

EPA: Report of the meeting of the Labour and Globalisation network

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On behalf of the Labour and Globalisation network, I send the report of the network meeting in Stockholm, at the occasion of the European Preparatory Assembly (EPA).

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The European group of the network Labour and Globalisation in the WSF, initiated in Nairobi, held its second working meeting at the Stockholm EPA on 14 September 2007.

The aim of the network is to strengthen the preparation of the next ESF on issues related to labour; to encourage greater participation in the ESF process by actors engaged with labour issues (trade unions, other social movements, NGOs, research centres, etc); to improve the usefulness of the ESF on this type of issue.

A wide range of different actors took part in the meeting, and more than 50 people joined the network, leaving their contact details.

The day was organised on 3 themes: EU international trade agreements and their impact on labour conditions in EU countries; a framework analysis of the historical conditions behind the welfare state and European social model, and of its current crisis; the growth of 'precarity' (casualisation) in Europe, together with an account of the movement against the CPE in France.

Arising from the discussion on these 3 topics, we would like to bring to the attention of the general assembly and to the future work of the network in view of the preparation of the next ESF the following aims:

EU Trade Policies and the impact on Labour in Europe

The meeting placed particular emphasis on the threat posed to labour and to the European social model by the neoliberal agenda of the EU's recently approved 'Global Europe' doctrine.

In this direction we identified a need in all European countries:

- to publish and share analysis of the likely impacts of the Global Europe doctrine on labour Europe, including attacks on labour rights and collective bargaining systems;
- to organise conferences in each country and at the European level to raise awareness of the threat posed to labour in North and South by the Global Europe doctrine;
- to promote a European network of researchers to develop a 'European Analysis' (including a critical analysis of the concepts of competitiveness, economic growth and wealth) as well as

alternatives to the neoliberal model, in collaboration with trade unions, farmers' organisations, social movements and other NGOs.

The meeting also identified the need to involve trade unions and social movements from Latin America, Africa, Asia and North America in the European Social Forum in Malmö to discuss and develop strategies to resist the implementation of the Global Europe doctrine, and to share proposals and experience of alternatives in the field of international trade. This includes to explore the strengthening and use of the instrument of collective bargaining as a tool to fight against the Global Europe Doctrine.

Several organizations raised the specific call for a general mobilization to prevent the signing of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) by the end of December 2007.

On the European Social Model and the Welfare State

Discussing a framework analysis of the historical conditions behind the welfare state in Europe and its current crisis, we identified the need to further analyse and develop the concept of the welfare state, and to continue this work in conjunction with relevant researchers and research groups.

During the discussion, other important points raised include:

- given the fact that the current neoliberal offensive has been conducted on the global level, the defence of the welfare state and public services cannot be won at the national level only; at the same time, international cooperation and solidarity must also be rooted in grassroots organisation;
- the neoliberal assault on the welfare state requires a political response. In this regard, the trade union movement's relationship to political parties and its own political role should be discussed;
- democratic processes and structures are being weakened as decision-making powers are transferred from political bodies to the market through deregulation and privatisation. In order to democratise public services, it will therefore be necessary to discuss new democratic structures and to learn from recent experiences regarding direct democracy and participatory budgeting, as well as discussions on public services as part of our commons.
- the need to build social alliances in order to mobilise the necessary social power to create a social Europe; plus the need to discuss what kind of alliances are desirable in this regard.
- the need to link our work with the European Network for Public Services which was established at the European Social Forum in Greece in 2006.

Precarity

In the discussion of the increased 'precarity' (casualisation) of work in Europe and the case of the French movement against the CPE, we identified the need:

- to develop and share a better knowledge of the differing situations of precarity in the different countries of Europe
- to reflect on the fact that the groups most affected by precarity are women, migrants and young people; and that all these groups have a very limited relationship with the trade union movement
- to face up to the challenges posed to the idea that permanent contracts should be the norm while we live under flexible capitalism; but also to face the challenge posed by some sectors of the younger generation that have a different cultural view of flexibility (that is different from precarity)
- to deepen reflection on possible common norms and on regulations against precarity in Europe, and even globally
- to question and disprove assumptions that neoliberal globalisation is able to fight unemployment and that the increased casualisation of labour conditions can be the solution to unemployment

On all these topics we are committed to continue our work of common research, exchange of

experiences, enlargement of the network and preparation of the next ESF in Malmö.

Finally we also discussed about how to maintain and relaunch the initiative of the network at the global level; especially thinking about to shape new online tools and to organise a meeting of the global network in Europe in the near future.