

# solixtra



Europe 2008

## Politics has to look after young people

*The ESF as a common project for European trade union youth. By Jessica Heyser*



*International Trade Union Youth – mobile by choice: G8 protests in Heiligendamm*

**P**olitics and economics have long been organised on a European, if not global level.

Consequently young employed people all over Europe have similar concerns. Alongside the demands being placed on young people, their problems are growing too, precarious jobs, youth unemployment, discrimination of younger workers with lower pay, worse social security and higher health risks in the workplace.

**The unions have recognised** how important it is to also be able to act on a European level. This is true for lobby work with EU institutions, as well as for co-determination in companies and for networking with other trade unions in Europe.

It is also true for union work with young people. There are already trade union youth committees and other decision making bodies which work on a European level. The most important committee is the youth committee of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The various central trade union confederations from the different EU member states are represented in the ETUC.

The ETUC-youth committee is not a political council however. The committee does

not form or take political positions, neither does it prepare nor pass resolutions. This is due to the fact that in many EU countries, there are no politically independent trade union youth organisations which form their own resolutions. Therefore on a European level, the hands of delegates from these trade unions are tied. Also in France for example, young people often organise themselves in independent student unions or other social movements such as »Génération précaire«.

Trade unions in an increasing number of countries however, have now recognised how important it is for them to have their own youth structures to be able to appeal to young people.

The DGB-youth has set itself the goal of turning the European Social Forum in Mal-

mö, Sweden September 17-21, 2008 into a youth gathering. The workshops that we are offering as the European Trade Union Youth, are being prepared internationally. In the meantime, colleagues from 12 different countries are now involved in the preparation of the trade union youth workshops. The workshops being planned are especially to target young people.

**We want to make a statement** by organising the events together. Yes, there is a European trade union youth movement and it is active, critical and committed to its cause.

The ESF offers a good space for young colleagues from all over Europe to discuss their problems together and to facilitate the development of strategies for European trade union youth work.

This Soli-Extra deals with important issues that the trade union youth have placed on their agenda – including European employment strategy, fields of action for unions on a European level, civil rights in Europe and education policy. [5]

*Jessica Heyser, DGB-Youth political speaker for international affairs.*



### CONTENTS

#### European politics

**2 High interest: Unions to play a bigger role than even before in the Malmö ESF.**

#### work and social welfare

**3 The new magic formula: Flexicurity**

**4 The right to strike in danger**

#### education

**5 On a narrow track: the European Qualification Framework (EQF)**

#### co-determination

**6 Global Organising: Get out of the offices!**

#### trade union youth

**7 Becoming aware! The geopolitical strategy of the EU**

**8 Our chance: Workers unite!**

# High interest

**Unions to play a bigger role than ever before in the Malmö ESF.** By **Felix Lee**

**S**ince the European Social Forum (ESF) was held in Florence, Paris and London in previous years, some activists may now wonder why the organising committee chose the Swedish city of Malmö as the venue for the next forum. With a population of only 260 000, it is also hardly known to be a cradle of resistance and social movements.

**»Sweden is an example of how a once highly developed social welfare system...**

However, appearances can be deceiving. A short drive over the Öresund bridge is enough: Malmö's surrounding area includes Copenhagen and more than 2 million people. As an old industrial city, it is also a stronghold for the Swedish trade union movement today, in a country in which 80% of all employed people belong to a trade

union. »Sweden is an example of how a once highly developed social welfare system has been brought to the point of collapse within recent years,« says Hugo Braun from the coordination committee of Attac Germany.

The experiences which the Swedish unions have been through could offer grounds for interesting debates at the ESF. According to Braun, who is also in the German section of the preparation committee, around 20 000 participants are expected.

Several hundred participants are expected to come from Germany.

**The social forums** are set up as opposing events to the economic summits of the powerful, i.e. the World Trade Organisation, the Davos World Economic Forum as well as the G8 and EU summits. The first large-scale Social Forum was the World Social Forum (WSF) which was held in Porto Alegre in 2001. More than 100 000 globalisation critics as well as representatives from developmental aid, environmental and human rights organisations streamed into the Brazilian harbour city for a week to discuss counter strategies to global neo-liberalism. The WSF became a symbol for the then still fledgling anti-globalisation movement. Since then, the gathering takes place regularly but always at a different location.

**...has been brought to the point of collapse within recent years.« Hugo Braun**

The ESF attempts to break down the principles of the WSF to a regional level. It first took place in November 2002 in Florence. More European social forums followed in Paris, London and Athens.

»It has long been a wish to hold the ESF once in Northern Europe,« says Attac-representative Braun. Malmö was chosen because the local green-left city authorities promised support. »Such large-scale events mean enormous costs,« Braun explains.

To date, no city in Germany has offered help. Therefore no ESF has ever been held there. However, two national social forums in Germany, a German Social Forum in Erfurt, 2005 and the second in Cottbus in Autumn 2006.

Globalisation critics will only encounter a small movement in Malmö. One reason for this is the protests which took place in Göteborg in June 2001 at around the same time as the protests against the G8 summit



in Genoa. The EU summit was being hosted by Göteborg and over 50 000 people took to the streets. However, since it came to massive confrontations between demonstrators and the police, the non-parliamentary left in Sweden has been chiefly concerned with winning back public sympathy. »Attac Sweden has only recently recovered within the last few years,« said Braun.

The ESF participants are expecting all the more input from the Scandinavian trade unions. According to Jessica Heyser from the DGB – Youth, social partnerships have long been a central focus for them. This has also changed in Sweden however, in the course of the dismantling of the state welfare system. »That's why the local unions there are showing so much interest in the ESF,« said Heyser.

**There are to be nine** so-called »theme areas« in Malmö. Fundamental questions concerning trade union activists all over Europe are buried behind each of these areas. If employers are increasingly operating internationally and circumnavigating national collective wage agreements, don't trade unions also have to organise themselves to be much stronger on a European level? How can each of the national unions better cooperate with their counterparts in other countries when, for example, the parent company of General Motors, tries to play the Bochum factory off against the Polish factory in Gliwice?

Frank Lütticke from the IG-Metall-Youth calls not only for regular Europe-wide networking of the trade union youth, he also hopes for new impulses from environmental initiatives such as Friends of the Earth. »We might even be able to agree on action days together,« hopes Lütticke.

After the previous social forums, the organisers were often criticised that the gatherings are increasingly becoming a diffuse, unproductive »carnival for leftists« due to the wide range of topics and the many different groups represented. For this reason, the activists in Malmö want to focus more on a few central issues. According to Braun it looks like this will work. [5]

## THE ESF THEMATIC AREAS

### Another Europe is possible!

- Working for social inclusion and social rights – welfare, public services and common goods for all
- Working for a sustainable world, food sovereignty, environmental and climate justice
- Building a democratic and rights based Europe, against »secularisation« policies. For participation, openness, equality, freedom and minority rights
- Working for equality and rights, acknowledging diversities, against all forms of discrimination. For feminist alternatives against patriarchy
- Building a Europe for a world of justice, peace and solidarity – against war, militarism and occupations
- Building labour strategies for decent work and dignity for all – against precarity and exploitation
- Economic alternatives based on peoples needs and rights, for economic and social justice
- Democratizing knowledge, culture, education information and mass media
- Working for a Europe of inclusiveness and equality for refugees and migrants – fighting against all forms of racism and discrimination
- Cross-thematic theme: Social movements, the state and future of global justice movement. [5]

# The new magic formula

**Flexicurity: The European job market is supposed to be made fit for globalised competition through a mixture of flexibility and security. By Beate Willms**

**T**he EU heads of the government agreed on a »new cycle for the Lisbon-strategy« in December 2007. »Flexicurity« has now become one of the largest goals, alongside the areas of »competition,« »the full integration of the European single market« and »the modernisation of administration«.

The intention behind this is to find a compromise formula for job market policy that reconciles the interests of employers with those of employees. Employers demand »flexibility«, meaning a loosening of dismissal protection laws, while employees are above all interested in job »security«, i.e. interested in retaining employment. Flexicurity is nothing more than a catch phrase made up of these two English words.

More precisely, as defined in the resolution made by the heads of government, »Flexicurity is a deliberate combination of flexible but nevertheless reliable contractual arrangements, comprehensive life-long learning strategies, effective and active labour policy measures, as well as modern, adequate and sustainable systems of social security.«

Appropriate strategies are to be discussed and developed in all EU member states in 2008. In Germany, the upper house of parliament (Bundesrat) already called on the federal government in September 2007 to »...more strictly follow the flexicurity approach than previously when developing future reforms and to be able to show progress in the implementation of the flexicurity approach i.e. in the annual national reform programmes and progress reports.«

»This newly invented EU-catch word promises a reconciliation of flexibility and security,« says the general secretary of the IG Metall trade union Klaus Pickshaus. In this sense it is »...a product of modernised social democracy, in which on the one hand

growing inequalities are recognised but on the other, the competition oriented Lisbon strategy is still brought into effect.«

The »growing inequalities« Pickshaus speaks of are in fact partly the result of previous strategies to increase flexibility. What more recent employment types such as temporary work and out-sourcing, pseudo-self employment and 400 Euro-jobs all have in common is above all a high risk of precarity. And they are on the increase: According to information from the European Trade Union Federation ETUC, already 32 million people in Europe

work under temporary conditions, 10 million more than 10 years ago. 40 million are part time employed, a fifth of which against their wills, they simply cannot find full time jobs. Especially frightening is that 31 million belong to the working poor and already 17 million live in poverty.

**Whether the EU's flexicurity concept** can turn around or even alter this trend is doubtful. Strategists have really less of an idea of how the social state and social secu-

ring« (i.e. dismantling) of the social security system. In Germany, the »Hartz IV« reforms have shown that »activating« means nothing more than expecting more from the unemployed and tightening disciplinary measures. The results are well known: the demoralisation of those affected, windfall gains for business and low wages.

Although calls for »lifelong learning« are part of the flexicurity concept, there is a lack of rights for workers, for example there is little possibility of legally claiming the costs. As Pickshaus stated, »Those who go through further training have to foot the bill as well.«


**The German Trade Union Confederation** »Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund« (DGB),

criticises the flexicurity principles as one-sided. According to the Vice President of the DGB Ingrid Sehrbock, false premises are used. »From the increased amount of more

flexible but often more precarious jobs, one shouldn't draw the conclusion that standard employment relationships should be adapted to these insecure and temporary work conditions through the dismantling of workers' rights, in particular laws protecting against unfair dismissal.«

On the contrary, it is about defining what can be understood as »good work« under the given circumstances, reducing precarious employment and the minimisation of the risks that it brings along with it, the limitation of working hours and performance »to a healthy amount«, as well as age appropriate organisation of work which promotes learning.

Trade unionists are in no way naive in this issue. Even the EU parliament is demanding a range of amendments to the commission's strategy concerning workplace health and safety.

Parliamentarians argue for the same level of protection for temporary and outsourced workers and better monitoring in general of known and possible health risks. 

**»This newly invented EU-catch word promises a reconciliation of flexibility and security...«**

**»...On the one hand growing inequalities are recognised but on the other, the competition oriented Lisbon strategy is still brought into effect.«**

*Klaus Pickshaus*



urity for workers can be adapted to the altered conditions.

What they do very well know is how they want to make job markets more flexible, employees should become more mobile, »activating elements« in employment policy should be extended.

What this means has been shown in recent years with the so-called »restructu-

# The right to strike in danger

*The EU court of justice is dismantling labour laws. The free market for services and labour is taking precedence. By Reinhard Wolff*

**T**here should be space in the EU for the coexistence of different welfare state concepts. However trade unionists in Sweden and Denmark are afraid that Brussels is threatening hard won gains in their national models of a welfare state and beyond that, possibly fundamental workers' rights in the whole of Europe.

**The Luxemburg ruling is perplexing not only for its concern for companies...**

The reason is a judgement of the European court of justice in which according to critics, the judges have improperly crossed the line. For the first time, they have ordered that laws governing the right to strike be reviewed to comply with (European) community law, thereby introducing limitations in strike measures for unions that otherwise never existed under national law.

**The test-case** in question was the »Vaxholm« ruling in December 2007. It concerned the question of what rights unions have against companies which want to use the EU freedom of movement of labour treaty to establish a second job market ruled by massive wage dumping in another EU member state by importing their own cheap labour.

In 2004, a Latvian based construction company took on a contract in Vaxholm, Sweden. They brought their own workers from across the Baltic Sea and paid them according to the Latvian wage agreement, which is less than half that of the Swedish wage agreement. The firm later refused to give in to demands to pay Swedish rates.

In response to this, the construction workers' union imposed a blockade on the construction site, a common reaction perfectly legal according to Swedish industrial relations law. The Latvian company then terminated the contract and made a legal claim against the blockade, officially in their own name but the process was actually run by the Swedish employers' association. Obviously the chance had been seen to limit the rights of trade unions with the help of EU community law, rights felt by some to be too far-reaching.

**In the end**, the association was at least partly successful. The EU court of justice ru-

led the blockade to be a hindrance to the free movement of labour. Such a measure was found to only be justifiable when the unions' goal is to protect their members' jobs or to protect them against wage dumping. The unions have to observe »the proportionality« of their actions. A requirement for this however is the existence of clear legal guidelines for companies, i.e. a minimum wage. Companies may not be forced to first negotiate with unions or to concern themselves with the specifics of collective bargaining law. This was ruled to be too complex for foreign companies. Consequently, strike measures could characterise increased »discrimination« under community law.

At present, most European countries have minimum legal requirements in the area of labour law in the form of minimum wages. In Sweden and Denmark, similar to Germany however, this is not currently the case. In Scandinavia there is a long standing tradition of the fundamental principle that legislators do not involve themselves in this sector, leaving it to be regulated autonomously by unions and employers. Only the work agreements themselves govern regulations in these countries.

**...It questions a historical cornerstone of the Scandinavian model of a welfare state.**

**The Luxemburg ruling** is perplexing not only for its concern for companies. It questions a historical cornerstone of the Scandinavian model of a welfare state and possibly industrial relations laws as a whole.

Beyond that, it indirectly demands the introduction of minimum wages. That would mean an intervention in national law-making, against which not only the EU commission but also the »old« EU member states and the Advocate General had argued in court.

With this decision, the court has clearly taken sides with industry, »the right of trade unions of a Member State to take collective action« was said to be capable of making »it less attractive, or more difficult, for such undertakings to carry out construction work in Sweden«

Such extensive rights of unions must thus be limited.

**»For us, the retention** of our welfare state model was a deciding factor when we voted to join the EU,« said Hans Tilly, president of the Swedish construction workers union.

Like other unionists, he is now calling for the Lisbon treaty to be amended so that it explicitly states that each member state has the sole right to determine what form its social welfare system should take. [S](#)



Building the EU – with low wages? Latvian workers in Vaxholm, 2004

## EU-LAW

## Bad Judgements

The »Vaxholm« ruling is no isolated case from the European court. In addition to this, there have been further rulings which also demonstrate how guidelines governing the transfer of staff to other countries are interpreted in such a way that actually puts the free market before worker's rights.

In the »Viking« ruling, the Finnish shipping company, Viking Line, wanted to have a shipping vessel sail under an Estonian flag and to hire only lowly paid Estonian crewmembers. The Finnish merchant seamen's union and the International Transport Workers Federation called for strikes. The European court recognised the right to strike on December 11, 2007 but at the same time limited the possible options through strict legal criteria for cross-border collective actions.

In the »Rüffert-ruling«, the German state of Lower Saxony wanted to predetermine collective wages with the awarding of a public tender. This was overruled by European court judges on April 3, 2008. It ruled that wages may only be prescribed in a tender process if the collective wages in question are declared as being universally valid. [S](#)

## ETUC STATEMENT

## »Pretence for wage dumping«

» We are being told that the right to strike is a fundamental right but not as fundamental as the EU's free movement provisions. At the same time, in some member states, the right to strike is a first rank constitutional right, and all Member States have ratified the relevant ILO and Council of Europe conventions which guarantee the freedom of association, and the right to collective bargaining and to strike. The ILO Conventions on labour rights set worldwide standards. These are challenged by the ECJ. This is not acceptable. Europe is expecting others to obey these rules, and cannot be a region that infringes fundamental conventions. Our fundamental rights are now at risk. So, generally, is trade union autonomy.

The idea of social Europe has taken a blow. Put simply, the action of employers using free movement as a pretext for social dumping practices is resulting in unions having to justify, ultimately to the courts, the actions they take against those employers' tactics. That is both wrong and dangerous. Wrong because workers' rights to equal treatment in the host country should be the guiding principle. Wrong because unions must be autonomous. And dangerous because it reinforces EU critics who have long argued that the single market would inevitably threaten social standards.« [S](#)

# On a narrow track

**Education standards to be made comparable through a Europe-wide ranking list. Standards could quickly deteriorate, warns Marco Frank.**

**W**hen trainees or apprentices travel abroad for part of their training, most of them face the same huge problem: is their training also going to be recognised at home? The systems of training are too different and many final qualifications are unclear, lacking transparency.

**This is about to change.** After the universities, other kinds of vocational training in the EU are also to be standardised. EQF and ECVET are the abbreviations which are to make it possible. EQF stands for »European Qualifications Framework« which is an attempt to make all levels of education in Europe comparable. From semi-skilled workers through to trained tradesmen and professors at university, eight levels are thought to be sufficient to rank each individual's knowledge.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is the system of the credit points which are to be given for individual training efforts – comparable with the points already given at university for seminars and lectures.

Now the EU-commission has outlined the details. Uniform points are to be given for the individual part qualifications of the more than 30 000 European training institutes. This is a massive task that the EU has set itself.

**27 countries, 8 levels, a foreseeable chaos.** Even comparing vocational training just in Germany and France, one is left doubting if the two education systems can so easily be transferred onto one another. The political intention is clear: All EU-states are to determine how their systems can be adapted to the European framework. In the meantime there is a lot of bargaining going on behind the scenes. Each country will do everything it can to make sure that qualifications from its own system are ranked as highly as possible.

However there is also conflict within each country. One of the disagreements in Germany is that skilled workers will not be

given a uniform ranking. While a hairdresser lands at level 3, a banker could reach level 4 or 5 – with the same length of training.

**This is the change of paradigms** caused by EQR: its purpose is not to calculate the training time, but rather to evaluate the competencies, knowledge and skills acquired, i.e. how much someone can do.

Also causing resentment are the credit points that are to be awarded for small training »snacks« (i.e. so-called modules). »Categories that are problematic from the perspective of German vocational training«, according to the experts' report »Vocational training perspectives 2008« issued by the scientific advisory council from the unions ver.di and IG Metall. The evaluation of smaller study units threatens to result in the »erosion of complete vocational training courses.« This would mean an end for the approximately 340 different apprenticeships that one is so proud of in Germany. The new points system follows more the

English example in which learning the simplest of tasks is rewarded with a certificate.

However there is also trouble with the universities, as the

trades in Germany think that being a master of a particular trade should be ranked as equivalent to at least a Bachelors degree. The universities and colleges think that the top three levels should be reserved for PhD, masters and bachelors degrees respectively, leaving non-academics to scrounge for the other lower rankings.

**In all EU countries,** the various interested parties are fighting about how their training will be evaluated. What is worth how much? Who knows how to do what? Who is ranked higher than whom? Therein lies the danger that weighing up qualifications against each other will take priority over describing levels of competence. The highly prized dual training system in Germany could be placed on equal footing with a bachelors degree from a neighbouring European country.

Therefore narrow educational norms must be prevented from being introduced through the backdoor. The goal should instead be effecting transparency and permeability of the educational system on the basis of broad qualifications. [S](#)

# Get out of the offices!

*When the usual means fail, campaigning and organising come into play, for example with transnational companies.*

By *Beate Willms*

**U**sually one of Christy Hoffmann's first sentences, is »You won't believe me when I say how much fun union organising can be.«

But you do believe her, often straight away simply due to her infectious enthusiasm. As the representative of the US Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in Europe, you start to believe her at the very latest after she has spoken for an hour about what campaigning and organising is and how these approaches can change the way unions work.

It goes like this, tackle particular companies or industry sectors, try out how to best come into contact with the employees, seek them out, identify any conflicts in common, find out the opponent's weaknesses, win over public opinion, mobilise all available forces. In brief, get out of the offices and go to the people. Of

course this takes effort, of course it demands resources and ideas and of course it is a lot of fun, especially when success is assured.

**Which it is.** This has not only been shown by the experiences in the USA but it has also long been demonstrated in Europe. In London, the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) carried out a campaign in the cleaning service sector and successfully fought for collective wage agreements for 20,000 workers and gained 2,000 new members. The trade union association FNV Bondgenoten in the Netherlands is trying something similar. In Hamburg, Germany, the service industry union ver.di has gone on the offensive organising workers in the security industry in a pilot project and has recorded a significant increase in membership.

»There are always similar industry sectors which are suited to organising or other campaigns,« according to UNI, the international association of service industry unions. Sectors in which many people work in precarious circumstances or with many migrants, sectors in which the workers often slave away isolated from each other at odd hours, in which there are no standard factories or plants where employees can



Experienced in action: SEIU activists at the bus driver's strike (Kansas City, April 2006)

share experiences or organise themselves. These sectors are then accordingly difficult for unions to reach with the services they usually offer.

These concepts also lend themselves especially well to getting access to companies set up Europe-wide or even transnational companies in which decisions are made anywhere except where work councils for example, have the right of codetermination. That is if there is any form of workers' representation in the company at all. Campaigns and organising enable unions to apply pressure which would not be possible by usual means.

**One of the first big** campaign projects was against the catalogue retailer Brylance, which belongs to the French multi-national corporation Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR). The employees in the logistics centres in the US state of Indiana wanted to found a company union but were barred by the company management. In consultation with the textile workers union Unite Here, which was already hardened from its own previous campaigns, they began to look for weak points in the corporation.

Research found that the key was a totally different PPR subsidiary, the fashion label Gucci. Together with Unite, European unions and non-government organisations, the Brylance employees developed a com-

plete programme of demonstrations in Berlin, Dusseldorf and Hamburg, as well as satirical fashion shows in front of Gucci stores in Stockholm, Vienna and Amsterdam. In addition to this, there was a fake Brylance catalogue titled »Holiday Sweatshop«, which described working conditions in Indiana. That was too much for Brylance/PPR and the company union was allowed to be founded.

**UNI has started similar campaigns** with a greater focus on gaining new members, for example against the security corporation G4S which operates on all continents. In Warsaw for example, Solidarnosc recorded 1000 new members after an organising campaign. There are around 10 000 security personnel working in the Polish capital.

The German union IG BAU and the Polish agricultural workers union ZZPR are going another unique way. They have founded a European migrant workers union which seeks out construction workers at building sites who travel around working on various building sites. In the meantime, the union has been recognised by many construction companies as a partner in negotiations. ☐

*European Migrant Workers Union: [www.emwu.org](http://www.emwu.org)*

*International Service Industry Union: [www.union-network.org](http://www.union-network.org)*

*Further reading: Bremme, Peter u.a. (Hg.): Never work alone, VSA-Verlag, Hamburg 2007, 276 pages., 19.80 Euro*

*To get involved: The DGB-Jugendbildungswerk Hattingen (youth education centre) offers various seminars on the topic of union organising. [www.dgb-jugendbildung.de](http://www.dgb-jugendbildung.de)*

**...for collective wage agreements for 20,000 workers and gained 2,000 new members.**

# Becoming aware!

**Does the EU have a geopolitical strategy? Yes and it means militarisation, surveillance and the dismantling of workers rights. According to Claudia Büchling, we need to resist.**

**A workshop at the ESF will take on the topic of the geopolitical strategy of the EU. What stimulus can the trade union youth give to this debate?**

For us it is primarily about informing young people of what strategic alignments exist within the EU. In our perception, young people do not intensively concern themselves with EU politics. If we can awaken an interest in this, we will certainly then be able to involve ourselves more and better present our position.

**At the 2000 summit in Lisbon, the European heads of government set themselves the goal of making the EU into »the most competitive and dynamic economic region in the world« by 2010. The new competitors are the USA, China and India. What will we have to reckon with in the coming years?**

With services provided by the state being dismantled at an ever faster rate and further worsening of precarious work conditions, there will be consequences for the ability of trade unions to assert themselves.

**How much do issues such as protection of data privacy and the curtailing of civil liberties affect young people?**

We also hope to encourage debate within the trade union youth about how to answer this question. Parallel to this, the IG – Metall youth organisation is developing a brochure about the dismantling of civil liberties and the increase of surveillance by the German state. We believe that this will help to increase awareness among young people and encourage them to join us in lobbying for the retention of our rights as citizens. Our parents have done this in the past and now it is our turn.

**Germany's interests are being defended in the Hindu Kush, according to a political catch phrase. Where does the trade union youth movement stand on German military involvement?**

The IG Metall youth organisation rejects war as the resolution of conflicts, regardless of what kind! We are therefore also against the deployment of the German military.

**How can the connections between the dismantling of the welfare state and militarisation be interpreted?**

When people are forced to live in constant fear of social descent, radicalised outbursts have to be reckoned with in the long term. I think that increased militarisation can be categorised with this background. While on the one hand the state reduces the level of social security, on the other it relies on prevention through increasing the possibilities of repression. In this way it is hoped that opposition can be nipped in the bud.

**Should the autonomy of the individual EU states be stressed more?**

Then would all problems be solved? I think as unions and social movements in Europe,

ly any prospects of a professional career and accordingly have only prospects of what approaches a secure future. When they then turn to crime, there is no concept of how to deal with the causes. Young people are turned into the problem themselves.

**How big is the unions' interest in issues such as the protection of data privacy, (big brother) surveillance and militarisation?**

Our task is to awaken interest and to make it clear that we can only change the situation through working together. I feel that these issues are slowly getting more attention. We should therefore develop a strate-



»The future is ours«: protests of the IG Metall Youth against the increased retirement age, Berlin 2007

we have to fight so that politics focuses on the people, but we can only achieve this together.

**Young people in many European states are strongly influenced by the precarity of their living conditions. Which consequences does a lack of security in living standards have for politics?**

Above all it is problematic that people having to live in insecure circumstances, also have less time and money to involve themselves actively in political processes. Whoever is constantly afraid of not having enough money to live is of course primarily concerned with work. This threatens our democracy as it can only function when everyone takes part.

**Does the youth penal code in Europe also play a role in your thinking?**

No, not yet. However we can also find the same pattern here, young people have hard-

ly any prospects of a professional career and accordingly have only prospects of what approaches a secure future. When they then turn to crime, there is no concept of how to deal with the causes. Young people are turned into the problem themselves.

**Should one work together with as many coalition partners as possible?**

Of course. Unions are an important part of society but only together with other social movements can we develop an opposing force in the long term. [5]

Claudia Büchling is responsible for international affairs at the IG Metall-youth organisation.



# Our chance: Workers unite!

*EU trade unions are recollecting an old virtue: international cooperation. The ETUC provides a good space for this, says **Andreas Köppe**.*

*A lot is going wrong in the EU for democracy and above all for workers. It seems obvious to call for radical resistance. You are not doing this, rather you work within European structures. Why?*

Andreas Köppe: That is right, the EU project is primarily an economic one. Its aim is to make Europe competitive for global capitalism. More and more states and more and more people are being integrated for this purpose. At the same time, social aspects are suffering, above all because the unions and social movements have limited themselves within their national borders for far too long. This brutal EU economic project is now virtually forcing us to concentrate on international work.

However through this, all progressive forces also have the chance to remember again the original demands of the workers movement. Workers unite!

*Is there still a chance for Europe?*

The unions are still at the beginning, but they are on the right path. The only important thing is that no project can come from the top down, it has to become a project which starts from the bottom up – from the grassroots.

*Does the work in the ETUC youth com-*

*mittee also seem so militant?*

In principle, yes. Our most important demands are to fight against unemployment, precarity, as well as the social exclusion of young people and for peace, solidarity, equality and democracy. The way for us to achieve this is through campaigning and lobbying.

*And how does European cooperation work in with very specific issues such as vocational training?*

That is more difficult but also very interesting, as it is also about the future of the dual system of training. In Germany and Austria, which I represented, we have had very good experiences with this system. It makes a highly qualified profession possible with greater freedom of choice on the job market. However other EU countries don't have this system and some have no real vocational training in the same sense at all. In Scandinavian countries there is »only« a state run training system, which is of high quality however. The starting point is very different. At the moment we are at the point of making minimum demands on



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how people should be trained and what exactly »good« training is. It is important that we make ourselves heard and take part in this debate.

*What do we need in order for us to be successful?*

To be able to fight for a just Europe of solidarity, we need more »European people« in companies. People who can speak foreign languages, who are interested in other systems, who want to have dialogue with colleagues from other countries and to coordinate actions with them. With the youth multiplier series »Europe step by step« and the IG Metall Youth Brigade we are going in the right direction. [5]

*Andreas Köppe was until recently the representative for the German speaking region in the ETUC youth committee board. His replacement has yet to be decided.*



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### The youth committee of the ETUC

The European Trade Union Confederation ETUC youth committee's task is to develop programmes of action for young people in the working world, to offer seminars, conferences and workshops as well as to instigate campaigns about issues such as vocational training or internships.

The ETUC youth committee is composed of representatives from the individual umbrella union organisations from the EU countries and Turkey. As each umbrella union organisation has the right to send a representative, countries with several such organisations might also have several representatives in the committee. The upper age limit is 35.

The members of the committee elect a new six member board every two years in which all regions should be represented.

The current board members are: Robert Hansen from Norway, president, also representing Scandinavia, two vice presidents, Panikos Argyrides representing Cyprus, Malta and Greece and Erika Brselová representing Eastern European countries, while Panos Bartolome represents Italy, Spain and Portugal and Tanja Matias represents Luxemburg, Belgium and France. There is no representative for the English speaking region at present.

As a rule, the youth committee meets twice a year while the board meets four times a year. The working language is English. [5]

<http://youth.etuc.org/en>

## IMPRESSUM

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