

**Sharan Burrow - President of the International Trade Union  
Confederation – ITUC  
Address to the DGB's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Berlin, 5 October 2009**

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Happy Birthday DGB and Congratulations! The German Federation of Trade Unions, the DGB, celebrating sixty years of strong collective action for the benefit of working people and of your nation are rightfully proud of their achievements.

President Michael Sommer, President Kohler and Chancellor Merkel, union leaders, members of the DGB and friends, today is an auspicious day; a day of celebration; of reflection and of affirmation of the role of trade unions in shaping a great nation. I am proud to stand with you as the President of the ITUC and, from your union brothers and sisters from all over the world, I bring greetings, messages of solidarity and indeed heartfelt appreciation for the significant contribution you have also made to a better world, both here and beyond your borders. The fact that we have more than 100 international guests here to share in these celebrations demonstrates the standing of the DGB across the globe.

Your history is one to be proud of, the DGB has been instrumental in campaigning for and winning struggles that have shaped the very foundations of a modern workplace; a workplace where dignity and respect for working people is assured.

The campaign in the 1950s for the forty hour maximum working week inspired the world and the May Day image of 1956 with the young boy claiming that "On Saturday my daddy belongs to me" helped change the workplace but also laid the foundation for the dignity of family life.

The seventies you broke new ground in claiming the dignity of labour with the right of the workers to participate at the shopfloor and at the company level with the result that the New Works Constitution Act in 1972 and the new Co-Determination-Act in 1976 are both still the cornerstones of the industrial model of Germany.

In the nineties the DGB again inspired the world with its courageous stand against xenophobia in Germany and who can forget that famous slogan which sparked a conscience call to everyone - "Don't harass my buddy!" Unionists defending the rights of immigrant workers is still a central responsibility for us all today.

I can only pick out one or two highlights but let me also acknowledge that the DGB didn't just look to its own nation but has always stood in solidarity with working people in other nations. We all recall the strong support of the DGB and the German unions for the Polish union movement Solidarnosc in their fight for democracy and workers' rights.

Indeed the DGB was a foundation member of the ICFTU, so this celebration also marks 60 years of trade union internationalism. Today we all belong to the ITUC

founded in 2006 and I take this opportunity to acknowledge the role of the DGB and in particular, your President, Michael Sommer's leadership in the process that brought together the ICFTU, the WCL and independent unions in a magnificent outcome of unification. His capacity to extend the hand of friendship and his unwavering support for unification was very important. Since the founding Congress he has served as a Deputy President and worked with Luc Cortebeek, our Secretary Guy Ryder and myself as a critical member of the leadership team. I personally take this opportunity to thank him for his leadership, his friendship, his vision and his drive and indeed the DGB and the German unions for sharing him with us.

For Michael understands, the DGB and the unions of Germany understand, that unification is not enough, that we need a new internationalism to challenge the inequity and injustice in the world.

The World Must Change.

If we were rightfully anxious about a world that was growing more unequal before the global financial crisis, then the challenges are even more obvious today,

The GFC was a disaster waiting to happen The fault lines were obvious to all as corporate greed and self interest co-opted not just the boardrooms but the political will of too many of our powerful governments.

The harsh reality is that we already had a crisis in two many nations driven by inequality, poverty, unemployment and global imbalances in trade and development. The collapse of the financial system has deepened that devastation. A return to pre-crisis status quo will not satisfy the workers of the world.

Workers and their unions are angered by the senseless greed and risk taking of corporate globalisation. We have a right to be angry:-

- millions of workers have lost their jobs and the ILO says up to 59 million may join those who are already unable to get work this year alone,
- some 200 million more people could be forced in to extreme poverty, joining the 1.4 billion of our sisters and brothers who are already desperately trying to live on less than \$2US dollars a day,
- migrant workers are again being made scapegoats despite the economic and cultural richness they bring to their adopted countries and the solidarity of investment they contribute to their countries of origin through remittances,
- women and young people are again the invisible victims of the erosion of work, often precarious in the first place,
- the rights of our children and grandchildren to a secure job and a safe planet are at risk because of a history of a lack of political will to expose the corruption and the moral deficit of an economic system that was always set to end in tears

They want, we all want a better world where *people, their jobs, their rights and their environment come first!*

The challenge for the unions is to organise.

Indeed we cannot and will not sit back and watch the world paper over the cracks again. And we will not hear of green shoots on the stock exchanges as evidence of recovery. For as more and more of the world's people realise that their jobs, their houses, their savings and the value of their pension funds have been stripped away by a crisis caused by greed and incompetence in the financial sector they want, we want, real jobs, good jobs, decent work and social protection to be the benchmarks of recovery.

The message is loud and clear from the workers of the world and from their unions – the party is over! There can be no *business as usual*.

The words of President Lula, a trade union leader, from Brazil at the ILO Jobs Summit in June ring loud and true;

*Unemployment is purely a social issue. It will only become a political issue when you begin to take action, when you start to take action for it is unthinkable that we could end the twenty first century in the same way that we ended the twentieth.*

*These times call for a tougher attitude from employers, workers and governments. We cannot go on living with tax havens, we cannot live with a financial system that creates paper mountains of speculation without creating a single job, without manufacturing a single nail, a single shoe, a single shirt or a single tie. We cannot go on ignoring the fact that more than 1 billion people still face a struggle to eat at least once a day.*

*Now is the time for us to draw up a new proposal which needs to be heard by the G20 leaders, heard within each country and heard by every political leader and included in debates in the UN General Assembly.*

Well I am pleased to say the ITUC has responded to that call and met with world leaders before all the G20 meetings, the G8 meetings, the UN processes and with the IMF and the World Bank and will continue to hold them to account for real reform.

Here let me acknowledge the leadership of your Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who, with the support of the DGB and the ITUC has helped us to get a seat at the table for the ILO, ensured with other leaders that the G20 commits to putting quality jobs and decent work at the heart of the recovery and a process with labour ministers, unions and business representatives. She has recognised the Global Jobs Pact along with the follow up to the Rome Jobs Summit of the G8 as central to employment growth and initiated the development of a charter of global governance for sustainable economic activity which must frame new values, transparency and reform of the global economy.

Further in regard to the question of who pays for the financial crisis we cannot accept that workers should pay twice and therefore the work and the advocacy of Germany for a financial transactions tax has our support.

The world must look different after the crisis and our response is best outlined in the ILO Social Justice Declaration and the follow up tools negotiated in the Global Jobs Pact. Strong social protection for all, a guaranteed minimum wage, collective bargaining rights for fair wealth distribution and the space for domestic growth and development are non negotiable and essential to realising the MDGs, the Millenium Development Goals, to building a fair globalization, a greener economy and development that ensures jobs; good jobs and decent work inclusive of migrants, women and young people,

Unions across the world call for:

Strong action on climate change. Unions want a strong deal in Copenhagen, the climate financing to ensure development opportunity and a just transition for all nations with decent work at the heart of a greener global economy. This is a moral responsibility but also an opportunity to grow green jobs. Again Chancellor we acknowledge and look to your leadership.

Fair trade rules. There can be no more exploitation through trade. Trade must be based on a floor of rights and environmental standards with policy space for nations to realise development and decent work – no excuses, no more exploitation and a real commitment to narrow the trade imbalances.

Poverty, peace, rights and social justice as always remain central to our mission and we all know the DGB will continue to be there standing together, standing up with all of us against oppression, injustice and attacks on the rights of working people here and all over the world.

The global financial crisis has demonstrated once and for all that the unfettered markets don't work. They don't work for the economy, and they do nothing for workers and their families.

And the same unfettered economic development has also rushed headlong down a path of environmental catastrophe, with climate change threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of the worlds people and whole communities in vulnerable continents like my own and many of yours.

Its over!

We want a different world, a world where people really do come first. Celebrate today but you know that the celebration sits at the heart of your determination, our determination, union and democratic determination to shape a fairer world

Viva DGB Viva

Solidarity!

