

Brothers and sisters of RMT,
Comrades,

When I take the floor at this congress,
it is not only to deliver you a polite message of international solidarity.

It is to tell you that ETF needs you, comrades.
ETF needs you, the men and women of RMT
Just as you have all the reasons to be an active affiliate of ETF.

I came to tell you that ETF needs all democratic
and progressive forces
in these dark times that we live in.
And that all progressive unions in Europe should stand together!

You all know that we organised our ETF congress
in May in Budapest.
But what you might not know is that on only 4 kilometres
from our congress venue
another conference was organised a few days earlier.
The conference of CPAC Hungary.
It is a conference where far right
from all over Europe and the United States
gathered to discuss for two days in a row
on how to impose their agenda
both in Europe and the United States.
And let me be clear,
It is an anti-democratic
Anti-social
Anti-union
And anti-workers agenda!

According to Victor Orban, who took the floor at this conference,
the institutions in Europe and Washington
Are, and I quote, in the hands of 'progressive liberals',
'neo-Marxists dazed by the woke dream' and,
an Orban classic, 'people financed by George Soros'.
In short: forces that 'destroy the Western way of life that you and we love so
much',

A Hungarian talkshow host that also took the floor at the conference called Jews (I quote) “stinking excrements” and Roma people (I quote again) “animals”.

This happened seven days before the ETF congress, in Budapest, near to the conference centre, we were confronted with a transatlantic party for the far right.

Comrades, it is indeed a sign of the times.
Far right is back all over Europe.
They are back, and they are not hiding anymore.
Quite the opposite.
For years they were marginalised.
Far right was a bunch of nostalgics of fascism and nazism.
Living in the past and telling stories of their non realised and dangerous dreams and their scary unrealised ambitions.

Today far right is rehabilitated.
They don't wear uniforms anymore, they wear fancy costumes.
The leadership is dressed up well.
They are active on social media
and opened a cultural battle against democracy,
tolerance, open mindedness,
Like wolves disguised as sheep they present themselves
as the representatives of the working class people.
With a narrative seducing workers all over Europe.
European values would be in danger because of open borders, immigration, the Islam, ...
Our social security would not survive because so called non-Europeans are living from the system that we, the real Belgians, Germans, French, British, ... are financing.

In that perspective, the new far right of today is more dangerous than the past 50 years.

We can not let this happen without reaction!

And we have to tell people that democracy is never to be taken for granted.

Could you have imagined some years ago that in the United States, a coup d'état would be organised by far right, armed mob, assaulting Capitol Hill, with - as becomes more and more clear – the complicity of the beaten candidate for the presidency, Donald Trump?

Could you have imagined that the prime minister of your country would still be in office, after the misconduct he demonstrated the past years? knowing that on different occasions he and his staff broke the covid-legislation, he imposed himself the British citizens? and he gets away with it?

Apparently he found inspiration with the CEO of P&O
Well known by you people,
who declared in the British parliament,
after having sacked brutally 800 workers
that he knew that he broke the law,
and that he would do it again.

If we let it go, far right, populists, fascists will be there to break down our democratic society.
They will attack unions and the social security system we built up with our bare hands,
and even with the blood of our ancestors.
Because we know,
history is telling us,
far right are the storm troopers of capitalism!
And we cannot accept this happening!

Do not mistake comrades,
They are already knocking at the union doors,
Like in Italy where the offices of our friends of CGIL were several times attacked by fascist mob!
Tomorrow it can happen in Belgium, in France or in your country.

Do not mistake, comrades,
Far right is represented already in the parliament,
And even in governments
in a lot of European countries,

Unions have the duty to stop far right!

I am convinced that trade unions must be in the centre of the battle against far right,
as they always have been throughout history.
That is why I think that every single union affiliated to ETF should develop educational programs for the membership about the danger of far right. Their false narrative must be unmasked, our membership must be organised in the battle against far right.

That is why ETF voted a motion at our congress to fight against far right.
And that ETF will take initiative to do so.
That is also why we proposed to make the 8th of May,
the end of the Second World War,
the victory of democracy against fascism,
a collective and official holiday all over Europe.
And I appeal to you, RMT to join the campaign for this!

Comrades, if I say we need RMT in the battle against far right,
we also need you in the battle against corporate greed.

Corporate greed has spread almost faster than Covid or the plague.

Company gains are all that matters to the majority of the CEO's.

They do not care about the working conditions of their staff.

They do not care about people's safety.

They do not care about social dialogue.

They do not care about the workers all together.

All they care about are the numbers on the company's bank account
and the profits they can show to their shareholders.

You cannot find a better example than P&O's CEO Hebblethwaite.

With a basic annual salary of £325.000 Hebblethwaite will have no trouble in paying his electricity bill. Unfortunately, the 800 seafarers he sacked in a disrespectful way are not in the same luxurious position,

nor are the agency staff he hired to replace them and who are paid on average £5.50 per hour.

Amazon is the top e-commerce company in the world.

In the second quarter of 2021 the turnover of this online retailer peaked sky high. Netto profits went up with no less than 48%.

The Danish company Maersk, well known in the maritime sector, has booked a gross profit of 20 billion dollars in 2021. Their operational profits were higher than the previous five years put together. The CEO stated that if the company made even more profits, he would not know what to do with all this money.

Well, I know what he could do with it!

And these people have the “guts” to complain about the high salary costs of their staff? What a joke!

There is money in this globalised economy,

So let's work together to go and get it!

And yes, we have to be honest.

If we want to fight back against corporate greed,
against far right,
against liberalisation and deregulation,
we need strong unions.

No softies!

We need unions in the ETF membership who want to make a fist and fight back.

Negotiating if possible, but mobilising and organising action when needed.
If we want a strong and powerful ETF.

Last week you organised a strike in British Railways
with 50.000 railway workers saying loud and clear they had enough of it.
The biggest dispute since 1989 in British rail. Let me congratulate you for this!

And if the government and the Secretary of State for Transport
Grant Shapps do not realize that they should talk with the unions
instead of fighting them, there is a hell of a problem.

That's why ETF is in full solidarity with the British railway unions
in their battle for decent working conditions and decent salaries for the
workers they represent.

And make no mistake, comrades,
even if Britain took the decision to step out of the European Union,
international union solidarity remains essential to defend workers' rights.
The Eurostar does not stop halfway the Chunnel,

planes from and to Europe continue landing and taking off on British airfields,
trucks from and to the continent are moving in and out
And the maritime world is international by itself.

Multinational companies are dominating the transport economy.
Amazon, DHL, GLS, Kühne & Nagel, Keolis, ...
they have a clear and aggressive global strategy.
They reshuffled, adapted to the circumstances and made it work for great
business results, for the sake of the big bucks.

So we, the unions, we must do the same.
We, the individual unions,
must not think that we can solve the problems that our workers deal with
only by organising on a local or a national level
We have to do it together.
Let me quote someone you all know:
“We want to bargain for our futures. We have to negotiate. If we’re not
bargaining, we have to beg. I don’t want any working class people in this
country to beg the employers for a decent living.” That is what your secretary
general Mick Lynch said!

And Mick knows,
I know,
All of you know,
That at the negotiation table
a union is strong if the employers know that we are ready to fight!

We, the unions, have to organize ourselves,
not only on a national but also on an international level,
with unions from other countries,
to unite our forces,
to defend the workers’ rights.
Because, brothers and sisters, if we don’t defend them, no one else will.

So Brothers and sisters
Together we are strong!
Let’s stay strong together
In international solidarity.

Frank Moreels, 04/07/22