

1 May 2014:

To reverse the trend and find the lost thread of social progress,  
the role of trade unions is irreplaceable

Since its inception (1886 Chicago, USA), the May Day or International Workers' Day has had as its central claim **the reduction of working time**: Eight hours labour, Eight hours recreation, Eight hours rest. Whereas throughout a turbulent world history the struggle of unions has been able to achieve and go beyond this goal, employers managed, on the pretext of the financial crisis of 2008, to remove from workers a series of improvements they had achieved.

In the 80s, an increase in hours of work, presented as a 'natural' counterpart of **job cuts**, would have been unthinkable for the Community institutions, which were seriously developing the issue of reducing working hours as a means to stem the scourge of unemployment. Today's Europe is doing exactly the opposite!

When an agreement between the three institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council) on the reform of the Staff Regulations was reached in June 2013, the Commission proudly presented that agreement to the press under the heading 'Austerity measures': it referred in particular to extending the working time per week, per year and throughout the working life; and to letting employees hope to get a – probably incomplete – pension not before the age of 66; to making savings on the weaker layers by lowering their level of recruitment and raising new barriers to careers; and by keeping, for contract staff, salaries below the social minimum wage in Luxembourg, thus practising social dumping.

It is the neoliberal grip on Europe which, through austerity-driven counter-reforms, feeds the various anti-European trends, including the extreme right. European institutions, led by neoliberals, are involved in unprecedented direct attacks against collective labour rights, salaries, pensions and employment conditions of public service workers, and against the social and political role of unions. Thus, for example, the recent reform of the Staff Regulations of the EU was adopted without negotiation with the trade unions.

The brutal austerity policies are both unfair and inefficient. EPSU -CJ, the union representing the staff of the Court of Justice, reaffirms its commitment to the construction of a social Europe in which sustainable development, high-standard public services, full employment, workers' rights, the well-being of the citizens and the welfare state occupy a central place. Since the end of 2008, the public service unions have undergone continuous attacks by governments and other public-sector employers while austerity policies are imposed across Europe. Of course, the European public service could not be immune to these attacks, as some want "less Europe", while others are forced to defend their own "credibility" by showing "consistency" between what they impose on the Member States and what they practise on themselves.

It is urgent for Europe to break this vicious circle, which, by destroying its most precious achievement, the **European social model**, is feeding the forces which put forward nationalist and identity issues, up to and including racial hatred, and is denying the very foundations on which Europe was originally built: rejecting war and refusing fascism<sup>1</sup>.

A strong and democratic union movement is consistent with our vision of **a different Europe**. In this project for a fairer, more inclusive and more democratic society, trade unions play an irreplaceable role. Especially since the stakes are high: it is about finding the forces necessary to repair the damage brought about by the recent counter-reform.

This effort begins in the field of your workplace, through your support and participation in the democratic union that gives meaning to solidarity at down-to-earth while bearing in mind the overall movement of history. By joining EPSU -CJ, you strengthen your own ability to improve your situation in a more humane public service serving all citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> [Lucien Wercollier](#), whose sculpture is exhibited in the premises of the Court of Justice, was himself a political prisoner.