

John Monks
General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation

**Role of Corporate Social Responsibility and the OECD Guidelines
for Multinational Enterprises
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Coming from a British trade union background and being well aware from the 1970's of the devastating impact of public opinion on your standing, I draw attention to an EU poll which should make all business people think carefully.

The poll covered trust. 61% of people said that they did not trust big companies – only political parties fared worse.

This should worry the corporate world and cause some reflection about the relentless pursuit of shareholder value as the key goal of publicly quoted companies – driven with ever greater ruthlessness by financial institutions.

The end of paternalism, the attempted marginalisation of unions and the forces which seek to pluralise corporate governance and widen the range of stakeholders beyond the shareholders, the fashionability of outsourcing and offshoring, the linking of executive remuneration to shareholder value – all these are alienating forces which cannot be covered up with cosmetic corporate responsibility mission statements.

So, forgive me, if I start a little cynically and play around with a theme of saving capitalism from the capitalists, some of whom bring to mind those foolish rulers of this great city and country – the Bourbons.

I see it all the time in Brussels where company lobbyists argue strongly against any new regulation on business. The cry of « no more red tape » was taken up by European and other employers. Images of enterprise portrayed as Gulliver chained down by restrictions were on recent prominent display.

At the same time, the corporate lobbyists seek to portray their efforts at corporate social responsibility as the alternative to regulation, using it as a defensive tactic to block new regulatory steps.

Let me be clear. I am not advocating a future of controls and regulation but I am sceptical about voluntary regulation in areas like worker involvement, collective bargaining and sustainable development that voluntarism will be enough.

I would be more impressed if we were doing better with general observance of OECD guidelines. I welcome the efforts made by OECD, some governments, businesses and NGO's to make the Guidelines more visible.

But the full potential is not being realised. They are less well known than other international initiatives such as the Global Compact or the Global Reporting Initiatives.

TUAC has produced a user's guide – now translated into 18 languages, most recently into Chinese.

But can we not add some weight to the guidelines by making them a qualification for public support.

The trade union world has stepped up its efforts – 40 cases raised in the three years since the review but progress can be slow. There are still some cases which date back to 2001 and 2002. The national contacts points are key to this and some are showing lack of drive and competence.

But the key message for business is make a commitment and demonstrate that you are keeping to it. Do not allow business ethics to be described like military intelligence as an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

And recognise that in democracies, governments are subject to the will of the people and the lurches of businesses are not paramount. Governments and politics are more influenced by joint approaches by unions and employers – the social partners – than by unilateral actions. So the average is clear – make joint working work, make social partnership work. That way trust can be developed and deservedly believed.