

## **Statement in Support of EPSU's Austrian affiliates**

*Adopted at EPSU Executive Committee 6-7 November 2018, Brussels*

EPSU supports its Austrian affiliates in their continuing struggle to defeat new legislation on working time that has entered into force and against proposals to weaken the social security institutions.

The Austrian Conservative Party (ÖVP) and the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ) government have not hesitated in advancing the employers' agenda by getting people to work longer for less pay by adopting a new law on working time. This new law takes away the overtime allowance for around 1 million workers on flexitime. Employers can demand that employees work up to 12 hours a day but without extra pay for overtime hours. Evidence shows that employers are already putting pressure on workers to work these long hours without the extra pay. Workers fear that they will lose their jobs if they don't comply as the law demands a "willingness" to do the overtime at the risk of dismissal. Workers will have to challenge these decisions in court as the burden of proof lies with them. It is expected that employers will hire more people on flexitime in the near future.

The new law allows a working week of up to 60 hours, making it hard to balance work, free time and family. An overwhelming body of research shows that overtime creates fatigue leading to unsafe conditions at work and more accidents. The law allows employers to define whether 60 hours of work are "necessary". Previously the employer had to seek agreement from the works council; provide serious economic reasons for the long hours; ensure, through a review, that the long hours would not have an impact on occupational health; and notify the social partners and labour inspectorate. The new law thus undermines workplace democracy and information and consultation rights. It will be workers in vulnerable jobs, many women among them, that will be hardest hit by this law. Unions are leading the resistance and, following adoption of the law, are focusing on "repairing" the situation in collective agreements.

At present, the 48-hour maximum set by the EU's Working Time Directive means that workers can only work a 60-hour week on a very limited basis. The development in Austria is worrying for all trade unions across Europe. Austria is setting a negative example and undermining social Europe, especially at a time when it holds the Presidency of the EU Council. It's a step back into the 19th century.

Another legislative initiative of the Austrian conservative-extreme right government is targeted at weakening the role of the trade unions in overseeing social security funds (eg. occupational health, pensions). These funds are currently self-governed by workers' representatives as it is workers who pay into the funds. No real consultations nor negotiations have taken place. The funds are centralised, administrative costs are increasing and the funds risk being privatised.

EPSU will work with its Austrian affiliates to underline how the agenda of the conservative-extreme right is an agenda of the employers and offers neither progress nor protection for working people. We continue to stand in solidarity with Austrian workers in their resistance to these unjust laws.