



# **Global challenges for Labour**

- **Institutions for economic global governance – which kind of institutions are needed from a trade union point of view and how to achieve it?**
- **Employment and wages in a global economy – how to respond against downward pressures?**

**Call for Papers**

**International Workshop in Kassel (Germany)**

**5./6.April 2006**

## **Workshop background**

The Global Labour University<sup>1</sup> is a network of trade unions and universities that aims at facilitating research, debate and qualification programmes in order to address global labour issues. At its annual workshop in 2006 trade unionists and scholars are invited to present papers and discuss the challenges for organised labour as outlined in the two lead questions.

Unions around the world operate in a complex and rapidly changing environment. In response to the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century organised labour fought for (labour) legislation and welfare provisions to make the ruthless dynamic of a free market compatible with a democratic and inclusive society. Especially in the industrialised countries this struggle has been remarkably successful within many nation states during the second half of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the new wave of globalisation is eroding the regulatory capacity of the nation state and the capacity of trade unions to defend social achievement at this level. Deminishing labour rights and welfare provisions, informalisation of employment relations and growing inequality in most countries are calling for internationally coordinated responses to global problems.

### **A) Institutions for global governance – what is needed from a trade union point of view and how to achieve it ?**

The rules of economic global governance as promulgated in multilateral agreements and international organizations such as IMF, World Bank, World Intellectual Property Organisation etc. are increasingly influencing the living conditions of the working classes and the political powers of their representatives around the world. One recent example is the GATS, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, which is an instrument to privy open state regulated services to foreign suppliers. In general, this leads to fewer employment opportunities in the state sector, lower labour standards for those still employed, less access for the poor and a weakening of an ever more important part of the labour movement, the unions of public employees. Despite the impact of those multilateral agreements on the working classes, labour issues were not sufficiently reflected at the bargaining tables. Even those governments that rely heavily on organized labour for election victories do not advance a labour agenda in the policy discussions in preparation for multilateral bargaining rounds. But the fault does not rest solely with the governments, the labour movement, with some notable exceptions, has 'underinvested' in developing its own voice on international economic governance. As a result the rules of global capitalism are moving towards a neoliberal constitutionalism that privileges private ownership rights over national sovereignty and the rights of the producers and consumers.

At the workshop we want to start redressing this exclusion of labour issues from international economic governance. We therefore look for papers that

- a) Systematically analyse the impact of economic global governance on working conditions and the political influence of trade unions (preferably in a comparative fashion);
- b) analyse past or current attempts of trade unions to influence global economic rules making or – vice versa – how trade unions have been kept out of the policy loops;
- c) develop alternatives to the current rules with a focus on the interests of labour;

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<sup>1</sup> The Global Labour University is an open network initiated by universities and national trade union centers from Brazil (University of Campinas/ Central Única dos Trabalhadores), Canada (Universities of York and McMaster/ Canadian Labour Congress), Germany (Berlin School of Economics/University of Kassel/ Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund/Hans Böckler Foundation and DGB Bildungswerk), Malaysia (National University of Malaysia, Malaysian Trade Union Congress), South Africa (University of Witwatersrand/ Congress of South African Trade Unions, UK (University of Cardiff), Global Unions, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation .

- d) explore ways to make labour more influential in economic global governance.

## **B) Employment and wages in a global economy – how to respond to downward pressure**

The globalisation process has intensified competition without resulting in strong global growth. This has increased the pressure on companies to reduce costs and employment. While millions of people in particular in China and India have been lifted out of poverty, inequality between and within most countries is growing. Employment becomes more precarious and many workers see their real income falling.

On company level unions often see no alternative to “concession bargaining” as they often face the choice between closure or concession. Therefore employment and wage policies beyond the company level are of key importance to respond to the current exclusionary policies.

At the workshop we want to look at conceptual and practical responses for organised labour to create employment and achieve fair income distribution and look for papers that

- a) analyse the impact of globalisation and increased competition on employment and wages;
- b) analyse the impact of the global monetary and exchange rate regimes and their impact on wages and employment in particular in commodity producing countries;
- c) develop new approaches for coordinated wage/income policies and employment creation in open economies and beyond the nation state.

### **Format**

The workshop will bring together an international group of scholars and trade unionists. It will feature working groups, paper presentations, and panel discussions involving both academics and trade unionists. Papers will be presented mainly in small interactive working groups to allow for in-depth discussion and development of ideas for possible future research and cooperation. A selective number of papers will be published in the 2006 GLU Yearbook.

Proposals for papers should be sent until the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2005 to:

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The proposals should give the rough structure of the paper and outline the main idea.

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