

FIM CISL Lombardia – 5 April 2025

Congress, friends,

It's an honour to be able to join you today on behalf of the 7 million manufacturing, mining and energy workers organised in industriAll Europe.

Across Europe, workers in industrial sectors are grappling daily with harsh realities: restructuring, factory closures, delayed investment, and reduced demand driven by austerity measures and the cost-of-living crisis.

By any standard, Europe's industrial base is experiencing extraordinary pressures: strategic dependencies on components and energy, heightened tensions across the Atlantic, and the demands of a massive economic transformation.

Meanwhile, we see some multinationals pursuing profit maximisation strategies – squeezing workers even further and stripping value out of our industries through excessive dividends and share buyback schemes.

I want to particularly recognise the role that FIM, together with FIOM and UILM, has played in calling for a united European response to this reality.

At your united request – on the 5 February this year, 6000 workers came to Brussels from north, south, east and west with a united call: it's the time to act. To act for Good Industrial Jobs. Your green flags and vests were highly visible.

The united approach from the Italian metal unions to tackling the challenges we face is an example for others. We stand in full solidarity with your united strikes for renewal of the Italian sectoral collective agreement, mostly recently last week.

Your congress places the emphasis on the importance of participation – of bargaining – of taking responsibility for our

own destiny. This is the most fundamental of our shared values: that workplace democracy is the bedrock of social stability and peace.

This is a crossroads moment in history. Attacks on trade unions and our values are becoming increasingly coordinated.

We face substantial attacks on some of recent gains that we have made at European level. Recent union wins for gig economy workers, higher minimum wages and supply chain transparency and responsibility in Europe. Rules that are still to be effectively implemented, and are already under-attack from a deregulation agenda under the guise of 'simplification'. In the context of massive lobbying from multinational companies, particularly from the US, this week the European Parliament will likely support the delay of the new EU human rights due diligence framework and sustainability reporting.

The attacks have also increased at national and local levels.

The latest Global Trade Union Rights Index 2024 produced by the International Trade Union Confederation, charts the increasing attacks and threats facing European workers' rights and trade unions. These attacks have been accompanied by a rise in authoritarianism and malign corporate influence on politics.

Even the Nordic countries who were long seen as beacons for a political and industrial democracy which delivered stability, competitiveness and social fairness are under attack. From Tesla workers in Sweden (and Germany), to the wholesale attack on collective bargaining and workers rights in Finland. These changes are familiar to workers in Hungary, where the right to strike has been significantly restricted by Viktor Orbán's authoritarian government.

This hasn't happened in a vacuum. Hyper-globalisation has fuelled a historic weakening of organised labour. In Europe, the

post-war consensus on welfare has been undermined from within and without. Multinational companies have been able to create extended global supply chains which have undermined the bargaining leverage of workers in every site. The resulting declines in the wage share, and falling or stagnating real wages, have allowed skyrocketing profits.

Austerity measures have stripped welfare safety nets bare, increased precarious work and undermined labour inspectorates, with fatal work accidents increasing in nearly half of EU member states. Austerity not only has an economic cost but political consequences.

We are embarked on an energy and industrial revolution, while war wages in Europe, which is testing the strength of our democratic structures. By every metric, the decline in respect for democratic rights at work tracks closely with the decline in economic equality and a rise in political instability. Workers' rights are the canary in the democratic mine.

There is no "business as usual" approach. Europe needs to urgently resolve the economic and social insecurity that lies behind growing anger and fear in our societies.

Yesterday's failed recipes of austerity, labour-market flexibility and privatisation will only exacerbate the problems we face. The embrace of short-termism by multinational corporations – through cost-cutting, excessive dividends and share buybacks over reinvestment of profits – has further undermined our industries' dynamism and resilience.

Fortunately, another way is possible.

Strong democracy at work has proved its economic worth. Countries with a high level of democracy at work have higher employment rates, better wages and income equality, higher productivity per employee and a higher share of GDP devoted to R&D. Meanwhile, companies with effective democracy at

work and trade union involvement do better socially and environmentally, are more resilient to external shocks, invest more and lead on sustainability. What's not to like?

Investment and industrial democracy are antidotes to our economic instability. Europe needs an industrial policy fit for the challenges of our time, bound with social conditionalities on all public funding and procurement that ensure the maintenance and creation of good quality jobs and worker participation from plant to international levels.

A strong and united trade union movement is a prerequisite.

Congress, stronger collective bargaining is the way forward to ensure that Europe's workers are not left behind in the ongoing industrial crisis and the twin green and digital transition. Just Transition is key to deliver on an ambitious industrial policy, and collective bargaining is essential in ensuring that workers are involved in the anticipation and management of change, sitting at the table where decisions about their future are made.

And when we are united we are heard – through the cacophony of industry calls for deregulation.

The Commission's Clean Industrial Deal published on 26 February (after our rally in Brussels) acknowledges our analysis — declining demand, stalled investment, reduced industrial capacity, and soaring energy costs — which have resulted in tens of thousands of job losses. 90,000 automotive job cuts announced since June 2024. According to Eurostat, up to 4.3 million jobs are now at risk unless immediate action is taken. The Commission has called for social conditionalities and a proactive industrial plan.

Nevertheless, the proposed measures lack both urgency and the necessary funding.

This inadequacy is all the more striking compared to the "Rearm Europe" initiative, which was put on the table at speed

after Zelenskyy was accosted in the Oval Office. Here the EU has proposed unlocking €800 billion and, crucially, activating the EU's national escape clause to exempt military expenditure from the revised EU fiscal rules

Following the European Council's decision on 6 March to relax fiscal constraints for defence spending, it is clear that the existing economic governance framework needs to be changed. Rightly, the European Trade Union Confederation has called for a full suspension and thorough reassessment of these fiscal rules.

Potentially things are moving. The decision in Berlin within the new coalition government unleashes public aid for the renewal of the energy and transport infrastructure, as well as military spending. While a Spanish proposal in European Council to do the same across Europe was rejected, the number of national governments raising our concerns is growing.

Congress, as in any of our struggles as a movement, we have never been given something easily. We have collectively mobilised and fought for our wins – and that's what we must continue to do together.

This demands the strengthening of our alliances – redoubling our action.

In June, industriAll Europe will hold its Congress in Budapest in June (just shortly after the national FIM-CISL Congress). Our theme is 'uniting for an industriAll future' – our draft work plan for the next 4 years focuses on how we will build trade union power for strong and sustainable industries, for fair wages and better working conditions, for solidarity and peace, and to ensure union renewal. Exactly the themes which are on your agenda today and in the coming months.

A new social contract is urgently needed with government and industry, and it must bring dividends for working people, giving

them a stake in decision-making as masters of their own destiny.

This is how we defend democracy at the workplace, in our societies and globally.

We are the generation who must step up in this struggle.