

A message to Davos

By Guy Ryder, Conny Reuter and Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, published in *Le temps* (Switzerland), 23 January 2007

This week two events will take place, each exploring the state of the world, but coming from different viewpoints. One, the World Social Forum (WSF) in Nairobi will discuss the way in which the global economy is resulting in increased poverty and inequality and placing greater and greater obstacles in the way of achieving decent work for the millions in desperate need of it. The other, the World Economic Forum will deal with new economic drivers but without enough attention to the real effects these have on people. No doubt, there will be discussion of how to revive the stalled Doha round and what to do with the IMF's identity crisis. But if history is any pointer, those conversations will pay little heed to the types of issues raised at the WSF.

This disconnection between the corporate business agenda on the one hand and civil society on the other is increasingly threatening to prosperity. Whilst the economy is global, it is at the local ballot box that people pass their judgement and the reality is simply that for all the talk of five years of economic growth the trends in the world of work are not improving. Far from it. Unemployment is on the rise and growth is increasingly jobless; a still larger part of the world's population is underemployed or underpaid; real wages are stagnating and declining, and workers' remuneration in total make up a diminishing share of national economies; welfare is being cut on a grand scale, particularly where it is employer provided; collective bargaining is under more and more pressure; casual work, based on temporary, agency and part time contracts, is surging; employment relationships are in general weakening, with a growing number of them being disguised and ambiguous and the so called informal economy is surging.

At the World Social Forum we will launch a joint campaign for Decent Work for a Decent Life. Under the auspices of the campaign, the Decent Work Alliance (which consists of the International Trade Union Confederation, Social Alert International, European Trade Union Confederation, Solidar and Global Progressive Forum), will mobilise young people at a summit to coincide with the G8 meeting in June this year in order to send a clear message to politicians that the lack of decent work for young people must be a global political priority. We will take the same message to the world forum of the International Labour Organisation. We will also join with Building Workers' International in pressuring FIFA and the South African government to ensure that all construction work undertaken in the lead up to the 2010 World Cup is carried out under decent working conditions.

Unless the quality and quantity of work improves, we can forget about sustainable development and poverty alleviation, not to mention popular support for trade. The structural changes that have taken place over the last decades and the global challenges we face today require a whole new set of policies to ensure decent work is the general experience instead of the exception in people's working lives throughout the world.

Globalisation must be managed by strong international co-operation and governance to maximise sustainable jobs and sustainable economic growth. It must function to the advantage of working people, the unemployed, and the poor. The deterioration of work at the start of the 21st century must be countered if we are not to suddenly find ourselves

in a global jobs-crisis with devastating costs and consequences for our societies and our industries. This is the message we will take from Nairobi to Davos - we hope it will not fall on deaf ears.

On behalf of the Decent Work Alliance
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