

ETUC Roadmap - Building the Trade Union response to the rise of far-right

Adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting of 3-4 June 2021

Introduction

Trade unions and the far-right are opposites. Not only because of trade unions' history and proud tradition of opposing the far-right in past, but because of what trade unions stand for today. Trade unions, above all else, believe in solidarity: we seek better lives, social justice and opportunity, for all working people. We stand for unity over division.

Far-right groups seek to divide working people. – to use identity to divide people, most commonly 'national' identities that work against immigrants or anyone considered to be 'foreign' or minority groups such as Roma. Sometimes the targets are based on religion or women or LGBTIQ people or any minority group that can be described as an enemy. The far-right attacks environmentalism and science, and sometimes seek to portray both as elite conspiracies (indeed global climate action for example is seen by some on the far-right as an attempt by global elites to undermine national government and destroy national identity, or conspiracy theories, for example against the need for measures to protect against covid, lockdown, masks or vaccines.

The far-right also exploit public discourse to portray trade unions as separate from workers and part of the ruling elite whether a corrupt and/or cosmopolitan and/or liberal political elite, often portrayed as distanced in a capital city, or even a global elite. They often claim that they (far-right groups) can be better trusted to represent the best interests of working people than trade unions. Some even campaign around traditional trade union topics such as fair wages and secure jobs. There are ongoing attempts by the far-right to organise to take over workplaces, works councils, branches of trade unions and to establish 'puppet' trade unions.

While it is clear that the far-right shares many characteristics across Europe, important national differences remain, for example the radical right in Eastern Europe is similar to its West European counterparts in its emphasis on mobilization against minorities but it also has unique characteristics based on its history that distinguish it from West European far-right parties. There is no silver bullet or one-size-fits-all 'cut and paste' solution to tackling the far-right. Trade unions are stronger together and will win with solidarity and by learning from each other. .

The common feature that is shared everywhere is that the growth of far-right and right-wing extremism takes place in a political- economic context where occupational and economic security and income has declined. The acceleration of technological innovation has abolished some kinds of work, deskilling and routinising others. Within the workplace deliberate models of individualised and fragile relationships are fostered and collective solutions rejected. The expected continuous improvement in living and working conditions and wellbeing has not materialised for many. Instead, there has been the creation of a growing precariat with no long-term clear prospects.

The trade union counter argument to the far-right extremism is to show that these experiences of dispossession and insecurity are shared by different groups of workers and communities. The disrespect for workers and our skills, the mistreatment because of where we are from or the kind of people we are, the loss of our collective force and the resulting unjust distribution of wealth created by our labour is a shared experience among working people. This argument has to be made a new online and offline in ways that our members and allies can take up reuse, remix and recirculate. It means trade unions must offer a counter argument both to the unacceptable status quo and to the

alleged solutions purported by the far-right. It means making noise and taking part in the arguments. We need to be clear that scapegoating any group of people just distracts from the real causes of problems in our workplaces and communities.

A year of trade union cooperation to combat the far-right

There is a clear demand from our affiliates for a joined up European trade union response to coordinate our efforts aimed at combatting the far-right. This Roadmap sets out a plan of actions for the September 2021 – September 2022 period. It is based on 14 key actions to be undertaken by the ETUC and our affiliates and it includes the support of the ETUI Education Department.

- Action 1: **Leadership at the highest level:** the ETUC proposes to have a **dedicated ETUC Executive Committee discussion** in June 2022 to assess developments and to take stock of the effectiveness of the different actions in the roadmap. **Dedicated contact persons:** affiliates are requested to identify a dedicated contact person to be the link with the ETUC for the period of the plan. Working meetings for the dedicated contact persons will be arranged online as necessary during the year.
- Action 2: **Mainstream the fight against the far-right throughout our organisations.** For the ETUC this means inviting all ETUC Committees to have a consideration of the far-right and for each Committee to make a report to the ETUC Executive discussion in June 2022.
- Action 3: **Continuing networking and exchange of training practices:** The training activities organised by our affiliates on trade union approaches to understanding and combatting populism and the far-right must increase. To support affiliates the ETUI will create an **online repository of trade union materials**. This will ensure that affiliates and their unions can share their learning, their training methods, courses and materials. To ensure more interaction between trainers, a **trade union trainers' coordination meetings** will also be organised by the ETUI.
- Action 4: **Specific communications training** will be designed and delivered by the ETUI as a means to help trade unions to build a solid and valued based narrative in order to combat the far-right extremism based on building confidence in the trade union and democracy to deliver for working people.
- Action 5: **Political education:** the ETUI will be requested to organise workshops on political education that articulates our vision to counter the far-right by providing a real alternative to tackle inequalities.
- Action 6: **Building trade union capacity to counter far-right narratives.** In a separate '**Discussion Document on Advancing European Trade Union Digital Campaigning**' the ETUC proposes two actions to
 - Set up a European trade union petitions platform **megaphone.europe**, enabling affiliates (and affiliates own members) to post petitions and use the data from their petitions to organise and mobilise workers and supporters. It also provides for the development of a database that will allow us to communicate directly with members and supporters, equipping them with counter arguments to the far-right that they can share.
 - Establish a European Trade Union Cyber Network (**ETUCyberNet**) with the opportunity for affiliates to invite their own member communicators

and social media activists to join a dedicated digital space to permanently share communications materials including materials relevant to the fight against the far-right and right-wing extremism.

- Action 7: **Commission research on public opinion and reach out to organisations** and institutions that study or attempt to counter the far-right extremism – such as ‘More in Common’ that have produced insightful opinion polls and who help develop communications strategies against hatred. Affiliates are also requested to share with the ETUC the findings from their research. This should also include information on the actual voting record of far-right politicians (for example through ‘vote watch’) examination of voting records often demonstrate that their real support does not lie with the interests of working people.
- Action 8: **Celebrating the history of our movement** and its fundamental values. We need to foster a culture of ethical remembering that does not allow for the far-right to appropriate days of national celebration or remembrance. The ETUC Press and Communication Committee will be requested to organise an **annual initiative to celebrate trade union history** and to promote our values and key achievements.
- Action 9: **Map the influence of the far-right at the workplace.** The ETUC will with the assistance of our affiliates undertake an annual survey on the influence of the far-right and right-wing extremism in the workplace. This survey should be developed with the assistance of the ETUI and distributed through our national and sectoral affiliates. This survey is key to evaluate and map the influence of the far-right, to identify groups who are against the trade union values and to formulate the challenges. Collecting real examples of anti-union statements by far-right along with a mapping of their workplace organising strategies will provide the information needed to advance the strategy in coming years. The survey results will be reported to and form the basis for the annual debate at the ETUC Executive Committee in June 2022.
- Action 10: **Develop joined up industrial strategies to confront the growth of divisive narratives at the workplace:** Trade unions have negotiated for measures to combat the far-right at the level of the workplace. These agreements can be source of inspiration and encouragement. ETUC affiliates are requested to send examples of their collective agreements, transnational company agreements and other texts or statements concluded by them that have the purpose of combatting the rise of the far-right in workplaces. The ETUC will promote a workplace, sector and cross border approach as an essential agenda for collective bargaining including by highlighting agreements through the ETUC Social Dialogue Webpage.
- Action 11: **Social Partner Model Agreement:** At European level, the ETUC will propose in its mandate for the European Social Partners future Social Dialogue Work-Programme 2022-2024 to include an item on “**Social Partners’ response to the rise of the far-right**” in view of a joint statement or joint guidelines to further give weight to affiliates and trade unions opening discussions on this at the level of the enterprise or sector.
- Action 12: **Form Alliances.** The ETUC and our affiliates must give a particular focus to form alliances to counteract the far-right and to **call for regulation of social media; against hate speech**, intimidation and harassment on online platforms; and for a diverse media of quality journalism. The ETUC has submitted its views to two consultations on the European Democracy Action Plan and will

continue to make the case for regulation and for a diverse media in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

- Action 13: **Combatting the far-right in the European Parliament:** The ETUC will formulate the current practice on limiting contact with the far-right in the European Parliament into a policy that may be adopted by our national and sector affiliates.
 - The ETUC has adopted a practice that the ETUC should not have contact with members of the far-right group(s) in the European Parliament. The ETUC identifies after each European election which are the far-right groups, and whether there are other national far-right parties in other European Parliamentary groups with which contact should be avoided (with advice of the national unions of that country). The ETUC also has a practice not to have contact with leaders or elected representatives of far-right parties at national level except in very limited circumstances, such as they are Ministers in a Government with responsibility for issues on which our national affiliates have requested the ETUC to join them in presenting their members' interests. In all cases we do so for the purpose of working to achieve that they change course and sign up to implement democratic, trade union and human rights principles (in government).
 - While the limited contact with the far-right in the circumstances described above may be necessary, it would be a catastrophic mistake to believe that far-right parties and their leaders, or those parties and leaders close to the far-right, could be improved by having some worker-friendly policies, or that some 'deal' can be reached with such parties to make them less harmful. In short, a 'cordon sanitaire' needs to be imposed at European level, and nationally (unless in very specific defined circumstances).
- Action 14: **Safeguard the 'rule of law':** The rise of the far-right has encouraged increasing challenges to the rule of law – with high profile cases of political interference in the judiciary, media and other institutions which should be independent. The ETUC will continue to call on international organisations, including the European Union to uphold the rule of law in member countries including for a real EU 'comprehensive European Rule of Law Mechanism' and **making ALL EU funds conditional on respect for the rule of law.** The ETUC will use its participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe to press the case for the 'rule of law', and effective safeguards for the rule of law.
- Action 15: **Keeping far-right and extremist ideas out of our movement:** The ETUC will **undertake a survey our national and sector affiliates to identify the rules and practices** they have adopted. The results of this survey will be included in the discussions of the Executive Committee meeting on the far-right to take place in June 2022.

Conclusion

Battling the far-right and the right-wing extremism will not be easy, perhaps most challenging is that the wrong approach risks reinforcing the far-right narrative that trade unions are part of the elite attempting to silence them. This underscores the importance of engaging with workers on the basis of our rejection of the status quo and our trade union alternative. Working people have been failed by stagnant wages insecure work and poor working conditions and inequality. These are the consequence of political choices not the fault of other working people.

The priority in this plan is clear we must develop or capacity to combat the far-right and support our affiliates to resist all attempts to divide working people whether that is in the workplace or in politics. We need to build solidarity and workers' power.

This Resolution and the Resolution on Democracy are mutually reinforcing, with parallel commitments for comprehensive and coherent trade union actions to defend and strengthen democracy and counter the far-right.

The Executive is requested to adopt this plan and to agree the leadership debate to take place on the day before/ after the June Executive in 2022.