

ETUC European day of action—a cynical maneuver

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The European day of trade union action to be held Wednesday is a cynical maneuver by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) with one central purpose—to pressure the European business and political elite to involve the trade union bureaucracies in their plans to impose new austerity measures on the working class.

This why the ETUC has planned its action to coincide with a meeting of European Union finance ministers in Brussels.

Any workers taking part in the central demonstration in Brussels, or the scattered protests in other European cities, should realize they are being used by the ETUC leadership to demonstrate that the trade union bureaucracy's services are needed to implement the wage and job cuts being demanded by the corporations and banks.

The most important myth to dispel is that the ETUC is opposed to austerity measures and attacks on workers' jobs and wages.

The central speaker at the rally in Brussels is the general secretary of the ETUC, John Monks. Already in June, Monks declared that there was no alternative to the spending cuts being implemented by governments across Europe to recover the cost of the massive bailout of the banks.

In an interview with the *EUobserver*, Monks reported on his discussion with the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, at the height of the Greek debt crisis. "I had a discussion with Barroso last Friday," he said, "about what can be done for Greece, Spain, Portugal and the rest, and his message was blunt: 'Look, if they do not carry out these austerity packages, these countries could virtually disappear in the way that we know them as democracies. They've got no choice...'"

Monks then made clear he entirely shares Barroso's concern that austerity measures be successfully implemented. "Greece obviously does have to change," he declared. "It has to tighten up... the terms of the EU-IMF bailout are the only terms Greece has got. The country doesn't have a choice. They've got to comply..."

Earlier this month, Monks shared a platform with Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England, who fully supports the draconian cuts planned by the British Conservative-Liberal coalition government and argues that they should be introduced as quickly as possible. The platform was provided by the British TUC.

In his speech to the TUC congress, King expressed his heartfelt thanks for the "huge contribution" made by members of the TUC General Council who sit on the board of the Bank of England. Monks then returned the compliment and reaffirmed the commitment of his organisation to the smooth running of boardroom business. "Let me say that I believe that influence on the boardroom will be better than influence on the picket line as a guide to trade union strategy in the future," Monks said.

Monks was speaking at the TUC congress for the last time in his capacity as leader of the ETUC. Following decades of dedicated service to the British and European bourgeoisie, Monks is due shortly to take his seat in the House of Lords as Lord Monks.

The ETUC functions along the lines of the many other business and special interest lobbies in Brussels. The main concern of the bureaucracy is to obtain lucrative posts on the boards of the continent's major banks and companies for its leading officials. In return, union functionaries offer management their specialist knowledge and years of experience in betraying and

suppressing the struggles of workers.

Workers should reject with contempt any declarations of European solidarity made by speakers at the rallies and demonstrations on Wednesday. In the wake of the financial crisis unleashed by the collapse of Lehman Brothers two years ago, trade unions across the continent have stepped up their efforts to pit workers in different factories, regions or nations against one another.

This is the core of the policy of “defence of workplace locations” (Standortpolitik) refined over decades by the German trade unions and since adopted by unions all over the continent. Based on this corporatist collaboration with the unions, major companies such as GM-Opel have been able to impose the closure of entire factories—most recently the Opel plant in Antwerp.

In today’s capitalist society, unions are a principal means for the promotion of protectionism and national egoism and share responsibility for the recent emergence of new nationalist political movements and parties in many European countries.

Broad layers of the working class in Europe and across the globe quite correctly regard the trade unions with contempt. There are growing indications that the hostility of the working class to the bureaucracy is taking a more conscious form.

Increasingly, workers are recognising that the trade unions represent an obstacle to any struggle in defense of jobs and living standards, and they are beginning to rebel against the bureaucracy. In the course of the recent massive strike by public service workers in South Africa, union leaders were chased out of a meeting in Johannesburg by members for attempting to call off their three-week strike.

In America, an overwhelming majority of workers at the General Motors auto plant in Indianapolis recently voted down a proposal from their trade union for a 50 percent wage cut.

The *World Socialist Web Site* welcomes and encourages these expressions of rebellion against the bureaucracy. Tossing aside the straitjacket of the unions and establishing independent committees and new forms of struggle is an important step toward the unification of the European working class.

On this basis, we completely reject the perspective of a myriad of petty-bourgeois groups such as the New

Anti-Capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, and SYRIZA and Antarsya in Greece, which work as cheerleaders for the bureaucracy and seek to provide a left cover for its corporatist and nationalist perspective.

An effective struggle against austerity policies and the growth of nationalism and militarism throughout Europe cannot be conducted on the basis of seeking to influence this or that section of the business or banking community. The only genuine alternative to the EU of the banks and big business is the mobilization of the working class across Europe on the basis of a socialist perspective to break the power of the monopolies and banks and establish the United Socialist States of Europe.

This is the program advanced by the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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