

Presidential candidate presents herself to delegates at EPSU congress



(Dublin, 5 June 2019) **Can you tell us a bit about yourself?**

My name is Mette Nord. I recently celebrated my 60th birthday and am the president of Fagforbundet in Norway. We have over 367000 members and organise workers across the public services. My hometown is Porsgrunn. It is two hours from our capital Oslo and I still live there with my husband. I have two children, three step-children and three, soon four, lovely grandchildren who I spend as much time with as possible. I am a licensed practical nurse and have a degree in health administration. I worked in a nursing home before I started as a full-time elected representative for the trade union.

How did you join the union movement?

It was natural to join the union when I started my education as a practical nurse. When we were going to elect our new representative at the nursing home where I

worked, someone pointed me out and I accepted the challenge. I have always been committed to defend our members' interests and contribute to the social and professional development of our workplaces. Tripartite collaboration and cooperation are essential to achieving this and ensuring the full development of all workers' skills and competences.

What positions have you had in the trade union?

I have been an elected representative at my workplace as well as in Fagforbundet's local and regional branches. In 2009, I became vice president of the union and between 2009 and 2013 I was also a deputy representative in the Norwegian parliament. I became state secretary at the office of the Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg in 2013 and was elected President of Fagforbundet that same year. This year I will be a Labour Party candidate in the municipal elections in Porsgrunn. In all my roles, I have had both political and organisational responsibilities and have led many negotiations at both local and national levels.

What are the big challenges and main political battles for the unions in Norway?

The biggest challenge has been and will continue to be to mobilise and organise as many people in the trade unions as possible. This is essential to give legitimacy to our demands on both pay- and working conditions as well as socio-political issues. In Norway today we have a conservative government that wants to create what it calls more flexibility in our labour market. In reality this means making it easier to employ more temporary employees and less security in terms of pay and employment conditions. Conservative policies are especially hard on women with no priority given to their rights to equal pay and a full-time job. Workers' rights are under attack every single day and we see an increase of inequality in our country.

What do you see as main challenges for workers in Europe?

Right across Europe, we need to mobilise more workers in our trade unions and make sure that we increase our influence. Our strength is that we are the many and that we stand together not just in each country, but also in Europe and internationally. The challenges that we face are similar, but in different degrees. The solutions may not always be the same, but we will learn from each other and work with each other to achieve change for workers. We must make sure that our natural resources benefit all in our communities and not just the few and we have to

do this in a sustainable manner, respecting our environment.

I want to contribute to the struggle of the European public service unions and our European Federation to achieve a social and sustainable Europe. Tackling the climate crisis and putting people and our planet over profits are key. It is crucial to invest in public services and the men and women who deliver them, which means higher pay and better conditions for many. As President of the Federation I will strongly support action to reduce the gender pay and pension gaps and fight for equality between men and women, as set out in EPSU's "Breaking with the Past" manifesto. In Norway we want people to have control over our water supplies and energy resources and I believe this is important for all countries. Public utilities are crucial for ensuring many quality jobs and, of course, for guaranteeing essential services for all our citizens. Public utilities and public services play a central role in developing our economies and societies. Privatising them invariably leads to worse working conditions and more inequality, while failing to, redistribute wealth or deliver more sustainable communities.

A major concern is the attacks we see on our democratic values. We need to stand up for our democracies in Europe, take a stand against those who want to divide us and set us against each other. An increase of social inequality in our countries and in our continent will only result in apathy or extremism. We see an emergence of extremist groups, both political and religious and that is a consequence of more inequality in our societies. These groups attack women's rights but they will find the unions and the Federation standing in their way. In the European Union policies of austerity and neglect of workers' interests have contributed to the rise in these extremist groups. It is now time to deliver more fairness for workers and our communities. To achieve this we need more Europe in our unions in the sense that we need to work more systematically together towards bringing a change in the EU and other European arenas. We have to defend and promote the rights, health, safety and working conditions of Europe's public service workers, and to deliver a sustainable future for us all.

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