

1 May - we demand another Europe

(30 April 2015) On marches, at rallies and other celebrations across Europe on 1st May, the labour movement will demand an end to austerity and a new policy for Europe. I will join the march in Antwerp. Speeches there will stress the need to change a government that is attacking pay and conditions and slashing funding for public services. The public service union CGSP/ACOD organised a strike on 22 April to put pressure on the government for a change of policy and all the EPSU unions in Belgium have been very prominent in the national protests since November last year. More actions are expected as the government is conceding little. And the mayor of Antwerp, a Flemish nationalist with a neo-liberal programme, has already threatened to abolish the so-called Ghent system in which the unions administer the unemployment benefits, hoping that this will weaken the unions which are opposing his party's corporate agenda. This is the corporate agenda that seeks further structural reform, the next step in the austerity agenda. Local union leaders will strongly condemn this and recall that with over 20 million people unemployed and 1 in every 4 Europeans threatened by poverty, austerity policies have failed. Public service workers in Europe are demanding fair pay increases after years of pay cuts and wage freezes EPSU is demanding investment in public services. The European Commission's investment plan is not enough. We need funding for child and health care and for tax administrations, and not through public private partnerships but through direct public investment. Above all this has to be in those countries seriously impacted by austerity policies.

On Tuesday 28th April the EPSU Executive Committee adopted a statement in support of the Greek workers and their unions to underline that endless cuts and labour market reforms are not the solution and that the pressure on the Greek government for yet more austerity needs to stop. Structural reforms translate into attacks on unions and trade union rights. We stand with workers and their unions fighting for their rights. Across Europe the labour movement will demand fair pay increases, quality jobs and more investment. And the money is there. Working people pay taxes, corporations must pay their share. This is the message EPSU, PSI and the Global Tax Justice Alliance have issued for May Day. The average top corporate tax rate in the European Union fell from 35% in 1995 to 22.9% in 2014.

But even then companies like McDonalds escape paying their tax bill. That needs to change. 23 June - Global Public Services Day - will be a next major rallying point.

The EPSU Executive Committee decided to use that day to mark our demands for fair trade and against trade agreements like the EU-Canada trade deal (CETA) and the negotiations with the US (TTIP) as well as the multilateral talks on services (TISA). We will also underline our demands for tax justice. It would be great if we all use that day to push our agenda for Another Europe. Another Europe that will also be a place that cares for people that seek refuge from war, hunger and persecution. Where we do not have governments that put protection of borders above the needs of people seeking shelter.

The EPSU Executive Committee stood in silence remembering the people that have died in the Mediterranean. Members adopted a statement with demands for a different European policy and stressing how workers on the frontline are affected and need the resources to provide services to ensure decent conditions to migrants. That message for Another fairer Europe will sound out loudly across Europe this 1st of May. An inspiring day to all. We stand for equal pay for equal work – for migrant workers, for all. Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary

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