

MANIFESTO of the INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ANTI-FASCIST TRADE UNIONS

"There is only one freedom: the chains imposed on one of us weigh on the shoulders of all"
(Nelson Mandela)

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"
(Art.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights – UN)

1) The autonomous, free and democratic trade union organisations all over the world denounce - with alarming increase year after year - the resurgence of neo-fascist and extreme right-wing movements. The references to the worst experiences of the past or through 'new' acronyms and movements that draw inspiration, ideas and objectives from that past are becoming increasingly explicit.

It is a phenomenon that is articulated in different ways country by country, according to local historical experiences and social conditions, but it has a clear identical matrix in the denial of universal freedoms and rights and maintains a profound transnational link: not only in relationships and references, but in aims, strategies and recruitment methods.

2) Although they use different names and organisational forms, these movements have common characteristics. They advocate the recall of any traditional identity element explicitly opposed to 'others': nationhood, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation...

They advocate a return to rigid societies, based on the definition of a single model accepted because it is traditional and 'majority', promoting the explicit discrimination (if not expulsion or elimination) of 'minorities' not belonging to that model.

They undermine democracies through the exaltation of a totally disintermediated system, built in the direct 'strong leader-people' relationship, imagining the people as a set of individuals not bound to any collective experience of representation, other than those referred to those characterising identity 'values'.

The same principle of disintermediation is applied to the world of labour and workers' rights: where the trade union is pointed at as the main enemy precisely because of its function of civil aggregation, social representation and collective response to universal needs.

It is no coincidence that in many countries of the world, through coups or with violence, political and military organisations of clear extreme right-wing matrix have - among their first steps - dissolved the autonomous trade unions and replaced them with regime or convenience trade unions.

3) The spread of such ideas and organisations has social causes that trade union organisations have been denouncing and fighting for years.

The consequences of the systemic crises of the neo-liberal economic and social model have always been poured onto the shoulders of the working and popular classes, progressively shrinking both the space of law and of participation in the democratic life of decision-making processes - national or transnational.

This happened in the economic crises of the past few years, in the one brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, and is happening now in the dramatic international geopolitical conjuncture.

In recent years, work has been devalued, increasing all inequalities and exacerbating generational, gender and territorial gaps; job insecurity has become an eternal present, to the point that one is poor even while working. This has led to making workplaces themselves increasingly unsafe, putting the lives of working people at risk; wealth has thus been concentrated in the hands of the few, economic and financial power has prevailed over politics and states, thus weakening democracy.

Indeed, by making the mechanisms of governance ever more distant from the 'governed', the same institutions (again: national and transnational) have in fact created the conditions for the individual citizen to feel alone in his or her own socio-economic malaise, powerless in the face of major world phenomena and, therefore, more inclined to adhere to the propaganda of the extreme right - based on the principle of a 'simple and immediate answer to complex problems', such as closing borders or leaving the European Union.

By means of extremely sophisticated communication and propaganda tools, right-wing forces thus contribute to creating a society dominated by 'fear of the other', where they always point to an 'enemy' to conceal the real causes of social malaise and where the response to major issues is increasingly individual and, consequently, the condition of the citizen is more and more isolated and weak: so that the mechanism of overpowering, manipulation and exploitation of the weaker classes can, in reality, be perpetuated.

4) Free and democratic trade unions have always been aware of their fundamental role not only in combating these phenomena and drifts, but in building different and more advanced social models based on inclusiveness, law, equality, justice and solidarity in the world of work.

For our trade unions, the fundamental reason for existing is to make women and men subjects with rights that are realised in their lives and work. This is not simply in a logic of equality but by assuming gender difference, with the aim of transforming both the organisation of work and the relations and relationships between people. Collective bargaining, at all levels, and solidarity are the tools that can enable women and men workers, through trade union action, to improve their working conditions and to participate in political, economic and social organisation not only in their own countries, but also in the transnational dimension: to affirm equal dignity between work and business and, therefore, to build real social justice.

In fact, it is Labour with its wealth of values and rights that is the real social and economic force of a democracy; it is the dimension of the human being that goes beyond the individual condition and opens up to the recognition of oneself as belonging to a collective, universal experience - which is the same in any nation, whatever one's religion, ethnicity, language, culture, gender and sexual orientation.

A collective and international dimension, therefore, universal, the only one capable of constructing for all and everyone the answers necessary to overcome injustice and inequality.

5) These responses pass through the recognition and concrete implementation of universal rights as entrenched in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights - from which the international system of human rights protection developed - so that they do not remain mere declarations of intent but live on in the laws and behaviour of our societies. Societies that are based precisely on those values of equality, solidarity, justice and inclusion - through the realisation of full democratic participation, equal rights and equal opportunities for all - anywhere in the world.

This requires that the fundamental trade union rights of workers are guaranteed everywhere: the right to organise in collective trade union structures, the right to representation in bargaining, the right to freedom of trade union activities, the right to strike.

This requires overcoming and transforming this development model, affirming economic, social and ecological sustainability, combating inequalities, get over fragmentation and precariousness in the world of work; guaranteeing the full involvement and protection of women and men workers in the global processes of ecological and digital transformation - including through the right to lifelong education recognised precisely as a work activity; building welfare mechanisms that are of real and continuous support in the daily lives of those who work; and realising a tax justice that truly redistributes the effects of the wealth produced by those who work.

This requires that workers have a strong say in the choices that are made by and for the companies and structures in which they work, whether public or private.

Through their collective and representative dimension, trade union forces can thus give their fundamental contribution to the development and strengthening of the democratic life of individual countries and transnational bodies.

In order to realise inclusive and fair universal development models and - precisely because of the international nature of the world of work - to contribute to the pervasive search for Peace through the application of international standards, diplomacy and the action of international bodies as the only solution to global conflicts.

6) To expand and strengthen their action in this regard, trade union organisations from different countries therefore decided to formalise their cooperation in an 'international network of anti-fascist trade unions', against extreme right-wing movements, nationalism and populism, dictatorships and against all forms of discrimination, exclusion and oppression.

The joint work will develop along two fundamental and closely connected pillars.

The first through constant work of study, analysis, research, monitoring, which will make it possible to identify not only the places and ways in which neo-fascist and far-right organisations organise themselves and act, but which will also address the nodes of the various social conflicts (national and supranational) that then determine their birth and spread. The contribution of researchers, experts, academics and militants of associations and realities committed to the fight against the extreme right will be fundamental.

The second through concrete actions of mutual solidarity, construction of training paths for trade unionists and delegates, exchange of 'good practices' and experiences, promotion of initiatives characterised by both specific single events and structured paths, activation and promotion of common and effective communication campaigns and strategies not only to counter neo-fascist propaganda, but to promote the ideas and values of labour at national, European and international level. The Roadmap drawn up by the ETUC, the work of the REDES network and many other experiences already gained in the international field constitute a good starting point for the launch of the network's work.