

# MANIFESTO of the INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ANTIFASCIST TRADE UNIONS

*“Freedom is indivisible: the chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them.”*

(Nelson Mandela)

*“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”*

(Art.1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights – United Nations)

1) Independent, free and democratic trade union organisations in every part of the world condemn the resurgence of neo-fascist and far right movements, which have been rising at an alarming rate year after year. Their reference to the worst experiences in our past is increasingly explicit, even when they operate through ‘new’ movements and organisations which in any case draw their inspiration, ideals and goals from that same past.

This trend has taken different forms in each country, depending on the historical background and local social conditions, but all these forms are manifestly rooted in the same denial of universal rights and freedoms, and they are all deeply intertwined at a transnational level: not only in terms of ideas and direct connections, but in their goals, strategies and methods of proselytizing.

2) These movements may well use different names and organizing formats, but they have a lot in common.

They advocate sticking to whatever traditional identity can be explicitly opposed to that of ‘Others’: nationhood, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation...

They promote a return to strict societies, based on the definition of one single model, to be embraced because it is traditional and shared by ‘the majority’. They promote explicit discrimination against (or even the expulsion or elimination of) those ‘minorities’ which do not share that same model.

They threaten democracies by extolling a completely disintermediated system, based on the direct relationship between a ‘strong leader’ and ‘the people’: where ‘the people’ are conceived as an ensemble of separate individuals, not sharing any collective experience of representation, except those based on identity-based ‘values’.

The same principle of disintermediation is applied to the world of labour and of workers’ rights: hence trade unions are finger-pointed as the main enemy, because of their role in civic organisation, social representation and collective response to universal needs.

Be it through coups, violence, murders or attempted murders of trade union leaders, repression, incarceration, or layoffs, it is not by chance that in many parts of the world one of the first initiatives taken by political and military organisations clearly inspired by far-right ideas and beliefs has been to dissolve independent trade union organisations and replace them with state-controlled or fake unions. Labour rights and freedoms are under attack: all attacks against trade union organisations or against individual trade-unionists – at any level – must be met by our response, through immediate solidarity

and a common debate on how to fight against this trend at international, European, national and regional level.

3) There are social causes behind the spreading of such ideas and organisations. Trade unions have been denouncing and combating them for years: because by promoting individualism and rejecting social solidarity such social phenomena undermine the very texture of our society.

The consequences of the systemic crises of the neo-liberal economic and social model have always been dumped on the working class and on poorer people, by gradually downsizing both legal rights and the scope for participation in democratic decision making – be it at national or transnational level.

It happened during the economic crises of the past, in the specific crisis caused by the Covid pandemic, and again now, in the present dramatic geopolitical scenario at international level.

In recent years, labour has been devalued, all forms of inequality have grown, while gender, generational and territorial disparities have been exacerbated; precarious work has become a permanent condition, so much so that employment and poverty can go hand in hand, with the creation of a new class of ‘working poor’. This has led to increasingly unsafe workplaces, where the life of working people is at risk; wealth has become concentrated in the hands of the few, economic and financial power has prevailed over political and State power, thus undermining democracy itself.

Having caused a greater and greater distance between ‘governance’ processes and ‘the governed’, it is public institutions themselves (again, both at national and transnational level) that have created de facto conditions where individual citizens feel left alone in their economic and social malaise and with no power to influence major world phenomena. This makes them more prone to accept far-right propaganda, based as it is on the principle of ‘simple and fast solutions to complex problem’ – such as closing borders or leaving the European Union.

Through extremely sophisticated means of communication and propaganda, right-wing forces are contributing to create a society dominated by a ‘fear of Others’, a society where the real causes of social malaise can always be hidden by blaming an ‘Enemy’; a society where the solution to each and every major problem is more and more to be found at individual level. In such a society, citizens increasingly experience weakness and isolation: which is actually the way through which oppression, manipulation and exploitation of the weaker classes can be perpetuated at best.

4) Free and democratic trade union organisations have always been aware of their fundamental role not only in combating such phenomena and distortions, but in developing different and more advanced social models, based on inclusion, rule of law, equality, justice, worker solidarity.

The key *raison d’être* of our trade union organisations is ensuring that women and men become rights-holders, who can fully exercise those rights both at work and in their lives. The principle of equality is crucial to transform both work organisation and human relations. There are many concrete steps to be taken in order to overcome gender inequalities, including by ensuring that women and men receive equal pay for work of equal value. Collective bargaining at all levels, solidarity, and the right to collective industrial action, are the tools which can enable all workers, through trade union activity, to improve their working conditions and to participate in political, economic and social organising, not only in their own country, but also at transnational level: to assert equal dignity between labour and business, safeguard quality welfare services, and hence achieve real social justice.

Labour, by upholding rights and values, is indeed the true social and economic force within a democracy; it represents human beings moving beyond a merely individual condition, towards a self-

perception as part of a collective and universal experience – an experience which is the same in each and every nation, whatever a person's religion, ethnicity, language, culture, gender and sexual orientation may be.

Such a collective, international, universal dimension is the only one which can provide all women and men with the answers we need in order to overcome injustices and inequalities.

5) These answers are based on the recognition and concrete enforcement of the universal rights upheld by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights – upon which the international system of human rights protection is based – to ensure that they are not mere mission statements, but are actually transposed into laws and behaviours within our societies. Indeed, all societies must be based on those very values of equality, solidarity, justice and inclusion, by ensuring full democratic participation, equal rights and equal opportunities for all, men and women, in each and every part of the world.

To achieve this goal, all workers must enjoy their fundamental labour rights: the right to organise through collective trade union structures, the right to be represented in collective bargaining, the right to freely engage in trade union activities, the right to strike.

This requires transforming and indeed moving beyond the present development model, advancing economic, social and environmental sustainability, struggling against inequalities, leaving behind fragmentation and precariousness in the world of work. It requires ensuring full participation and protection of workers in the global processes of environmental and digital change, including through the right to personal life-long learning, which must be considered as working activity; the creation of universal welfare systems which must provide real and stable support in people's daily lives; and tax justice, ensuring a real and fair distribution of the wealth produced by workers.

Furthermore, it requires that working women and men have a strong say in decision-making about the fate of the companies and organisations where they work, be they private or public.

In this way, through their collective organisation and representation structures, trade unions can give their fundamental contribution to the working and indeed the strengthening of democratic life, both at national and transnational level.

The goal is to bring about inclusive and fair universal development models and – because of the international nature of the world of work – to contribute to a staunch quest for Peace, by enforcing international law as well as through diplomacy and the work of international organisations, the only way to settle global conflicts.

6) Hence, in order to expand and strengthen their action in this direction, trade union organisations from many different countries have decided to formalize their cooperation by creating an **'international network of antifascist trade unions'**, to oppose far-right movements, nationalisms and populisms, dictatorships and all forms of discrimination, exclusion and oppression.

Their joint action will build upon two main cornerstones, both essential and closely interconnected.

The former will entail a sustained set of activities in studying, analysing, exploring and monitoring these issues, in order not only to detect where and how neo-fascist and far-right organisations operate and get organised, but also to pinpoint which social conflicts (at national and multinational level) foster their growth and spread. The contribution of researchers, experts, academics and militants from civic organisations and movements fighting against the extreme right will be crucial to this effort.

The second cornerstone to build upon will be a practice of concrete mutual solidarity actions, ad hoc training and education for union officers and workplace representatives, exchange of 'good practices'

and experiences, launching and promoting both individual specific events and long-term structured processes, as well as common campaigns and communication strategies aimed not only at effectively opposing neo-fascist propaganda, but also at successfully promoting the ideas and values of the labour movement at national, European and international level. Many experiences have already been undertaken both by the trade union movement and by civic movements at international level: they can be a good starting point to develop the work of this new network.