



### Job flexibility and precarity are no response to globalisation

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**M**any workers in France and Europe worry about their jobs being exported to low wage economies. These fears are skilfully abused by those claiming that the only way to hold on to jobs in Europe is to work longer, to work for lesser pay, to give up on social security and job protection. It is obvious whose interest is served. By shifting the entire burden of adjustment to the side of workers, business can profit from the weakened position of workers and trade unions and reap the benefits of globalisation to most the fullest extent.

**H**owever, jobs paying poverty wages with employers able to fire workers at will are not the way forward. Countries such as China will simply react to such a strategy by exploiting their work force even more. One telling illustration is that a Chinese subsidiary of an Italian owned company producing wooden furniture forced their Chinese workforce to work longer hours while pretending European workers were putting in unpaid overtime.

**W**hat Europe needs to do instead is to try to keep ahead of low wage cost competitors. Europe needs to upgrade its economy and move into new activities and sectors. Innovation and productivity need to spread throughout the economy. And for this to do so, Europe needs a skilled work force that is able to handle new production techniques, products and services. Here, the severe contradiction between flexible and precarious work and the agenda of investing in workers' skills needs to be stressed. How to expect that are workers putting in long working weeks and surviving on poverty wages to engage in skills improvement and lifelong learning? How to expect insecure workers to be motivated to the work place and its innovation? How to expect children growing up in poverty to escape from the vicious circle of poverty, school failure, low skills, hence poor paid jobs? It is no coincidence that countries which have deregulated their labour markets and where precarious jobs take up about one third of the work force have seen stagnating productivity (Spain) or even falling levels of productivity (Italy).

**E**uropean governments and Commission need to think again. Taking away workers' rights to decent wage, adequate access to social security and stable employment relationships is the entirely wrong answer. Instead of playing down the social dimension of Europe as a cost, social cohesion and workers' rights need to be seen as an investment and guarantee for productivity and innovation. What is necessary is that the Commission and the European Council draw up a plan to fight and get excessive flexibility in the labour market back under control.