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eighty miles away. In May a petition containing over a quarter of a million signatures was handed in at the Prime Minister's residence in Madrid while a protest was held outside the US embassy. On the 21st. a European Action and Solidarity Day was organised by the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) in support of demands for no compulsory redundancies, no more plant closures in Europe, a socially responsible solution to the problem, no more building of factories in low-wage countries and a complete information and consultation procedure with unions before any further decisions are taken. At the time of writing it seems that the factory will close although the regional government of Andalusia has promised that new employers will be found for all redundant workers.

More Latin American women in top jobs than in EU

A NEW REPORT FROM THE International Labour Organisation (ILO) shows that women have made progress in breaking through the 'glass ceiling' to take on jobs near the top of organisations but that the gains have been uneven and vary around the world. From 1995 to 2004 the percentage of female legislators and managers increased from 25.5 to 28.3. South Asia recorded the biggest proportional increase but remained at the bottom of the league on 8.6%. There was less hopeful news for the EU which, at 30.6% trails not only North America (41.2%) but also South America and the Caribbean on 35%. While there is almost universal 'condemnation of discrimination in employment and occupation' by governments and widespread equality provisions in labour codes, at workplace level action to combat it has become more necessary. The report says that this is because people increasingly feel that the world is insecure and entrenched income inequalities hamper change.

European posties to face UK problems

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HAS voted for the full liberalisation of the postal sector by 2011. Although some Member States, notably Sweden and the UK, have already allowed unlimited competition for some time, EU legislation still allows national monopolies in distribution of letters weighing less than 50 grammes. After opposition from France, Italy and Poland the European Commission's planned date of 2009 was postponed. Governments will have to notify the Commission by 2010 of how they will propose to guarantee universal postal services at reasonable cost after liberalisation. The proposed directive will not directly affect terms and conditions of employment or the right to strike but experience in the British Royal Mail whose workers are on a national strike at the time of writing suggests a bumpy road ahead for national operators.

Work harassment agreement is third success for EU social partners

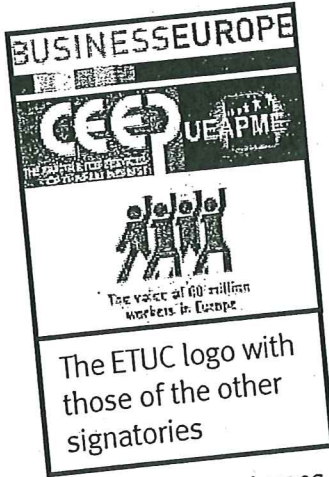
NEGOTIATORS REPRESENTING THE MAIN European employer and trade union organisations have concluded an agreement on violence and harassment at work. After ten months of talking the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and BusinessEurope (formerly UNICE), together with representatives from the public sector and small businesses, fulfilled the desire of the European Commission which launched a consultation on the subject in 2005.

In condemning all forms of harassment and violence the social partners aim to raise awareness of the problem and to assist employers, workers and union reps. in combating it. They state that 'harassment and violence can potentially affect any workplace and any worker, even if in practice some groups and sectors can be more at risk'. The definition

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of harassment is when workers or managers 'are repeatedly and deliberately abused, threatened and/or humiliated in circumstances relating to work' while violence occurs when they are 'assaulted in circumstances relating to work'.



The text of the agreement goes on to list different forms that the phenomenon can take including the physical, psychological or sexual, one-off incidents or systematic patterns of behaviour, occurring amongst colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or due to clients, customers, patients, pupils, etc. Incidents can 'range from minor cases of disrespect to more serious acts, including criminal offences, which require the intervention of public authorities'.

In describing a framework for dealing with these incidents the social partners say that employers must make a clear statement insisting that violence and harassment will not be tolerated and specify the procedures for dealing with it. An informal stage in which a trusted person gives advice and assistance can be useful. The procedure to then be followed is outlined in the box below. If it is established that harassment or violence has occurred measures must be taken, including disciplinary action up to dismissal. Victims must then receive support and help with re-integration into the workforce, if necessary.

The agreement is voluntary in that the union and employer organisations must implement it at national level rather than by a European Directive, in the same way as the previous deals on stress and telework.

- Parties should proceed with the necessary discretion to protect the dignity and privacy of all
- No information should be disclosed to parties not involved in the case
- Complaints should be investigated and dealt with without undue delay
- All parties involved should get an impartial hearing and fair treatment
- Complaints should be backed up by detailed information
- False accusations should not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action
- External assistance may help

French temporary contracts no longer successful

IN SUMMER 2005 THE FRENCH government changed labour contract law with the intention of encouraging small businesses to recruit more 'new starters'. The CNE contract, which lasts for two years, allows employers to dismiss workers more easily than the traditional, open-ended kind known as CDIs. The contracts apply to workers over the age of eighteen and when it was proposed to extend it to younger people a wave of opposition forced the government to back down. However it seems that the existing CNEs are ineffective anyway. A survey of the first year of its operation has revealed that one third of workers leave in the first six months with or half of them remaining after a year. Half of

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