

Speech by Guy Ryder ITUC General Secretary

To DGB Congress Berlin, 18. May 2010

Thank you for this opportunity to take part in your debate on overcoming the crisis and greetings from the ITUC. The resolution you are discussing shows just how dramatic the situation facing workers is – not just in Germany but in all countries. What is important about this DGB approach is that you are not looking at each of the many problems before us in isolation – one by one. Instead you are doing what I believe we all must. Stepping back and recognizing that we face a generalized crisis of an entire model of globalization and that the only way forward is a complete rethink of that model and setting it on an entirely new course. It is exactly what the ITUC is trying to do at the global level at our own World Congress in Canada next month – moving on from the crisis to global social justice. So I want to congratulate you on that.

One lesson of the crisis is that no country is going to get out of it alone. So as you tackle the big issues here in Germany inevitably you will need to consider their international dimensions. And whether you like it or not Germany's international role is at the central of much attention – not just because of Greece, not just in Europe but throughout the world. Germany's voice is being hurt. So what it has to say and how the DGB can influence it matters to us all. The ITUC can see six areas for fundamental rethinking and a new start:

- Firstly – Jobs: With 34 million jobs so far lost worldwide because of the crisis and more on the way it is the moment to recover the commitment to full employment that was one victim of the neo-liberals. That means keeping coordinated fiscal stimulus in place now and active labour market intervention to keep and create employment. Germany has plenty to offer in this regard – you have done better than most in keeping the job costs of the crisis down.
- Secondly – Labour Market Justice: The fact that the share that labour takes in national income around the world is at historic lows – the levels of the 1939's now – represents a massive transfer of resources to capital and the major cause of inequality in our societies. Ending this crisis of distributional justice means restoring justice to the labour market – reinforcing collective bargaining, combating precarity at work, strengthening social protections. All things at the heart of the social market economy, all issues where Germany can lead.
- Third – Regulation Financial Capital: Whether you call them locusts or casino capitalism it is finally time to put finance back at the service of the legal economy. Global regulation which sticks and an international tax of financial transactions are needed now. The fact that the speculators are already back to their old ways - this time using taxpayers money – only means we must act quicker and with the same political determination that was applied to saving the skins not very long ago. I think Germany has more interest in this than most. You actually still believe in making money by making things not by the alchemy of turning paper into gold.
- Forth – Going Green: We know we must move to the sustainable low carbon future and trade unions insist that this must be a “just transition” that respects workers interests and promotes decent work. Our governments said that we could not afford failure in Copenhagen last December and then producing one. We are facing the absolute necessity of bringing the biggest transformation of our productive system for generations and we need to start the job now.

- Fifth – Balanced World Development: Development countries did not generally do well even when globalization post generating impressive growth. They must not become the innocent victims of its crisis. Standing by the commitments given – particularly the UN Millennium Development Goals – is a common responsibility and one we can not simply abandon now. Yes, that is a matter of solidarity but also of self-interest. Strong global development is a big part of coming out of the crisis together.
- And lastly – Governing the Global Economy. When the crisis struck there was not a single political leader who was not calling loudly for real governance of globalisation. Today their voices are fewer and not so loud. But this is not something that can safely be forgotten and as the crisis hopefully receives. To her credit Chancellor Merkel is one of the few who seems to take the subject seriously and the ITUC has supported strongly her call for a Charter on Globalization.
-

Colleagues,

These are objectives for which, with your help, the ITUC will continue to fight – in the G-20 and elsewhere. I hope that you will see them not as distractions from you own national priorities but as a part of them. As the global solutions that the global crisis requires.

If we trade unions are to be serious actors in realizing these ambitions we need to look also at ourselves – our structures and methods. Like the ITUC itself I know that the DGB has been, and is, doing that. Your resolution shows it. And your conclusion, like ours, is that we need to combine a strong assertion of longstanding values – freedom, justice and solidarity – the innovative strategies for organizing and winning support for our goals.

The challenge comes less from a rejection by working people of the need for trade unions or their values but rather from the fact that they doubt whether we still have, after three decades of neo-liberal attacks and in conditions of deregulated globalization, the capacity to deliver the results they want from us.

The founding of the ITUC was in a very direct way and attempt to respond to that challenge and the continued development of its new internationalism and its forthcoming Congress and under its new leadership in the years ahead needs to count on the input of all its affiliates.

We will see how we will measure up to these global challenges and how the DGB is present in them. But my feeling is that the DGB just like “Der Mannschaft”, at the World Cup, whatever difficulties it may have along the way is always there when the important issues are decided and is never far away from final victories.

So let's hope for a good month for all of us in June – as well as a successful Congress for you here in Berlin!