

Industrial Europe Declaration on the situation in Austria

There has been a clear shift to the right in Europe since the last Congress of industriAll Europe 2016 in Madrid. Nationalist parties are growing stronger, fuelling fears with xenophobic slogans and thereby attracting votes, not only in the new Member States such as Hungary and Poland but also in Western Europe. The bottom line for this dangerous development has been the failed neo-liberal economic policy of the EU, which has fuelled anti-European resentment through deregulation and austerity measures at the expense of its workers and the socially disadvantaged.

Austria took over the Presidency of the EU Council at this critical stage in the European Union for the third time after 1998 and 2006 in July 2018-. Austria's economic performance puts it in the fourth highest place in terms of value in the EU, and Austria is also in the lead in relation to disposable income and a well-developed welfare state. The basis for quality business locations are fair and good working conditions through high collective bargaining coverage and balance of interests between employees and employers. This success model of the Austrian social partnership is now endangered by the right-wing conservative federal government in Austria, which has been in office since 2017, because it is trying to impose a neoliberal agenda in favour of capital assets and large companies, including:

- Massive redistribution from bottom to top (cancellation and reduction of benefits for migrants and the long-term unemployed) while at the same time favouring higher incomes
- Reduction of corporate taxation and abolition of labour law controls for companies
- "Reforms" of self-managed social insurance schemes with caps on expenditure and power shifts in favour of employers, eventually paving the way for privatization of health care provisions
- Disempowerment of trade unions, company-level worker representation, as well as legal representation of interests (Chamber of Labour)

One of the Government's first measures concerned the changes in the working time law, which permits a daily working time of 12 hours or 60 hours per week without the consent of the works council as from 1st September 2018.

The Austrian trade unions have organised massive resistance to this deterioration since the summer. In the current pay round in the metal industries, for instance, which opened on 20 September, PRO GE has put forward demands not only for adequate wage increases, but also for compensation for longer working hours through higher bonuses and easier access to the 6th week of annual holiday and longer periods of time off

The participants in the Mid-term Conference support the demands of the Austrian trade unions and will resolutely organise resistance against actions by neo-liberal governments in Europe to weaken trade unions and employee representative organizations. They will work together for a social Europe, also with a view to the spring elections to the European Parliament, in order to deprive the right-wing populists of power.

They are resolutely opposed to the rise of xenophobic, nationalist, anti-European forces and right-wing extremism in Europe.