



Agreement

A Green Mentality for Collective Bargaining

Summary of the Dutch report

by Miriam Kullmann

Despite the doctrinal emphasis on the need to create synergies between employment and While the climate crisis has been on the agenda in the Netherlands for quite some time now, and also among the social partners, the dominant interest is social-economic sustainability rather than environmental sustainability. This is represented, to some extent, by the tripartite body, the Social-Economic Council, in which the social partners and independent (academic) members have a seat.

It is an institutionalised form of what is known as the generic approach for collaborative and consultative decision-making between relevant stakeholders, also referred to as the (socio-economic) Polder Model, becoming seen as the Dutch miracle in the late 1970s. Issues on sustainability are explored and developed, always, however, on the basis of consensus among the represented stakeholders (social partners and independent (academic) members). Nevertheless, even though in its reports and advice the SER refers to sustainability and the environment, it usually refers to social-economic sustainability rather than environmental sustainability, the latter seemingly reserved for environmental organisations and associations.

Viewing the legal framework based on which industrial relations in the Netherlands is organised and given form, the scope of collective bargaining agreements is not limited to employment and working conditions interpreted in a narrow way. Rather it could be argued that employment and working conditions, through health and safety, decently paid jobs, and the idea of facilitation a just transition, could cover also those topics that, so far, have been left outside of collective agreements.

Exploring the role of social partners and addressing the question to what extent collective agreements contain provisions on sustainability (not only social-economic, but environmental as well), it can be concluded that there are hardly provisions that can be framed in terms of promoting sustainability. But apart from the outcomes of collective bargaining, social partners engage with their members and beyond as well as the businesses where they work in order to focus attention on environmental issues. Nevertheless, clearly, employment is still a crucial cornerstone of a trade union's business, even though the environment is particularly important where industries or sectors are causing (long-term) health problems (and with some time delay) for workers.

Overall, however, looking at the role of social partners makes clear that caring for the environment is possible and is necessary. But it takes quite some effort and a convincing strategy. It can also be a way to increase the trade union's legitimacy by increasing member numbers.

While a lot is already being done by social partners on the environmental side, the question though remains whether linking environmental sustainability with economic and social sustainability is

enough without rethinking and redesigning the current economic model key of which is to promote economic growth and social and environmental protection are subordinated to that.

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