

TRANSPORT WORKERS FIGHTING BACK

ORGANISING GLOBALLY

Young workers: standing up for their rights

Unions are facing enormous challenges in today's globalised transport industry. Privatisation, deregulation and commercialisation have led to job losses and a reduction in trade union membership numbers. Meanwhile, the transport industry is growing, with new areas of employment opening up. However, much of this work is unregulated and casualised. Very often, many of these jobs are done by young workers – especially those working on computers, in call centres, in warehouses and driving delivery vans - who are not organised into unions.

Trade unions have a duty to protect the rights and interests of these workers. At the same time, unions that take up this work will build their strength, membership and organisation.

It is also vital to ensure that young workers are engaged in the trade union movement so that they can take forward the work of the movement in the future.

Key issues affecting young workers:

Wages and a two-tier workforce

Young workers can often be paid less than older workers, creating two levels of pay depending on age; young workers are also more likely than older workers to receive just the minimum wage

Casualisation and precarious work

Work undertaken by young people can lack job security as they are more likely to be employed on a temporary basis, especially if work is outsourced

Lack of union rights

Many young workers may not be unionised particularly if they are employed on a casual or temporary basis

Young transport workers around the world share many experiences and problems. By coming together, they can learn from each other, seek common solutions and build collective action.

Organising young workers can present a specific challenge for unions. It is important to allow young workers the opportunity to build their participation in their own way, and to recognise the different ways of campaigning that young people use which could be advantageous to certain areas of union work. Unions have to be innovative to shift away from the traditional approaches of organising and consider how the interests and issues of young workers can be represented in union structures.

Many unions are undertaking strategies to organise young workers, including for example, establishment of youth committees at union locals, youth meetings, and sports events.

The Action Week is an opportunity to support young workers to do something for themselves in the name of the union and to get them involved in union activities, issues and campaigns.

... Can your union use the Action Week to identify where young workers are in the industry?

... Can you invite and include young workers to participate in your campaign activities?

... Can your union use the Action Week to highlight issues for young workers?

... How about including young workers on your action week planning committees?

Can you set-up a specific structure for young workers within your union?

For more information, please contact the Secretariat (young@itf.org.uk)

ITF road transport and railway unions are undertaking different strategies to organise young workers.

For example, one of the activities promoted by the National Transport Workers' Union in Singapore is access for young people as union members to centres where they can meet other young people. The CC.OO in Spain reports that although there is a lack of union culture among the youth, due to the progress the union has made in improving working conditions, membership has increased, especially among women. In Canada, the CAW has encouraged its young bus drivers to talk to students who use the buses about issues affecting workers such as overcrowding and violence. The Trade Union of Railwaymen and Transport Construction Workers of Russia holds an annual event 'Student – strong union leader' for young people who will become workers on Russia's railway network to share experiences and take part in training on basic trade unionism, visits to the railway companies working with new technologies and systems they might use on the job. During activities for the 2012 Action Week, the union organised a youth action in Krasnoyarsk aiming to attract more young workers into the trade union movement.