



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

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CISL Congress

Chair, General Secretary, delegates, fellow guests. Thank you for this invitation to address the Congress of CISL, sadly at a time of great crisis for Italy and Europe.

Let me first take this opportunity to express the condolences of all European trade unionists for the terrible earthquake not far from here in Aquila. Nowadays a tragedy like this is not remote. It is on all our TV screens and all of us, wherever we come from, saw those deaths and people suffering. I wish all Italy well with the recovery from that disaster and a special message of sympathy to the people and trade unionists of Aquila. Like, apparently, Silvio Berlusconi, I enjoy camping holidays, but the tents of Aquila is one campsite that none of us would like to experience.

And the earthquake deepened the sense of gloom spreading from the economic front. Already as the weather warms, the economy darkens. Unemployment up, debt up, bankruptcies up, precarious work up. This is all fertile territory for the racists and ultra nationalists who invariably use a crisis to blame the problems on migrants, on neighbouring countries and on Europe.

This is a time for democrats to stand up and be counted, and to stand firm for trade unionism and European unionism. The principles are the same. We stand together – else we fall apart. So to all Italian trade unionists, I ask you – ‘go forward and vote for candidates who support Social Europe’, a Europe which puts **People First** and fights the crisis, not by blaming the neighbours but by acting together and respecting others.

The ETUC is fighting the crisis. From the north to the south, from east to west, from Madrid to Prague, Brussels to Berlin; last week, our unions were on the streets demonstrating their will, their determination to fight the crisis – 350,000 workers on the streets of those great cities.

We originally planned four major European demonstrations that week but Luxembourg and Birmingham joined the united protests last Saturday.

These were

- protests against the greed, the sleaze and looting of money by some top executives;

- protests against the bonuses of the bankers;
- protests against the selfish short-termism of far too many in the boardrooms.

All this bad behaviour is just not down to the conduct of individuals, although there is plenty of bad conduct by individuals.

And it is just not down to a system which permitted bad practices to thrive in the margin.

No, this has been a system expressly designed to make rich people richer and trade unions weaker; a system designed to make welfare states cheaper and inequality greater; a system of shareholder value designed in the Reagan / Thatcher era but continued ever since; a system centred in the English-speaking world in New York and London but infecting every where.

Well now this system has had a heart attack. And it is workers who are paying the price – with our taxes, with our wages, and worst of all, as unemployment soars, with our jobs. We say stop casino capitalism now.

I am trying to stop calling it casino capitalism because someone told me that casinos are more efficiently run than many banks – and often more effectively regulated.

We are saying today that the European authorities, including national governments, are too timid in the face of the crisis, too nervous to respond with the ambition and imagination that is required.

We want a real recovery plan co-ordinated across the EU. The European Union is like a European trade union; whenever we do things together, we are more effective, more powerful and more impressive than if we act separately. We want a plan which keeps up wages, not bonuses. And a plan which leads to better balanced, more sustainable, greener economies.

We are ambitious for Europe, for a better Social Europe, for a Europe that can issue its own bonds as CISL have proposed, fight for solidarity, stop tax competition between countries, and end social dumping.

And together, we can beat the ultranationalists and extremists who are emerging to push national solutions. We are vividly aware of the disaster of the 1930s when the dictators pushed democracy aside and went to war. The European Union was designed to make impossible a repeat of those

mistakes. But it will now be tested and we must think and act in a European way, not just protecting ourselves and our own.

We want a New Social Deal and we want it now. As part of a New Social Deal, we propose European wide investment in green technologies, in public transport and energy, innovation and research and development; we want quick acting help for workers – subsidies to stop them becoming unemployed; help with training and education; top class public employment services. We want to be stopped from using free movement of services in the EU to sweep aside collective agreements; and we want too equal pay for work of equal value in every country, including migrants. We say no exploitation, no inequality, and fair wages for all.

And we want the rich and comfortable to pay their fair share of the rescue and recovery plans. Did you see the news from London recently? The top rate of tax was increased and a long list of businessmen said they were moving to Switzerland. So much for patriotism.

Well, we can do without their lack of interest in helping solve the problems which they themselves helped to create.

For trade unions and workers, this crisis is a disaster and there is no exit or exile option.

But it is also an opportunity. As Roosevelt said in 1933, ‘never waste a good crisis’. This heart attack of neo-liberalism, of financial capitalism, gives us a new chance to rebuild the social market which has been retreating for years. Now it can advance again.

But it will be a battle between those who say ‘back to business as usual’ and those who say ‘never again’. We need more social Europe, less inequality Europe!

So we say never again to casino capitalism. We say yes to recovery, yes to a renaissance of trade union influence, yes to the social market economy and social dialogue, and yes to fight the crisis. We will not suffer patiently. We will fight for jobs, pay and public services. And we will fight together, united, for a better society and for a better Europe.

Thank you to CISL and to all Italian trade unionists. Thank you for all your help to the ETUC.