

The OeGB and Migrant Workers

On the Austrian labour market, there work more than 370,000 people who don't have Austrian citizenship. Until recently, these employees and workers were excluded from the right of being elected as representatives on the level of their firm or factory. This meant that migrant workers did not have the right to be represented by people like themselves who know their problems from their own experience. This discouraged many and prevented their taking part in trade union activities. Since January 2006 these more than 370,000 migrants who are part of the Austrian workforce have been allowed to run for elections as representatives on the level of their firms and companies. Yet, the trade union leadership (i.e., the leadership of the OeGB) contributed only little to this success achieved by colleagues from Vorarlberg. Empowering migrant workers and strengthening their rights in their firm or factory has so far remained an unsolved task.

This situation does not only concern the 370,000 people mentioned above. An additional one hundred thousand migrants who are already Austrian citizens are daily confronted with xenophobic prejudices at their workplace and on behalf of their colleagues. Practices of exclusion in their workplaces and the day-to-day discrimination in public have given rise to cultural ghettos, furthering the division and polarisation between so-called “natives” and so-called “foreigners”.

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Migrant Workers into Trade Unions!

In the past 40 years, the OeGB has never taken a clear position on this situation. Within the trade unions, migrant workers seem to be appreciated only as paying members but not as colleagues with equal rights. So it is high time that the OeGB adopts the social situation of migrant workers as one of its primary concerns.

We, the Independent Trade Unionists in the OeGB (Unabhaengige GewerkschafterInnen / UG) demand for all the people living in Austria equal rights in their workplaces, in society as a whole, and equal political rights – regardless of their respective nationalities and citizenships. From a self-reforming OeGB we expect an approach to our colleagues, the migrant workers, which is characterised by solidarity. We demand their inclusion into all the discussions about reform of the OeGB and trade union work on the level of factories and firms.

In order to achieve that aim the initiative of those concerned is also necessary. It is the declared aim of our workgroup to set into motion a process of sensitisation among Austrian colleagues for the situation of migrant workers by distributing information material and by organising workshops and seminars, discussions and activities. We want ourselves and them to become aware of the manifold experiences and strengths of migrant workers and we want more and more migrant workers to become actively involved with trade union work.

Colleagues! Your committment, your ideas and your activity are required!

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