to a lack of knowledge and insight, but also to the fact that the socialist union ABVV-FGTB remained opposed to the idea (Houthuys 1979; Lagae 1986b: 797).

Very little came of the proposal to set up a workers council and a codetermined supervisory board. Some smaller advances were made with the 1972 national collective agreement that better defined the competences of the works councils, the law on improved Economic and Financial Information, and in 1975 when the accountancy rules were clarified and made more transparent for the works councils. In 1981, a law was proposed by two Christian Democrat members of parliament (Jan Lenssen & Luc Van den Brande), broadly inspired by the ACV-CSC proposal. It was never discussed in parliament, however. As a party, the Christian-Democrats focused more on improving information and consultation procedures than on a radical rethink of the nature of the company (Sloover 1978). The steps forward in terms of economic and financial information should, however, be seen as a part of the unions' strategy towards economic democracy. In the words of the ACV-CSC 'there is no participation without precise information' (Jouan 2015).

15. 'Deze filosofie tekent ons ideaal, waarin de arbeider in zijn arbeid en onderneming als volwassene gezien wordt, erkend wordt, tot ontplooiing kan komen en uiteindelijk zijn bestaan als arbeider in de onderneming zelf in handen kan nemen' ['This philosophy marks our ideal, in which the worker is seen as an adult in his work and enterprise, can be recognised, can develop and ultimately take over his existence as a worker in the enterprise itself.'] (ABVV et al. 2015: 33).

3.4 1980-2000s: the years of silence

After the radicalisation of the 1970s came a long period of silence on the issue of codetermination. For one thing, the context had changed dramatically. Companies were pushing for more flexibility and installing management-oriented forms of workers' participation. Politically, the period was dominated by the Christian Democrat Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene, who was close to the workers' movement and governed in coalition with the socialist parties. His ideas about the financial participation of employees (and his legislative action on that field) pushed the ACV-CSC to take up this subject in more detail. As such, codetermination barely figured in the congresses, where the focus shifted to demands for workplace employee participation in self-management teams, as it were. The initial enthusiasm cooled as management initiated types of direct participation that were perceived to bypass the unions without leading to genuine self-management.

When the issue of more democracy at work came up, it was mostly framed within the changing economic context of outsourcing, which required a different kind of worker participation as these companies were often too small for a works council or any other workers' representative institution. Clear reference was made to ongoing European discussions about codetermination in European Companies (ACV-CSC 1989: 23). In the 1994 congress, the same demands were reiterated with a focus on arguments regarding the strengthening of democracy. Social sciences were still mobilised to underscore demands for job enrichment, quality of work, autonomy and its function as a steppingstone to more democratic companies.[16]

Officially, the ACV-CSC remained in favour (in the long term) of the establishment of workers councils and a supervisory board with employee participation (ACV-CSC 1989: 16). However, the rise of forms of direct participation (supported by management) incited the union to take a more critical stance on direct participation.

3.5 2010-...s – failed renewal

In 2010, the topic of workers' participation finally resurfaced with a decision in the congress to renew the ACV-CSC position on codetermination. Five years later, the 2015 ACV-CSC congress was titled 'Say it yourself' (*Zeg nu zelf*). European developments helped to reignite this topic. With the Europeanisation of companies, and their cross-border mobility (mergers, acquisitions) and the advent of 'European Companies', there was a spillover of codetermination rights from other companies in Belgium. As such, several Belgian employee representatives

16. 'Zo'n werkoverleg zou goed zijn voor taakverrijking en meer menselijke gezagsverhoudingen en als leerschool voor verder democratisering van de onderneming' ['Such a work meeting would be good for job enrichment and more human authority relations and as an education in further democratisation of the company.'] (ACV-CSC 1989: 22).

took up positions on company boards and the Belgian unions (both socialist and Christian) were obliged to take a position on the issue.

Compared to previous periods, there was very little debate around the topic in the run-up to the 2015 congress. The only article, in *De Gids*, for example, was published shortly after the congress (De Spiegelaere and Van Gyes 2015) and a book including information on the theme was only distributed at the congress itself (Van Gyes and De Spiegelaere 2015). Internally however, a small-scale information campaign was being conducted into codetermination. The increasing globalisation and Europeanisation of the economy and companies themselves was central to the argumentation. According to the union, this rendered some of the employee involvement institutions less effective or even obsolete.[17]

This information was mostly focused on the pragmatic added value that codetermination could offer the unionists in support of existing information and consultation institutions. Ample reference was made to foreign and local examples of codetermination with representatives on the board often taking the floor. Much attention was given to addressing counterarguments regarding co-responsibility, corporatism and possible alienation from the rank and file.

The idea of changing capitalism with the use of codetermination, increasing the democratic character of the economy or as a steppingstone towards a new system were completely absent from the debate. Moreover, it was even explicitly stated that codetermination would not make that much difference. The same holds for the ethical considerations that were mentioned but which received very little attention. A relatively new argument was the explicit reference to codetermination as a way of reducing inequalities in society. The work by Thomas Pikkety and his support for this line of argument was often cited.

During the congress of April 2015, the union bureaucracy's proposed opinion on codetermination was downvoted by a large margin. Since this congress, for the first time in its history the union was officially not in favour of any type of

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17. 'Terwijl onze economie en de onderneming drastisch veranderen en globaliseerden, en de markteconomie sneller en schichtiger werd, raakten onze recepten van informatie en consultatie mee uit de tijd. De rechten op economisch-financiële informatie, veroverd in de jaren zeventig, doen er almaar minder toe. Met jaarlijkse financiële gegevens schiet je niet zoveel op in markten die veel sneller veranderen: de polsslag van onze economie is nu veel gejaagder dan toen. (…) Om een sociaaleconomische analyse van je onderneming te krijgen, heb je gegevens nodig van de hele financiële groep. En niet alleen achteraf, maar best allerlei rapporten over diverse aspecten van allerlei vestigingen en van de hele groep: gegevens over de productiviteit, kosten, investeringen, markten, perspectieven. Dat is veel meer bepalend dan wat in de boekhouding van de Belgische vestiging staat' (Fonck 2010). ['As our economy and the business changed drastically and globalised, and the market economy became faster, our information and consultation remedies became outdated. The rights to economic and financial information conquered in the 1970s are becoming less important. With annual financial data you do not get that far in markets that are changing much faster: the pulse of our economy is much faster now than it was then. (…) To obtain a socio-economic analysis of your company, you need data from the entire financial group. And not just afterwards, but preferably from all kinds of reports on various aspects of all kinds of locations and for the entire group: data on productivity, costs, investments, markets, perspectives. That is much more decisive than what is stated in the accounts of the Belgian site.'] (Fonck 2010: 10).

codetermination. In the run-up to the congress, two proposals were put forward for consideration. The first demanded that workers representatives take a seat on company boards, under certain conditions. As such, the system would be established on a step-by-step basis; the members should be employee representatives with mandates in other institutions; they should have the same rights and duties; have access to expert support; and would have specific rules regarding confidentiality. All this would enable 'a timely information and consultation of employees in important company decisions' (ACV-CSC 2014: 11).

Having met with some opposition, the second version of the proposal envisaged the admission of workers' representatives onto company boards as observers with the right to participate in meetings and obtain the same information. A clear reference was also made to European experiences (ACV-CSC 2015a: 5). This second proposal, however, also met with criticism and was outvoted. The resulting opinion of the union on codetermination was that the employer is, and would remain, the only party responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation (ACV-CSC 2015b: 13).

The ACV-CSC union is now officially opposed to codetermination, just as its socialist counterpart has been for decades. While both unions support the defence of the codetermination system in European companies or in companies involved in European mobility, they do not want to replicate such a system in national companies.

4. Discussion

In 2015, a long era of creative thinking about economic democracy seems to have come to an end in Belgium. What can we learn from this history? An historical overview of the various periods in the debate about economic democracy within Belgian Christian trade unions reveals some interesting developments and patterns, and can even point to some practical lessons for the future.

4.1 Arguments: ethical, economic, citizenship based and others

Focusing first on how the argument evolved, we see some unsurprising developments. To frame this discussion we use the work of Foley & Polanyi (2006) who distinguish between three main lines of arguments around workplace democracy: i) the economic argument, ii) the citizenship argument and iii) the ethical argument.

Looking at the historical evolution, we see that the *economic* argument for industrial democracy (indicating that it might improve decision-making and cooperation, for example) never figured significantly in the debate. In the early period it was touched upon while referring to the need for cooperation in firms. Only in the second and third period were social sciences actively used to substantiate the claims for more democracy. In later decades, economic arguments were mostly used to show that codetermination would not hurt the companies, but never became a central part of the argumentation.

The same can be said of citizenship arguments. The idea here is that workplace and economic democracy can give essential experiences of democracy to employees, which will have a positive spillover effect on political democracy (Pateman 1970). References to this line of thinking are made in the first period and in more recent debates, but as with the economic arguments they were mainly used as supporting arguments in the debate.

Contrary to the first two, *ethical* arguments have always been important in the ACV-CSC debate, until recent decades. The shape of the ethical arguments has nevertheless changed over time. In line with the secularisation of Belgian society and the ACV-CSC (Pasture 1993: 52–60), the importance of arguments related to Christian teaching eroded over the years. Since 1968 some references have been made to Christian texts, but they occupy a far more marginal place in the debate. While references to Christian teaching have decreased, the core ethical

argumentation has remained the same over various periods: that capitalist organisation of the firm hampers the self-accomplishment and self-realisation of the employee. It is only from the 1980s on that this ethical argumentation has become devalued and was even largely absent from the 2015 discussion.

Alongside the three main lines of argument defined by Foley & Polanyi (2006), we observe some other important arguments in various periods which mostly relate to the (counter)arguments made by the competing socialist trade union in Belgium. As such, codetermination was clearly put forward as a middle road between liberalism and socialism in the first period. The union thus used the 'spectre of communism' haunting Europe to push their demands and assert their independent identity. In subsequent periods, this argument paled into insignificance as communism became less of an issue. The Christian trade union, consequently, had to develop arguments against the typical line of the socialist movement: that codetermination meant co-responsibility and incorporation of the labour movement into capitalist structures. In the second period, this argument was taken on board by proposing a combination of codetermination and contestation. Similarly, in the third period, the proposed 'works council' was meant to address this concern. In the last period, the observer status of the workers' representatives had to play the same role.

Focusing on the period after 2010, ethical arguments are almost absent. Most arguments made are defensive (for example, it's not bad for the economy, it also works in other countries) and pragmatic in nature (it only needs to strengthen existing structures). While these arguments are obviously necessary in a debate, they are rather weak in themselves. Indeed, if it doesn't matter all that much, why bother?

At the same time, in his review of the ethical motivation of demands for codetermination until 1980, Lagae (1986b, 1986a) concluded that ethical arguments alone are insufficient because they are too vague and give little concrete impetus for action.

The only period which combined strong ethical arguments with science-based arguments was the 1974-80 period. This was also when a concrete and all-encompassing plan was proposed to change the nature of the company from the top down. Unfortunately, it came just at the time when all thinking about participation would be side-tracked for the next three decades.

Taking into account that this review only looks at the debate in one trade union, and acknowledging that every period has its historical specificities, the overview here suggests that in a debate on codetermination a rich set of arguments is required. Ranging from purely ethical and moral arguments to economic and political and more pragmatic ones referring to established practices: capture the imagination while removing the fear of change.

A second tentative conclusion refers to the limited use of citizenship-based arguments for codetermination in Belgium. The idea that in democratic societies it only makes sense if there is a degree of democracy at work is rarely put forward.

These arguments certainly have their value at a time of increasing political apathy and citizen disengagement.

4.2 In favour of codetermination, but never fully

A second pattern uncovered by this research is that the official 'in favour' position of the ACV-CSC towards board level employee representation masked a high degree of internal discussion and debate on the issue.

In the Belgian context of trade union pluralism, the position on codetermination was for a long time one of the main distinguishing factors between the socialist and Christian democratic trade unions. While the socialists wished to avoid any co-responsibility without genuine control, the Christian-democrat union saw board-level employee representation as a step towards the ultimate goal of employee self-governance.

Yet while it was put forward as a major distinguishing factor, it seems that in all historical periods it never really won the full support of the rank and file. Many (if not most) rank-and-file members were never convinced of the need for real codetermination rights. In the early post-war days this was easily acknowledged and framed as part of the emancipatory and training mandate of the trade union. The union was not only to follow and represent their members, it was also there to teach them and be a frontrunner in defence of their interests.

This changed in subsequent periods when the union not only went out to 'teach' their members but also to consult them about positions on codetermination and company governance. While the consultation rounds were nothing less than impressive, they also demonstrated the contentiousness of the issue.

Consequently, the demand for board-level employee representation never became a top union priority. After the official adoption of a position, the debate mostly simmered down and then died a slow death. The contentious nature of the issue *inside* the Christian trade union is clearly one of the explanations for the curious non-advent of board-level employee representation in Belgium.

4.3 Christian-democrat and socialist unions: ideological rapprochement

Traditionally, one of the other explanations for why codetermination was never realised in Belgium is the position of the other important trade union in Belgium: the socialist ABVV-FGTB. Refusing any kind of co-responsibility because it might incorporate the labour movement into the capitalist system, they always pleaded for 'worker control' as an alternative to codetermination (Dermine 2022).

Throughout the post-war history of the internal ACV-CSC debate we can observe quite a shift in the thinking about codetermination, with Christian unionists becoming convinced by or at least open to socialist ideas. In the immediate post-war

period (taking the middle road), the ACV-CSC union clearly wanted to distinguish itself as a less radical alternative to the socialists and rejected the notion of class struggle. Class cooperation was the objective and the responsibilities coming with the concept of codetermination were readily accepted[18] in no uncertain terms 'When workers steer towards codetermination, they have to accept its whole responsibility'. Moreover, what was to be avoided was contestation combined with no responsibility at all since: 'this last regime is without a clear goal and will lead to adventurism.'[19]

In the second period (codetermination through control), these statements were nowhere to be found. As is obvious from the slogan, the ACV-CSC accepted the important role of control and contestation and did not want to jeopardise this with demands for more economic democracy. In their proposals they therefore distinguished active and passive codetermination and codetermination on social and economic issues. Without clearly saying where they wanted to end up, these distinctions were to come to a 'synthesis of the responsibilities linked to codetermination (…) and the demanding posture of the union movement.'[20]

The third period (revolutionary evolution) went even further and clearly stated that codetermination was not to entail responsibility[21] and (interestingly) that

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18. Hulpiau (1946: 566): 'De medezeggenschap is verder noodig als instrument voor de deproletarisatie van de arbeiders. De deelneming in de leiding zal bij de arbeiders het gevoelen van plichtbewustzijn, van verantwoordelijkheid en waardigheid aankweken of verstevigen.' ['Employee participation is also needed as an instrument for the deproletarisation of the workers. Participation in leadership will cultivate or strengthen the awareness of duty, responsibility and dignity among the workers.']
Hulpiau (1946: 569): 'Wanneer door de arbeiders op medezeggenschap aangestuurd wordt, dan moeten zij ook de gansche verantwoordelijkheid daarvan opnemen' ['When the workers are guided by employee participation, they must also assume the entire responsibility thereof.'].

19. Hulpiau (1947: 453)('Niet het medebeheer met verantwoordelijkheid moet gevreesd worden, maar wel de controle zonder verantwoordelijkheid, want dit laatste regime is zonder klare doelstelling en leidt naar het avontuurlijke.' ['It is not co-management with responsibility that should be feared, but control without responsibility, because this last regime is without a clear objective and leads to the adventurous.'].

20. 'Bovendien en in elk geval dient er een synthese gevonden van de verantwoordelijkheden verbonden aan de medezeggenschap der arbeiders in de nieuwe ondernemingsstructuren en het economisch leven enerzijds en de eisende houding van de syndicale beweging anderzijds.'. ['In addition, and in any case, a synthesis must be found of the responsibilities associated with worker participation in the new corporate structures and economic life on the one hand, and the demanding attitude of the trade union movement on the other.'] (ACV-CSC 1964: 135)

21. 'De werkgroep was dus verplicht om een andere vorm van ondernemingsraad te zoeken, die tegemoet komt aan de wens van het ACV om voor de werknemers meer reële invloed te verwerven op het ondernemingsbeleid en om de werknemersbelangen beter te kunnen doordrukken; zonder evenwel te raken aan de fundamentele structuren van de onderneming en zonder de werknemers verantwoordelijkheid te doen nemen in het beheer van de onderneming.' ['The working group was therefore obliged to look for a different form of works council that meets the wish of the ACV to gain more real influence on company policy for employees and to be able to better push through the interests of employees, without affecting the fundamental structures of the enterprise and without making employees take responsibility for managing the enterprise.'] (ACV-CSC 1974: 16).
'De hervorming van de ondernemingsraad mag geen afbreuk doen aan de macht en het dynamisme van de syndicale afvaardiging. De syndicale afvaardiging behoudt volledig haar rol inzake contestatie en syndicale strijd.' ['The reform of the works council must not affect the power and dynamism of the trade union delegation. The trade union delegation fully retains its role in contestation and trade union struggle.'] (ACV-CSC 1974: 17).

proposals would only be made when they came to an agreement with the socialist ABVV-FGTB on the issue.[22]

In the last period, finally, the first drafts of the congress documents indicated that while the union certainly did not want to be co-responsible for company policy; they were already co-responsible through the involvement of Belgian workers in some company boards and through collective bargaining. This experience showed that, while difficult, co-responsibility did not cause fundamental problems. During the congress, however, the co-responsibility issue was such a sensitive one that any reference to codetermination was eliminated from the congress resolutions.

While board-level employee representation and codetermination was for a long time one of the main distinguishing factors between the two main Belgian trade unions, their positions are currently aligned: no co-responsibility without full control. There is, in other words, a clear ideological rapprochement between the socialist and Christian trade unions in Belgium.

22. 'De juridische vormgeving is slechts zinvol, nadat het concreet van het ACV zich heeft uitgesproken over de grond van de zaak, en nadat - gebeurlijk - een gemeenschappelijk voorstel met het ABVV tot stand komt' ['The legal form is only meaningful after the ACV has given its opinion on the substance of the case and after - possibly - a joint proposal with the ABVV has been reached.'] (ACV-CSC 1974: 15).

5. Conclusion and lessons learned

From this overview there is a clear trend from accepting to refusing all forms of co-responsibility. This means that, in practice, the thinking of the Christian trade union in Belgium converged with that of the socialist trade union. A conversion, however, in which only one party moved, and which went together with an overall rapprochement between the different trade unions.

While this might seem to be quite a clear revolution, in practice the shift might be less radical. There was never a broad consensus among the rank and file about codetermination because it implies quite a different role for trade unions and workers representatives. The change in official position might thus seem radical, while the actual change in opinions of the rank-and-file union members is probably not.

Focusing on the conception and argumentation of the ACV-CSC union regarding codetermination and economic democracy more broadly, we did observe some remarkable developments. While the practical proposals remained largely similar over the years, the ideological backing has seen a real shift: from being mostly an ideological and ethical choice to being a more strategic and pragmatic reinforcement of existing structures. At the same time, the union started by accepting co-responsibility and now clearly refuses it. In parallel, the importance of Christian teaching decreased and eventually disappeared.

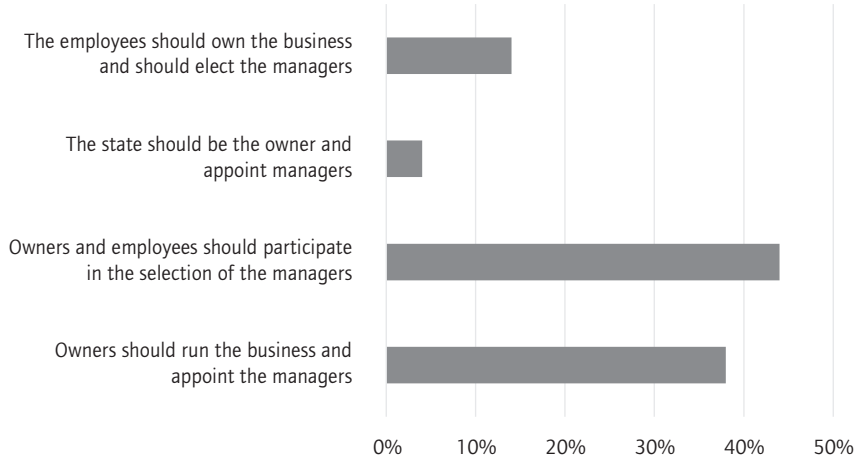
While this working paper focused on a specific case in a single country, there are still some tentative lessons for a broader audience. First of all, the historical overview suggests that in discussing codetermination, advocates should use a broad set of arguments. Throughout the periods considered, many arguments have been advanced that are currently absent in the debate on codetermination. More specifically, the whole argumentation around democracy and the moral importance of bringing democratic values into the governance of the company can be thought of as a strong yet underutilised line of argumentation.

Similarly, the argument that codetermination is the *third way* between company governance solutions focused on either the state or the market appears to be undervalued. When asked, I believe that citizens intuitively understand the logic that companies should not be solely governed by their owners. Illustrative of this is the question included in the European Value Study of 1990 (and unfortunately excluded from other waves of the survey), which sought the opinion of citizens on who should run companies and businesses (Figure 1). The results are surprising in that the most popular answer was that owners and employees, together, should

participate in the selection of company managers. Less than one in two thought, at that time, that businesses should be run by owners alone.

Advocates of codetermination should reuse this reasoning on codetermination – that it is a third way between state and market – and in such a way as to tie in with the idea that companies should not be governed by capital owners alone (Ferreras 2017).

Figure 1 **Who should run businesses (EVS 1990)**



Source: European Value Study, wave 1990, only EU countries selected.

To move the (Belgian) debate on codetermination forward, I suggest that in terms of argumentation the focus should be on (1) speaking to the intuition of citizens about the mutual governance of companies and the need for democracy at work, (2) capture the imagination of a capitalism in which broader interests are taken as a basis for company decisions and (3) remove the fear of change by referring to existing practices abroad.

As the debate on codetermination in Belgium is as good as dead for the moment, it seems appropriate to remember the words of Jef Houthuys, President of the ACV-CSC from 1969 to 1987: 'those who want to set sail must leave the harbour.'

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Annex: List of ACV-CSC Congresses

Number	Year	Dutch title	Type
XXXVI	2019, October	Transitiecongres	Normal
XXXV	2015, April	Zeggenschap	Normal
XXXIV	2010, October	Morgen mee maken	Normal
XXXIII	2006, 19-21 October	Voluit voor solidariteit!	Normal
XXXII	2002, 17-19 October	Het juiste inkomen	Normal
XXXI	1998, 25-28 November	Basissyndicalisme	Normal
XXX	1994, 23-26 November	Een vakbond van waarde(n)	Normal
XXIX	1990, 25-28 April	Vakbond over morgen	Normal
	1987, 27 July	Vakbeweging: democratie en solidariteit	Evaluation Congress
XXVIII	1985, 24-27 April	Vakbeweging: democratie en solidariteit	Normal
	1983, 12 March	Nieuwe technologieën	Extraordinary Congress
	1981, 7 March	Voor de tewerkstelling - Voor de minstbedeelden - Voor klaarheid, waarheid, rechtvaardigheid	Extraordinary Congress
XXVII	1980, 24-26 April	Een economie in dienst van mens en samenleving	Normal
	1976, 13 April	Programma voor een volledige en betere tewerkstelling om de toekomst veilig te stellen	Extraordinary Congress
XXVI	1975, 11-13 December	Voor een rechtvaardige spreiding van de inkomens	Normal
	1974, 16 March	Van ondernemingsraad naar werknemersraad	Extraordinary Congress
	1973, 24 November	Actualiteitsproblemen	Normal
XXV	1972, 23-25 November	De maatschappelijke zekerheid	Normal
	1971, 20 November	Actualiteitsproblemen	Normal
	1969, 25 October	De moeder in de familiale politiek - De pensioenen der werknemers	Normal
XIV	1968, 24-26 October	Verantwoordelijk voor de toekomst	Normal
	1967, 28 October	Gewetensonderzoek congresbesluiten 1966 - Volledige tewerkstelling en sluiting ondernemingen	Normal
	1966, 5 November	De vrouw in de vakbeweging - Het sociaaleconomisch beleid	Normal
XXIII	1964, 27-29 November	Onderneming en syndicalisme	Normal
XXII	1962, 19-21 October	Het vraagstuk van de collectieve arbeidsverhoudingen in België	Normal
XXI	1960, 21-23 October	Solidariteit en syndicalisme	Normal
	1960, 16 January	Het gewaarborgd weekloon	Extraordinary Congress
XX	1958, 4-6 July	Actualiteitsproblemen	Normal
XIX	1955, 23-25 September	Volledige tewerkstelling. Een programma voor industrialisatie.	Normal
	1955, 5 en 26, July	Tegen de afbraakpolitiek van de regering-Van Acker - Voor de vijfdagenweek	Restricted Congress
XVIII	1953, 2-4 October	Interne organisatieproblemen	Normal
XVII	1951, 12-14 October	De christelijke vakbeweging. Wezen en streven. - Syndicale jeugdproblemen	Normal
XVI	1949, 28-30 October	De syndicale loonpolitiek	Normal
XV	1947, 10-12 October	Medebeheer - Onze familiale politiek - Het syndicalisme	Normal
XIV	1945, 13-15 July	Syndicale betrekkingen - Nieuwe tijden. Het christelijk syndicaal programma voor de eerstkomende maanden.	Normal

European
Trade Union Institute
etui@etui.org
www.etui.org

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