

SPEECH TO DGB CONGRESS

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by

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Mr President, Delegates,

I bring to you the greetings of the International Labour Organization and best wishes for the success of your work.

This is the third time I have had the honour of addressing the DGB Congress, but the first as Director-General of the ILO. I want to thank you – in every sense – for providing me with that opportunity.

Delegates,

Germany stands at the centre of key policy-making in Europe and in the world. So it is particularly important – and encouraging – that the DGB is also so closely engaged in decision-making in Germany, the outcomes of which will be felt well beyond your national frontiers.

Your role in the establishment of a minimum wage has been warmly welcomed in many countries – a symbol not only of the need to ensure protection of the weakest in Germany's labour markets but also to ensure that competitiveness is not secured through low wages. As you put it, to succeed at work Germany must be better not cheaper. That goes for other countries around the world as well.

When you stand firm in defence of collective bargaining and of co-determination rights you give signals that others can hear and that others can act upon. That rights and justice at work matter. And when you insist on the need for a New Order of Work you are pointing to the need to conceptualize a different approach to economic and social policy-making from the one that relies only on the rigours of fiscal consolidation and deregulation.

And that change is badly needed. Because the crisis will only be overcome when we get back to at least the pre-crisis levels of unemployment, and that means creating nothing less than 62 million more jobs in the world just to get back to where we started. We won't get them without that fundamental change that you are demanding.

Rightly, you look to the ILO as a partner in your work for working people.

Our tripartite structure gives trade unions their seat at the international multilateral table.

Our mandate – to secure lasting peace through social justice – has never been more contemporary and it echoes the historic mission of trade unionism.

The ILO is the custodian of the international labour standards which define rights at work and we are responsible for their application. You may know that today we have a major dispute in the ILO concerning the right to strike, so I can tell you that this task is far from simple, and we need your engagement in it.

And the ILO's place in the G20 for the last five years gives us opportunity to win support from Heads of Government for putting jobs – decent jobs that is – and growth back where they belong at the centre of international policy and not allow them to be relegated to an after-thought once financial interests have been accommodated.

For the 18 months that I have been in my job, I have led a process of change, of reform in the ILO which is designed to make it more effective, more relevant, more useful, closer to the realities of work in its member States and, yes, more efficient. Change is not always welcome, but it is often necessary; today's DGB looks quite different from the one that I first knew. The point is that adjusting

to new realities – sometimes harsh realities – must be done without any loss of basic principles.

But we do need to find new ways to realize these principles. For example, while the ILO must continue to hold its 185 member Governments to their international obligations to apply the Conventions that they have ratified, we need to turn our attention as well to the management of increasingly complex global supply chains. The Rana Plaza tragedy a year ago in Bangladesh tells us a lot about how those supply chains can operate to produce enormous profits at one end but lethal working conditions at the other. These need to become chains of decent work, and the ILO needs to be engaging with the companies involved and their workers to make that happen.

Thanks to the extra financial support we are receiving, with your help, from the new coalition Government here in Germany we have an opportunity to do just that.

Similarly, we need to take a new look at how we move the struggle for gender equality forward to a successful conclusion. After decades of valuable work and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation in most countries, women still confront a major pay gap and labour market segregation. We have

to build on what we've already done but simply doing more of the same will not be enough. Again, we need to innovate, to redefine how work interacts with the rest of our life arrangements. The ILO intends to take up the challenge.

And as the international community continues to struggle to truly assume the challenge of climate change, with Germany itself making courageous choices about its energy future, we simply cannot avoid nor postpone the task of fundamental change to make our production systems sustainable and a generator of decent work for all. Easier said than done, I know. But we must start doing.

As the ILO moves towards its centenary five years from now, it needs to be prepared to take on these new challenges and some old ones – eliminating the still 168 million strong army of child labourers, liberating the 21 million victims of forced labour. These challenges are still with us.

And with the world of work changing with unprecedented speed in ways which too often are to the detriment of working women and working men, we need to deepen our understanding of the forces that will continue to transform the global landscape of labour – demography, technology, increasing global

production systems integration, and all the rest. That is a precondition for putting them at the service of social justice.

So I have proposed at the ILO that we launch a global initiative to examine The Future of Work as the centrepiece of the ILO's centenary celebration in 2019. We need to be ambitious about this. It cannot just be a philosophical reflection; it has to be an exercise that equips the ILO to do its job in the second centenary of its existence.

President, Delegates,

I know that the DGB has already drawn one important conclusion about the future: that fair globalization requires strong trade unions.

And I can think of no trade union national centre that has done more in recent years to give new force to trade union internationalism than the DGB, through your bilateral activities, and of course through your work in the ITUC. Your draft resolutions describe the ITUC as the biggest democratic power in the world. And it's thanks to you that it's just that.

The fact that the 3rd ITUC Congress meets here in Berlin next week is testimony to the DGB's leadership since the founding of the ITUC in Vienna in

2006. And allow me to pay my personal tribute to the role of Michael Sommer, from the outset and particularly over the last four years as ITUC President.

Some positive things happen because of good planning – others by good luck. It was the ITUC's good luck to have had in Michael a leader who saw that internationalism was not only a natural reflex for trade unionism, part of our collective DNA, but also a key to its success in conditions of accelerating globalization. And he was ready with others to act on that realization and to harness the strength and the influence of the DGB to that end.

In my time at the ILO and previously at the ITUC I benefited hugely from Michael's leadership and his friendship, and his advice which included criticism – based entirely on his honesty, his realism and his commitment. To tell you the truth, professionally I was also a little bit scared of Michael – I am not sure if that was really healthy but I suspect Michael found it a pretty satisfactory situation. We worked well together.

So, as a born internationalist, one whose political instincts gave substance to the lyrics of the old labour song “this land is your land, this land is my land”, and today on behalf of the ILO Governing Body that you have served with great

distinction let me thank you sincerely for your extraordinary leadership and contribution, which I know will be continuing in the future.

Congratulations also to Reiner Hoffmann, the new DGB President. I've had the pleasure of working with you closely in the past and I know you will bring all the necessary personal qualities to meet the challenges ahead. Equally, congratulations to all new members of the impeccably gender-balanced DGB Executive Board.

To Michael then, thank you and goodbye.

To Reiner, welcome and good luck.

To you all – success in the work ahead.
