

LIVING MANIFESTO

PROLOGUE

This is a product of the fourth GLI international summer school, held in July 2015. After the experience of the first three summer schools, some of the threads of discussion were pulled together into a draft 'manifesto', which was then discussed and reflected upon throughout the week. In the concluding session, the Summer School Commission presented proposed amendments for plenary discussion and debate, the results of which are presented below.

It is not directed to governments, employers, or political parties. It is not a manifesto to declare a new society (that comes later!), nor to launch a new movement, sect, tribe or club. It does not attempt to redefine Marxism, socialism, feminism, syndicalism, internationalism or democracy. It does not attempt to list all the world's injustices and declare our opposition.

Instead, this manifesto is directed towards the trade union movement itself, as a stimulant to discussion amongst trade unionists throughout the world, and as a political education tool that can be carried by summer school participants back into their respective unions for debate.

It is a deliberately short document, and will always remain a draft, hopefully to improve over time in future summer schools and within our unions themselves. It is not a manifesto of the GLI Network. It belongs to the participants of the summer school themselves.

A. Our common political purpose

The neoliberal agenda constitutes a fundamental challenge to the values on which the trade union movement is based: democracy, communality, cooperation and equality. Strong international industrial organisation is necessary, but in itself, insufficient. The international trade union movement needs to establish or reassert a political agenda. Much of the international labour movement has internalised the prevailing neo-liberal ideology to such an extent that there is little or no discussion on politics: how to bring financial markets under democratic control and run banks as public utilities, for example. Climate change, the existential threat to life on earth, remains on the margins of the union agenda. We need to challenge all forms of discrimination against vulnerable and under-represented groups.

We need:

1. To develop political and historical education programmes within national unions and international federations to explore, discuss and redesign the political dimension of trade unionism to create a common international political agenda
2. To build truly global solidarity movements using horizontal strategies, and engage with broader social justice movements, community groups and campaigns
3. Ensure that the international trade union movement represents the economic, social and political interests of all workers, including informal, precarious, unemployed and migrant workers.
4. To promote plurality and ongoing political dialogue.

B. Democracy

An increased role for international union organisations needs to go hand-in-hand with strengthened democratic accountability and responsiveness to the members and elected representatives of affiliated unions.

We need:

1. Strengthened democratic accountability of national unions' international policies and programmes to their members
2. Strong, clear and enforceable criteria for national unions and federations to be accepted into membership of international federations, built around the key principles of democratic trade unionism: independence from governments and employers and meaningful fee structures
3. To ensure that political alliances work for us with transparency and democratic accountability to our members, including financial and political autonomy
4. Establish standards and procedures to address the problem of affiliated unions that are found to be corrupt, undemocratic, or manipulated by governments, employers or political parties; including, where appropriate, expulsion from international union organisations. Openly recognise that the problem exists and is deeply damaging to the democratic trade union movement, and encourage open debate and discussion on affiliation/disaffiliation criteria and process.
5. International trade union organisations should uphold and defend the right of workers to establish their own democratic unions when faced with undemocratic or corrupt organisations, even when the effect is to create rival union structures, or breaks national labour laws. Global Union Federations and the Workers Group of the ILO should support unions in the this process.
6. National unions to develop international political agendas including horizontal solidarity strategies to ensure that national centres take action to influence national governments.

C. Organisation

It is clear that the present structures and policies of the labour movement, particularly at international level, are not adequate to meet the challenges of a globalised, environmentally vandalised, privatised, financialised, informalised and precariously employed corporate economy.

We need:

1. International organisations and networks that engage with and are directly relevant to union members at the workplace and in their communities
2. National unions to invest substantially money and time in building the capacity of GUFs to be effective as an agency of countervailing power against global corporations and international finance institutions. GUFs to stimulate education, discussion and debate among their national affiliates about the future role of GUFs in building an international movement.
3. To recognise and build upon recent international struggles and gains made by workers in transnational corporations, with substantial further investment in the creation of permanent and sustainable cross-border union organisation within TNCs, led by elected workplace representatives.
4. National and international trade union organisations to prioritise a thorough reform of constitutions, structures and organising strategies to organise and represent the rapidly expanding numbers of informal, precarious and migrant workers in all parts of the world, both rural and urban.
5. Thorough reform of all regional trade union organisations, especially in Europe, where we need to build a serious pan-European organising strategy, independent of EU finance and integrated into GUF/ITUC structures; recognising that European strategies and models of organisation continue to have considerable influence in other world regions.
6. More integrated practical cooperation between GUFs in organising within TNCs, in overlapping sectors, and around key cross-sector issues, in addition to emergency solidarity work.
7. To rebuild the union movement from below. To welcome the possibilities and potential for new forms of rank-and-file based international trade union organisation and solidarity utilising all forms of communications strategies, while recognising some of the inherent dangers.