

## Chapter 13

# Trade Union Education and Democratic Participation: the Case of Malta<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The link between education and democratization is well established. A minimum level of education is clearly necessary for citizens to be able to exercise meaningfully their democratic rights. In the process of development towards democratic workers' participation,<sup>2</sup> workers' and trade union education (TUE) is an essential tool for enabling workers to overcome their culture of dependence, subordination and passivity which is traditionally embedded in their work roles. Furthermore, the technical complexity of the modern work organization demands that decisions are made by well-informed and highly qualified people. Undoubtedly, those who for their own reasons are against the introduction of workers' participation may sometimes use the 'low level of the workers' [formal] education' as a delaying technique behind which to hide their real intentions. The existing level of workers' education may thus be depicted as being perennially inadequate for the responsibilities of participation. Though it may be promoted to serve different interests, the principle of workers' education is however nowadays universally accepted. Despite their different agendas, the leaders of industry, trade unions and, of course, governments have a common interest in promoting workers' education. In today's globalized labour-market conditions, lifelong workers' education is widely recognized as an essential condition for employability (Commission, 1997). Many adults today are returning to education to acquire credentials that may serve them as an insurance against any possible adversities at work. TUE – as a special branch of workers' education – is equally necessary for the survival of trade unions which, in addition to militating against the workers' traditional culture of subordination to managerial authority and know-how, rallies members on the principle of solidarity in an era of widespread individualism. Just as employers are resorting to staff training or human resources development to enhance the skills, knowledge and commitment of their employees, so trade

unions should resort to TUE as a mechanism for their own organizational development. TUE is equally necessary to enable workers to undertake the responsibilities of participation for which they need to be prepared technically and psychologically. In the process of achieving these aims, workers are likely to rely on their natural allies and representatives – the trade unions.

In addition to its contribution to personal growth and functionality, education theorists usually identify two divergent objectives of education in general, namely that of ‘cultural reproduction’ and ‘cultural transformation’. The survival of organizations like trade unions, their effectiveness and development require the realization of both sets of objectives. In their efforts to change the prevailing situation in industry, trade unions have always recognized the importance of TUE. This is required by workers and unions to acquire the competence for the furtherance of their roles. By their very nature, trade unions are concerned with the management of cultural change and TUE forms an important part of their strategy to bring about change. Trade unions acknowledge the value of TUE in carrying out their traditional collective bargaining role, in rallying their members and instilling in them appropriate values, and in implementing direct forms of workers’ participation. However, TUE activities do not seem to have generated too much interest in the literature of industrial relations. Indeed, as Holford states: ‘To students of industrial relations, union education has been a side issue, a peripheral activity of institutions which are properly to be judged by their bargaining capacity’ (Holford, 1994, p. 247). In recent years, on an international level, the interest at universities and research institutes in subjects like TUE and worker participation has generally waned (Welton, 1997; Spencer, 1998; and Kester and Sidibe, 1998).

This chapter explores empirically one concrete application of the third proposition outlined in the introduction to this book. This is the condition that the sustained spread of democratic participation is possible only in the presence of ‘a framework to provide facilities for research, information, education ... and legal advice, as well as an institutionalized framework of trade union-university/research cooperation’. Likewise the fourth proposition states that democratic participation ‘poses a particular challenge to the trade union movement to provide the necessary support [for appropriate innovative approaches]’. In order to do this, TUE must perform a ‘culturally transformative’ role, systematically, formally and informally.

This chapter reports on a longitudinal survey<sup>3</sup> of the TUE programmes organized by Malta’s largest trade union – the General Workers’ Union (GWU) – over the years since its establishment. It is argued that, while partially

reflecting the traditional 'paternalist' culture, TUE was 'transformative' to the extent that it aimed at overcoming the traditional workers' subculture of 'compliance with paternalism'. Furthermore, transformative TUE does not simply substitute a fatalistic mentality with a new set of attitudes, but also creates concrete alternatives where these attitudes could operate. In other words, an education intended to transform 'has to be grounded in present or emerging events or organization with a vision of the future' (Heaney and Horton, 1990, p. 92). To what extent were the GWU's TUE activities designed with such a vision? It will be argued that, though some success was achieved, TUE fell short of implanting the values of democratic participation and social partnership at the appropriate historical epochs. Instead, the TUE objectives have generally tended to reflect the changing trade union agendas – as perceived by the leadership – in which they played a supportive role. TUE has thus played a mainly 'reproductive' and a subsidiary 'transformative' role. This established TUE pattern may have served the union and its members well enough in the past, according to the exigencies and circumstances prevailing at the time. However, this chapter also suggests that the future development and effectiveness of the trade union require a more proactive and 'transformative' TUE role to be played. This agenda should be enshrined and guided by the results of policy research carried out by independent and sympathetic researchers working in an autonomous capacity. Through their empirical data and scientific analysis they can identify the strategy upon which TUE can be planned and executed.

It has been argued elsewhere that the present and future challenge to TUE strategy lies in an unreserved and systematic commitment to democratic worker participation (Kester and Pinaud, 1996). Failing this, the union may itself end up adopting a narrow, 'reproductive' outlook, effectively leading to the adoption of a restrictive, backward-looking role and a lack of innovation when confronting new situations. At present, when major initiatives for workplace participation are emerging from the employers' side – under their schemes for 'employee involvement' from which the unions are usually excluded – union leaders would do well to reassess their TUE policy towards direct participation. They might well conclude that the traditional, indirect forms of democratic participation through collective bargaining and the direct forms are indeed complementary and mutually reinforcing.

## **TUE Methodology**

According to the principles established by Paolo Freire (1972), TUE should ideally be organized around the concept of cooperative learning. Experience shows that people learn better when working together with others in a cooperative atmosphere. Some adult worker educators are pioneering the techniques of cooperative learning now making their way in the formal primary, secondary and even higher education systems (Mayo, 1999). In practice, however, most educational institutions – including those offering TUE – generally mirror the dominating managerial concept of organizational hierarchy, control from the top, dependency of the pupil on the instructor, and paternalist patterns of interaction. The organization of schools, discipline and the teacher's control is more reminiscent of the supervisor in a plant than of Freire's cooperative pedagogy.

One main characteristic of TUE methodology should be the use of both a formal and informal learning context and strategy. Formal learning opportunities may be unavailable or unfeasible for many adult workers. Hence TUE organizers may impart knowledge in accessible formats outside the formal classroom pattern. In fact, apprenticeship schemes have always relied on the role of the work experience itself as a necessary ingredient of the learning process and as a further stimulant to workers' interests in further learning and qualification development.

TUE should also lead to a greater acceptance and appreciation of diversity and tolerance, thus giving a wider meaning to the 'historically restricted' concept of working class solidarity (Hyman, 1994). Because trade union membership is becoming increasingly heterogeneous the need is being felt by worker educators to develop educational strategies for teaching individuals from different gender, religious, class and ethnic backgrounds. This again contributes towards the development and consolidation of democratic institutions in pluralist societies.

However, as trade unions pursue their objectives in a social-cultural context, their effectiveness has to be measured within such parameters. Precisely because they act as agencies of change in a particular social landscape, both their initial interventions and their subsequent success or failure must always be assessed against the historically specific background in which they emerge and operate.

## **Trade Union Organization**

When compared with most countries, the present state of Maltese trade unionism appears healthy. Evidence includes the relatively high level of union density (60 per cent), which has been continuously increasing, as well as the social visibility and influence of the unions on public and private decision making. The movement is Eurocentric and its roots lie in its British counterpart. Nevertheless, the Maltese trade union movement is best understood and analysed within Malta's general cultural and historical experience of colonialism and post-colonialism. Indeed, up to this day, the history of the Maltese labour movement has reflected local political and economic developments and cultural characteristics. Likewise, TUE efforts have historically reflected the unions' current agenda as perceived by the leadership. These include the members' responses to the changing challenges confronting the unions from time to time.

Maltese trade unions are currently organized in two opposing camps. The GWU, whose members amount to 57 per cent of trade union members, is traditionally close to the Malta Labour Party (MLP) and upholds a left wing, social-democratic ideology. Its members are organized in 10 different sections, each representing specific industrial sectors. Its strength lies among manual labourers in the public and private sectors. By contrast, the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions (CMTU) consists of a looser confederation of a number of unions, chief among which are the Union of United Workers (UHM, in its Maltese acronym), the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) and the Malta Union of Bank Employees (MUBE). Collectively, their members amount to 41 per cent of Malta's total trade union membership.

The main union in the CMTU is the UHM. Like the GWU, this is a general union, organized in seven different sections, with its main strength lying among clerical workers in the public sector. The CMTU's affiliates generally uphold an ideology based on the traditional social teachings of the Catholic Church.

The following section of this chapter presents some data about the cultural background. The subsequent sections present an analysis of the changing TUE objectives over time, which are compared with the main issues confronting the union leadership at different historical epochs.

## **The Cultural Background**

The GWU was founded in 1943, during World War II. At that time, Malta

was an integral part of the British Empire and playing an important part in the allied war strategy in the Mediterranean and North Africa. A siege mentality prevailed, as it had for many years in varying degrees. In fact, Malta had been a colony since Roman times and had been dominated by a succession of foreign rulers who controlled its part of the world. As a result, the Maltese people traditionally experienced a condition of national 'powerlessness' and fatalism. A series of patterned responses or adaptations to their situation were developed by the people to this condition, which will briefly be described below in view of their bearing on TUE.<sup>4</sup>

### *Compliance with Paternalism*

Compliance with paternalism is the most traditional response, and is deeply ingrained in a culture of submission and helplessness when dealing with a superior power. It legitimizes the subordinate position by invoking 'paternalist-filial' relations with the implied mutual obligations, which normally accompany such relations in a family context. This response is reinforced by religious traditions and, when applied to ideal 'employer/employee' relations, militates against the 'oppositional' values required for trade union action.

### *Patronage and Clientelism*

Patronage and clientelism as a response constitute a realistic but concealed manipulation of power by individuals who seek to secure for themselves advantages or benefits from someone in a superior position. He acts as their 'patron' in preference to others, while they become 'his clients'. This response militates both against the 'paternalist' ideology and the values of collective consciousness and solidarity on which trade unionism is based.

### *Localism*

Localism constitutes a strategic retreat from the national arena of decision making particularly on economic and political matters. It is accompanied by social and political involvement at the local level. Here villagers establish their own standards and symbols of identification, and are better placed to compete for prestige and power at the local 'parish/village' level. This may lead to local rivalries and factions, which militate against the development of 'national', working class solidarity, consciousness and action.

This chapter reviews the various TUE strategies adopted by the GWU throughout its half century of existence showing mainly how it aimed at recasting the traditional cultural responses described above. At the same time, TUE has also sought to provide the training required by its officials to fulfil their roles adequately. Even here, however, the focus of attention will be on the ways through which the appropriate ideas, values, norms and feelings accompanying the roles were imparted rather than on the technical aspects of the roles themselves.

It should be further noted that TUE includes not only the formal educational programmes presented by the union through its education section, but also the other activities performed by the union to communicate its ideas and perceptions to its members and others. These include particularly the speeches and exhortations by its leaders to officials and members, which are invariably and faithfully reported in its popular newspapers. The GWU publishes two of the leading popular papers in Malta: *L-Orizzont* on weekdays and *It-Torca* on Sundays, both in Maltese (*It-Torca* was formerly published as *The Torch*, in both English and Maltese). These papers, as well as most of the Union's other publications, are published by its own printing press, and are widely circulated among all sections of the working class.

The main epochs in the union's history, other related developments that took place from time to time and its TUE objectives are summarized in Table 13.1. These are followed by a commentary in which the relevant data illustrating the main arguments are presented. For the sake of brevity, the commentary will be restricted to Epochs I and III.

### **Epoch I (1943–52): Post-war Reconstruction and Labour Mobilization**

The initial period is characterized by the establishment of the GWU and its integration and consolidation into Maltese society. Almost from the start this union became a formidable ally of the Malta Labour Party and together they constituted the Maltese Labour Movement (MLM). Over the years, the two organizations worked towards the creation of a social welfare state based on socialist ideas tempered with a dose of traditional paternalism. The leaders' inspiration was partly derived from the British labour movement with whom they maintained regular contacts. The militant drydocks workers played a prominent role in the organization and throughout the years significantly influenced union policy.

**Table 13.1 Developmental epochs and strategies towards trade union education**

Epochs	Main Developments	TUE Strategy
I (1943–52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malta is a colony of strategic military importance for the British Empire</li> <li>• The defence and post-war reconstruction industries provide substantial employment. However, the number of jobs is threatened by cuts in Britain's defence expenditure</li> <li>• The Maltese Labour Movement (MLM) is organized into two flanks: the industrial (GWL) and the political (MLP)</li> <li>• Trade union and political goals overlap and reinforce each other</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ Mobilization and organization of workers behind leadership</p> <p>⇒ Recruitment and training of promising young workers in trade union leadership</p>
II (1953–70)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emigration is promoted as safety valve for unemployment</li> <li>• First run-down of British military base</li> <li>• Confrontation between the Malta Labour Movement and the traditional dominant groups (including the Church and professional classes)</li> </ul>	<p>⇒ Familiarization and reproduction of British trade union practices of collective bargaining</p> <p>⇒ Training leadership core</p> <p>⇒ Instilling discipline and loyalty to union and Party leadership</p> <p>⇒ Propagating vision of a better future</p>



- III  
(1971–86)
- Prolonged period of Labour Party in government
  - Amalgamation (fusion) between GWU and MLP, full cooperation of GWU with the government's political, social and economic policies, in exchange for the union's involvement in planning and execution of policies (including industrial relations and education)
  - Collaboration with government for the achievement of two overriding political objectives:
    - 1 economic independence (despite a tightly closed economy and high unemployment);
    - 2 establishment of welfare state (national minimum wage, social housing, social services, pensions, unemployment assistance, etc.)
- ⇒ Justification of union policy of collaboration with government in terms of social justice, welfare state, workers' dignity and workers' participation
- ⇒ Union promotes the establishment of the Workers' Participation Development Centre at the University
- ⇒ 'Worker participation' as an ideological support legitimizing the policy of 'union participation in government'; union espousal of national objectives and its fusion with the MLP
- IV  
(1987–2000)
- Nationalist Party in government: neo-liberal and pro-European agenda
  - GWU searches for an autonomous trade union identity
  - Formal detachment from political leadership (after the resignation of Mintoff from the MLP helm)
  - Facing new challenges from Europeanization (and globalization), post-Fordism and a weak economy
- ⇒ Autonomy, militancy and responsibility
- ⇒ Recruitment of the new, emergent workforce (women, services, small and medium-sized enterprises and youth)
- ⇒ Balance sought between social partnership and confrontation
- ⇒ Inter-union rivalry

During the GWU's first 15 years of existence, Malta was still a fortress-colony of considerable importance to the defence strategy of Britain and its allies. The defence industry provided substantial employment in Malta even in peacetime. From time to time, the local economy was adversely affected by cuts in Britain's defence budgets. These caused widespread poverty and hardships. The British economic strategy additionally created a culture of dependence and powerlessness (Zammit, 1984) within the Maltese working class who rarely questioned or challenged decisions coming from either their colonial masters or the Maltese political elite (Boissevain, 1969).

Almost from its establishment in 1943, the GWU became the strongest union on the island. Its numbers gave it the strength to address problems created by the dependence of the local labour market on British interests and needs. Indeed, the dismantling of the British base during the 1950s led to thousands of dismissals. Successive Maltese governments resorted to mass emigration as a solution for the growing population and heavy unemployment. On the other hand, workers started to reap the benefits of a strong union and labour movement. Wages gradually improved and emigration was regulated and assisted. This contrasted with post-World War I days, when workers were offered some help only through benefit societies. All that time, the trade union movement had been rudimentary and fragmented, often dominated by politicians or clerics and engulfed by political intrigues.

The GWU pressed the government to pass important legislation safeguarding the interests of the workers and the union. The Trade Union Act of 1945 recognized the right to strike and protected trade union funds, while the Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1948 provided the machinery to solve industrial disputes. Furthermore, the Conditions of Employment (Regulation) Act of 1952 regulated employment in the private sector.

### *TUE Initiatives*

The first leaders of the GWU, particularly its founder, Reggie Miller, saw in education a very important tool for democratization, recruitment and mobilization of the masses within its ranks. One of the first and perhaps most important informal educational initiatives was the establishment of the union's weekly paper, *The Torch*. According to Attard Bezzina, one of the founding members of the GWU, the objectives of this newspaper were:

To teach with detailed meaning the vague words [the worker] often hears that he must live a decent life, and earn a decent wage for his livelihood and the

maintenance of his family. Above all, it will urge him to be united with his fellow workers, in order to safeguard his own rights and that of his country.<sup>5</sup>

The bilingual weekly publication was used as a platform to propagate the union's political, moral, educational and even gender policies and actions among its membership. It also served as a forum of discussion among members and non-members.

A topical issue that featured in *The Torch* during the early period under review concerned the right of women to work. The GWU's spokesmen at that time disapproved of women who wanted to maintain the jobs they had procured during the war years. Economic, moral, ethical, sexist and all sorts of other reasons – all smacking of paternalism and male chauvinism – were cited by certain officials to justify their claim for the retreat of women from the workforce. Here are some of the most provocative statements that appeared in *The Torch* over this period:

... much of the wages earned by them [women] are being spent on the purchase of lipstick and powder<sup>6</sup>

... women present a serious threat ... not only because employers prefer those who work for lower pay but also, even more importantly, because they have an added sexual appeal<sup>7</sup>

... a man works for a woman, so she does not need to work<sup>8</sup>

... the inferior wage [of women] is keeping down the wages of men<sup>9</sup>

Even at that time, these ideas and policies were seen by some as paternalistic and divisive. Female members (particularly dockyard workers) accused their union of instilling 'sexual hostility' among the male labour force and for this reason they threatened to leave the union. Indeed the union, under the threat of this early and dangerous exit of members, pleaded with the women to reconsider the possible consequences of such a decision – pointing out that 'their skirts' were much less important 'to the [drydocks'] management than to the GWU'.<sup>10</sup>

Over this period, the union's TUE initiatives were of two kinds: one was formal and in-house and directed towards its members while the other was a national campaign criticizing the national state-controlled educational system. Its strategy was aimed at reaching two distinct groups: the first group comprised shop stewards and union officers while the other group was made up of the

general GWU members. The primary objective of the formal TUE initiatives for shop stewards and officers was to teach trade union principles and to promulgate information about the union's policies and activities.

The educational activities for the young members of the GWU were more informal. They relied less on formal lectures and more on social and cultural activities. The Youth Movement of the GWU was very active in this regard and organized various activities for its members including art exhibitions, film shows, weekend camps and tours to various localities of archaeological importance and industrial complexes, such as the dockyards and the power station. These activities were aimed at fostering the young member's loyalty and motivation towards the GWU.

From its earliest days, the GWU was highly critical of the state educational provision for both children and adults (particularly workers). Indeed, during the second half of the 1940s, with the prospects of self-government on the horizon, the union insisted that the masses 'should be educated in the right way ... and taught to attach importance to such vital matters on which the future of these islands largely depended'.<sup>11</sup>

For the union, education was also a top priority in the reconstruction of war-torn Malta. It criticized strongly, through its weekly newspaper and in many of its public meetings, the educational system, which was seen as serving the colonial needs. The union demanded a schooling structure that catered for the more urgent technical needs of the nation. It was argued that:

The whole basis and direction of our education has been to produce, apart from the professions, a surplus of clerical labour, definitely ornamental but not so definitely useful or usable ... The solution is to go for a less academic or classical instruction, for less veneration if you like, and instead for a more rational, more practical curriculum. We could do with fewer blackcoats and more tradesmen, more technicians, more skilled workers... When the artisan is no longer despised, education will become more rational. Schools will be divided between the textbook and the lathe. Only then can we talk of reconstruction with a degree of sense in our words.<sup>12</sup>

The GWU also insisted that the teaching of English should take precedence over the teaching of Maltese in the local educational system. Once again this 'compliance with colonial paternalism' must be viewed as a practical response to the dominant political situation which prevailed at the time. It was not an attempt to anglicize the people – as some of the local political establishment claimed – but a radical attack on the power structure of Maltese society. It was rather a Gramscian 'war of position', in which the workers aimed at 'mastering

the tools of oppression' of both the colonizers and the local dominant classes, for their own liberation.

We of the GWU measure the success or failure of our entire education services by the extent to which English (neither the quayside nor the grandiose type) manages to spread among the people. It is one of our strongest tenets. In practical terms, it equals that of our answering loyalty to the Church and the Empire ... May the worker's son be better equipped than his father to stand up for his rights, to exchange ideas with profit to himself and to the whole country ... We would like to see everyone in Malta capable at least of making himself understood, and consequently respected, by those who are masters, or equals according to one's knowledge of the only language they know.<sup>13</sup>

In a nation plagued by a high illiteracy rate – more than 48 per cent of the Maltese adult population claimed to be illiterate in the 1948 census – the GWU and Labour leaders also demanded compulsory schooling for the children of the working class. A resolution passed at the delegates' conference in 1947 also insisted that the University of Malta should fall under the control of the Maltese Minister of Education – rather than under the control of the British authorities – and that technical education should also be developed. The National Executive of the GWU urged its members to vote for the Labour Party in the 1947 general elections because 'the programme of the Party reflected the issues – including those about education – outlined in its resolution.' Eventually the Labour Party won these elections and implemented most of the recommendations made by the GWU in its 1947 resolution.

Although during this period the GWU never held its own educational programmes for illiterate workers, its leadership strongly supported the state-organized programmes for adult learners.<sup>14</sup>

### **Epoch III (1971–86): Economic Independence and the Welfare State**

This period was dominated by three consecutive Labour governments and characterized by close collaboration between the GWU and the Labour government culminating in the official statutory 'fusion' of the GWU with the MLP. Throughout this period Dom Mintoff, the Prime Minister and charismatic leader of the MLP, and his ministers effectively led the fully cooperative union to support his governments' paternalistic, yet radical, Labour policies. Indeed, the union exposed itself to both internal and external criticism for abandoning its former militancy often leading to open confrontation with the previous

government. Instead it now adopted a policy of dialogue and full support of government initiatives.

This collaboration effectively enabled the government to achieve its most important set objectives: those of ending the British military presence on the Island by 1979, the achievement of 'full economic and political independence', nationalization of the key sectors of the local economy and a reform of public institutions to enable government to establish a generous welfare state in which health, education and pensions were provided to all citizens in addition to financial benefits and housing for the needy. Simultaneously, efforts were made to raise working class status and living standards by narrowing income differentials. These reforms were implemented while the basic democratic institutions were retained.

### *TUE Initiatives*

During the first 10 years of the 'workers' government', from 1971 to 1980, TUE was not high on the list of the union's priorities. Very few systematic initiatives were undertaken, apart from some occasional, short-lived ventures by a small group of volunteers within the Labour Party aimed at promoting educational courses in political economy. One such venture was the setting up of the Maltese Institute for Education, Politics and Economy, though it did not last long and was largely ineffectual. Systematic TUE remained sidelined and the GWU's education section continued to provide a motley collection of peripheral courses, which included subjects like flower arrangement, intended mainly for women.

Ironically, it was during this period that the concept of workers' participation became one of the policy options of the Maltese Labour Movement. The MLP-GWU tandem became heavily committed and involved in the introduction of different forms of workers' participation in industry particularly throughout the public sector. Experimentation was rife and the concept was introduced in different quarters with a high degree of flexibility. However, there was also a lot of confusion in people's minds about the meaning, goals, and practice of workers' participation and about the strategy to be adopted (Kester, 1980; Zammit, 1984). This vacuum clearly demanded a heavy investment in TUE.

The Labour government had tackled, with initial success, the Malta drydocks' problem through the introduction of a form of workers' participation modelled on the German codetermination system. This paved the way for self-management modelled on the former Yugoslav system, which was introduced in 1975. The drydocks workers were thus given the responsibility of running

this major enterprise – which in the early 1970s employed around 5,000 workers – with hardly any previous training for it. Nevertheless, this experience gave a new lease of life to the industry and provided a psychological boost to workers and their trade union to pursue the goal of democratic workers' participation in other areas of the public sector.

Between 1975 and 1979, various workers' participation schemes were established in parastatal and state-owned enterprises. However, this policy was not pursued further by government or union in the private sector where employers were generally sceptical and even hostile to the idea. The strategy was to make the dockyard and parastatal enterprises models of successful firms run on a form of management different from the traditional one. Their viability under this system would eventually serve as an example for others, including the private sector, to follow suit (Kester, 1980).

Despite the initial euphoria, however, during the second phase of the Labour government (from 1980 to 1987), the workers' participation structures failed to meet expectations and the process was overshadowed by the political and economic problems of the country at the time and gradually discontinued.

In its heyday, the GWU leadership actually spared no efforts in encouraging workers, through the union papers and public speeches, to promote the system of workers' participation. The GWU also organized numerous TUE activities including seminars, workshops and short courses on workers' participation usually earmarked for its groups of shop stewards and other activists. These efforts however had limited impact. They were organized sporadically and there was rarely any follow-up on the conclusions which emerged. The suggestions were usually shelved until they resurfaced again in some subsequent seminar. Thus there was little improvement in the participative systems, and this proved to be a major flaw in their operation (Zammit, 1996).

There were, of course, also some practical reasons for the state of affairs, as almost all the available personnel and resources of the Labour movement went into the management of government institutions and programmes. The Party and union structures and their staffs were effectively depleted up to a point where they became mere appendages.

In the meantime, TUE – on an informal level – continued, as in previous years, by means of the GWU newspapers and publications. So did the 'stereotyped' TUE activities of the GWU's education section, including an annual seminar for the shop stewards of each section and participation in local and international seminars and meetings. Otherwise, systematic and sustained TUE for the union officials, activists and shop-floor workers was practically non-existent. At a time when democratic 'workers' participation'

was the buzzword of the Maltese Labour Movement, TUE was conspicuous more by its absence.

However, the situation changed between 1981 and 1984. At this time, three new, significant initiatives were started from within the ranks of the Labour movement. These were: the establishment of the MLP's Department of Information; the Guze Ellul Mercer Foundation (GEM) as a joint venture between the MLP and the GWU; and the Workers' Participation Development Centre (WPDC) as an autonomous institute of the University of Malta, with the involvement of the whole trade union movement.<sup>15</sup>

The Information Department of the MLP, set up in 1981, was instrumental in organizing both formal and informal worker education projects including political courses for party cadres. This department also established its own publishing house – Sensiela Kotba Socjalisti – that produced popular, political and literary editions. The GEM Foundation<sup>16</sup> was set up as a joint venture between the MLP and GWU in 1984. This was a voluntary non-profit making organization, with its primary objective to provide 'educational opportunities to raise the consciousness and empower the workers and their families, in order to enable them to participate actively and fully in the political, economic, social and cultural transformation of society' (Caruana 1997, p. 360). To achieve this objective the GEM Foundation became involved in the organization of workers' education, community development, functional literacy, environmental and youth development and programmes promoting awareness of gender issues. It also organized art exhibitions and cinefora. The dominant role played by the MLP in GEM is indicated by the fact that its first chairman was the then president and later leader of the MLP and chairman of the MLP's information department.

Perhaps the most significant development in TUE was the setting up in 1981 of the WPDC at the University of Malta. In this case, both the GWU and CMTU played a prominent part in its creation. The WPDC was born as the outcome of a doctoral research project on the development of workers' participation in Malta carried out by a Dutch sociologist with a lifetime of commitment to worker participation and trade union development. The WPDC was conceived as a permanent structure to support, monitor and promote the processes of democratic workers' participation in a number of sites on the island, such as the Malta drydocks. The Centre aimed at providing worker and trade union education, carrying out scientific research and offering consultancy services on the development of worker participation and on the empowerment of people to become active agents of participation. In an evaluation of the role played by the WPDC, Mayo (1997) considered the efforts of the Centre 'as a breath



of fresh air' in Maltese workers' education. He commented:

The kind of worker education the Centre promotes is definitely not of the Human Capital Theory type. One may argue that this organization is concerned, in Freirian-Hegelian terms, with protecting the image of worker as subject rather than object of the production process, even though its initial and primary concern has been industrial democracy. Even its traditional links with the trade unions and the Malta Drydocks, where a self-management process had been in operation since 1975, this organization seeks to generate a culture of participatory democracy in its wider sense. In principle at least, this would render it open to the ideas and demands of other groups seeking greater democratic spaces within the wider community (Mayo, 1997, p. 311).

The subsequent epoch (1987–present day) is characterized mainly by the presence of the Nationalist Party in government, and its pursuit of moderate, liberal economic and social policies. The most important developments taking place are the result of government's determination to have Malta accepted as member of the European Union. With this aim, most legislation and many institutions are being harmonized with the requirements of the *acquis communautaire*. This includes a dynamic implementation of social dialogue and partnership as a central part of the EU's social and industrial relations policy, the establishment of European works councils and the recently adopted European Company Statute (see chapters 2 and 3 of this book).

In the meantime, one important boost has been given to trade union education in Malta since 1990, following the opening of a Mediterranean area office of the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation, with its own representative officer and secretary and a modest budget. The aim was to promote and assist workers' educational activities with a social democratic inspiration in collaboration with established local institutions working in this field. The Foundation has since funded many educational research publications and related activities organized by the GWU, WPDC and GEM, amongst others. All of these organizations were thus able to expand and diversify their activities and cater for a wider clientele. For its part, the Foundation has left each organization totally free to design and implement its own programmes and has monitored each programme only to ensure its effectiveness and the correct use of its limited financial resources. It can be safely stated that, were it not for this support, many of the union educational activities that flourished during the 1990s would not have materialized.

## Conclusions

This chapter has traced the TUE activities organized by Malta's GWU since its foundation and juxtaposed them against the main experiences and developments undergone by the union at the different stages of its history. The main question posed is to what extent and under what conditions the various TUE strategies pursued over the years – both formal and informal – were 'transformative' or merely 'reproductive'. Given that the union, at least during certain stages, was promoting the establishment of systems of democratic workers' participation, the chapter has also sought to establish whether TUE was organized around this 'transformative' vision. If so, this would provide an empirical test case for one of the main propositions presented in the introduction to this book. This specific case study of Malta may thus be viewed from a wider comparative perspective, and its conclusions acquire a more general significance.

It was found that throughout the different epochs, TUE tended to be 'reproductive' particularly when reflecting the culturally patterned responses of Maltese society and when it aimed at propagating uncritically the Labour leadership's views on the national developments taking place from time to time.

Simultaneously, TUE pursued a 'transformative' role when it promoted the emergence and development of a working class subculture. This involved confronting and reshaping the established culture when mobilizing the union membership behind the leadership, when promoting popular access to education, when establishing the leadership, when establishing the welfare state and, to some extent, when promoting the concept of workers' participation. In reality, however, workers' participation was not promoted in a specific, systematic, structured and integrated manner. There was much emphasis on rhetoric and little on substance. Just as the inspiration for the initiatives and experimentation on workers' participation came mostly 'from above', the theory of teaching utilized followed mostly the traditional, hierarchical pattern. Therefore, for these reasons, it can be said that TUE was only 'partially transformative'.

Despite the significant contribution made to TUE by the university's WPDC, and by the other institutions in this field, their impact has been mainly that of providing training and development for the benefit of individual union officials and members rather than on the development of the union's policy-making organs.

This lack of a coherent, systematic and cumulative TUE programme by the union may be due to the fact that its message and ideology is diffused through

its own daily newspaper which is widely read by the working class. There the public exhortations of the leadership as well as union activities and directives are given wide coverage. The TUE provided through the union newspaper effectively constitutes the main strategy to nourish and renew the commitment of union members and the union ideology. This powerful medium is also used to address the roots of social and industrial conflict and to mount a serious challenge to prevailing, culturally patterned social relations. Nonetheless it must be stated that although TUE may have bordered on the subversive, it ultimately conformed to a rationalized and reformist consensus which kept extremism at bay. Its educational role was ultimately grounded as much on traditional culture as on Fabian gradualism, that is, on the assumption that a society can be reformed from within, by consent.

Likewise, the present TUE strategy in the area of democratic workers' participation continues to support and reflect the union's official policy at a particular time, rather than to be inspired by a proactive, futuristic vision. This applies equally to the union's current policy on social partnership as to the direct forms of workers' participation at shopfloor level. If the union were to engage seriously in dialogue and commit itself to forms of direct workers' participation, it may find it feasible to integrate these into the traditional role of collective bargaining. TUE may play a vital role for such a development.

Like many other learners, trade unionists prefer TUE to be practical and directly related to the reality they have to cope with. In their speeches and actions, they exhibit a certain pride in their ability to engage in practical problems. They consider this to be their greatest asset because it makes them effective in dealing with bread and butter issues at the workplace. At a time when their role as social partners also requires them to discuss these issues at the national and transnational levels, they need to acquire new skills and knowledge. This form of democratic workers' participation, which is currently promoted as an integral part of the European Employment Strategy – with social partnership reflected in all its pillars – again requires a further investment into TUE, if it is to operate effectively.

Finally, the traditional culturally patterned forms of behaviour and the characteristic values of the working class subculture promoted through TUE are summarized in Table 13.2. These are subdivided along four key dimensions, namely: power relations, interactions, identification and future vision. In each case, the role of TUE has been to undermine culturally-patterned behaviour in favour of the working-class subculture.

**Table 13.2 Impact of trade union education on forms of culture**

<b>Key dimensions</b>	<b>Culturally patterned behaviour</b>	<b>Working class sub-culture</b>
1 Power relations	Compliance with paternalism	Us/them perceptions
2 Interactions	Patron-client relations (individual)	Working class solidarity (collective)
3 Identification	Local (village/parish) focus of loyalty and prestige	Loyalty to the Labour movement
4 Future vision	Progressive rise in living standards for all (social classes/strata are seen as superseded)	Political and social goals are defined by leadership Social justice and welfare state Workers' participation is seen as ultimate goal

**Notes**

- 1 The research for this chapter was sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Malta Office). The authors are also grateful to Ms Nerissa Sultana for her assistance.
- 2 The concept of 'workers' participation' refers to the active involvement of employees in decision making within enterprises, as distinct from 'labour participation', which normally refers to the passive contribution of workers and is the concern of labour economics and human resources management.
- 3 The empirical data for this survey was gathered through the systematic analysis of documents and other material reported in the newspapers published by the General Workers' Union, particularly *The Torch*. This was the first newspaper published by the union soon after its foundation in 1943.
- 4 For a fuller explanation of these adaptive responses, see Zammit, 1984, pp. 31–4.
- 5 As translated from Maltese, *The Torch*, 25 July 1944.
- 6 As translated from Maltese, *The Torch*, 15 July 1944.
- 7 As translated from Maltese, *The Torch*, 12 August 1944.
- 8 As translated from Maltese, *The Torch*, 11 November 1944.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 As translated from Maltese, *The Torch*, 4 November 1944.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Particularly the literacy campaign organized by Captain Paul Bugeja (Vancell, 1997). Indeed the leaders of the GWU, including Reggie Miller and Vincent Dye, participated in Rediffusion discussions by Bugeja.

- 15 Both GWU and CMTU officials were represented on the WPDC Board from the beginning. This was a rare case of inter-union cooperation.
- 16 The Foundation was named after the late, prominent novelist, journalist and past Labour Cabinet Minister, Guze Ellul Mercer.

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