



TOGETHER FOR A FAIR DEAL FOR WORKERS

Towards a global charter of labour rights Madrid, 13-14 November 2024 Speech of Esther Lynch – ETUC General Secretary

Check against delivery

It is always an honour to represent the 45 million workers and their trade unions in Europe and I am very proud to do so today.

To extend the hand of friendship and solidarity from the ETUC.

I want to express our deepest condolences and our full solidarity to Spanish people following the tragic floods. We join with our brothers and sisters in mourning the victims. Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones and with the communities of the territories affected by this tragedy.

This terrible tragedy confirms once more the need to address climate change, to oppose far-right narratives denying climate change and scapegoating others for their own failures, and instead to ensure investment and to deal with extreme climate events.

Thank you Yolanda and the Spanish government and our trade unions in Spain, Unai and Pepe, for offering an alternative vision of solidarity.

Continuing this international labour conversation is essential as we get ready for the Second World Summit for Social Development to be held in 2025.

Delivering a fair future involves us all.

What makes the labour movement exceptional is our allegiance to each other as working people, not to the colour of our skins, not to the tenets of our faiths but rather to each other as workers, a fifth estate, a community of labour.

We face many challenges that go beyond borders and that require cooperation at a global level and that affect and can be affected by the actions of trade unions at company, sector, regional, European and international level.

We must put our unique and vibrant movement to the service of working people everywhere.

Strong trade unions are good for workers, good for the economy and for the functioning of inclusive democracy, good for social and economic justice at work and in society.

We must carry forward what our labour pioneers began.

Our moonshot target for Europe is to have at least 80% of workers covered by a collective agreement in 5 years.



Collective bargaining benefits the economy, boosting productivity and represents workers greatest chance of a fair wage.

The countries that perform the best on human development do so thanks to the strength of their social dialogue and collective bargaining systems, AND they are also the most competitive.

That's why we worked, with your assistance to win the Minimum Wage Directive and its obligations on all EU member states to have in place practical and legal measures that support the achievement of 80% of workers covered by a collective agreement. This means workers throughout Europe will soon be in a far better position to defend and improve their pay and conditions through trade unions.

No workers should be exploited. Minimum wages must be made fair and must ensure a decent living.

Equal pay for work of equal value must be guaranteed. We cannot accept the undervaluing of work done predominantly by women.

Friends,

Our overarching aim is to combat the race to the bottom by employers competing on low wages and bad conditions.

My assessment is that ending this race to the bottom and all “divide and conquer” tactics must be a priority for the Second World Summit for Social Development.

We believe that using our combined strength is how we can win and that's why we put our weight behind the Directive on Due Diligence, introducing new rules to ensure that companies identify and address adverse human rights and environmental impacts, including in their value chains. With record numbers of violations of trade union rights throughout Europe and internationally, the importance of this Directive cannot be overstated.

So, it is no surprise that employers' organisations are leading a heave against the Directive as part of their dangerous deregulation agenda.

But we have a message for them and every unscrupulous employer trying to make a profit through abuse of human rights or denial of trade union prerogatives, shame on you,

workers' rights are not red tape,

trade union rights can't be deregulated,

nor will we accept trade unions being replaced or undermined by yellow unions or other actors.

Workplace democracy means trade unions.

Friends,

we believe in solidarity with future generations and that the failure to deal with climate change would represent a betrayal of them. That is why we must not resist the need for a transition, but we must lead it.

The current management of the transition is failing working people, over 800,000 quality jobs in manufacturing have been lost, with more job losses forecast.



That is why the ETUC and our affiliates are calling for a European industrial policy as part of the Clean Industrial Deal and for it to be backed up with investments and a Just Transition Directive that guarantees workers and their trade unions with rights to negotiate the changes, both digital and green and until there is an industrial plan in place agreed by the trade unions there should be a moratorium on forced redundancies.

We will be relying on Vice-President designate Ribera to support us. She has our confidence.

We know she will work with us and deliver just transitions and quality jobs in reality.

Science and technology can play a powerful role and can help us live longer and better lives but only if its use is accountable and responsible.

We must work together to protect human labour and human dignity at work by securing the human in control principle and urgently legislating at European level to ensure the full respect for the right to disconnect and we need to ensure that the benefits of digitalisation are fairly redistributed through collectively bargained wage rises.

It is not acceptable that those few at the top are taking all of the gains. That dividends skyrocket, while prices increase, wages stagnate and redundancies are on the rise.

This is an injustice we cannot accept.

There is no social justice without progressive and fair taxation.

The 'tech bros' must pay their fair share of taxes.

We need to ensure that the technological advancements bring also improvements in terms of working time.

It is urgent to increase workers' control over working time flexibility and reduce working time.

We support the mobilisation of the Spanish unions to get a reduction of working time.

Friends,

We recognise that we have obligations to each other. We know that no matter how responsibly we live our lives any one of us at any time may face a job loss, or a sudden illness, or other crisis.

There must be minimum income safety nets.

There must be more – not less – funding for our public services, childcare, transport, affordable housing.

This is how we can respond to the growing crisis of insecurity in our societies. This is how we answer the far-right.



The rise of – as Yolanda said – the ‘International of Hatred’, could leave us disempowered in the pessimism of the reason.

But being here together, I am confident we will mobilise our optimism of the will in an ‘International of Hope’.

Solidarity will power us, so that we can write together the next pages for workers’ rights and a fairer society.

We shall overcome.

ENDS