



NEWS

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR WORKERS' QUESTIONS • NO. 2 / 2010

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EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

2011 will attract attention as the "European Year of Volunteering". This is a good decision by the European institutions. For ages voluntary work has been a feature of Christian commitment, handed down from generation to generation like a baton: many young and elderly people are involved in it. It is a very valuable activity, a service to mankind, for society and without any expectation of receiving payment. In Germany one in three people has an honorary function – that is an incredibly huge resource for our society.

This figure will now increase even more: the Confederation of German Trade Unions has just decided at its conference to use volunteers in future for assisting members in every town and municipality. However, this decision was taken because of a lack of funding caused by losses of members. As volunteering lives primarily on "conviction for the cause", it can perfectly well undergo a fruitful symbiosis even without funds. Every organisation should ask itself this question. For EZA itself this has always been a key to success.

Volunteers help turn "You" into "We". That is what we need urgently in every EU country. We very much want voluntary work to attain a greater degree of social recognition - and, it is to be hoped, well beyond 2011.

*Yours,
Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary General*

EZA's mission – more important now than ever

The European Union is currently in a difficult situation – politically, economically and socially. This is the opportunity for EZA to set a benchmark, to point up a direction, arising from the mission that over 60 member organizations from 24 European countries have entrusted EZA with: to help shape stronger social cohesion in order to ensure the solidarity of European society as a whole.

As an education and training network of Christian-social workers' organizations, today EZA underscores the importance of social dialogue more than ever. The main aim of its work is to defend the European social model in these times of crisis and to develop it in qualitative terms, as well as having a say in shaping the change and modernisation of the labour market from a workers' perspective.

Education and training work carried out by social partners, such as EZA, strives for greater European integration. It is in tune with the aims of the Lisbon Treaty and the Treaty on Functioning of the European Union.

The dialogue between the social partners is a key factor in upholding and consolidating democracy. It must therefore be able to unite economic, social and political interests on a European level, and for this reason attain greater significance than it has at present. ■

EZA Project on the financial and economic crisis: concluding assessment



Plenary discussion at the final conference of the EZA project on the financial and economic crisis entitled "The social dimension of the financial, economic and employment crisis – consequences and demands for workers' organisations?" held in Berlin

Following the regional conferences held as part of this project and their evaluation, and after the final conference entitled "The social dimension of the financial, economic and employment crisis – consequences and demands for workers' organisations?" held in Berlin in March, we now have the assessment of the project.

Besides answering the questions discussed, which are the biggest (social) problems caused by the crisis in the different regions, and how these problems can be solved in the long run with the help of workers' organisations, whether the social partners and civil society organisations in the different regions were involved in elaborating national and

European economic programmes, how the future role of the social partners can be strengthened, and how sustainable growth, long-term employment and responsible action within the EU can be achieved taking social justice and a fair redistribution of social benefits into account, the final report also contains concrete recommendations to workers' organizations for action.

In addition to concrete approaches to action for workers' organizations with regard to workers, companies and state bodies, the focus is on achieving sustainable reform of the financial system, supporting the war on poverty on a European and world level, improving the social dialogue and the possibilities for workers' organizations to shape the "EU 2020 Strategy".

The issues at the heart of the final conference, such as the social dimension of state measures to overcome the crisis, the increase in social inequality during the crisis, the possibility of ethical investments for workers' organizations, and the creation of sustainable employment for workers are likewise included in the final document. ■

Fourth Conference on the State of the Welfare State

The provisional conclusions of the conference, which was organised by HIVA and held in Leuven, Belgium, from 19 to 20 April 2010, are clear. In the five years preceding the financial and economic crisis, the welfare state developed in the same direction as before. Progress was achieved or announced in many countries. But the trend observed in the new EU member states in 2005, that of approaching the old member states, seems to be a thing of the past. It is also clear that the welfare state has initially survived the crisis. It has helped diminish the impact of the crisis for the people of Europe. At the same time, though, it has heightened the crisis of public budgets. The consolidation of budgets could develop into the greatest

current and future threat to the welfare state, if not perhaps out of sheer necessity then as a pretext for reforms already planned before the crisis. In some countries far-reaching measures for dismantling the welfare state have been announced, and those are not even the countries worst hit by the crisis. Even though the welfare state has helped us overcome the crisis, it is possible it will not survive the crisis itself. If the social movements are aware of this, they may be able to prevent it and take suitable measures. How they can do this will have to be demonstrated at the next conference on the subject, being held on 20/21 April 2015.

The full conference programme is available on the project website at

http://hiva.kuleuven.be/resources/pdf/activiteiten/20100419-20_folder.pdf

The conclusions of the EZA Financial and Economic Crisis project were also presented at the conference. The full list of the proposals can be downloaded from the project website:

http://www.eza.org/aktuell/news/eza-projekt-zum-thema-finanz-und-wirtschaftskrise.html?tx_jppageteaser_pi1%5BbackId%5D=127 Jozef Pacolet, HIVA ■

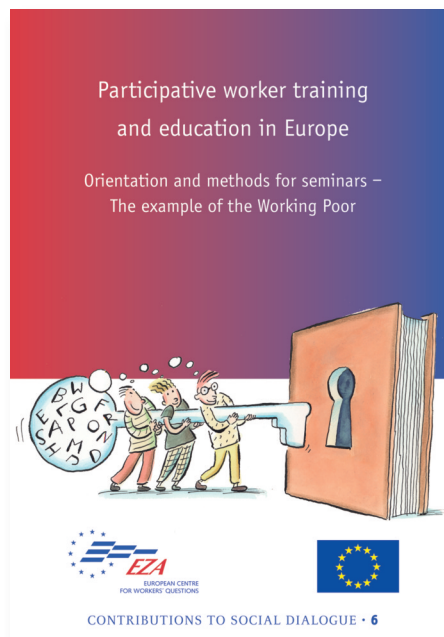
Using research results in workers training – which method guarantees a high level of participation?

Pointing up methods for using the results of scientific studies on European social dialogue issues in EZA's education and training seminars was the aim of the "Transformation of Research into Education and Training" project.

The idea for the project was developed by Hubert Cossey, former director of HIVA. The starting point was a scientific article on the issue of the 'working poor' by Johan Wets, a researcher at HIVA, which is available in English on the EZA website along with other seminar materials. Every method is presented with the example of this highly topical issue in Europe.

Participants can increase their knowledge during a seminar with the example of a Need2know document (drawing up a paper with every essential aspect of a topic) or a study table with materials on the topic in several languages.

Starting up a seminar topic by means of pictures, or a "house of camps" (the seminar-goers conduct a discussion with two



camp, similar to the British House of Parliament) are examples of methods that broaden and deepen context and awareness.

Writing a future history on the topic or transposing a problem into a totally different context are ways of improving the participants' ability to act in everyday life and enhancing the transfer from seminar into practice.

Under the aegis of the three authors Eva-Maria Antz, Wilfried Wiene and Jos Kooman, a pool of innovative methods has been created to promote the participative education and training of workers in Europe. The text, which also represents a further development of the manual on improving the quality of international seminars for workers' organisations, appears in ten different European languages in the "Contributions to the Social Dialogue" series and can be requested from EZA: eza@eza.org.

Change the world, it needs it

The 4th European Social Week, which took place in Bad Honnef, Germany, from 15 to 17 April 2010, focused on the issue "New times. What future will we opt for? Work. Social cohesion. Leadership". The following points were addressed:

A comparison of the economic situation, demographic figures, unemployment, poverty and precarious working conditions in the world and in the European Union shows that the social redistribution has failed. The rich become richer and richer, the poor poorer and poorer. The moment has come to learn lessons from the financial and economic crisis, as it has proven spectacularly that the market must not be left to its own devices. The market is as ever the best place for social redistribution between rich and poor. To this end we need a renaissance of the social market economy, i.e. an economic system based on values. Only then can we combine the efficiency of the market with equal opportunities.

Used properly, globalisation offers the opportunity to correct social inequalities

from the bottom up. This is only possible if the race for profitability stops and common sense regains the upper hand. Man must be restored as the focal point of economic thinking. Labour must take precedence over capital!

This can only be achieved if we are active. "Change the world, it needs it", that was Bertold Brecht's call. It is in this context that the European Social Weeks represent a valuable contribution by the Christian social players in Europe to the age after the crisis.

Robert Weber

Chairman of the 4th European Social Week

National President of the LCGB

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