



## Working conditions fit for the 21st century

The European Parliament has adopted a report setting out a broad statement of its approach to **Reform of European Labour Law** and a closely related report on what the European Commission called a **Flexicurity** approach to the labour market - that is, in theory, an approach which would combine flexibility with security for employers and employees. In truth, for politicians from the Right, both reports were seen as opportunities to promote deregulation of the labour market and an erosion of employees' rights.

### Where we played a leading role - splitting the right

In the face of a right-wing majority in the current European Parliament, the Socialist Group realised that the only chance of defending workers' rights in these two reports lay in 100% unity. On the Labour Law report, all Socialist MEPs empowered Stephen HUGHES (UK) to table amendments in the name of the whole Group. With this mandate, he was able to table amendments finely calculated to split the right-wing groups and build a progressive majority. On the Flexicurity report, the Socialist rapporteur CHRISTENSEN (DK) was equally successful in splitting the right and building a winning coalition.

The term 'flexicurity' has raised concerns among our citizens. All too often it has been a device to allow firms to get rid of staff more easily, with no counterbalancing benefits for employees. The European Commission proposed a set of common principles on flexicurity which claimed to balance the interests of employees and employers, but which in fact put too much emphasis on flexibility and not enough on job security. The Socialist Group's victory in the European Parliament managed to radically transform the flawed proposal.

### Key Victories on Basic Legal Protections

In recent years new and precarious forms of employment contract have spread like wildfire across Europe. In response, the two EP reports laid down the principle that, in EU labour market laws and policies, a full-time standard contract is the norm. They also renewed the EU's commitment to adequate legal protections for all workers. Among the key provisions:

- **"...any form of employment, whether non-standard or otherwise, should carry with it a core of rights regardless of the specific employment status**, including equal treatment, health and safety protection, provisions on working/rest time, freedom of association and representation, collective bargaining, collective action, and access to training."- *Labour Law report*

- promotion of **both employment security and job security** (The Commission wanted to have employment security - based on access to retraining, employment services etc - at the expense of job security). - *Flexicurity report*
- keeping the **traditional model of permanent contracts**, which forms the basis of the social security systems in Member States, at the heart of all EU employment policies. - - *Flexicurity report*
- promotion of **decent work**, and **condemnation of abusive labour practices**, particularly in certain non-standard contracts as well as the right to protection against unfair dismissal; - *Flexicurity report*