

Assembly Labour
6th ESF Istanbul, 3rd July 2010

Statement of the Assembly of Labour
at the 6th European Social Forum in Istanbul 1-4 July 2010

The Assembly of Labour very much welcome the realisation of the 2010 Istanbul ESF, underlining the importance to reach new civil societies and new countries. We are therefore thankful to the Organising Committee in Turkey and, particularly, the Turkish trade union confederations.

During this forum many seminars and workshops have been organised, which have focused on the financial and economic crises and their dramatic consequences on workers' rights and conditions. The need to fight the root causes of the crises has been underlined, as well as the need to fight failed policies like the austerity plans imposed in the name of public debt and the EU Stability Pact which strongly contributes to deepen the crisis.

At the Social Forum we heard reports from many European countries. Across Europe trade unions, workers and people in general have experienced forceful attacks on wages, working conditions, public services and social benefits – unemployment has grown and poverty has increased. In many countries national collective agreements, pensions and trade union rights have been considerably cut and weakened – not through negotiations with trade unions, but through government decrees.

In this way, governments, employers, multinational companies, European Union institutions and the International Monetary Fund are trying to make workers pay for the effects of the financial and economic crisis, even though we have no responsibility for the neo-liberal policies, the redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top and the capitalist system which have created the crisis. The situation is dramatic. If we are not able to stop this development, the trade union, labour and social movements may possibly face a historic defeat in Europe.

The Labour Assembly therefore stresses the need to work together to develop an alternative to the current social and economic model. To this end we welcome a fruitful exchange of ideas as well as mobilisations and struggles to turn our alternatives into practice. We want a different idea of Europe based on peace, solidarity, cooperation, democracy, sustainable environment, people's needs and social and workers' rights.

The situation calls for massive mobilisation across Europe to prevent a defeat. The Labour Assembly therefore appeals to all trade union and social movements in Europe to take immediate and co-ordinated actions to prevent the social degradation which is going on in most countries.

We propose:

- To support the struggles of workers and trade unions in Turkey which are under severe oppression from the government, from multinational companies and capitalist interests in general.

- A comprehensive information campaign to inform workers all over Europe on concrete developments in each country in order to prevent workers from being played out against each other.

- To mobilise and organise support across Europe to workers who decide to take the fight against austerity programmes and attacks on wages, working conditions, pensions and social programmes. Their struggle is our struggle.

- To deepen a debate in the European trade union and social movements on how to improve the policies and change the focus of our organisations in order to adapt them to the new, more aggressive attitudes of the employers, to activate the members, to strengthen the international perspective and co-ordination and to prepare our organisations for harder confrontations as a result of the attacks from employers, governments and capital.

- That the manifestations planned for 29 September 2010 and surrounding days should be organised as an all-European event, with forceful action across Europe, a main manifestation in Brussels and general strikes where possible. This important day of action should be a step forward in a widespread wave of struggles that need to continue across Europe in a coordinated manner.

Debate

The Assembly on Labour started with an initial proposal of declaration, to be included in the Final Declaration of the Final Assembly.

This initial proposal was presented by the Labour and Globalisation Network, who promoted this panel.

Several opinions were debated. Among these we could find:

- The initial proposal was very reformist, since it just distinguished good capitalism from bad capitalism; capitalism was not mentioned in the text, capital just once.

- There should be a greater focus on social movements. Work does not belong just to trade unions, but to social movements as well. Combining these, we could strengthen the struggle.

- Capitalism was not mentioned too much. It only mentioned employers, which is different from capitalists.

- Intervention from Piero Bernocchi, from COBAS: COBAS co-organised five seminars on labour. The question concerns not just trade unions in general.

This document should be joined to the general document, it's important to find an agreement. In Europe the capitalist attack is much bigger than the reply to it.

We must address the fight as a whole in Europe, alone we have no capacity to resist. Capitalism has divided the organisations, even within each country. Therefore, we need to carry a common response, with a clear message. Proposals for the Final Assembly:

It's impossible to unify all movements and struggles; however, different experiences can be brought together. So, each country should organise the struggle in different ways, and not just on the 29th September. We could use the 29th as a first part, and then a formulation like "29th and around these dates" in different countries.

- Elisabeth Gauthier, Transform! – We are not in a good situation. Transform! also organised different seminars on this issue. We are in a paradox: lots of needs to struggle and people to organise movements. However, this is not possible except in very good conditions the situation is very fragile. The ideological pressure increases, along with crisis. There is a crescent need for solidarity and struggles. We should interpret the crisis: how to fight together. There is a very high conscience of the global crisis. The alternative should be much more global too.

- Franco Russo, Italy – In Italy two trade unions accepted the new model of collective bargaining. We should take action around the 29th September. However, we also need to discuss about social cuts and the new stability pact in the EU. The LGN is very important. However, there is no common space to analyse and discuss the evolution of the crisis and to have a common agenda.

Further interventions took place, focusing on the importance of a consensus. They stressed the need to include references in the declaration regarding:

- social movements;
- coordination between trade unions and social movements;
- conditions of workers in Turkey;

New proposals of amendments were suggested:

3. To mention trade unions and social movements;
4. Refer to the demonstration planned for the 29th September and surrounding dates. This should be organised as a EU event, with a main demonstration in Brussels.

These proposals were incorporated in the final declaration (as mentioned in the initial part of this report). The Assembly was therefore closed, having achieved a consensus.