

GIG ECONOMY AS A CHALLENGE FOR EMPLOYEES

AND TRADE UNIONS

Federacja Związków Zawodowych Metalowców i Hutników w Polsce (Federation of Trade Unions of Metalworkers and Steelworkers in Poland) is a young organization uniting two very important sectors for the country's economy, although its pedigree is more than 110 years of the trade union movement of metalworkers and 35 years of steelworkers. However, under one umbrella, after 70 years of separation, it has been operating since last year. The Federation of Metalworkers and the Federation of Steelworkers' Unions in Poland have joined forces in order to represent better the interests of the steel industry in its broadest sense. Mirosław Grzybek was chosen as the president of the new organisation at the 1st Congress.

In addition to its statutory duties, i.e. defending the jobs of its members' trade union organisations, the Federation has been actively participating in many international programmes for years. As a result, trade unionists have improved their qualifications and knowledge, among others, in the field of labour law, or broadly understood labour relations and employer-employee relations.

Mirosław Grzybek the President of the Board of Directors, in connection with a very difficult situation at ArcelorMittal Poland's Kraków plant, where on Saturday night, November 23rd, the process of blast furnace extinguishing started, issued an "Appeal to Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki". In this appeal, he recalls that the first decision to extinguish the blast furnace and part of the raw materials in Kraków was made on May 6th, 2019, and then on July 25th, it was suspended.

"At that time, the social partners, as OPZZ and the Federation of Metalworkers' and Steelworkers' Trade Unions in Poland, within the scope of their competences, launched meetings within the Tripartite Body for Social Conditions of Metallurgy Restructuring, the Problem Team for Economic Policy and Labour Market and the Social Dialogue Council. The result of these meetings and consultations is Resolution No. 84, which contains all the most important elements concerning current metallurgical problems".

In the appeal we also read: "The hopes of the workers were dispelled on 12 November 2019, one month after the parliamentary elections. Reductions in the Kraków plant will affect about 1,000 employees directly involved in the raw material part and more than 1,000 employees working in steel companies that perform specialist work. (...) We hope that the Polish government will not remain indifferent in the face of threats to hard-working people, who with great commitment and dedication are trying to preserve the steel industry in the face of the challenges it has faced for years".

Today, we would like to take a closer look at the activities of the Federation within the framework of international cooperation and the participation of its members in the current EU projects. A strong trade union organisation of metalworkers and metallurgists, which unites members, is the second force in the National Agreement of Trade Unions. It also belongs to the European Federation of Industry IndustriALL, which represents 7 million workers employed in European industry, including the steel sector.



What does belonging to a European trade union family mean? - we ask President Mirosław Grzybek.

- IndustriALL is an organization associating many industries. During the meetings we present the problems occurring in the member countries of the organization. We try to solve them, lobby to protect the European market, including energy-intensive industries. The steel industry throughout Europe is struggling with huge problems, due to the large export of steel from countries where there are no emission fees. Therefore, we promote the introduction of a carbon footprint or a carbon tax for producers outside the Union.

In this respect, we count on the support of the largest European trade union IG Metall, with which we have been cooperating for years. At the October congress in Nuremberg **Jorg Hofmann** (WHO ????)..... devoted a lot of space to sustainability, global climate policy and fair trade in steel products in the context of the rising costs of CO2 emissions, which are destroying the European steel industry, but not only. That is why we, as representatives of the steel crews, have the right, and the duty, to expect support from politicians for solving this crisis.

By belonging to a European trade union family, we can also improve our qualifications in various EU projects carried out by all the countries associated in IndustriALL.

The Federation has been implementing a number of EU and social projects for years. Within the framework of these projects, our representatives deepen their knowledge and experience in trade union activities; acquire the necessary tools to talk to employers. They also have the opportunity to confront their problems with colleagues from other countries. Our organisations are mainly operating in international companies, so contacts with trade unionists from other countries are highly needed.

We have just finished, as a leader, the Air Space project on the situation of employees in the aviation industry. Its participants were representatives from Serbia, Romania, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria. We are partners of two projects of Bulgarian metalworkers, as well as a large project on the participation of automotive workers in the GIG economy, i.e. based on the so-called "jobs". The project involves trade unionists from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Serbia and Slovakia. The employers' side is represented by Poland, Slovakia and representatives of the Greek University of Thessaloniki - says the President.

To explain - gig economy is a definition of an economy based on the realization of tasks and projects more and more often offered through digital platforms, rather than a job. This form of employment is being used by more and more people and this is due to demographic changes, technological progress and ubiquitous automation and digitization. This phenomenon has both positive and negative implications for employees and companies.

The implementation of small projects of the so-called gigs is an increasingly frequent phenomenon and for many people it is becoming the basic form of livelihood, and for companies a way of rapid development. The beginning of the gig economy phenomenon is considered to be the turn of the century, when the Internet became a space where employees were sought and commissioned. This trend was initiated in the United States. In Poland, it is often called the economy of sharing. It consists of the so-called "job-to-job", and its rapid development in recent years is largely associated with increasingly advanced technologies and their constantly growing



impact on human life.

The term "gig" is a jargon word for 'fixed-term work' or "independently contracted work". From the point of view of sociologists, "gig economy" is one of the manifestations and faces of the so-called "liquid modernity" of our times. Such a system of work and economy is connected with the feeling of insecurity that people nowadays feel the need for constant risk taking and instability. A person who chooses to work only on a casual basis gains freedom, but loses the benefits of the employment contract. The employee has to seek new jobs alone, which can cause stress due to lack of security and financial comfort. He or she should also individually take care of covering insurance premiums and putting aside funds for rainy days. However, nowadays there are more and more "gig" offers.

- Do you think that such projects are needed and to whom they are addressed?

- The project is aimed at workers representing the automotive industry, but its core is mainly about labour relations. The automotive industry is one of the largest industrial sectors in the EU and key to Europe's prosperity. It provides jobs for 12 million people and represents 4% of the EU's GDP, the world's largest manufacturer of motor vehicles. Almost 20 million of the 70 million cars assembled worldwide are produced in Europe. The steel industry is one of its main suppliers.

Our project is based on the experience of the Federation of Metalworkers' Unions, gained during the participation in another project carried out by Ires Lucia Morosini " Smart manufacturing in the manufacturing industry - Organisation and work: new scenarios for industrial relations". The conclusion of this Italian project is the strong link between the digitisation of production processes and the development of the gig economy.

That is why we decided to broaden our knowledge in this area and create our own project, which is currently being implemented. In front of our eyes, the definition of an employee is evolving and new employment relationships between employer and employee are beginning to emerge. Employers mainly introduce the need for flexibility, so that employees must harmonize their work with their private life and other duties.

The research that has been carried out within the framework of our project clearly shows that employees do not accept this form of employment as a form of permanent work. Of course, it is acceptable as a casual form of employment outside normal employment. In turn, employers want to maximize profits and minimize costs, so they try to introduce flexible forms of employment of so-called gigs. Therefore, being fully aware of the trends that occur on the labour market, we want to have an impact on eliminating, wherever possible, these unfavourable, from the employee's point of view, phenomena.

- How do you intend to eliminate this phenomenon when it has entered the common consciousness?

- And here is the biggest problem. We have to make the employees aware that it is impossible to watch passively what is happening in a given plant. People must be actively involved in the decision-making process. Inactivity and changing circumstances lead to a lack of decision-



making about their future. As research has shown, transparent and understandable communication of decisions has not caused employees to misunderstand and reject them. An employee who has a direct impact on the surrounding reality has less stress and more satisfaction with his or her work.

Although the project concerns the automotive industry, it also fits perfectly into current employment relationships in the steel, metal and processing industries. According to the values of the European Union, there is a new need to regulate industrial relations differently. The project aims to raise awareness of the potential benefits resulting from the implementation of the model of employee participation in decision-making processes in companies, because it is a very important aspect of managing changes that constantly occur in companies.

- However, gig economy mainly concerns young people who want to be independent and do not really think about the future, retirement etc.

- Yes, it is true that the giggers are mainly young and educated people with university degrees in economics, marketing, architecture, philology and engineering, or poorly educated people who do simple work in the short term, as drivers, packers or data entertainers. Most often, they provide software and technology development, writing and translation services or work in the creative and multimedia industry. Their employment is mainly characterised by the uncertain duration of the contract, low pay, poor protection of the employment relationship, i.e. generally lack of employee participation.

This can also lead to serious pathologies in the future. Working on a contract basis, we do not have pension, retirement or health insurance contributions paid. Few people want to pay them themselves. Moreover, this shows how important it is to make employees aware of what gig economy is and what its consequences are. Therefore, I consider participation in this project very important for the activities of our Federation, its members and their families.

We live in times of permanent change. Unfortunately, the times when most employees could expect to spend their whole professional life with one employer are a thing of the past. Technological progress, evolving consumer preferences and the market that adapts to them on an ongoing basis are also transforming the world of work.

