

# **Ending exploitation of workers with public money**

Date

Thursday, June 25, 2020 - 12:00

Last week EPSU's collective bargaining group discussed the position of the ETUC on fair minimum wages. Not all agree on the approach to take. National situations vary as does the assessment of how European rules would affect bargaining systems even if excluded from a possible directive. Our discussions will continue along with the debate in the ETUC.

We do agree, however, that all workers need a fair wage and that the best way to achieve this, is through collective bargaining. The importance of bargaining and of strong unions to protect workers' interests and our health and safety has been clearly demonstrated in this pandemic.

Several colleagues in the bargaining group stressed that the Commission should come forward with proposals that require companies that receive public contracts financed by public money should have a collective agreement with representative trade unions in place. We do not want shareholders to be given free reign to exploit workers, and get paid public money for it. In fact, many companies support the union position as they also want good pay and conditions for workers but are undercut by cowboy firms that do not provide decent wages and do not apply collective agreements.

My reading of the European procurement directive of 2014 is that Member States and public authorities who award contracts should ensure that the successful companies comply with ILO conventions 87 and 98. Companies need to negotiate with unions and should not block workers from organizing in the union of their choice. Member States are being negligent if they do not enforce this.

Public authorities should not award contracts to the likes of Amazon Web Services, for example. Why should public money be paid to a company that dodges taxes and that ensures more wealth for its CEO Jeff Bezos (now worth 165 bn dollar, the GDP of a country the size of Hungary). Amazon fights with trade unions as it does not want to negotiate and conclude collective agreements and it opposes its workers

that want to join a union. The European Commission is failing us here by not being crystal clear to Member States, public authorities and the corporations that such companies don't deserve public contracts. We want a European Union that delivers for workers.

Luckily there are alternatives to enriching Bezos. Public authorities don't have to outsource and privatise their services. Many municipalities are now (re-)discovering that in-house provision is cheaper and there is no need to boost the profits of Bezos and his ilk. It guarantees better quality and good pay and conditions to workers. Our seminar on remunicipalisation shows how this can be done and how unions can play a role and you can read more about it in the newsletter.

Demanding recognition for the role of the public sector and the workers that deliver our public services was part of our platform for 23 June, public service day. Not only applause for workers but funding and investment in services and good pay and conditions. Thanks to all who were active in supporting public service workers on 23 June. We can build from here to reinforce our actions in the coming months.

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