

Mediation, allocation, control: trade unions and the changing faces of labour market intermediation in Western Europe (19th/early 20th centuries)¹

Abstract

Labour exchanges as institutions to facilitate the labour market were instruments of market control as well. This was not only true for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forms of labour market intermediation, but also for the public labour exchanges that were established all over Western Europe from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Implicitly and explicitly their aim was to bring order in the labour market by regulating and controlling supply. In spite of liberal ideology that market parties can profit equally from exchanging (information on) supply and demand, the uncertainties of the labour market itself forced participants to organise the outcome of this process. Trade unions claimed a monopoly in the organisation of intermediation to prevent oversupply in the market and downward pressure on wages. However, a trade union monopoly in labour exchange could nowhere be realised. Trade unions had to restrain themselves to another union device to prevent downward pressure on wages in slack times: unemployment insurance. In the end, the moral hazards connected with this type of insurance, forced them to cooperate with employers and authorities to control the unemployed by obliging them to register at the public labour exchanges to attest their willingness to work. In this way the labour supply could be split into a fit and an unfit body of workers. The last were relegated outside the labour market, or to an 'external' market of informal and second grade jobs.

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According to the statutes of the Vienna hatters' guild from 1815, each Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 2.00 and 4.00 p.m. masters in need of a hand and journeymen in need of a job were to meet in the guild's lodging house (*Herberge*).² In 1870, the Vienna hatters (*Hutmacher*) still had their own labour exchange in this *Herberge*, where members of the hatters' union spent their free time, and foreign hatters had to present themselves:

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² Josef Ehmer, 'Tramping Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Vienna', in: David Siddle (ed.), *Migration, Mobility and Modernity* (Liverpool 2000) 164-185, cit. 167.

Die Herberge war auch die Arbeitsvermittlung. War in einer Werkstätte Bedarf an Gehilfen, so schickte der Meister den Altgesellen mit dem Auftrag, Arbeit zu geben, auf die Herberge; manchmal kam auch der Meister selbst hin [...].

By centralizing the local exchange of supply and demand of labour in the pub, the hatters' journeymen were able to control labour supply ('Wer nicht fleißig auf die Herberge ging, war kein rechter "regulärer" Geselle...'), and maintain their wage standard:

Über die Erhaltung der bestehenden Löhne und aller traditionellen Freiheiten und Vorrechte wachte man seit jeher und auch noch nach der Vereinsgründung sehr streng. Alle Konflikte im Werkstättenleben, sowohl jene zwischen Meister und Gehilfen, als auch solche zwischen Gehilfen untereinander wurden zumeist auf der Herberge ausgetragen. [...] Wehe dem Gehilfen, der einer Lohndrückerei oder eines sonstigen Verstoßes gegen die Solidarität überwiesen wurde!³

Everywhere in pre-industrial Europe journeymen and day labourers met their bosses' demand in actual market places, public houses or public squares and tried to use these labour exchanges as instruments to regulate labour supply and wage standards. By means of placement control competition for jobs could be limited and employers or fellow journeymen be forced to comply with wage rates.⁴ The London tailors used pubs as 'houses of call' or labour exchanges at least since the eighteenth century.⁵ In 1747 a house of call was described as 'an ale-house, where they generally use, the landlord knows where to find them, and the masters go there to enquire when they want hands'. In 1811 it was stated: 'in large concerns it is very common for the master to send to a house [of call] for a 'squad' of 10 men and a captain, and to another for 6 men and a captain, and so on'. The houses of call were also the 'very basis and foundation' of the journeymen's association: 'in all parts of the metropolis

³ K. Sekirnjak, *Damals und heute. Kurzgefaßte Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges des Vereins für alle in der Hut- und Filswaren-Industrie beschäftigten Arbeiter und Arbeiterinnen Niederösterreichs* (Wien 1904) 25, cited by: Josef Ehmer, *Soziale Traditionen in Zeiten des Wandels. Arbeiter und Handwerker im 19. Jahrhundert* [Studien zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft 20] (Frankfurt/New York 1994) 282-283. On the importance of this kind of *Herberge* in the early Vienna trade union movement: *ibidem*, 274, 278.

⁴ Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, "'An Irresistible Phalanx': Journeymen Associations in Western Europe, 1300-1800", in: *idem* and Jan Lucassen (eds.) *Before the Unions. Wage Earners in Collective Action in Europe, 1300-1850*, *International Review of Social History* 39 (1994) Suppl. 2, 11-52, cit. 31; on the relationship between pubs as labour exchanges and strike propensity: Reinhold Reith, 'Arbeitsmarkt und Gesellenstreiks vom 15. bis ins 19. Jahrhundert', in: Angelika und Ekkehard Westermann (Hg.), *Streik im Revier. Unruhe, Protest und Ausstand vom 8. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (St. Katharinen 2007) 177-219, cit. 198, 212.

⁵ Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft. Entwicklung, Struktur und Politik der Londoner Gesellenorganisation 1550-1825* [Göttinger Beiträge zur Wirtschafts- und Socialgeschichte 16] (Göttingen 1991) 185-191.

these houses are established and every journeyman is compelled to belong and resort to a Society there formed'. From here the union organised strikes, and regulated supply, as a statement from the eighteenth century makes clear:

About the beginning of the year 1763, we looked upon it that Mr. Dove, Mr. Fell, and Mr. Mason, three masters, were stirring up strife against us: so we fixed upon them that they should not be served. We insisted upon the men that worked for them to come away and leave them: it was a general resolution they should have no men work for them. The master of the House of Call sends the men, and if he sent any there, the body of men in that house would be fined...⁶

In seventeenth century Amsterdam, to give another example, the unruly cloth shearers controlled the entrance of foreigners to their trade by obliging them to wait for their turn to be employed at a place called the *Oude Brug* ('Old Bridge'), which functioned as a regular open air labour exchange. The shearers also held meetings there in case of their frequent strikes.⁷ It is easy to imagine that in a place like this, where the effects of changing market forces were clearly visible, pressure on wages provoked immediate action. In other European towns labour markets where supply met demand on a regular basis are mentioned also, but I do not know of collective action there: in Antwerp in the sixteenth century, workers in the port and building trades, and probably also in dyeing, offered their work in groups on Monday morning near the Church of Our Lady and later the Corn Market.⁸ In seventeenth century Milan migratory masons from Biella in the Piedmont met each morning at a *mercato delle braccia* in a place called *Crocetta del Ponte Vedro*: 'questi tali muratori, garzoni e lavoranti in detta arte che sogliono convenirsi in detto luogo ogni giorno di lavoro per ritrovare occasione d'andar a lavorare'.⁹

The most famous example of a labour exchange developing into an instrument of wage control is the *Place the Grève* in Paris, which lent its name to the French word for strike (*grève*). Situated between the *Hôtel de Ville* and the river Seine (*grève* also means: 'sandy riverbank'), it provided daily opportunities for workers in the building trades to present themselves to employers, masters and contractors, who picked out the ones they could use. It

⁶ Citations in *ibidem*, 185, 187 and 189; on 'houses of call' as centres of the tailor's strike in 1763 also: 286.

⁷ Ad Knotter en Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Immigratie en arbeidsmarkt in Amsterdam in de 17e eeuw', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 13 (1987) 403-431, cit. 411; Rudolf Dekker, 'Labour conflicts and working-class culture in early modern Holland', *International Review of Social History* XXXV (1990) 377-420, cit. 393.

⁸ Herman Van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)* (The Hague 1963) vol. II, 135-136.

⁹ Cited by: Domenico Sella, *Salari e lavoro nell'edilizia lombarda durante il secolo CVII* (Pavia 1968) 33.

was the regular labour market for migratory masons from the Limousin area.¹⁰ By organising themselves and withholding labour supply (*se mettre en grève*) workers could counteract the effects of oversupply.¹¹ Already in 1621 a city ordinance required that all carpenters, masons, roofers and plumbers assemble periodically at the square to agree upon a city-wide wage scale (*tarif*).¹² Negotiated wages at the *Place the Grève* (*prix fait en place de grève*) could also be enforced in court, as Alain Cottureau showed with a case in 1791.¹³

The *Place the Grève* was the most visible place of labour market intermediation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Paris, on top of a variety of smaller *stations d'embauchage* and *bureaux de placements*.¹⁴ As Steven Kaplan showed, in the eighteenth century journeymen in all kind of corporations struggled with their masters to win control of job placement:

Leurs bras étant ordinairement leur seul propriété, les ouvriers défendent avec acharnement la liberté d'en disposer. Ils veulent décider eux-mêmes où ils vont travailler et sous quelles conditions.¹⁵

The above examples of collective action to control wages emanating from labour exchanges show that it would be inadequate to consider these as neutral institutions, only to facilitate the labour market by bringing together (information on) supply and demand. They were instruments of market control as well. To cite a German historian of *Arbeitsvermittlung* in the eighteenth century:

¹⁰ Casey Harison, 'The Rise and Decline of a Revolutionary Space : Paris' Place de Grève and the Stonemasons of Creuse, 1750-1900', *Journal of Social History* 34 (2002) 403-436, with extensive references on the history of the *Place de Grève*.

¹¹ Cf. Peter Schöttler, *Die Entstehung der 'Bourses du Travail'. Sozialpolitik und französischer Syndikalismus am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* [Campus Forschung 255] (Frankfurt/New York 1982) 29. The waiting room in the Parisian *Bourse du Travail* was called *salle de grève*: *ibidem*, 65. There was a 'labour market' in the *Place de Grève* (now *Place de l'Hôtel de Ville*) until the Second World War : J. Luciani, 'Logiques du placement ouvrier au XIXe siècle et construction du marché du travail', *Sociétés Contemporaines* 3 (1990) 5-18, cit. 8

¹² Harison, 'The Rise and Decline of a Revolutionary Space', nt. 55.

¹³ Alain Cottureau, 'Droit et bon droit. Un droit des ouvriers instauré, puis évincé par le droit du travail (France, XIXe siècle)', *Annales. Histoire, Science Sociales* 57 (2002) 1521-1557, cit. 1528. I owe this reference to Malcolm Mansfield.

¹⁴ Steven L. Kaplan, 'La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail à Paris au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* XXXVI (1989) 361-412. Next to the *Place de Grève* as a meeting place for building workers, Kaplan mentions the *rue Aubry-le-Boucher* and the *quai de Gesvres* for masons, carpenters and painters; the *rue de la Poterie* and the *rue des Écouffes* for pastry bakers and woodworkers (p. 363). Some nine other occupational *stations d'embauchage* in nineteenth-century Paris are summed up by Luciani, 'Logiques du placement', 7 nt. 1.

¹⁵ Kaplan, 'La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail', 363. He gives several examples of journeymen struggling for placement control.

Die Vermittlung von Arbeit hat sich historisch nicht nur als Instrument effektiver Distribution auf dem Arbeitsmarkt erwiesen, sondern zugleich als Machtfrage ersten Ranges, denn der Arbeitsvermittlung ist es möglich, den Zugang zum Arbeitsmarkt zu beeinflussen. Wem es gelang, die Arbeitsvermittlung oder den Arbeitsnachweis zu monopolisieren, konnte den Preis der Arbeit massiv beeinflussen.¹⁶

This was not only true for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forms of labour market intermediation, but also for the public labour exchanges that were established all over Western Europe from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Implicitly and explicitly their aim was to bring order in the labour market by regulating and controlling supply. In spite of liberal ideology that market parties can profit equally from exchanging (information on) supply and demand, the uncertainties of the labour market itself forced participants to organise the outcome of this process. Trade unions claimed a monopoly in the organisation of intermediation to prevent oversupply in the market and downward pressure on wages. However, a trade union monopoly in labour exchange could nowhere be realised. Trade unions had to restrain themselves to another union device to prevent downward pressure on wages in slack times: unemployment insurance. In the end, the moral hazards connected with this type of insurance, forced them to cooperate with employers and authorities to control the unemployed by obliging them to register at the public labour exchanges to attest their willingness to work. In this way the labour supply could be split into a fit and an unfit body of workers. Supported by unemployment benefit, the first could be held 'in reserve' for the next upturn, provided this would happen soon; the last were relegated outside the labour market, or to an 'external' market of informal and second grade jobs.

In my paper the changing role of trade unions in the organisation of labour exchanges will be illustrated by developments in several European countries. But first I will give an overview of the organisation of the labour market before the institutionalisation of labour market intermediation in public exchanges.

Before the public labour exchanges

Tramping

¹⁶ Rainer Schröder, 'Arbeitslosenfürsorge und Arbeitsvermittlung im Zeitalter der Aufklärung', in : Hans-Peter Benöhr (Hrsg.), *Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in der neueren deutschen Rechtsgeschichte* (Tübingen 1991) 7-76, cit. 24.

Forms of labour recruitment or intermediation before the public labour exchanges were based on personal, face to face contacts of employers and workers at the moment of selection and hiring. Contacts were made on a relatively small scale (like the examples above make clear). In pre-industrial Europe - stretching far into the nineteenth century -, supply and demand in urban artisan trades were matched by peculiar institutions like the French *compagnonnages* (journeymen's associations), which, among other things, organised the traditional touring through France.¹⁷ The labour market intermediation of the *compagnonnages* also served the maintenance of a wage standard. They

règlementent les mouvements sur le territoire, recommandant à leurs membres les villes où le travail est le mieux rémunéré, interdisant l'accès des villes où les maîtres sont exigeants et le travail mal payé.[...] Le compagnon ne peut chercher d'ouvrage par lui-même et par conséquent ne peut travailler à un tarif moindre que celui de ses compagnons.¹⁸

The English 'tramping artisan' based his job search as an organised tradesman on 'vacant lists', maintained by a network of 'houses of call', often public houses that served both as centres of trade union activity and as means of organising the mobility of union members out of work. Unions supported tramping with a travelling relief, which later developed into unemployment benefit. For the tramp the 'house of call' was first of all a labour exchange. 'Vacant books' were kept in public houses right up to the time of the introduction of public labour exchanges in the early 1900s.¹⁹ However, at the end of the nineteenth century 'travelling' was a declining feature of union activity.²⁰

The tradition of *Gesellenwanderung* in the German speaking countries was based on a comparable system of meeting places in *Herberge*, the equivalent of the British 'houses of call'. A travelling journeyman did not try to make contact with an individual master but rather sought out the lodging house for his craft.²¹ In nineteenth century Germany and Austria corporate and trade unions exchanges in public houses and so-called *Innungen* were still

¹⁷ Cf. the most recent work on this subject: Nicolas Adell-Gombert, *Des hommes de devoir. Les compagnons du Tour de France (XVIIIe-XXe siècle)* [Ethnologie de France 30] (Paris 2008).

¹⁸ Luciani, 'Logiques du placement ouvrier', 9.

¹⁹ R. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers. The Six Centuries' Road from Craft Fellowship to Trade Unionism* (London 1980) 132, 137. A classical study is: E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Tramping Artisan', in: *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour* (London 1979⁶) 34-63; see also: Humphrey R. Southall, 'The tramping artisan revisits: labour mobility and economic distress in early Victorian England', *Economic History Review* XLIV (1991) 272-296.

²⁰ Malcolm Mansfield, 'Labour Exchanges and the Labour Reserve in Turn of the Century Social Reform', *Journal of Social Policy* 21 (1992) 435-468, cit. 455.

²¹ Ehmer, 'Tramping artisans', 179-181.

functioning as networks of agencies for artisan labour. In the Austrian Empire in 1898 it was reported: 'Die Herberge bleibt [...] bis in die Gegenwart [...] der Marktplatz für Angebot und Nachfrage von kleingewerblichen Arbeitskräften'.²² As Sigrid Wadauer argues:

'Arbeitsvermittlung und Unterstützung bedeuteten Einfluss auf Löhne und Arbeitsbedingungen und waren deshalb ein wichtiges Anliegen der Arbeitervereine und Gewerkschaften'.²³ In its heydays in earlier times journeymen tried to organise supply in this way:

Die Regelung des Arbeitsangebots war [...] einer der ersten Programmpunkte der organisierte Gesellschaft, zumal sie sich bald darüber klar war, welches bedeutsame Mittel ihr mit der Arbeitsvermittlung im Kampfe gegenüber den Meistern in die Hand gegeben wurde.²⁴

Reminiscences of the *Gesellenwanderung* could be found in the travel funds (*viaticum*) of the early German trade unions.²⁵ The travel funds later developed into trade union unemployment insurances.²⁶

'Places de grève' and 'Gesindemärkte'

Apart from these urban institutions, there were concrete 'markets' for labourers in public places, where demand and supply literally met each other. In France these were named *places de grève*,²⁷ after the Parisian model. These could be found all over Europe, in towns, but also in rural areas. The great French ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep described such a market as follows:

²² *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich. Verfasst und herausgegeben vom statistischen Departement im k. k. Handelsministerium* (Vienna 1898) 122, cited by: Sigrid Wadauer, 'Vazierende Gesellen und wandernde Arbeitslose (Österreich, ca. 1880-1938)', in: Annemarie Steidl, Thomas Buchner, Werner Lausecker, Alexander Pinwinkler, Sigrid Wadauer, Hermann Zeitlhofer (Hg.): *Übergänge und Schnittmengen. Arbeit, Migration, Bevölkerung und Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Diskussion* (Wien etc. 2008) 101-131, cit. 109.

²³ *Ibidem*, 109-110. On *Inningen* in Germany: Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung in Deutschland 1871-2002* [Beiträge zur Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung 270] (Nürnberg 2003) 26.

²⁴ *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich*, 96. Cf. Schröder, 'Arbeitslosenfürsorge und Arbeitsvermittlung', 53: 'Je starker sich die Gesellen mit eigenen Bruderschaften/Gilden, mit den dazugehörigen Organisationen, Herbergen und Fürsorgemaßnahmen aus der Zunft ausdifferenzierten, desto leichter wurde es für sie möglich, das Angebot an Arbeitskraft zu steuern'.

²⁵ Anselm Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich. Arbeitsvermittlung, Arbeitsbeschaffung und Arbeitslosenunterstützung 1890-1918* [VSWG Beihefte 79] (Stuttgart 1986) 137; cf. *idem*, 'Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in Deutschland von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Kaiserreichs', in: Benöhr (Hrsg.), *Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung*, 105-135, cit. 121.

²⁶ Bodo Risch, 'Gewerkschaftseigene Arbeitslosenversicherung vor 1914', *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv* 117 (1981) 513-545, cit. 518. On the British case: Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, 227.

²⁷ Luciani, 'Logiques du placement ouvrier', 7; Sabine Rudischhauser, Bénédicte Zimmermann, '"Öffentliche Arbeitsvermittlung" und "placement public" (1890-1914). Kategorien der Invention der öffentlichen Hand - Reflexionen zu einem Vergleich', *Comparativ - Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 5 (1995) 93-120, cit. 101.

Ceux qui veulent changer de maître se réunissent en un endroit fixé par la tradition, place devant l'église, champ de foire, rue ou carrefour [...]. Les futures maîtres examinant les garçons et les filles, les hommes et les femmes comme ils étudieraient des animaux de trait.²⁸

In rural areas in German speaking countries there were so-called *Gesindemärkte*, and I found indications that these also functioned as wage regulators, at least in the eyes of observers in Bitburg in the West-German Eifel in 1877: 'Viele, namentlich verblendete Arbeitgeber, sind gegen diese Einrichtung, sie trägt aber wesentlich dazu bei daß der Gesindelohn nicht gedrückt [wird]'.²⁹ Concentrating the market in one place and on one moment made it transparent and helped to maintain customary hiring conditions. However, in Germany, from medieval times, this unifying effect of local markets for rural labour was undermined by *Gesindemäkler*, private agents or brokers for the recruitment of labourers.³⁰

Calling around

A further, and at the end of the nineteenth century perhaps more common way to find work, was just looking around and asking at factory gates, building sites, port entrances, mines (called *Zechenlaufen* in Germany), and the like. Under different names this can be noticed all over Europe. In Norway the phenomenon was described as *omskådning* ('looking around'),³¹ in the Netherlands it was called *leuren om werk* ('hawking for work').³² In England it was known as the 'calling-round system',³³ and also as 'hawking':

At the close of the nineteenth century the phrase 'hawking labour' was commonly invoked to describe the process whereby workers roamed from employer to employer seeking work. It was time-consuming, costly, and demoralizing.³⁴

The German term was *Umschau*. A Prussian observer remarked in 1894:

²⁸ A. Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain* I Bd. 4 (Paris 1949) 2040, cited by Schöttler, *Die Entstehung der 'Bourses du Travail'*, 198, nt. 30.

²⁹ Cited by: Peter Neu, 'Die Gesindemärkte der Südeifel', *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter* 32 (1968) 498-522, cit. 519.

³⁰ Schröder, 'Arbeitslosenfürsorge und Arbeitsvermittlung', 68-69.

³¹ Nils Edling, 'Regulating unemployment the Continental way: the transfer of municipal labour exchanges to Scandinavia 1890-1914', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'Histoire* 15 (2008) 23-40, cit. 28.

³² Ad Knotter, *Economische transformatie en stedelijke arbeidsmarkt. Amsterdam in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw* (Zwolle/Amsterdam 1991) 117; cf. B. Gewin, *Arbeidsbeurzen* (Utrecht 1898) 279.

³³ N.B. Dearle, *Problems of Unemployment in the London Building Trades* (London 1908) 82-96.

³⁴ Desmond King, *Actively Seeking Work? The Politics of Unemployment and Welfare Policy in the United States and Great Britain* (Chicago/London 1995) xiii; for the term 'hawking' see also: Mansfield, 'Labour Exchanges and the Labour Reserve', 453; William Beveridge, *Unemployment. A Problem of Industry* (London 1912³) 197: 'The prevailing method of selling labour is to hawk it from door to door'.

Das ganze weite Gebiet, welches die Arbeitsvermittlung zur Zeit noch frei läßt füllt bisher - abgesehen von den in einigen Städten des Ostens und in Landbezirken von Schleswig-Holstein herkömmlichen Gesindemärkten ('Menschenmärkten', 'Menschenbörsen') - die Umschau in ihren verschiedenen Formen aus.³⁵

Although the practice of *Umschauen* was known already in urban crafts in the context of journeymen helping each other looking for work,³⁶ in the nineteenth century it became associated with the unorganised labour markets in manufacturing, construction, mining and port industries. In 1902 it was qualified as 'der alles erdrückende Macht der Umschau'.³⁷ The Austrian bookbinders union was also quite negative:

Auf dem Gebiete des Arbeitsmarktes herrschte damals um [1890] die unheilvollste Freiheit. Der Unternehmer konnte sich Arbeitskräfte besorgen, wo er wollte, und auch bezahlen, was er wollte, ebenso konnte sich der Gehilfe auf jede Art eine Kondition verschaffen. Das gebräuchlichste war wohl das 'Anklopfengehen'. Zumeist umstanden die Arbeitslosen am frühen Morgen schon die Fabrikstore; wenn man glaubte, daß da oder dort mehr zu tun war, und man Hoffnung hatte, eventuell aufgenommen zu werden, ging man eben wie eine Dirne auf die Straße, von Bude zu Bude mit seiner Arbeitskraft hausieren.³⁸

In the light of the foregoing argument, it is no surprise that trade unions opposed the *Umschau* or other individual ways to find work, because it would lead to, or at least enable *Lohndrückerei*.³⁹ Their attempts to establish own labour exchanges were meant to counteract this effect.⁴⁰ So, in 1895 the German union of kid glove makers (*Glacéhandschuhmacher*)

³⁵ Georg Evert, 'Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Preußen während des Jahres 1894', *Ztschr. Des Kgl. Preußischen Stat. Bureaus* 36 (1896) 1-87, cit. 13, cited by: Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich*, 48.

³⁶ Schröder, 'Arbeitslosenfürsorge und Arbeitsvermittlung', 53-54, refers to the term *Umschau* in the context of journeymen monopolies in labour intermediation: 'Das "Zuschicken" [der wandernde oder arbeitssuchende Gesellen] geschah aber spätestens seit dem 15. Jahrhundert durch andere Gesellen, die den Angekommenen begrüßten, in Empfang nahmen und ihn im Wege der "Umschau" zu den Meistern führten'; see also: Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung*, 21: 'Die Umschau ein Überrest aus der Zeit der Handwerksgesellenbewegung'; for the Swiss case: Erich Gruner, 'Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung. Das Beispiel der Schweiz', in: Benöhr (Hrsg.), *Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung*, 237-256, cit. 244: '...der aus der Gesellenzeit stammende Brauch des "Umschauens"...'.

³⁷ Ignatz Jastrow cited in Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung*, 21.

³⁸ Cited by Wadauer, 'Vazierende Gesellen', 108. On the importance of *Umschau* as 'den weitestverbreiteten Modus der Stellenbesetzung' in Austria, especially in manufacturing: *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich*, 286-288.

³⁹ Wadauer, 'Vazierende Gesellen', 110; Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich*, 138.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 48.

wanted to keep the agency in their own hands to prevent losing control by the extension of the system of *Umschau*:

[um] jedes Überangebot von Arbeitskräften möglichst zu vermeiden; zugleich sollte er die Mitglieder von dem entwürdigenden Umschauen, welches oft einem wahren Bettel um Arbeit gleichkommt, entheben und auch die Möglichkeit bieten, denjenigen Fabrikanten die Arbeitskräfte vorzuenthalten, welche sich durch Bedrückungen ihrer Arbeiter besonders hervorthun, oder den gerechten Forderungen derselben in scharfer Weise ablehnend gegenüber stellen.⁴¹

In practice, to circumvent both the relative arbitrariness of the ‘calling round system’ and trade union control on job placements, employers often used informal ways of recruitment by relying upon trusted workers’ recommendations of acquaintances, family members, personal contacts, or other sources of information.⁴² So, in the Parisian metal trades we are told (1895) that in the majority of workshops people were hired by acquaintance [*connaissance*] or by comrades.⁴³ In many nineteenth century industries workers were subcontracted in teams; they were hired by contractors or foremen, who acted as brokers in the labour market.⁴⁴

Contractors as intermediaries were also very common in mobilising migratory labour in seasonal trades like construction and agriculture. Just one example is the yearly recruitment of masons and other construction workers from northern Italy for the Vienna labour market ‘durch Vermittlung der sogenannten Capi (Accordanten, Arbeiterpartieführer)’. Brickmakers, also from northern Italy, were mobilised by *Ziegelmeister* as *Accordgruppen-Führer*.⁴⁵

Private agencies

In the last decades of the nineteenth century urban workers in specific branches became more dependent on commercial employment agencies. According to Faust, in the 1890s these were responsible for two thirds of all placements in Prussia and Bavaria, but they had a bad

⁴¹ Cited by *ibidem*, 80, und Faust, ‘Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in Deutschland’, 115.

⁴² Rudischhauser, Zimmermann, “Öffentliche Arbeitsvermittlung” und “placement public”, 101; Chr. Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements. The Politics of Labor in the French Third Republic* (Cambridge 2001) 65; *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich*, 283-286.

⁴³ Cited by Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity*, 65.

⁴⁴ Luciani, ‘Logiques du placement’, 6; Christian Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur 1880-1910* (Paris 1994) 44-45; Philippe Lefebvre, *L’invention de la grande entreprise. Travail, hiérarchie, marché (France, fin XVIIIe - début XXe siècle)* (Paris 2003). Cf. the latest overview on this issue: Patricia van den Eeckhout (ed.), *Supervision and Authority in Industry - Western European Experiences, 1830-1939* [International Studies in Social History 15] (Oxford / New York 2009).

⁴⁵ *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich*, 291-293.

reputation.⁴⁶ In 1894 632 of a total of 5.216 Prussian *Stellenvermittler* were prosecuted 761 times, and 345 were known by the police because of complaints about malpractices.⁴⁷ All parties involved agreed ‘daß infolge des persönlichen Erwerbsinteresses des Vermittlers die Versuchung zu unreellen Vermittlungen sehr nahe liege’.⁴⁸ Commercial agencies were active in sectors with a low trade union density, like agriculture, domestic services, seafaring, the catering industry.⁴⁹ In Kristiania (today’s Oslo), a public labour exchange was established in 1894 after private placement agencies had come under attack because of several scandals.⁵⁰ In Britain, frauds and malpractices by private bureaus were signalled in the beginning of the twentieth century by William Beveridge as one of his arguments in favour of public labour exchanges.⁵¹ In Paris, trade unions initiated a *Ligue pour la suppression des bureaux de placement*, and in 1886 launched massive protests against malpractices by private *bureaux de placement*, with petitions and demonstrations. A trade union dominated municipal *Bourse du Travail* (see below) was established in response to these protests. However, the *bureaux de placements* continued to be popular among specific employers in branches where trade unions were weak, predominantly in the food and catering industries.⁵² In 1910, their role was still hotly debated by French social reformers.⁵³

Trade union attitudes

Trade union agencies and the Parisian Bourse du Travail

In the nineteenth century trade unions claimed a monopoly in the organisation of supply to prevent downward pressure on wages by the entrance of low paid outsiders. Union exchanges were part of a system to regulate conditions of access to a craft.⁵⁴ The Parisian *Bourse du Travail* (established in 1886/7) is a very interesting example of a trade union initiative to

⁴⁶ Faust, ‘Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in Deutschland’, 110. cf. Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung*, 22-23.

⁴⁷ Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich*, 48.

⁴⁸ Cited in: *idem*, ‘Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in Deutschland’, 111. See also: *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich*, 77-93: ‘Missbräuche bei der modernen gewerbemäßigen Stellenvermittlung’.

⁴⁹ Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich*, 49.

⁵⁰ Edling, ‘Regulating unemployment’, 28.

⁵¹ William Beveridge, *Unemployment: a Problem of Industry* (London 1909) 240.

⁵² Schöttler, *Die Entstehung der ‘Bourses du Travail’*, 60, 99.

⁵³ Rudischhauser, Zimmermann, ‘“Öffentliche Arbeitsvermittlung” und “placement public”’, 102.

⁵⁴ Noel Whiteside, ‘La protection du métier : l’organisation industrielle et les services des syndicats dans l’Angleterre de la fin du XIXe siècle’, *Cahiers d’Histoire de l’Institut de Recherches Marxistes* 51 (1993) 29-51.

centralise labour market intermediation with this aim, backed by the municipal authorities.⁵⁵

The *Bourse* was a combination of a local labour exchange and a rallying point for trade unions and their members, which also coordinated strikes. This Parisian concept was rapidly followed all over France: in 1900 there were *Bourses du Travail* in 77 big and medium sized French towns.⁵⁶ It is very significant that, although the *bourses* competed with the then old fashioned and rather conservative *compagnonnages*, it can be shown that *bourses* were strong in cities where *compagnonnages* had strong roots too. In fact, the idea of a *bourse* as a place where workers could find both a job and a professional community had much in common with the corporatist tradition of the *compagnonnages*.⁵⁷

Trade unions elsewhere in Europe - I know of Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries - tried to follow the French example.⁵⁸ A Scandinavian labour congress, held in 1888 in Copenhagen, requested the establishment of publicly funded labour offices to be led by the unions. In Denmark, Sweden and Norway unions demanded setting up *bourses du travail* (*arbejderbørs*), 'like the one in Paris', because it 'would [...] strengthen existing union-run placement activities which aimed at protecting the trade by limiting competition'.⁵⁹ Especially in Denmark, union linked placing activities gained a relatively strong position; many unions, mainly those organising skilled workers, had well-functioning services of this kind.⁶⁰

In Germany, Austria, and Great-Britain

In Germany, trade unions were also in favour of trade union control over mediation, as Anselm Faust argues in his study on German labour exchanges:

⁵⁵ Schöttler, *Die Entstehung der 'Bourses du Travail'*, *passim* ; more recently: Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity*, 110-117.

⁵⁶ Rudischhauser, Zimmermann, "Öffentliche Arbeitsvermittlung" und "placement public", 109.

⁵⁷ Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity*, 115, 127. He computes a strong correlation between *bourses* and cities with a tradition of *compagnonnage*. On the relationship between the concept of *Bourse du Travail* and *compagnonnage* also: Luciani, 'Logiques du placement ouvrier', 14.

⁵⁸ B. Gewin, *Arbeidsbeurzen* (Utrecht 1898) 249-250; W. Bevaart, S. Veen, *De rechten man op de rechte plaats. De ontwikkeling van de openbare arbeidsbemiddeling in Amsterdam (1886-1940)* (Amsterdam 1986) 21; Ronald van Bekkum, *Tussen Vraag en Aanbod. Op zoek naar de identiteit van de arbeidsvoorzieningsorganisatie* (The Hague 1996) 149-150; Edding, 'Regulating unemployment', 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 32-33.

In der absicht, auf dem Arbeitsmarkt als ‘Preiskartell mit Angebotskontingentierung’ [...] aufzutreten [...] mußte ihr [die Gewerkschaften] die Regulierung der Angebotseite des Arbeitsmarktes von zentraler Bedeutung sein.⁶¹

The socialist *Freie Gewerkschaften* had established their own exchanges from the 1860s/70s onwards. Rapid growth, especially in the 1880s, had led to 967 union exchanges in 1904 - organised locally for individual crafts.⁶² Union members who received benefits were obliged to use the union agencies, and individually looking around for work was prohibited.⁶³ Until the end of the nineteenth century German trade unions held on to the view that ‘der Verkäufer der Arbeitskraft das Recht hat, über die Art zu entscheiden, wie er seine Arbeitskraft auf den Markt bringen [wolle]’.⁶⁴ In 1896 the congress of the *Freie Gewerkschaften* advertised a system like the French *Bourses du Travail*:

Der Staat kann uns Häuser zur Verfügung stellen, wie er den Kaufleuten Börsen baut, alles andere überlasse er den Gewerkschaften. [...] Die Arbeitsnachweise gehören den Gewerkschaften.⁶⁵

An Austrian trade union congress, also held in 1896, pleaded likewise against bipartite and state or municipal exchanges. The congress

machte es allen Gewerkschaften zur Pflicht ernstlich an den Ausbau der eigenen Arbeitsvermittlung zu schreiten und jedes weitere Experiment, die Arbeitsvermittlung durch den Staat oder die Commune ohne ausschließliche Leitung der Gewerkschaften durchzuführen energisch [...] zu bekämpfen.⁶⁶

An Austrian report from 1898 wrote about ‘das Fortschreiten der gewerkschaftlichen Organisation der Arbeiter, die überall das Bestreben äußert, die Arbeitsvermittlung an sich zu

⁶¹ Anselm Faust, ‘Arbeitsmarktpolitik in Deutschland: Die Entstehung der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung 1890-1927’, in: T. Pierenkemper, R. Tilly (Hg.), *Historische Arbeitsmarktforschung. Entstehung, Entwicklung und Probleme der Vermarktung von Arbeitskraft* [Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 49] (Göttingen 1982) 253-272, cit. 262.

⁶² Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung*, 24.

⁶³ C. Conrad, *Die Organisation des Arbeitsnachweises in Deutschland* (Leipzig 1904) 33-35; 49: ‘Den Arbeitsnachweis [...] seiner höchsten Leistungsfähigkeit zuzuführen, haben die Gewerkschaften [...] denselben mit ihrem Unterstützungswesen in enge Verbindung gebracht’.

⁶⁴ Cited by Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik in deutschen Kaiserreich*, 224. See also: Conrad, *Die Organisation*, 27-28.

⁶⁵ *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des 2. Kongresses der Freien Gewerkschaften* (Berlin 1896), cited by: Rudischhauser, Zimmermann, ‘“Öffentliche Arbeitsvermittlung” und “placement public”, 112. On the Parisian *Bourse du Travail* as an example in Germany: Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich*, 82 nt. 126.

⁶⁶ *Die Arbeitsvermittlung in Österreich*, 215.

ziehen'.⁶⁷ It counted 249 trade union exchanges in the Austrian empire as a whole.⁶⁸ In most cases members looking for work were obliged to use the union's exchange. The aim was to protect local wage standards, as 'die Bewilligung verweigert werden kann, sobald auf dem Arbeitsplatze, um den es sich handelt, nicht den örtlichen Verhältnisse angemessene oder anerkannte Arbeitsbedingungen bestehen'.⁶⁹

British trade unionists originally appear to have had a comparable attitude toward public exchanges. Like their continental counterparts, the British trade unions wanted exchanges to be administered wholly by trades unionists for their members' benefits.⁷⁰ They were suspicious of the policy of public exchanges in trade disputes and standard rates, and with some reason, as the liberal protagonist of central labour exchanges, William Beveridge, in 1906 'refused to concede that exchanges should only advertise situations which paid either trade-union rates or the local standard wage'.⁷¹ Winston Churchill, then President of the Board of Trade and the leading official in the debate on public labour exchanges, was equally 'uncompromising about the use of the exchange to enforce standard rates in wages'.⁷²

Trade union comments on this issue in 1906 stipulated that these should maintain their own 'vacant books', like in the 'houses of call' mentioned above, at each exchange and, 'with the exception of the place of registration, shall be allowed to continue their present methods'. Furthermore, they requested that

where an organized system of registration [like in the 'houses of call'] is already in existence, covering any trade, such registration shall be accepted [...] in the locality [of the public exchange] as sufficient for the purposes of that trade.⁷³

In the first public London labour exchanges, which combined their operations in 1906, unions were indeed allowed to deposit their own 'vacant book' at each exchange, so that they could use its facilities and at the same time retain their own rules and system of information.⁷⁴

An artisan device

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 119.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 219.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 220.

⁷⁰ King, *Actively seeking work?*, 48.

⁷¹ José Harris, *Unemployment and Politics. A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914* (Oxford 1972) 203.

⁷² King, *Actively seeking work?*, 43; on this issue also: Malcolm Mansfield, 'Flying to the Moon: reconsidering the British labour exchange system in the early twentieth century', *Labour History Review* 66 (2001) 24-40, cit. 29.

⁷³ Cited by King, *Actively seeking work?*, 34.

⁷⁴ Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*, 203; see also: Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 185.

This system of occupation-based exchanges referred more to the artisan past than to the industrial future, however. In Germany, intermediation by trade unions could only exert some influence ‘in wenigen Berufen mit klein- und mittelbetrieblicher Struktur, hohem Facharbeiteranteil und hohem gewerkschaftlichen Organisationsgrad’.⁷⁵ In the Swiss case this is documented also, as the Swiss historian Erich Gruner argues:

Je höher ihr Organisationsgrad wurde, desto weniger waren die Gewerkschaften ihrerseits bereit, auf den [...] Monopolanspruch auf Arbeitsvermittlung zu verzichten. [...] Ihre Chancen waren umso größer, je weniger transparent der Arbeitsmarkt war, je kleiner die durchschnittliche Betriebsgröße in der Branche war und je weniger straff die Arbeitgeber organisiert waren. Im Handwerk waren die Chancen am größten für die Gewerkschaften, beim Arbeitsnachweis ein Übergewicht zu erreichen.

The explicit aim was to combat the *Umschau*: ‘Die dabei verfolgte Strategie begann damit, daß die Verbandsleitung ihren Mitglieder ein Umschauverbot auferlegte’.⁷⁶

From the fact that trade union agencies were well represented in the Brussels artisan luxury trades:

Spécialement dans les industries de Bruxelles, parmi les bronziers, les compositeurs typographiques, les carrossiers, les chapeliers, les gantiers, les ouvriers ont essayé de dominer aussi le marché de travail en développant l’embauchage dans le sein des syndicats ouvriers,⁷⁷

it has been argued that the concept of trade union control in labour exchanges arose at a specific moment, when corporate institutions in small scale industry, like the urban luxury trades mentioned above, were declining, but still functioning.⁷⁸ In this respect there is perhaps a parallel in the programme of productive associations in the early labour movement.⁷⁹ In the light of this argument it is interesting to note that the independent French *Bourses du Travail* were dominated by trade unions of small scale artisan or semi-artisan trades, and that

⁷⁵ Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung*, 25.

⁷⁶ Gruner, ‘Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung. Das Beispiel der Schweiz’, 247.

⁷⁷ *Le placement d’utilité publique. La question du placement en Belgique par M. Louis Varlez* (s.l., s.d.) 9, cited by Els Deslé, *Arbeidsbemiddeling en/of werklozencontrole. Het voorbeeld van de Gentse arbeidsbeurs (1891-1914)* [Gemeentekrediet. Historische Uitgaven, reeks in-8°, nr. 84] (n.p. 1991) 35. It is no coincidence that most of the unemployment funds in Belgium in 1890 could be found precisely in these Brussels luxury trades: Guy Vanthemsche, ‘De oorsprong van de werkloosheidsverzekering in België: vakbondskassen en gemeentelijke fondsen (1890-1914)’, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 11 (1985) 130-164, cit. 131.

⁷⁸ Deslé, *Arbeidsbemiddeling*, 56-57.

⁷⁹ Cf. F. Lenger, ‘Beyond Exceptionalism. Notes on the Artisanal Phase of the Labour Movement in France, England, Germany and the United States’, *International Review of Social History* XXXVI (1991) 1-23.

industrial unions were underrepresented.⁸⁰ Also, small employers seem to have been more favourable towards union control: according to one observer in Saint-Etienne: 'Les petits patrons sont favorable aux chambres syndicales et viennent leur demander des ouvriers, mais les gros leur sont contraires parce qu'elles les combattent'.⁸¹

British trade unions at the end of the nineteenth century

Trade union agencies

There is a detailed and interesting British source to illustrate trade union practices in these matters, dating from 1893.⁸² Craft unions, mainly in artisan trades, like the 'Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners', 'the Typographical Association', 'the Alliance Cabinet Makers' Association', but also in manufacturing, like the 'Amalgamated Society of Engineers' or 'the Boiler Makers' and Iron Shipbuilders' Society', all combined unemployment insurance with forms of registration of unemployed members in 'vacant books' at the meeting house of the branch, usually a public house. Sometimes there were also 'vacant offices' at which the unemployed members of all the local branches attended daily and signed the book. On this basis an intricate system of supra-local intermediation could be maintained, as in the case of the well-organised engineers:

It is thus seen that the individual member must report to the secretary of the branch, and the secretary of the branch to the general secretary of the whole society, if necessary, as to the demand for men. [...] If men are wanted in any locality, it is necessary that he should supply the demand at once from such locality as may be most convenient with regard to distance and general conditions of trade. His information as to the places most available for men is drawn from the monthly reports of other branch secretaries.⁸³

⁸⁰ Schöttler, *Die Entstehung der 'Bourses du Travail'*, 93-95.

⁸¹ Cited by *ibidem*, 108. Cf. for the British case: Whiteside, 'La protection du métier', 34.

⁸² Board on Trade, *Report on Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed* (London 1893) [by H. Llewellyn Smith], downloaded from: <http://www.archive.org/details/reportonagencies00gearich>; also as: *Parliamentary Papers* 1893-94, vol. LXXXII. See also: Whiteside, 'Définir le chômage'; Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur*, 63, 226-229. Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 257-261, App. B.3: 'Trade Union Travelling Benefit and Registries', cites extensively from the report.

⁸³ Board on Trade, *Report on Agencies*, 24.

However, in many cases, allocation of unemployed members by the union was only one of possible ways to get a job, and for employers it could be a last resort, as the ‘Steam Engine Maker’s Society’ reported:

Employers requiring men, or foremen acting on their behalf, may send there [the branch club-house] for men if they are unable to obtain them in the usual way from among the applicants at the shop gate, or through other members working in their shop.⁸⁴

In this and other craft unions, ‘hawking’ labour was as common as allocation by the union. So, although in the case of the pattern makers it was ‘a very common thing for employers to apply to the society for men in times of good trade’, members out of work also ‘visit such workshops as they may think most likely to need men, and make application to the foremen’.⁸⁵ Another example: firms often sent representatives to the head-quarters of the ‘National Society of Amalgamated Brass Workers’ in Birmingham

commissioned to engage workmen, and these visitors frequently make application to the offices of the society, and take artisans on the recommendation of the general secretary. [...] The men themselves, however, often make personal applications for work.⁸⁶

In the case of the shipwrights, the way of seeking a job was also mixed:

Employers or their agents frequently apply to the society for men, and if they cannot be obtained in the locality requests for the required number of men are addressed to other districts or to the general office. [...] No objection, however, is offered to men applying to employers direct, provided they do so in the manner customary in the district.

However, in places like Dundee and Liverpool:

The method generally adopted is for members to congregate at the gates or starting places of such firms as are thought likely to require assistance. In addition to this, members visit the various docks and yards, and thus frequently obtain casual employment.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 28.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 34.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 38-39.

In the case of the bricklayers ‘employers seldom apply to the union for men, work being usually obtained by personal application or by the cooperation and assistance of other members’.⁸⁸ At the Typographical Association ‘employers requiring assistance apply to the secretary at the society house for a list of members signing the call-book, selecting those they require, but members also apply to employers and overseers for employment at their respective offices’.⁸⁹

In the textile industry, the ‘calling round system’ was even more common: unemployed members of the ‘Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners’

usually go round to the various mills inquiring for situations, it being customary for the foreman either to take their names and addresses or to communicate with them through some friend employed in the same mill. This system obviates the necessity of employers having to apply to the union ...⁹⁰

The mode of obtaining employment in the ‘Amalgamated Association of Card and Blowing Room Operatives’ was ‘by personal application at the mills, which is supplemented to some extent by information given and received by the branch secretaries at the society houses’.⁹¹ At the ‘West Riding of Yorkshire Power Loom Weavers’ Association’

no vacant book is kept, nor does the union attempt to find employment for its members [...]. Except in rare cases, employers do not apply to the union for men, but members make application to the employers or their representatives for work.⁹²

In the mining industry and for waterside labour there was no provision for out-of-work benefits, and neither for the placement of unemployed union members.⁹³ About factory workers in general it was reported that they ‘usually introduce one another, that they answer advertisements, and very frequently find work through notices posted up outside the factories’.⁹⁴

The conclusion from this report forces itself upon the reader that union based exchanges were in no way able to impose a monopoly (anymore?), and that unorganised

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 43.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 62.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 69.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 70.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 72.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 82, 89.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 121.

forms of job seeking were at least equally important. With William Beveridge, we can conclude from the report: ‘even in the most highly organised trades the use of the union office as a labour bureau is hardly ever exclusive of other methods of seeking employment or obtaining workpeople’.⁹⁵ The report itself concluded that ‘the bulk of the work of hiring labour and seeking employment will in most trades continue to be done directly between workmen and employers’.⁹⁶ British employers were also quite outspoken about the secondary role of trade unions in this respect. In 1909 they stated that the most common hiring methods were:

First, the foremen have usually in their possession a list of men out of work with whose capacity and character they are acquainted. Second, recommendations of other workmen on whose opinion the foremen can rely. Third, trade union and other organizations. And, fourth, the public press.⁹⁷

On the basis of this source alone we cannot be sure about the extent of market control by craft unions earlier in the century. Information on the London trades at the first half of the nineteenth century provides a mixed picture: close control in tailoring and printing, less so in the building trades (carpentry).⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it is tempting to suppose that processes of industrialisation and casualisation of labour markets in the last decades of the nineteenth century had undermined union regulation in labour market intermediation. Customary trade union controls were under threat from changing patterns of industrial relations, like the rise of general unions, lacking the close control over conditions and terms of employment typical of the skilled trades.⁹⁹ It is at least clear that at the end of the century British unions could not prevent members from individually calling around for work. Perhaps we can relate this also to the demise of craft related systems of subcontracting in industry and the ‘rise of the foreman’,¹⁰⁰ who recruited workers on an individual basis (note the important role of the foremen in the citations above!).

Unemployment insurance and union control of the unemployed

⁹⁵ Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 260.

⁹⁶ Board on Trade, *Report on Agencies*, 113.

⁹⁷ Cited by: King, *Actively seeking work?*, 37.

⁹⁸ Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, 189-191.

⁹⁹ Mansfield, ‘Flying to the Moon’, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Van den Eeckhout (ed.), *Supervision and Authority in Industry*.

Close reading of the report cited above makes clear that the efforts of British trade unions to seek job placements for their members were related to another union device to prevent downward pressure on wages: unemployment insurance. In Britain, perhaps more so than in France,¹⁰¹ union systems of trade regulation and control combined both elements: trade unions offered help to members out of work both in the form of placement and benefits.¹⁰² For the unions the issue centred on wage control: in combination with benefits, placement by the union enabled members to refuse work below wage standards as set by the unions, or withhold supply in case of strikes. In this way a dilemma could be solved: if a worker refused to accept a lower rate than the union had set, should he be called ‘unemployed’ or ‘striking’?¹⁰³ Unemployment benefits prevented members from being forced to take work on non-union terms. For the ‘Amalgamated Society of Engineers’ it was argued that

the unemployed benefit of the trade union acts as a regulator of the labour market. Practically, the trade union of this class is in a position to minimise the competition of the individuals composing it, by using this benefit for the purpose of lessening pressure upon the labour market [...].¹⁰⁴

Contemporary theorists of British trade-unionism Sidney and Beatrice Webb, argued that unemployment benefit was primarily designed to deter unemployed workmen from undermining the level of wages and only secondary to relieve distress.¹⁰⁵ In many unions the ‘out-of-work’ benefits were therefore not clearly distinguished from payments because of strikes.¹⁰⁶ The claim on union control of labour market intermediation can be seen as a part of this whole endeavour to keep up wage rates.

However, the above report suggests that the device of the ‘vacant books’ served yet another goal: signing of the book by the unemployed member was conditional for the union

¹⁰¹ Michel Dreyfus, Sandrine Kott, Michel Pigenet, Noël Whiteside, ‘Les bases multiples du syndicalisme au XIXe siècle en Allemagne, France et Grande-Bretagne’, in : Jean-Louis Robert, Friedhelm Boll, Antoine Prost, *L’invention des syndicalismes. Le syndicalisme en Europe occidentale à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris 1997) 269-284. See also : Noel Whiteside, ‘Unemployment Revisited in Comparative Perspective: Labour Market Policy in Strasbourg and Liverpool, 1890-1914’, *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007) 35-56, cit. 39.

¹⁰² Whiteside, ‘La protection du métier’. A short overview of unemployment insurance by British trade unions in: Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 223-230.

¹⁰³ Noel Whiteside, ‘Définir le chômage: traditions syndicales et politiques nationale en Grande-Bretagne avant la Première Guerre mondiale’, in: M. Mansfield, R. Salais, N. Whiteside, *Aux sources du chômage 1880-1914. Une comparaison interdisciplinaire entre la France et la Grande-Bretagne* (Paris 1994) 381-411; Cf. Luciani, ‘Logiques du placement ouvrier’, 14: ‘...’la définition syndicale du chômage, exprimée comme l’impossibilité pour un ouvrier d’une profession déterminée, de trouver un emploi dans son métier au tarif *normal*’.

¹⁰⁴ Board on Trade, *Report on Agencies*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (1897) 161-162.

¹⁰⁶ Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*, 297.

branch secretary to verify if a man was really unemployed.¹⁰⁷ The labour market intermediation of the Society of Engineers, cited above, was meant to relieve the burden on the unemployment fund. Daily registration in the ‘vacant book’ in this society’s ‘houses of call’ was obliged ‘to secure that the member would be easily available in the event of his services being required by an employer’.¹⁰⁸ The unions in the printing industries explicitly stated that ‘any one refusing to go when called upon to do so forfeits that week’s out-of-work pay’, and ‘those failing to answer a call are ineligible for out-of-work allowance for six days’.¹⁰⁹ As the benefit had to be raised by the members themselves, it was important to get the unemployed working as soon as possible and to control for unnecessary appeals. To cite Beveridge again:

Unions come nearer than any other bodies to possessing a direct test of unemployment by which to protect their funds against abuse. They have [...] at least the beginnings of a Labour Exchange system.¹¹⁰

This explains why union intermediation was meant for unemployed members only, not for members in employment wanting to change jobs. In this sense the unions’ labour exchanges acquired the function of controlling *unemployed members*, more so than controlling mobility in the labour market in general.

The Ghent system: incorporation of trade unions in public labour exchanges

The Ghent system

At this stage of my argument, I want to redirect your attention to the continent, to the city of Ghent in Belgium. The so-called Ghent system, designed by the prominent liberal reformer Louis Varlez, provided municipal financial supplements on individual out-of-work benefits by trade unions. It was a pioneering device, followed all over Europe.¹¹¹ Trade unions in Ghent cooperated with the municipal authorities in the administration of an Unemployment

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 296.

¹⁰⁸ Board on Trade, *Report on Agencies*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 56, 59, 62, 63.

¹¹⁰ Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 227.

¹¹¹ Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*, 299; Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung*, 54-61; George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social. The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton 1993) 203-209. For the Swiss case: Gruner, ‘Arbeitsvermittlung’, 254; for the Dutch and Scandinavian cases: see below.

Fund (established in 1900). They proved to be most severe in controlling unemployed members on their willingness to accept work. It forced them also to separate their unemployment and strike funds. These were, of course, two of the reasons for liberal reformers to embrace this system. Unions involved in the municipal Unemployment Fund had a strong interest in obliging their unemployed members to sign daily at their office to control if an application was justified.¹¹² In due time, however, most of the Ghent unions agreed that their unemployed members would better be registered at the existing public labour exchange for control, and in 1909 Louis Varlez managed to convince the unions to participate in a bipartite (employers and workers) administered municipal Labour Exchange, precisely because of this controlling function. A cooperation between the Unemployment Fund and the Labour Exchange was forged to this effect, resulting in the transfer of union intermediation and control, and in a sudden rise of union members applying at the Exchange in 1910.¹¹³

The Ghent unions had demanded that the bipartite municipal exchange would not accept job offers below standard rates or in case of strikes or lock-outs,¹¹⁴ but in fact they had to give up an independent role in this field of intermediation altogether, as had been the intention of Louis Varlez, who considered trade union control of labour supply detrimental:

Quelle arme efficace que le pouvoir ainsi disposer de la main d'oeuvre, d'éloigner, de refuser ou d'accorder des travailleurs, suivant que les patrons acceptent ou non les revendications syndicales!¹¹⁵

In Great-Britain and Germany

Elsewhere in Europe also, the combination of compulsory registration of the unemployed at labour exchanges with unemployment insurance schemes modelled on the Ghent-system, persuaded trade unions to participate in bipartite administrations of existing or newly established public labour exchanges. In Britain, trade unionists did not fully support public exchanges, fearing 'blacklegging' and 'wage cutting', until they were reinforced by a system of unemployment insurance in 1912.¹¹⁶ According to José Harris in her study on English unemployment politics,

¹¹² Vanthemsche, 'De oorsprong van de werkloosheidsverzekering in België', 145-146.

¹¹³ Deslé, *Arbeidsbemiddeling en/of werklozencontrole*, 180-189.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 149.

¹¹⁵ Cited in *ibidem*, 165.

¹¹⁶ Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*, 203-204; King, *Actively Seeking Work?*, 34-36, 47-48.

some kind of incentive was necessary to persuade the better class of workmen to register at an exchange; and it was not until the payment of benefits came into operation in 1913 that the prejudice [against public exchanges] of organized workmen, at least in insured industries, was to a certain extent broken down.¹¹⁷

However, this was only after attempts by representatives of organised labour to use labour exchanges to improve their members' power in the labour market had failed. Once unemployment compensation was enacted by the government, the aim of controlling the unemployed competed with the earlier rival aim of controlling labour supply.¹¹⁸ The linkage between the placement of job seekers and the distribution of benefits became a defining feature of the organisation of the labour market, as Beveridge had prescribed in his *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry*: 'No scheme of insurance [...] can be safe from abuse unless backed by an efficient organisation of the labour market [*i.e.* an adequate system of Labour Exchanges]'.¹¹⁹ Public labour exchanges became mechanisms through which the government could enforce a division between unemployed workers worthy or unworthy to receive unemployment assistance.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, it is interesting to know that in 1927 only 77 percent of British union members claiming unemployment benefit signed at public labour exchanges; of the remaining 23 percent 'considerably more than half prove their unemployment by signing vacant books kept under the supervision of whole-time officers of their associations', while the remainder signed vacant books 'kept at such places as the branch secretary's residence, or a shop or a public house'.¹²¹ Public enquiry into the work of the employment agencies in 1920, as analysed by Malcolm Mansfield, revealed that trade unionists perceived the public labour exchanges as of little use to skilled and organised workers. They were especially condemned for their tendency to impose a uniform 'job-search' over a diversity of existing, tailor-made employment practices: recruitment via foremen, union branches and personal contacts. In the eyes of both employers and craft unions, public labour exchanges were of use only to

¹¹⁷ Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*, 354.

¹¹⁸ King, *Actively Seeking Work?* 63.

¹¹⁹ Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 229.

¹²⁰ King, *Actively Seeking Work?*, 19.

¹²¹ Ministry of Labour circular E.D. 5117/3/1927, dated 22 February 1928, cited by: Dave Lyddon, 'From Unemployment Benefit to Redundancy Pay. Trade Unions, the State, and Unemployment in the British Car Industry, 1911-1965', in: Ad Knotter, Bert Altena, Dirk Damsma (eds.), *Labour, Social Policy, and the Welfare State. Papers presented to the Ninth British-Dutch Conference on Labour History, Bergen 1994* (Amsterdam 1997) 99-110, cit. 103.

inefficient workers. Not surprisingly, they found more support with the growing unskilled general unions.¹²²

In Germany, trade unions were also in favour of unemployment insurance, for the same reasons as their British counterparts. For the trade union movement

[sollte] die Versicherung nicht nur das individuelle Los der Erwerbslosen bessern [...], sondern durch die Entlastung des Arbeitsmarktes vom Lohndruck notleidender Stellensuchender auch die Arbeitsbedingungen der Beschäftigten. Eine nur auf Vermittlungserfolge abzielender Arbeitsnachweis durfte diese Absicht nicht zunichte machen.¹²³

The socialist expert in this field, Fanny Imle, wrote:

Das Bewußtsein, niemals mehr dem Arbeitgeber, den man vor kurzem noch mutig bekämpft hat, als ausgehungerten Lohndrücker nachlaufen zu müssen, ist mehr dazu angetan, das Selbstachtungsgefühl des Proletariats zu heben, als ein rasch gewonnener Streik, dessen Errungenschaften einer wehrlosen Organisation Stück für Stück wieder weggeraubt werden können.¹²⁴

The number of trade union unemployment funds in Germany grew from 10 in 1891 to 44 just before the First World War.¹²⁵ As in Britain, unions organised their own labour exchanges, both to control their unemployed members and prevent them to accept jobs below the standard wage rate.¹²⁶ From the late nineteenth century, urban authorities began to recognise the need for measures to reorganise the labour market. By 1914 some fifteen German cities had adopted the Ghent system.¹²⁷ Ideas to combine unemployment insurance and public labour exchanges were developed in German municipalities before World War I.¹²⁸ In the same period, trade unions gave up their resistance to cooperate in public labour exchanges and

¹²² Mansfield, 'Flying to the Moon', 29-34.

¹²³ Faust, 'Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in Deutschland', 130. For the argument to set up unemployment insurance schemes by German trade unions to influence 'das Angebot auf dem Arbeitsmarkt', 'zur Aufrechterhaltung des Standardlohnes, des errungenen Minimums der Arbeitsbedingungen überhaupt' also: Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik in deutschen Kaiserreich*, 134, 156. See also: Bénédicte Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage en Allemagne. Entre professions et territoires* (Paris 2001) 78-80.

¹²⁴ Fanny Imle, 'Die Ergebnisse der Gewerkschaftlichen Arbeitslosenunterstützung', *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 6 (1902) 800-809, cit. 801, cited by: Risch, 'Gewerkschaftseigene Arbeitslosenversicherung', 525 nt. 1.

¹²⁵ Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik*, 53; Risch, 'Gewerkschaftseigene Arbeitslosenversicherung', 518-520.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, 526-527.

¹²⁷ Whiteside, 'Unemployment Revisited in Comparative Perspective', 40-42.

¹²⁸ Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik in deutschen Kaiserreich*, 147, 149-150, 152; also: *idem*, 'Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversorgung in Deutschland', 129; Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage*, 109, 119-135.

abandoned the model of the French *Bourses du Travail*.¹²⁹ In 1908 the trade union congress opted for bipartite municipal exchanges, and in 1913 it advised all associated unions to transfer their own placement bureaus to a public exchange.¹³⁰

Strasburg (then a German city) was the first to integrate a scheme of unemployment insurance with a central labour exchange, managed by a joint bipartite committee. Trade-union agencies and municipally subsidized schemes of unemployment benefits were absorbed by the municipal labour bureau in 1906, while at that time Ghent had left the control of the unemployed still to the trade unions themselves - as we have seen above. According to William Beveridge, who in his book *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (1908) devoted an appendix of some 15 pages to a description of the German public labour exchanges, in Strasburg

has been in force since the beginning of 1907 a scheme of augmenting from a municipal fund unemployed benefits paid by trade unions to their members; one of the conditions for the receipt of this municipal subsidy is regular registration at the Labour Office.¹³¹

Like Ghent, Strasburg became one of the classic examples for labour market reformers both inside and outside Germany.¹³² The combination of public labour exchange and the administration of unemployment benefits was followed by other municipalities. William Beveridge, wrote about a German ‘movement to absorb competing institutions such as guild and trade union registries, and thus to centralise and unify the whole labour market’. In Stuttgart, in 1906,

all the larger trade unions [...] have closed their own registries in favour of the municipal Labour Office. [...] The unions of woodworkers, metalworkers, saddlers, paperhanger, glaziers, bookbinders, brewers’ operatives, millers, and factory workers compel their unemployed members to register daily at the Labour Office as the condition of receiving out-of-work pay.¹³³

¹²⁹ Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage*, 120.

¹³⁰ Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik*, 40.

¹³¹ Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 245; cf. on the Strasburg case : Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage*, 128 : ‘Ce passage obligé par le bureau de placement [...] facilite le contrôle des déclaration de chômage et de l’attribution des subventions’.

¹³² Whiteside, ‘Unemployment Revisited’, 45-49; Mansfield, ‘Flying to the Moon’, 27 ; see also: Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage*, 121-127.

¹³³ Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 244-245.

At first, the relationship with registrations of the unemployed by the trade unions themselves seems to have been delicate, however: in Strasburg, and also in Erlangen, Freiburg and Mülhausen, the municipal allowances according to the Ghent system were refused in certain cases in which trade unions did allow benefits (like strikes, or a stay elsewhere). The municipal authorities in these cities found a way to select these cases from the ‘genuine’ unemployed by controlling the registers of the trade unions. When unemployed were allowed a municipal subsidy on their union benefit, they were obliged to register at the municipal labour exchange also. This was considered in advance of the Ghent system:

Der Fortschritt der Strassburger Einrichtung gegenüber dem System der Stadt Gent beruht darin, dass man [...] sich auch hier nicht mit der gewerkschaftlichen Kontrolle begnügt, sondern daneben noch eine eigene in der Art treten lässt, dass die von der Stadt Unterstützten sich auf dem städtischen Arbeitsamte zu bestimmter Stunde einmal, in verdächtigen Fällen sogar zwei oder dreimal täglich melden müssen.¹³⁴

In France, Belgium, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries

The German example of a combination of unemployment insurance and public labour exchanges, supervised by bipartite colleges of employers and workers, played an important role in the British debate on these issues, and was also followed in many other European countries.¹³⁵ However, on the large *Conférence Internationale du Chômage*, held in Paris on 18-21 September 1910, where the question of control of the unemployed on benefit was a major topic, it appeared that France was lagging behind in this respect.¹³⁶ A law in 1905 prescribing the establishment of municipal labour bureaus (not to be confused with the *Bourses du Travail* mentioned earlier) in towns with a population over 10.000 was only followed by some, and control of unemployed receiving benefits was still an exclusive affair of the trade unions. The French expert on the conference could only note as an *oeuvre à faire*:

¹³⁴ O. Most, ‘Die Handhabung der Kontrolle in den Arbeitslosenversicherungseinrichtungen Deutschlands’, Rapport No. 4 in: *Compte rendu de la Conférence Internationale du Chômage, Paris 18-21 Septembre 1910, Tome deuxième III Rapports présentés à la Conférence par les sections nationales du Comité d’organisation (1re Partie)* (Paris 1911) 5-6, cit. 6. Cf. Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage*, 128-131.

¹³⁵ On the influence of German ideas in these issues in Britain: Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*; in the Scandinavian countries: Edling, ‘Regulating unemployment the Continental way’; in the Netherlands: Van Bakkum, *Tussen Vraag en Aanbod*, 166.

¹³⁶ Rudischhauser, Zimmermann, ‘“Öffentliche Arbeitsvermittlung”’, 101-102; see on this conference also: Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur*, 59-115. The initiator of the Ghent system on unemployment relief, Louis Varlez, was the driving force behind this conference : *ibidem*, 69-71.

de constituer partout des organismes de placement paritaire avec lesquels les Caisses de chômage entretiendront d'étroites relations, recourant à eux notamment pour qu'ils contrôlent, chez les chômeurs qui seront tenus de se présenter incessamment à leurs bureaux, la persistance du chômage...¹³⁷

This was realised in laws dating from 1910 and 1911, which required unemployed receiving benefit to register at these exchanges.¹³⁸

For Belgium, a mixed situation was reported at the Paris conference. As indicated above, several trade unions in Ghent had handed over the daily supervision of their members out of work to the municipal exchange. Other places in Belgium had followed the Ghent example. However, there were still unions that required their members out of work to register daily at the office of the society itself. At that time, daily visits to the Municipal Exchange were only obliged for unemployed members of the unions who had handed over their registration.¹³⁹

In the Netherlands, the Ghent system was introduced in several municipalities from 1906 onwards. At the Parisian conference in 1910 it was reported that it were 'in fact the associations themselves that most often verify the unemployed status of their members, generally by obliging them to present themselves daily at a determined hour and place'.¹⁴⁰ However, the majority of the municipal funds had reserved the right of controlling the statements of the associations. A certain number of funds insisted on the indemnified unemployed workman presenting himself each day at the municipal labour exchange, but in a city like Amsterdam both services were kept apart until 1915. In 1916 the registration at public labour exchanges of unemployed on benefit became required by national law.¹⁴¹

In the Scandinavian countries the situation was somewhat different.¹⁴² The Ghent system was introduced in Norway in 1906, and in Denmark in 1907. In these countries union

¹³⁷ E. Fuster, 'L'Assurance contre le chômage et le contrôle', Rapport No. 23 in: *Compte rendu de la Conférence Internationale du Chômage ... Tome deuxième III ... (1re Partie)* 15.

¹³⁸ Luciani, 'Logique du placement ouvrier', 16; Desmond King and Bo Rothstein, 'Government Legitimacy and the Labour Market: A Comparative Analysis of Employment Agencies', *Public Administration* 72 (1994) 291-308, cit. 294, 303.

¹³⁹ R. De Bruyne, J. De Clerck, 'Le contrôle des chômeurs dans les caisses de chômage en Belgique', Rapport No. 10 in: *Compte rendu de la Conférence Internationale du Chômage ... Tome deuxième III ... (1re Partie)* 14.

¹⁴⁰ M.H.W. Methorst, 'La lutte contre le chômage aux Pays-Bas', Rapport No. 41, in: *ibidem*, 40.

¹⁴¹ P. Schrage, E. Nijhof, 'Een lange sisser en een late knal? De ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse werkloosheidsverzekering in Westeuropese perspectief; een terreinverkenning', in: W.P. Blockmans, L. A. van der Valk (eds.), *Van particuliere naar openbare zorg, en terug? Sociale politiek in Nederland sinds 1880* (Amsterdam 1992) 31-52, cit. 35-36; Van Bekkum, *Tussen Vraag en Aanbod*, 222-223; 273; Bevaart/Veen, *Den rechten man op de rechte plaats*, 42, 50.

¹⁴² King/Rothstein, 'Government Legitimacy', 294, 300-303. On the Danish situation in 1910: Th. Soerensen, 'La question du chômage au Danemark', Rapport No. 12 in: *Compte rendu de la Conférence Internationale du*

control of unemployment insurance facilitated the creation of union-administered placement services, with the same officials managing the unemployment fund and the union exchange. In Denmark the unions for skilled and semi-skilled workers even retained control of placement services until the end of the 1960s. In these cases trade unions took responsibility for administering work tests to their members seeking assistance. Municipal public exchanges were mainly used by the unskilled and unorganised workforce. In Denmark there was only one public labour exchange before World War one (in Copenhagen), while in 1914 there were 100 in Sweden and 24 in Norway.¹⁴³ In these countries, public exchanges were not connected to the administration of union-based unemployment insurances. In Norway, unions kept control on placement and benefits in the Ghent system until 1936, when the union controlled unemployment insurance system was changed to a compulsory government-administered one, and public exchanges were given responsibility for imposing work tests. In Sweden, there was no public unemployment insurance until 1935, when a union controlled Ghent system was introduced, resulting in union control of the work test. Labour exchanges were given no role in administering means-tested benefits. For non-union members, these tasks became the responsibility of a separate government organization.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion: reorganising labour markets from ‘craft’ to ‘place’

The above overview makes clear that trade union devices to register unemployed members for mediation and control were only gradually and unevenly incorporated into public labour exchanges. In the period before the First World War, however, in by far the most countries, locally or nationally unified public institutions replaced the labour exchanges of the individual trade unions. In a short text, the French economist Jean Luciani has provided a penetrating analysis of this development, starting from the tension between a *logique professionnelle* and a *logique locale* (or *spatiale*) of labour market intermediation.¹⁴⁵ Craft controlled job placements were meant to protect the skilled professions by relegating outsiders to unorganised ‘calling-around’ or ‘subcontracting’ to find work. In this way a dual labour

Chômage ... Tome deuxième III ... (1re Partie); on Norway : M. Ormestad, ‘Le contrôle des chômeurs en Norvège d’après la Loi du 12 Juin 1906’, Rapport No. 40, in : *ibidem* ; on Sweden: G. Huss, ‘La question du chômage en Suède’, Rapport No. 43, in : *ibidem*.

¹⁴³ Edling, ‘Regulating unemployment’, 34.

¹⁴⁴ On the specificity of the Swedish case, see also: Desmond King, Bo Rothstein, ‘Institutional Choices and Labour Market Policy. A British-Swedish Comparison’, *Comparative Political Studies* 26 (1993) 147-177.

¹⁴⁵ Luciani, ‘Logique du placement ouvrier’.

market was created. In the period of the *ancien régime* the contradiction between the local organisation of the labour market by urban corporations and interurban labour mobility was solved by the craft centred, but non-localised *compagnonnages*. The supra-local organisation of labour market intermediation by the British trade unions with the help of ‘vacant books’ and ‘houses of call’, can be considered a British variant of this solution. The establishment of the *Bourses du Travail* in Paris and elsewhere in France is described by Luciani as an intermediary way out of the tension between ‘craft’ and ‘place’, attempting to combine a professional with a local organisation of job placement. The creation of *Bureaux Municipal de Placement* after 1905 and *Offices Départementaux de Placement* after 1915, combined with a system of subsidised unemployment benefits, undermined the intermediary function of the union dominated *Bourses du Travail*, and meant a definitive turn toward a spatial construction of the labour market.

The theme has been elaborated by Bénédicte Zimmermann on the German case of unemployment construction *entre professions et territoires*. In administering unemployment insurance the two logics - professional and territorial - had to be reconciled also. The communal subsidies in the Ghent system were only meant to be allowed to residents of specific municipal territories, while, at that time, trade unions were organised as professional, or craft communities. Zimmermann writes about the *logique professionnelle de qualification du chômage*, as against the *logique territoriale d’identification des chômeurs*.¹⁴⁶ The identification of ‘unemployed’ union members and municipal inhabitants did not necessarily coincide: for the union they were colleagues - and potential competitors - out of work; for the municipality, they were residents entitled to benefit. The way municipal authorities tried to incorporate union registration of unemployed members for their own purposes, while at the same time restricting the union’s criteria for allowing benefits, as described above, illustrates that this tension could not be solved without a reorganisation of the labour market from a professional to a spatial foundation. The Ghent system and the corresponding institutionalisation of unemployment control in centralised labour exchanges were installed to organise a labour market hierarchy on a territorial basis. A spatial reconfiguration of labour market intermediation could make the unemployment control more effective, as a German report argued in 1906 against the fragmentation of union controlled *Arbeitnehmernachweisen*:

¹⁴⁶ B. Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage en Allemagne .Entre professions et territoires* (Paris 2001) 75-135, cit. 90, 114..

Ein solcher Zustand der Zersplitterung [muß] die Leistung des Arbeitsnachweises als einer Kontrollstation der Arbeitslosigkeit sehr beeinträchtigen. [...] Die Kontrolle durch den Arbeitsnachweis als Voraussetzung einer Arbeitslosenversicherung hat zur Vorbedingung eine Vereinheitlichung des Arbeitsnachweises sowie sachliche Zentralisation.¹⁴⁷

In the longer run, the ‘territorialisation’ of labour exchanges and concomitant work tests was a prerequisite for the extension of unemployment insurance from the skilled and organised trades to other grades of labour.

From a somewhat different perspective Malcolm Mansfield has analysed the British case – where from an early stage public labour exchanges were conceived as a national clearing system – as a ‘spatial transformation’ of the labour market connected to the rise of concepts of labour supply and unemployment as abstract categories.¹⁴⁸ These concepts evolved from analyses of the growing unskilled casual labour markets, especially in London, which for Beveridge looked like markets for unspecified (‘abstract’) labour without further qualification (that these were in fact as differentiated and segmented as any ‘skilled’ market escaped him). Mansfield shows that concepts of abstract, interchangeable labour were at the heart of the idea that labour supply could be regulated by a ‘catch all’ national network of labour exchanges, but that these were in fact based on a profound misunderstanding of the nature of work and British labour relations at that time. Regional peculiarities tended to be ignored together with the specific requirements of skilled labour in specific localities. In this way, abstract ‘space’ superseded concrete ‘place’.

Why, then, had trade unions been prepared to give up the intermediary functions for their members, and hand them over to the public exchanges? The answer must be found in the character of the nineteenth century trade unions as associations of skilled craftsmen. Union regulation of job placements and unemployment benefits were meant to enable members to uphold a standard rate and occupational status by excluding the entrance of others. Growing pressure of ‘outsiders’ in the labour market and deepening unemployment crises, like that of 1908-1909, made it difficult to uphold this kind of protection. Urban and industrial development and related migration flows led to a growing and more fluctuating supply. For the craft unions, the Ghent system was attractive to overcome these difficulties. As Zimmermann writes on the Strasburg case:

¹⁴⁷ Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, *Die Versicherung gegen die Folgen der Arbeitslosigkeit im Ausland und im Deutschen Reich* (Berlin 1906) II, 2, cited by: Risch, ‘Gewerkschaftseigene Arbeitslosenversicherung’, 516.

¹⁴⁸ Mansfield, ‘Flying to the Moon’, *passim*.

Système élitiste d'aide aux chômeurs, le principe de la majoration des allocations syndicales ne s'adresse qu'aux ouvriers qui bénéficient déjà d'une couverture sociale: essentiellement les travailleurs qualifiés de l'artisanat, ce qui reflète l'implantation privilégiée du syndicalisme strasbourgeois dans les métiers traditionnels.¹⁴⁹

In this light it is not surprising that the system was first introduced in cities with a diversified economic structure, where artisan industry dominated (in southern Germany for instance), and not in areas of big industry (like in Germany the Ruhr, or Saxony).¹⁵⁰

The authorities were prepared to support the unions because their members - being able to save money for an insurance premium - represented a stable and regular part of the work force in a growing casual labour market. In the eyes of the liberal reformers, the growth of casual labour had led to a 'disorganised labour market' and tended to generalise 'underemployment' or 'irregular employment', and a 'waste' of productive labour power.¹⁵¹ Trade union members were – in economic terms – considered 'efficient' workers whose position had to be protected from the unproductive 'inefficient' ones. The central objective of public labour exchange was the concentration of work on a restrictive group of workers. Controlling the unemployed on their willingness and ability to work on a regular basis made the allocation of labour more selective. In this way the labour supply could be split into a fit and an unfit body of workers. The last were relegated to an 'external' market of informal and second grade jobs, or poor relief. In the words of Beveridge:

By regularising employment the organization of the labour market shifts the unemployable out of the industrial world altogether. [...] The work lost by these men – the unemployable on the fringe of industry – would go to make up a reasonable subsistence for others.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Zimmermann, *Constitution du chômage*, 128.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 127.

¹⁵¹ This is the central thesis of Beveridge, *Unemployment*; on this issue see also: Mansfield, 'Labour exchanges'.

¹⁵² Beveridge, *Unemployment*, 215.

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