
Executive Committee

ETUC campaign against austerity

`Summary

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has agreed to launch a campaign against austerity and for growth and workers' rights, in line with the TUC campaign for a Future that Works. As a precursor, the ETUC Executive Committee has called a day of action on Wednesday 14 November for jobs and solidarity, and against austerity. This document sets out details of the ETUC's overall campaign, and proposals for what could be done for 14 November in the UK, in the context of the TUC's Future that Works campaign and the 20 October demonstrations in Belfast, Glasgow and London.

Action

The Executive Committee is invited to:

- welcome the ETUC's campaign plans and encourage unions to be represented at the TUC briefing on 22 November; and
- comment on the proposals made for 14 November (paras 10-17) and agree the action to be taken.

ETUC campaign

1 The ETUC has developed plans over the last few months for a generalised Europe-wide campaign against austerity and for job creation, higher wages and workers' rights, in line with the TUC's campaigns for a Future that Works and against restrictions on workers' rights in the UK. The campaign plans have been drawn up by a committee chaired by the TUC General Secretary, and it is planned to launch the campaign at a major conference marking the 40th anniversary of the ETUC's foundation which will take place in Madrid on 28 January 2012.

2 The campaign is based on a call for a new Social Compact for Europe (to replace the EU fiscal compact) which is *attached*. This contains a series of demands for growth rather than austerity, decent public services rather than cuts, wage rises rather than greater economic inequality, and rights for workers rather than a race to the bottom.

3 Some of the steps envisaged are immediate steps that would improve the economic situation, and others are much longer term. This would allow for a campaign that encompassed urgent demands for action against youth unemployment, for example, but also longer term renewal of welfare states and a rebalancing of union and employer relations, such as through a social clause in the European treaties as demanded by Congress this year.

4 The TUC has strongly supported the development of the ETUC campaign, although it is fair to say there has been unease among various trade union confederations that the campaign still lacks clear focus, and that there is not yet a united vision across the European trade union movement of the sort of future for Europe we are demanding (key issues include the relationship between northern European trade union movements and those who have been worst affected by the crisis such as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain; and possible further integration in the European Union which the TUC for one would view rather nervously.)

5 The TUC has called a meeting of union European officers and campaigners on Thursday 22 November to brief them about the campaign, and consider UK involvement in it, and unions

are urged to ensure that they are represented at that meeting.

14 November day of action

6 As an early taste of campaigning at European level, the ETUC Executive Committee of 17 and 18 October 2012 called for a European day of action and solidarity on 14 November 2012 to mobilise the trade union movement behind the claims expressed in the Social Compact for Europe. The ETUC Executive Committee adopted a statement for the day which is also *attached*, including policy demands fully in line with TUC policy. The ETUC has called for solidarity with trade unions in the worst affected countries, and has asked trade unions across Europe to take initiatives on 14 November.

7 The date coincides with the date of general strikes being held in Portugal and Spain against the austerity measures being imposed by their respective Governments which have seen, in Spain, youth unemployment rise above 50%. The Greek trade union movement had originally planned to strike on the same day, but has brought their action forward to 6-7 November to coincide with a Parliamentary vote on the next austerity package which will include a further €13bn of cuts, further tax increases and further attacks on collective bargaining. The CGIL in Italy has also announced a four-hour general strike for 14 November.

8 In other European countries, demonstrations, conferences, lobbying activities and so on are being considered, although it is clear that the main activity on the day will be in those countries most severely affected by austerity. In France, for example, the CGT is considering demonstrations of solidarity in towns near the Spanish border as a key feature of activity. The Belgian trade union movement is staging a lunchtime protest outside the EU offices at the Berlaymont in central Brussels. As is the case in the UK, many trade union movements around Europe are campaigning against differing levels of government cuts and for growth and jobs on slightly different timetables.

9 There are also other campaigns underway at European level which address aspects of the ETUC campaign, where activity will link in with the 14 November days of action. The TUC has been very involved in the Robin Hood Tax at European level (see para 11 below), and public sector unions have been supporting the campaign run by the European Public Services Union (EPSU) for public water and sewerage services. EPSU will be launching another relevant campaign, on tax justice, on 7 November. The TUC will promote all these campaigns and encourage union members to join in.

Activity in the UK

10 The TUC has consulted unions on action that they think they could take on 14 November, and of course the successful demonstrations held in Belfast, Glasgow and London on 20 October constitute the main campaign action that the UK trade union movement has been able to make this autumn. Unions have indicated that the demonstrations should be seen as our main contribution to European campaigning this autumn, and there has not been a huge appetite for further mobilisation, despite support for the initiative being taken.

11 There are also a lot of other things going on in the week of the day of action: for example, on Tuesday 13 November, the EU Economic and Finance Council (ECOFIN) will be meeting to discuss a possible enhanced co-operation procedure allowing 12 countries (covering 95% of eurozone GDP) to introduce a Financial Transactions Tax - something that unions committed to the Robin Hood Tax will be lobbying and campaigning for among their members; and on Thursday 15 November there will be PCC elections as well as Parliamentary by-elections in Cardiff, Corby and Manchester and a Mayoral election in Bristol. Again, action around these events by unions form part of the campaign for an alternative. It is also the case that, given the vote on the EU budget in the Commons, Europe is as toxic as ever as a political issue, and that will affect whatever we do.

12 It is therefore likely that UK unions are only going to be able to mount symbolic actions on 14 November,

complemented by virtual activity on the internet and social media.

13 The TUC has been in contact with the union movements taking the main action on 14 November, and we will be able to post on the TUC website (and advertise through blogs, twitter and Facebook) articles from the GSEE in Greece, CCOO/UGT in Spain, CGIL in Italy and trade unions in Portugal. The Spanish and Greek trade union movements have asked for letters to be sent to their governments condemning the cuts being forced through, and the TUC will circulate to unions model letters with email and postal addresses for both governments and their Embassies in the UK, as well as sending formal letters from the TUC.

14 It might also be appropriate to focus on the role of the European Commission regarding the troika, and a central part of our solidarity action could involve formally handing in a letter of protest (together with the ETUC Social Compact for Europe) to the European Commission representation in the UK in Smith Square. This might also include a meeting with the Commission's representative, and involve leading members of the General Council and unions. The letter could also be released to the media and copied to the Government and Opposition. A token TUC delegation could also take part in the Belgian trade union rally (which will involve ETUC leaders) in Brussels, eg UK union officers based in Brussels, and any trade unionists from the UK able to travel on the day. The TUC will also circulate speaking notes for General Councillors and union leaders which could be inserted into speeches, messages to members and blogs.

15 In terms of materials for the web, the ETUC has produced a series of images and materials which will be circulated to unions for posting ahead of the day, as well as on the TUC website. A facebook page has been created for the day by the ETUC, and union members can be directed to that as a way of showing their support. The TUC will also mobilise bloggers on a variety of sites to cover issues relevant to the day (the TUC's Touchstone and Stronger Unions, of course, but also other left sites such as False Economy,

Left Foot Forward, Union Solidarity international and so on), and these could be promoted to members and activists.

16 Unions would therefore be asked to take part in the European day of action by:

- taking part in a formal hand-in at the European Commission offices in London;
- writing to the Greek and Spanish governments to protest at the cuts being imposed on working people;
- posting material about the day of action and the ETUC's alternative to austerity on their websites;
- contributing articles to blogs on aspects of the campaign; and
- encouraging members to distribute materials virally, including through twitter and the ETUC Facebook page.

17 Further ideas for action by unions would be welcome, although there is now obviously very little time left for planning activities. The Executive Committee is invited to consider these proposals and any others for activity on or around 14 November.