

TURN THE TABLES!

USB TRADE UNION 1ST NATIONAL CONGRESS

FOR A CLASS ORIENTED TRADE UNION, ANTAGONIZING , INDEPENDENT

USB CONFEDERATION - CONGRESS STATEMENT

Turn the tables! That's the password we want to launch with our first USB Congress. A password that must guide our undertaking and that means practicing employment and social protest, whenever it proves necessary in the process to enact or pursue transformation. Invoked conflict that is not fleshed out hurts its very core concept, a tool to rectify class interest. Too often we hear people around us invoke antagonism and too often it remains just that: a voiced but unexpressed yearning. It is up to us to create the conditions so that the password of our Congress may become mass culture, shared and practiced.

How and where the Congress fits into the larger context

We are celebrating this Congress during one of the most troublesome and enduring crises that our generations can remember. From its very onset, we have considered it to be systemic and not short-lived. A crisis that comes afar and that has little by little manifested itself under several guises: economic, financial, speculative, related to a new economics and that is felt the most on a social level, deep-rooted and evil, whose end no one seems capable of predicting.

We are experiencing the effects of the economy's financial drenching, that phase, in other words, when capital has poured out its profits and cravings in the financial-real estate-speculative market, in search for a quick bargain, which have been plenty and huge for them, subtracting valuable resources from training, industrial development, improvement of the environment and labor conditions. The speculative bubble that has burst on the real estate and subprime markets has now led invested capital to focus its profit phishing, thereby intensifying the compression of wages, rights, tenor of life, on the ruthless exploitation of man over kin and man over the environment.

At the same time, the most classic of methods has been revamped by investors to get past the crisis, the waging of war, of conflict between States and religions, ethnic clashes, the confiscation of land in many countries of the South, among which Africa, by multinationals, meant to open a highway for an economic, besides political, neo-colonialism, that sees developed Countries and emerging industrial powers as promoters. The race to lay a hold of raw materials, energy resources, water, soon to be extinguished elements and yet vital to the dominant model of capitalist development that has quickly picked up in pace, is a glaring example of that.

A new age of enslavement to capital is dawning upon us. The conquest that the

workers' and socialist movement had succeeded in achieving in the 20th century, especially after World War II, are under attack and are pointed to as the key culprits of the conditions in which the economy of our Homeland is now in. A fierce battle is under way between labor and capital, with the latter seemingly gaining the upper hand. Every resource available is drained to cover the losses of the banking and speculative system. The national debt has recently gone over the 200 billion Euro mark, an all-time record, precisely because the government of "technical experts" headed by the front-man of Club Bilderberg, Goldman Sachs and the CEB, Mario Monti, has channeled the hard-earned savings through a policy of weeping and blood-shedding into the safes of Italian and European banks.

We therefore find ourselves continuously faced with having to pay a debt that we are only partly responsible for and that has rather mostly grown out of State grants to Companies and to the banking/financial world. Unemployment has soared to incredibly high levels affecting, as official estimates that tend to be on the conservative low end, 11% of the adult population and as much as 33% of minors, with peaks of more than 50% in Southern Italy. Unemployment insurance in 2012 reached the sky-high amount of 1 billion hours serviced by INPS (Social Insurance); the real estate market has collapsed due to the unwillingness of banks to "risk" their money (which is actually our own, considering the many public transfers) to give out mortgage loans. While statistics on corruption amount to over 60 billion Euro a year, tens of thousands of families have lost or are about to lose their home due to overbearing rental fees or the impossibility to continue to pay mortgages, having lost their jobs.

There is a whole generation that is at the mercy of market interests that toy with their present and that are gradually shattering its hopes for the future. Meanwhile, the domestic and international banking system can gasp for air, thanks to the conspicuous transfers of cash that individual member States and the Central European Bank have made in their favor; in Italy, 10% of the population holds 50% of the wealth and buying power of average wages has dropped, in just a year, by 4.5%. If we take a closer look, the crisis has caused a transfer of wealth from labor to capital, as we hadn't witnessed in years.

The weakening of the sovereignty of member States of the European Union in favor of investors has magnified the consequences of this crisis. The EU, heralded as a kindling tool between peoples and one to strengthen national economies of joining members, has cast the cloak. The birth of the Union, the advent of the Euro, the establishment of European industrial and military complex, the treaties that shape internal re-organization, are all instruments that are handy to become a super-power on the international landscape, equipped to stand its ground in the scheme of global competition.

It is a tool in the hands of the predominant classes, especially in France and Germany, but elsewhere too, to assert a new hegemony that will force weaker Countries to a serious contraction of the cost of manpower, to redefine the international distribution of labor, even attributing minor tasks to Southern European Countries (tourism, services to the EU's manufacturing system, etc.), alongside an increasingly starker weight of European multinationals (whose turnover after 2008 has exceeded its U.S. counterparts) veered toward conquering foreign markets.

If this is the plan on a European level, internationally, the European Union candidates itself to play a part in the inter-imperialist competition currently in progress,

that is more and more brutal from an economic and military viewpoint alike. On an economic level, by advocating the role of the Euro as alternative to the U.S. and Dollar. On a military level, in a substantially different manner from U.S. doctrine, arriving as far as even undermining NATO's mission that had taken shape after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was precisely to prevent that the EU could become economically and militarily a competitor. A first taste of Europe's new placement on the international chessboard is given by its military action in Libya, which was directly overseen by a handful of individual member-States, but that cries for the need to have a European army and, therefore, a European military intervention whenever the call to duty shall surface again.

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The Labor movement agenda in Italy and the role of CGIL-CISL-UIL (Italian collaborative Trade Unions)

The climax of the crisis has found the working class to be utterly ransacked. Twenty years of concerted effort and social dialogue have so much crippled the Italian labor front, that it is dumbfound in responding in the least to the war waged by capital.

The policies of the Confederations meant to concentrate efforts, share and guide the choices for productive redevelopment brought on by Governments on behalf of financial, speculative and entrepreneurial capital have not only stripped the working class of its weapons for resistance, but have engendered a true, full-blown involution of the collective conscience that this class had traditionally voiced, of its role and strength and that had served as the tool with which it had carried on and won its battles in the 20th century. However, Companies are not the only ones responsible for the pillaging of the labor world and of the social fabric that it refers to.

Also the underlying and pretentiously a-ideological decisions made by political parties that call themselves progressive, have sizably contributed to the weakening the ability to give a class interpretation to domestic and international political events, little by little leading the labor market and workers' movement to conform to the same outlook of the class exploiting it. Ultimately, those that were supposed to be, and that for quite a while actually were in part, the waves of change and social transformation, have sunken into a couch role of ideological sponsors of the capital interests, toppling down working culture brick by brick and that self-conscience and of its own interests that the class had developed over the course of former centuries: a pursuit of no random origin, one thoroughly planned out before its undertaking and spurred on with maniacal brutishness through the media, to secure domination of the interpretational key of the working class' enemy.

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The devout defense of the EU and its basic decisions, a near total mindless agreement with the nationalistic interpretation of supra-national policies, putting the head in the sand while the sovereign power of our own and other Countries in the name of a greater Europe that becomes the object of international economic competition, clearly point to an irremediable situation.

We have long expressed our political opinion on CGIL and do not think there is any reason to address it again, if not to affirm without a shadow of hesitance that we are facing an organization that has definitively mutated its DNA and is attempting to also modify the one of its representatives.

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The objective role-playing crisis of basic Unionism

Having said that this is the view we have of the not too diversified historical Confederal world, the one we can gather from basic unionism, which instead is, also leaves little room for cheering remarks. That *weltanschauung*, that sense of intuition we, too, have been an active part of, has pretty much exhausted its driving thrust. It is not an issue that concerns the men and women, who have not spared themselves in generously contributing a consistent portion of their political activism and of their life to piece up the wealth of combined experience, but rather one that involves manufacturing transformation, its ripple effects on the working class, the significant amendments made to labor laws, the assault on individual and collective rights, changes to the form of work.

These have jointly made self-organization practices in the workplace and/or categories, be they large or small, basically un-pursuable and useless, while in time past they had been the password/mode for action that basic unionism had used to respond to the God-given need to restore direct leadership and a voice to workers, male and female. Business/category conflicts have almost utterly vanished. This occurs not only because of the fact that it proves more and more difficult, on a business or industrial level, to fix the disasters caused by the new legislation on labor and by contracts (if and when they are renewed), and this is perceived as a clear limit to the scope of action of male and female workers, but also because the use of repressive measures against those who "take the streets" to fight without an adequate support by Trade Unions is increasing and more visible.

The thing, however, we need to acknowledge is that today conflict, when expressed, is only done so on an organizational level, that spontaneous rallying is much harder to come by than before, that the overwhelming feeling is that the strength needed to curb the disaster is lacking.

The near total lack of a reaction to the crisis, to the Government's measures, to a halt to collective contraction are there are to prove it. International chronicles, day in and day out, tell us of harsh and bitter general conflicts to counter the crisis and the decisions made by national Governments, of millions fighting to defend their present and secure a future. In Italy, this has not happened because no one had sufficient credibility to spark similar spirals. Class oriented Unionism must either shed its skin, taking on the responsibility to show the path, pursued through conflict, of a working class re-organized and centered around its interests, or we must all decide for a broader, more general and open dimension, one that also includes that segment of society that no longer meets with Unions in the workplace, in light also of the destabilizing fact that the place is no more; if neither, a cycle that was at times invigorating will have come to an inevitable end.

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The Metropolitan Union: where we stand now

If the framework of struggles in factories and offices is obvious and we experience

it first-hand every day, our intuition to set out on a course to rebuild the metropolitan Union/social confederation seems, instead, to rally new consensus and support. The idea that the time is come for Unionisms to tackle the issue of its relation with those segments of society and the labor world that cannot meet up with the Union because they are outside its "circuits" is gradually becoming an idea to examine and fulfill.

We claimed it many times and experience it daily in our line of work: a growing army of citizens/workers are totally immune to the Union's traditional methods: contract bargaining is of no matter to them, they have no care for fringe benefits or unemployment welfare, they can't demand a raise to their wage or better working conditions. They are unemployed, without an income, on call or term, relying on unemployment insurance for shifters, they are immigrants and therefore also the new or old poor class that doesn't have the money to pay the rent, to continue to pay a mortgage or fatter utility bills, they are the class persecuted by Equitalia and by Town Halls, they are the tenants who are sold the home they have been living in for decades at an outrageous price they can't afford, they're the homeless people.

We don't see these folks in the factory or office, we do not cross their way in the cafeteria or during a cigarette break or in the hallways, these fellows live and inhabit the territory and it's there that we should make an effort to encounter them. Since USB first opened a reflection on this new labor perspective, a small number of test-runs have been made that are certainly interesting, but that do not give us a clear indication just yet as to how to act in practice.

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The main figure that comes out of these first experiments is that you don't network, you don't set up fights and conflicts unless individuals and groups surface that can "read" the territory, its development, that know how to venture on a new "street" unionism that can escalate our conscience and struggle, that change the interests into a collective thing and link our fight in the workplace to those in the territory.

This kind of strategy demands a change in step. While it is essential to maintain, and rather strengthen, our ability to take action in the workplace, practicing and relaunching conflict, increasing the number of members listed in our Union, continuing to be a crucial landmark for fight in the factory, in Companies and in offices and therefore, without taking a step back on a classic Union level, it is equally important to place much focus and spend resources on a project of Social Confederalism. Our locations must serve as effective aggregating spots, places for debate and especially to organize our fight against the new class structure. They must be the place where the fight of the Union and its mobilization meets the antagonist requirements pooled nationwide. They must become areas of high social contamination.

Quite naturally, these phenomena can take place if this decision becomes collective, of the organization at large, that does not look to this endeavor of the Union as "different" from its own work and/or that concerns those who sweat and toil for it, but as an element of our overall Confederalist being. The battle to wipe the slate clean of on-call, term labor is everyone's, it is the battle of those who have interim workers in their Company and of those who seek to organize them across the nation; the fight against the shutting down of hospitals, of those who are part of their staff and of the citizens who benefit of their service. Home tenancy and vacant apartments are not just a concern of homeless people, of

evicted tenants, of migrants, but of all who live and inhabit the city and local territory and fight dearly against speculation and devastation of the soil: the battle for efficient public transportation that is safe and affordable is not just the concern of its workers, but also of the citizens who use it.

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The European dimension

If, as we have time again claimed in our statements, the European Union is taking on the form of a super-State that handles first-hand political tasks and functions that were till now a nationalist matter, this means that social issues too, of labor and economic first of all, will more and more be defined on a European level: individual member States will be left with the meager task of applying and getting their subjects to swallow the pill, so to speak, of the decisions made by the supreme European state. The austerity policies that have swept the Countries of the Southern front in Europe in recent years were not the free choice of the Greek or Portuguese or Italian parliaments, but rather the deliberate decision of the triumvirate formed by the EU, the CEB and the IMF, which not only imposed the measures for "reclamation", but also decided which governments and even which statesmen should captain these Countries through the massive restructuring process, as we have clearly experienced in Italy, with the super-imposed Government of "technical experts" of die-hard European and Euro-bank loyalty.

Decisions on labor issues are also of a tendency summarily defined by the European Commission and, if they are not applied to the letter and swiftly, steep economic sanctions are levied, which drives subject Countries to obey without a word, even if their application causes strong setbacks in national legislation and, above all, extremely serious impact on workers, men and women; we care to mention one here in passing that speaks for all of them: raising the pensionable age of female workers in the name of an alleged equality of rights between men and women, achieved by cutting down on the protective legal framework accorded to them! The effects of this new scenario is gigantic and will soon become crucial to all of us.

We, and not just us, risk that in a future, not too long down the line, we will become unfit and un-influential in the decisions that are taken on issues that concern workers, men and women, and the entire population. Lack of information on the legal frameworks of the various proposals motioned by the European Commission and Parliament in time to debate them, downright ignorance of the procedure behind the ratifying of laws and verdicts, the fact that we are made aware of the adopted measures when they have been passed as laws and cannot escape total subjection, truly risk to make us useless in the process.

We absolutely must set things right and harness all the technical and political tools that equip us in the least time possible to bridge this serious gap and allow us to take action while still in time and with competence over all significant issues that affect the labor market and production. When we invoke Alitalia's privatization, or the privatization of ILVA or of any other Company with national interest, we need to know that among the major obstacles to making these passwords (which are God-given rights on an economic and political level) come true are the very diktats of the European Union, which would have them to be State aids and therefore impracticable (it should be noted that, unlike Italy, France and Germany have not dismantled their manufacturing system at all and, what's more, they have held on tight to the Companies that are nationally of strategic

interest.

In order to defeat the enemy, we must have a deep knowledge of the mechanisms it uses and refers to. Political reprimand is not enough, we must succeed in becoming the grain of dust that jams the system. To do this, we must use all the tools we have, first of which the international liaisons we have woven in these years.

International intervention

A class-oriented trade union cannot help being internationalist. Capital has long been seeking to arouse competition between male and female workers of different Countries. The odds at stake are the maintenance of the minimum production levels that guarantee occupation and wages. The most recent example of this policy is car-giant Fiat and its strategic decisions in terms of the allocation of its manufacturing facilities. Naturally, the criteria of capital is always the same, reap the maximum profit with the least investment and therefore, to move production to where manpower is much cheaper than in Italy, endless blackmailing schemes, using the scarecrow of production relocation to obtain "contractual and legislative discounts, use of all the possible forms of interim labor made available by local Governments, and so the list goes on.

We don't buy into the sadistic persecutory whim of capital that would want us attacking "those who steal our work" thanks to economic dumping and right deprivation, as the owners would have it, to force us to accept wages and laws here in Italy that apply in other undeveloped Countries. We fight alongside those workers, men and women, to secure equal rights for all of us, to turn the tables and lay our hands on equal justice. Our enemies are not the male and female workers of other Countries, but multinationals, the economic and manufacturing potentates that want the double advantage of producing for less and profiting more, even resorting to what are degrading, inhumane exploitation techniques.

What happened to the over 200 textile workers in Bangladesh, who were burnt alive while they were working on clothing articles that were later to be branded with some great Italian fashion label, the strenuous plight of the miners of Marikana in South Africa, with the killing of strikers are there to remind us. We therefore need to weave and broaden our international relations, especially on a European level, to contrast more forcefully and effectively capitalist schemes to return to 19th century exploitation of workers. Since USB's establishment, we have dedicated much of our focus on these international relations, precisely in this respect.

Our entrance in the World Federation Trade Union, of which we became members following our participation as observers at the 16th World Congress of Athens in 2010, has proven a key milestone on this route.

We are part of the European Secretariat of the WFTU, we have taken part in organizing the World Council in South Africa, witnessing first-hand the enormous contradictions of a Country that has won its challenge on a political level, but whose economic power is still firmly controlled by multinationals and where this status quo leads to the barbaric acts that we have seen in the repression of the fight of miners. We participate in setting up the Congresses of European organizations that are co-members with us in the World Federation Trade Union (Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, the Basque Countries to mention the main ones), we draft proposals for cooperation and networking

with other organizations which, though they are not share membership in the same international organization, are however on our same wave length (Sud France, Sud Suisse, OPZZ Poland, UGTT Tunisia, ETUF Egypt, etc.).

We have set ourselves the goal, and are pursuing it with resolute determination, to rebuild the class-oriented Trade Union as we know it in Europe, expanding our perspective to Countries that look upon the Southern shore of the Mediterranean and that have been at the center of important Arab spring uprisings, because it is with those male and female workers and with their organizations that we must interact to prevent that a neo-colonialist coup d'état be levied by European capital against the workers of those Countries and to submit proposals for partnerships.

We are striving to give center-focus to a reflection, in the European labor market as well, on those themes, like the indivisible right to water, to nutrition, to medical care, to a dwelling place that are key and vital for the South of the world and that are but a faded memory in Europe. We have hosted an international conference on these themes which has been attended by Union delegations from 13 Countries and that has led to a serious and well-articulated contribution in profound dissent with FAO'S intervention policies, FAO being a branch of the UN that we are a part of with a fellow Union, representing the 82 million listed members of the WFTU. We are mostly denouncing the "apartheid" that the European Commission is waging against Unions and the WFTU and of all those organizations that do not feel represented in the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which is the sole accredited interlocutor in the European Union, in which (for Italy) CGL, CISL and UIL are members, and which is fully carrying out its role of guardian of the conflict and of downplaying the social fight that is mounting across Europe.

The main item on agenda of the European strike called by ETUC last November 14 was the institution on a European level of a Social Compact to move alongside the Fiscal Compact: a social pact, but continental style!

It is through this rekindled protagonism in Europe of the WFTU, of which we have partly been and are the authors, it is by flooring direct relations with European parliamentarians closest to our positions that we aim to also conjure the tools that are essential to respond to our needs for knowledge and intervention on measures passed by the European Commission. International labor must by all means become a primary aspect of our Confederalist dream, which must receive our close political focus and the required resources in the making.

Counterattack

The need to make organizational structures for ourselves that are more functional and efficient is closely tied to the need to have a Trade Union that knows how to meet the requirements of the agenda we want to implement, in the best way possible. We have never been, nor must ever become, a Union that is content with responding, assuming if and when it can, to the attack that the enemy of the working class proposes and carries on. We must know how to engage conflict to enforce our suggestions to cater to the needs of workers. The troubles encountered in this phase known to all of us, but we are convinced that it is time to launch a counterattack, identifying the key points of our Union-based action.

- Fight against the European Union, against the diktats of the CEB, against their attempt to rise to the status of global super-power, vanquishing the conquests of the European workers' movement and having the upper hand on the labor market, with the blackmail of debt. Cancellation of European treaties, starting with the Fiscal Compact, that have imposed tax and austerity policies on male and female workers and the poorest social classes alone, and that have overthrown our Constitution.
- War on war: no more expenditures for weapons and war missions; we say no to regurgitating neo-colonialism to deplete resources. Solidarity toward populations that are the victims of aggression and support to the people's self-determination, starting with the Palestinians.
- Strong efforts by the State in economic policies, not only by exercising indispensable control and steering, but also with a return to an active public role, if need be by initiating processes of nationalization that involve the manufacturing industries and strategic services.
- A complete redraft of legislation on labor, abolishing the laws that institutionalize term-based contracts, restoring the constitutional right of sound and decent labor, safe and sufficiently remunerated, and cancellation of the agreement on productivity. Heavy sanctions on fiscally delinquent companies that relocate production to Countries with cheaper manpower. Restoration and extension to everyone of protective laws in the event of dismissal without a justified cause. Contract deadlock disengagement, consistent wage raises and paycheck bonuses, less working hours given the same wage to encourage new employment. Establishment of a national movement that imposes a public solution to reabsorb labor for on-call/interim workers, men and women, in mobility, laid off.

Legally required criteria for democratic representation in the workplace that guarantee pluralism and democracy in all sectors.

- Tutelage of public schooling and a strong drive to public research; financings to favor return to the homeland of migrated researchers. Reinstate the battle for a domestic rescue service that is truly public, entrusted to the Fire Department.
- Public monitoring of fees for services and primary goods; institution of the minimum guaranteed income; support and newly submit the bill to pass a law for popular initiative on tax-related issues.

- Re-encompassing of all public services on domestic turf, strong and exclusive financing to Health, to Schooling, to Public Transportation. Protection of common assets from relentless attempts to privatize them.
- Defense and strengthening of Public insurance, right to fair pension plans that are sufficient to cover living costs and that respect the right to a dignified old age and to retirement after the right number of years of work. Reassert and structure our NO to private pension plans
- Right to a dwelling place for all, cancellation of taxes on the home, reuse of rent from vacant apartments, revamping of a pacifying function of the social insurance institutes on the real estate market, stop to eviction and home sales, acknowledgment of the right to a home for all occupants.
- Abrogation of the Bossi-Fini Law to claim equal rights for immigrants and the closure of the CIE, right of asylum for refugees and asylum-seekers, along with the right to obtain citizenship and residence rights for children born in Italy.
- Fight on all levels to environmental devastation and staunch support and participation in the fight to prevent the execution of large costly public works that are useless and have a severe environmental impact.

Turn the tables!

An agenda like the one we are soon to discuss at our Congress, one that truly questions, from the working class' perspective, the Country's social and labor structure, quite obviously demands much effort, conviction, sharing. Our members, the male and female workers who we entertain relations with or are about to on all conflict ranges, from factories to offices nationwide, already practice and have endorsed this fight plan and growth plan of an advanced option of working class Union.

It is our task to develop and practice it, make it credible, share it with those who on grounds of labor and social action have our same general agenda targets and achieve them through conflict.

This is the very reason why we forcefully and resolutely relaunch the invitation to all those who have shared our objectives and Union practices to build common moments of reflection and debate, in order to come to a truly unified course of action. We address the same invitation to all those who today work on a social and Union level, though as members of other organizations.

The concept of a general Union, independent, antagonizing, democratic, open to subjects of the new class structure/de-structure is the idea that has spurred us to establish the USB. This must be the road we continue to travel, with patience and humility, but also with an awareness of the role we can play and that is rightfully ours. We do not exactly know how the complex situation we will be facing in the months ahead will develop nationally, in Europe and internationally.

What we do know is that there will be rising need for organized conflict to thwart the plans for re-organization and exploitation pursued by capital, to give trust and strength back to the workers' movement, to reconquer rights and demand new ones.

“.....Slowly dies
he who does not overturn the tables
when unhappy at work,
the person who does not risk certainty for uncertainty
to pursue a dream,
he who does not at least once in life,
escape sound advice.....”

(excerpt from "Slowly dies", a poem by Martha Medeiros)

Turn the tables!

January 2013