New EU-level trade union created

A new trade union, industriAll, was created on 16 May 2012 following a merger of the European Metalworkers’ Federation (EMF), the European Chemical Trade Union (EMCEF) and the European Federation for Textiles, Clothing and Leather (ETUF-TCL). This huge new trade union, representing around eight million workers, officially came into being on 1 June 2012 after a process of increasing cooperation among the three unions. Its aims are to fight for employment growth and social progress.

Background

As decided at the European Metalworkers’ Federation congress in June 2011 (EU1106051I), a new European industrial trade union, industriAll, was created at the beginning of May 2012. The new trade union was formed from a merger of trade unions in the metalworking sector, (EMF), the chemical sector (EMCEF), and the energy, mining, textile, clothing and leather sectors (ETUF-TCL).

The new union represents around eight million workers across Europe.

On 16 May 2012, the founding congress of industriAll took place in Brussels and elected Ulrich Eckelmann, previously General Secretary of the EMF, as industriAll’s General Secretary.

The decision to merge and jointly create a new trade union was seen as a logical step for the trade unions involved, which expect this move to result in a more efficient use of resources and greater representativeness at European level. Michael Vassiliadis, newly-elected President of industriAll, said:

IndustriAll will draw its clout not merely from strength of numbers but from our clear resolve to be a powerful, purposeful and effective player in the European political arena, in order to best represent the interests of industrial workers in Europe.

Common objectives

With a strong commitment to European industrial policy in a dynamic economic framework, the three founding organisations had been steadily increasing their cooperation prior to the creation of industriAll.

At their first joint meeting in January 2012, the three trade union federations strongly condemned the austerity measures put in place by European governments, along with what they regarded as attacks on existing workers’ and social rights.

According to industriAll, to secure both social progress and the functioning of the European social model, fundamental social and workers’ rights need to be strengthened rather than undermined. IndustriAll has said that it is therefore calling for the creation of European policies that place investment and employment, with growth and worker participation, at the heart of policymaking. Ulrich Eckelmann said:

We need a strategy based on investment in a strong and sustainable industry, employment growth, better participation and a harmonisation of living and working conditions in Europe. This will be the only way to lift Europe out of crisis and to restore the faith of European citizens and workers in the European project. There is an urgent need for more cohesion and genuine sharing.

At its founding congress, industriAll also announced in a press release (62Kb PDF) the adoption of a political resolution outlining four key policy areas for its future work.

- Industrial policy activities, focusing on sustainability and the quality of industrial products and production, the promotion of skills development and the improvement of working conditions. Representing workers in a broad range of industries, the organisation will develop specific policies for each sector.
- Company policy activities, seeking to enhance workers’ involvement at company level, with a particular focus on developing strategies for those workers engaged in multinational companies. Anticipating and managing change in a socially responsible way is another essential part of this policy area.
Collective bargaining activities, intended to improve pay, working and living conditions of workers through the coordination of national collective bargaining policies and the promotion of a European collective bargaining and social policy agenda. An active wage policy and increased coverage of collective agreements are the union’s key objectives.

Social dialogue at European level will provide the platform for promoting policies relating to European industry and employers’ associations as well as the European institutions. IndustriAll will also focus on developing both its capacities for joint actions as well as for negotiations at European level.

Policy committees will be set up to focus on these issues. The union’s regional structure will be split into eight: South, Benelux, Central, Southeast, Eastern, British, Nordic/Baltic and Southwest.

Commentary

This is a large and significant trade union merger which will see the consolidation of the forces of three of Europe’s most significant sectoral trade unions. The merger is the result of a long process of ever-closer cooperation between the three organisations. One of the stated aims of the new union is to fight for employment growth, sustainable economic growth and social progress. This will be a difficult task, given the ongoing economic uncertainty in Europe and uncertainty about the fate of the euro zone.

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