



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

Speech given by Bernadette Ségol
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(Check against delivery)

President, Delegates,

I am honoured and delighted to address your Congress on behalf of the European Trade Union Confederation. I am a first time speaker to Congress.

In previous congresses the ETUC General Secretary delivered his speech with a Manchester accent.

Today, you will have to adapt to a southern French way of handling your language.

Whatever the accent your campaign call: 'A Future That Works' certainly reflects the aspiration of the workers I meet.

Hardly a day passes without our being asked for support from our affiliates, from the Baltic States to Spain and Portugal; from Ireland to Greece; and throughout Eastern Europe.

The result of austerity policies, deregulation and privatizations is all too clear: rocketing unemployment, economic stagnation, rising inequality, the emergence of a new class of 'precarious' workers and, ultimately, social despair.

This is an explosive cocktail. Leaving aside the social issue, democracy itself is being jeopardised as right-wing nationalists gain ground across Europe.

But Delegates, remember: the European social model including welfare states, decent public services and social dialogue, was a social deal reached in Western Europe after the last War. In Britain it issued from the Beveridge Report and the work of your first post-war Labour Government. In all countries it aimed at preventing a return to the disasters of the 1930s and at bolstering our social democracies in their various forms.

That historical deal is being challenged throughout Europe.

We must meet this challenge.

In June, the ETUC leadership unanimously backed a new Social Compact for Europe. It is now on the table, for discussion. It is also there to mobilise along clear lines our own members and civil society at large.

The new deal we propose is to be based on three pillars: on social democracy; on sustainable economic governance; and on social justice.

In the first pillar - social democracy – we include in particular the respect for collective bargaining and rights at work.

They are at the core of the social compact – its sine qua non. It is totally unacceptable that the so-called Troika can coerce countries under their programmes into tearing up collective agreements, in breach of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and ILO conventions.

In Europe, we have built up a foundation of rights at work through dialogue as well as legislation that we must single-mindedly defend and work to improve.

In your motions I found these foundations: it is TUPE and collective redundancies, working hours and holiday entitlements, health and safety, equality, parental leave, part-time work; fixed-term contracts; agency work; information and consultation. Your Youth Members call them “huge achievements”. They are anchored in EU legislation.

I bet that these legal foundations will be first in the line of fire in the review of European competences announced by the British Foreign Secretary.

Their loss would harm not just British workers since right-wing governments and Employers in Europe would seek to follow the British example.

Delegates,

We have had our reverses. The European Court of Justice’s decisions on Viking, Laval etc. were a serious blow. The Monti II proposal would have made those decisions worse. But we managed to get it on hold under the so-called “yellow card” procedure.

I’m not a football aficionada. That may come the next time the French team wins the world championship. So it may take a while.

I do know what a red card is. Monti II does not deserve a yellow card. It deserves a red one, and, thanks to our efforts, it might well get it soon.

At the same time the ETUC will continue to press for a Social Progress Protocol to ensure that our collective rights are not trumped by economic market freedoms.

The second pillar of our Compact calls for economic governance that serves sustainable growth and quality employment.

We are caught in the austerity trap. Budget cuts deepen the recession; the recession worsens deficits; this prompts governments to redouble austerity measures, attacking social protection systems, wages, labour law and fundamental rights.

We must break out of this vicious circle.

Our social compact is responsive to the will of the people, based on sustainable prosperity through decent, well-paid jobs. It supports coordination of economic policies and investments that promote a low-carbon economy. Our social compact must be a central part of a new European political and institutional framework.

We are encouraged that growth is back on the agenda. Mr Draghi seems to be listening. What we need now is action for growth.

Which brings me to the third pillar of our Compact: economic and social justice, through redistributive taxation policies and social protection.

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher truly let rip on world finance. Since then the share of wealth has slid inexorably from labour towards capital. 8% of Europe's active population now faces extreme poverty. This is a total shame.

The global super-rich elite have exploited gaps in cross-border tax rules to hide as much as the American and Japanese GDPs put together. Since the 2008 financial crisis we have seen the depravity of casino capitalism and the corruption that lay deep in financial conglomerates revealed, bit by bit.

We are calling for a much more determined fight against tax havens.

The Financial Transactions' Tax must be implemented rapidly. There are no national solutions to this. Europe must take the lead.

Proposals are on the table, with the aim of introducing an FTT before the end of the year. Unfortunately some governments are refusing to sign up to this - the UK is to the fore. In December you and I will see the sorry sight of David Cameron, once again, insisting on his red lines of defense around the City, while at the same time, insisting that the integrity of the single financial market be respected.

Delegates, when talking about the world of high finance, the word "integrity" is a bad joke.

President, delegates,

Next year the ETUC will celebrate its 40th anniversary. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the TUC for all the support you have given us during this period.

Our first President, Vic Feather came from the TUC. Together with Jack Jones then Chair of your International Committee, he took a major part in shaping the ETUC. We would have been a quite different organisation if they hadn't worked at it with all the pugnacity you would expect.

Norman Willis was our President during much of the Thatcherite period. Her downfall was caused by the European question highlighted at the TUC by Jacques Delors. Norman, together with Ron Todd, took the TUC in a resolutely European direction.

My predecessor as General Secretary was of course John Monks. In 8 years as ETUC General Secretary he drove the ETUC forward with a fantastic sense of direction, with determination, diplomacy and a unique sense of humour; One slight weakness though: his French remains work in progress. Not sure he is taking lessons in the House of Lords.

Congress, I would like to thank Brendan for all the support he has given the European trade union Movement, and me personally since I have had the privilege to lead the ETUC. Apart from being one of our vice-Presidents, he has chaired our campaign group and given us his invaluable experience for the hard battles ahead.

Brendan, I would like to take this occasion to congratulate the whole British trade union movement on your achievements in regards to the London Olympics. I am French. Take this as a heartfelt compliment.

And of course I now look forward to working with Frances. Tom Jenkins explained to me that, in London, busses were late, but then three of them arrived at the same time. Well, like London busses, women General Secretaries have been late in making it, but you are getting them now. Enjoy.

These are not the easiest of times. But, Frances, I am sure that the TUC is in the best of hands towards "A Future that Works". You can of course count on the ETUC.

All our best wishes for 20 October and well, well beyond.