

Resolution on Securing the Future of Europe - Let's organise solidarity now!

European industrial trade unions are calling for a new redistribution offensive with a view to increasing the wage share of national income and thus fighting the effects of the economic crisis effectively and securing the future prospects of workers in Europe.

The effects of the crisis are dramatic. The austerity policies and strategies undermining democracy that are used by governments and public institutions to fight the crisis have failed completely and are making the situation for workers even worse.

The ruling opinion held by European and national institutions is that the reason for macro-economic imbalances lies mainly in the level of wages and social benefits, which are considered to be too high, and consequently also in all working and social conditions. The result is that the measures taken:

- aim at lowering wages,
- aim at breaking the wage-setting power of trade unions,
- aim at damaging collective bargaining systems and attacking negotiation partners' autonomy,
- aim at weakening protection against dismissal by facilitating atypical employment and reducing redundancy notices and redundancy compensation within the framework of 'flexicurity',
- and aim at lowering social regulations, benefits and pensions.

The social consequences, varying from country to country, are devastating:

- Exploding unemployment rates (the current official figures is over 26M unemployed and over 48M under-employed in addition to those stuck in non-employment), and especially youth unemployment, which is forcing a lot of well-qualified young people to leave their crisis-ridden countries.
- Deterioration of working conditions and increase in precarious work, sub-contracting, flexible work organisation and replacement of normal wages by variable pay forms alone.
- Decrease of real wages in 18 of the 26 Member States of the European Union.

- An alarming increase in poverty throughout the European Union, especially among women and children, migrants, and retired persons, as well as an increase as regards in-work poverty due to the increase of precarious employment.
- Dismantling of democracy via blackmailing of elected governments by a non-legitimised, unholy alliance (the Troika) and via destruction of social rights such as collective bargaining autonomy or social security systems, combined with some governments not wasting an opportunity to impose their neo-liberal policy against workers using the European institutions and/or IMF as an excuse.

All of this ignores the major future challenges for employment in European industry:

- To create decent work in innovative and socially and environmentally sustainable industries
- To address demographic developments and improve working life to ensure that good working conditions are combined with people's needs and wishes
- To increase wages in order to relaunch the economy, guarantee, rebuild and improve social protection systems and recognise work and working people as the primary factor of economic and social life.

The ruling powers in Europe are failing to see these challenges. The current European Union is an Economic Union and a Monetary Union, but not a Union for the majority of the people living here.

The power of trade unions is decreasing within the context of the economic crisis and the related measures. Workers, worker representations and trade unions, are forced into compromises which they would never have agreed to under different conditions in order to secure at least some kind of employment for workers.

Beggar thy neighbour policies, national strategies - and even nationalist ideas - are on the increase and workers are constantly being played off against each other.

In this situation, the trade unions' first task is to regain visibility and power to fight for better living and working conditions for workers in Europe. European industrial trade unions are advocating an alternative: A Europe of social justice for all the people, not for the profit of just a few. It is our role to fight for more and better jobs and to secure decent living and working conditions.

To collective European problems, we put forward collective European answers:

- Real wage increases are economically useful and socially responsible because a redistribution of income from capital to income from wages is the best way to economic revival. At the same time, purchasing power in the new EU Member States must be increased by eliminating unacceptable differences in wages and living standards compared with old EU Member States; but this should not, of course, be done by decreasing wages and living standard in the old EU Member States. If this does not succeed, then the risk of possible conflicts between the citizens of old and new Member States would increase, which could result in nationalistic and xenophobic excesses.

In this context, we have to prevent any unfair draining of company profits from locations in the new Member States to the mother companies, which results in an excuse for not increasing wages and benefits for employees in the new countries.

- Effective measures to increase employment quality whilst combating abusive use of part-time work, limiting the use of temporary employment contracts, temporary agency work and the posting of workers on the one hand, and limiting the increasing imposed working time flexibility on the other.
- An active working time policy to secure, create and redistribute employment can be an important and useful instrument in the crisis. But working time policy also has to play an important role with regard to challenges like reducing stress, improving the work-life balance and addressing demographic developments.
- We will promote an open debate about a new working time policy, including a possible working time reduction and other working time arrangements. Gains in productivity have to be reinvested in the interest of the workers, not to increase profits.
- Collective agreements are the best protection for workers. In general, they provide better conditions for workers than they would otherwise have obtained. However, we reject the Commission's strategy of decentralising collective bargaining. Instead, we need more and better collective agreements at all relevant levels whether this is company, sectoral, national or transnational level. Increasing our autonomous bargaining power is a precondition for reaching that.
- A European economy has to be based on decent jobs for the workers, not on precariousness. Men and women have to be able to earn their living by working, and not end up in precarious and/or badly-paid jobs. Decent wages have to be supplemented by a coherent labour market and social policy which supports demand whilst avoiding poverty.

- We reject all agreements between States that foster social dumping and call into question acquired rights and national social rights to the sole benefit of multinational companies.

European industrial trade unions have to stand together strongly in what are very hard times for Europe's numerous workers. Solidarity is not a fair weather matter. We will act together, especially in economically difficult times, and not be played off against each other, not on transnational level, not on sector level and not on company level either.

We have a long tradition of organising solidarity. We have to develop that further towards a solidly united collective bargaining and social policy capable of providing common solutions for cross-border conflicts. It is our job to organise that solidarity.

Finally, our solidarity is the very foundation for building up the necessary strength in order to push through our alternatives towards employers and politicians.

Resolution adopted by the industriAll Europe Executive Committee in November 2014

(This resolution was first debated and approved at the industriAll Europe Collective Bargaining and Social Policy Conference "Negotiating our future! Trade union strategies in times of economic crisis" held in Vienna on 12-13 June 2014)