

STATEMENT APPROVED AT THE ETUC 14TH STATUTORY CONGRESS

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Brexit statement

Congress notes that almost three years after the UK referendum on EU membership, negotiations between the EU and the UK on the terms of exit have concluded but that the UK government has repeatedly failed to secure approval for the Withdrawal Agreement in the British parliament.

Congress believes that the British government has consistently put narrow Conservative party interest above that of citizens, and has shown a reckless disregard for workers' jobs, livelihoods and rights. While the UK government belatedly sought cross party talks it has proved unwilling to substantially shift its position and provide the legally binding guarantees in any deal with the European Union that would deliver the security for the future that working people need.

Congress is proud that the European trade union movement has stood together in demanding a deal that puts working people first. We reaffirm our priorities of protecting jobs through frictionless, tariff and barrier free trade; a level playing field on workers' rights, now and in the future; free movement based on a right to work, the rate for the job and protection from exploitation; guarantees for citizens' rights; EU, UK Irish and other government investment funds to help counteract any harmful impact on jobs and communities; the protection of the Good Friday Agreement on the island of Ireland; protection of livelihoods through the right to free movement for workers in the Gibraltar area; an end to austerity and an EU with strong unions, workers' rights and decent secure work fit for the twenty-first century at its heart.

Congress notes that if labour rights in the UK do not keep pace with those in the EU after Brexit, it will not only damage workers in the UK, but could trigger a race to the bottom with devastating consequences for workers' rights and their livelihoods in the EU27, and especially in Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement contains a commitment not to undermine the economic and social fabric of Northern Ireland and a regression on workers' rights would breach that commitment.

Congress continues to believe that, at this juncture, only a deal rooted in membership of the internal market and a custom union would deliver a Brexit that protects workers' rights and prevents a border on the island of Ireland. The UK must find a way forward that protects jobs, rights at work and peace. And if the current deadlock cannot be broken, the people of the UK should be given the final say, through a general election or a popular vote.

Congress reaffirms our commitment to oppose the disaster of a no deal Brexit. The threat of no deal has already contributed to the loss of jobs and investment, and manufacturing company closures in the UK.

And congress has long campaigned against trade deals that privilege foreign investors' rights to sue governments through secret courts and which would pose further threats to jobs, environmental and consumer standards, as well as risking privatisation of public services. Instead, we support any necessary further extension to secure a deal that guarantees workers their jobs, their rights and peace in Ireland.

Congress will not allow workers to pay the price of Brexit and believes that those fanatical free-market politicians advocating 'no deal' are no friends of working people. With populism and the far right on the rise, workers will not support a Europe that fails to protect the many and a Brexit that only serves the interest of a privileged few. We need a Europe that tackles the root causes of people's discontent through a stronger social dimension fit for the twenty-first century and that champions decent jobs, rights, a union voice at work and decent social protection and public services for all. Working people and our unions across Europe will not be divided. We stand together for equality, democracy, peace and justice.