



TRADE UNIONISM OF THE AMERICAS AND THE DEFENSE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL TRADE UNIONISM IN THE WORLD

1. Introduction

The criterion of truth is practice. Discussions and commitments must be translated into action. We must practice what we propose and analyze in our speeches, theses, formulations.

Based on this principle, we are not going to propose anything to the ITUC that we are not already doing in the Americas. At least we are trying, the achievements will be seen, but we are trying. We are not giving a prescription, much less classes, we are sharing our vision and what we are doing in the Americas.

This is a proposal that we want to present to the ITUC, to contribute to the formulations of its 5th Congress, and we hope that it can be included in its preparations. It is not a proposal against any candidate. We do not do politics with hate. We make politics with ideas, proposals and actions.

Today we present our proposals democratically constructed in the TUCA and discussed in our international seminar: "The Challenges of International Trade Unionism and Sociopolitical Trade Unionism in Post-Pandemic Times", as a contribution to the discussions at the ITUC.

2. General characteristics of the world situation

The crisis did not start with the pandemic, it intensified, with greater impacts on the working class, labor relations, public policies.

The future of work was already precarious and with lack of rights, with the pandemic to leave a balance that we, workers, are paying.

The health crisis exposed a privatized, exclusive and unequal social protection system, which ignores care work, which is mainly women's responsibility.



The digitization of the economy, entrepreneurship, industrialization 4.0 disregard work as the center of society, production and economic activity, undermining class identity and our organization. The most perverse aspect is not informality, it is trying to remove our class identity. They treat us as entrepreneurs and collaborators, not as workers. Youth do not see themselves as exploited workers, they believe they are entrepreneurs.

We face a great challenge: war and geopolitical polarization also affect labor relations and leave workers bearing the greatest cost of the conflicts.

It is not only the loss of thousands of lives, injuries, refugees, destruction of production infrastructure in the disputed territories. They are also the effects on the global economic system: causing food shortages, rising fuel prices, inflation and thousands of negative effects for workers.

Production organized in Global Production Chains aggravates the conditions of informality and precariousness in the global South, with weak labor laws and the complicity of governments that legislate in favor of transnational companies and corporate capital. The laws are not democratic, they favor capital.

The trade union movement must commit to a more forceful action against the behavior of transnational companies, recognizing the need for binding instruments on business and human rights, as tool to defend our rights.

The reform of the United Nations system and multilateralism cannot jeopardize the possibilities of building democratic forms of participation for trade unions and social movements. The definition of "civil society" that is being proposed often allows the representation of interests contrary to the workers. Corporate interest cannot be privileged.

Inequalities persist and deepen: gender, generations, against migrants, xenophobia, racism. Workers who are discriminated against are victims of double or triple oppression as a consequence of a society that reproduces values of exclusion.

The advance of conservatism results in forms of neo-fascism and attacks on democracy throughout the world. The elections in France, in Brazil, in Colombia, in the Philippines are a reflection of the risk of advancement of the extreme right



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in the face of demands of peoples who reject neoliberalism and also open up the possibility of progressive governments. We hope to win in those countries.

The environmental crisis is one of the greatest challenges we face as humanity. We are committed to a transition from an excluding and corporate energy system to one that puts work and life at its center. An energy system that recognizes the right to energy.

We defend the need for a new social contract; for us, this means changing model as a necessary step towards sustainable development with social and environmental justice, how we contribute based on PLADA.

3. The trade union movement must give visibility and organize workers around the world.

The strengthening and transformation of trade unions must become a reality. We advocate building a global roadmap to strengthen our union movement together with the effective participation of Global Unions. This is the challenge. What do we want for the coming years? Are we satisfied with the representation of the workers as it is currently structured? Our answer is NO.

Trade unions face decisive challenges to defend workers' rights, in the face of new forms that break the structures of the Welfare State that operated until the last quarter of the century.

National and international trade union solidarity actions are required to renew our responses to represent the working class in all its diversity, regardless of the contractual relationship.

Organizing youth is a challenge that also implies a transformation of trade union structures. We must not only democratize and generate a multigenerational structure; we must also include the demands of the youth.

Strong restrictions on trade union activity continue through regulations that limit the rights to organize, to collective bargaining and to strike, through attacks on the autonomy of trade union organizations by governments observed by the ILO and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.



This is combined with various forms of criminalization and attack on trade union actions, which in many cases go beyond threats to the lives of those who organize in defense of their rights, where union and social leaders are killed.

4. Radical commitment to peace.

Trade unionism must prioritize global solidarity and the defense of the working class, without following the determinations and actions of governments and their geopolitical interests, much less those of the companies that make war a big business that feeds an economic model that generates crises in the world.

We always defend peace, following historical conceptions, as expressed in the recent pronouncement of the TUCA: *"Peace is built with dialogue, not with weapons, the perverse effect of greater radicalism, ultranationalism and the stimulation of far-right ideologies cannot be allowed, with serious consequences for peoples and ethnic minorities"*.

The recovery of multilateralism and international law as the basis of stability and security for all the nations of the world is urgent.

Trade unionism in the Americas reiterates its commitment to peace, sovereignty, and self-determination of peoples and nations, as expressed in our 4th Congress, when we underscored that Latin America and the Caribbean must be a land of peace and free of foreign military bases.

We champion that the ITUC is organizing a world day with strikes, demonstrations, seminars for peace. We must reflect the position of trade unionism in defense of peace.

5. Within the ILO

Today it is necessary to reinforce the tripartite mechanisms of social dialogue and the regulatory function of the ILO, to take a firm position against the excessive dependence on the positions of the group of employers that have operated to weaken control instruments that question their points of view on the application of international standards.



Employers question collective rights, especially the right to strike, which has been systematically denied since 2012, constituting a serious attack on freedom of association and collective bargaining. We cannot negotiate cases that penalize progressive governments and accept and relativize authoritarian governments that attack freedom of association, collective bargaining, and criminalize and kill workers. We do not accept that Brazil or Colombia, governments that are clearly enemies of the working class, are not condemned. We workers cannot be bargaining chips in the face of an alleged stability with the employers.

The election of the new Director General of the ILO brings challenges regarding the repositioning of the social agenda and the expression of workers' interests, in the face of the corporate logic of the multilateral system.

The ITUC must advocate for ACTRAV to more fully contemplate regional representation in all of its decisions and activities, as well as in defining the positions of its structure, in dialogue with the most representative trade union organizations. We want an internal system that operates relating to our organizations.

6. The ITUC must start to play a different role in a disputed world and at risk for the international working class

We are facing a crucial moment in the consolidation of the role of international trade unionism, whose last important moment was the creation of the ITUC 15 years ago. We must go a step further in our trade union internationalism.

The attack on the working class and trade unionism throughout the world requires an articulated response to build programmatic unity and mobilize an agenda that brings together workers and their organizations, as well as society as a whole.

Socio-political trade unionism is our commitment to reinforce an agenda that transcends actions limited to labor aspects and place us as a relevant and lead actor in political, social, economic and environmental disputes that are present in the world today.

Democracy is an essential value, which is why it must be prioritized in our trade union structures at all levels: national, regional and global. It is necessary to



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expand our definitions of democracy to guarantee the effective participation of trade union representatives of the different regions in the ITUC management bodies (secretariat, governing bodies, committees, etc.).

We start with a challenge: for all our affiliates to be present at the 5th Congress in Australia. We hope to guarantee in-person discussions with everyone. If some affiliates do not arrive, let the reason be health restrictions and not economic difficulties.

We champion the presence of Latin America in the ITUC secretariat. The Assistant Secretary General is a world leader, with all due respect we say, he is not an employee of the Secretary General.

We champion discussions on the financing of our structure. The membership fee cannot be governed by bureaucratic criteria. The membership fee is a non-financial political commitment. This is a debate for the next 4 years.

External financing has to operate under programmatic criteria. International cooperation must be supportive, without generating the risk of changing or questioning our policy.

The ITUC General Secretary is the head, voice and visible representation of international trade unionism. He represents all of us. His priority function is to coordinate, direct, set the pace, but most importantly to guarantee internal balance, to be the most important guarantor of internal unity. We want an ITUC that is Latin, African, Asian, European, from the North and South, East and West, that represents the working class with its diversity, ethnicity, gender, generation.

We want an ITUC with more mobilization and organizing, and less lobbying. That builds our strength for any negotiation relying on and supporting an organized and mobilized base. We need an international trade unionism that makes visible and organizes based on the recognition of organized grassroots.

We do not accept borders for the international working class. These are modest contributions of the Americas to the international arena. We propose a structure that does not create the risk of another division of the trade union movement. A structure that can say: my voice, negotiation and presence belong to workers, I am on the side of the working class. An ITUC that prioritizes the

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defense of a world with social justice, with civilizing values. We contribute these ideas to the international debate. We hope to leave the Congress in Melbourne much stronger and more prepared than we are today.

It is urgent that the ITUC recognize the points of view of all its affiliated federations and, in particular, of the different regions when adopting its positions and definitions.

The ITUC's work on the various issues must be articulated considering the priorities of its affiliated federations. Trade union unity is built based on the recognition of the needs, priorities and demands of the different regions, with workers at the center.

What we present here will help define the Americas for the next ITUC congress. The TUCA will arrive at this Congress with strong unity as a region, contributing in turn to international unity. This is our contribution for the construction of a global synthesis. We do not expect full consensus, we hope that our contributions will be considered in the formulations and decisions of the 5th ITUC Congress. The Americas will build a strong and united ITUC.

Panama, April 20, 2022