

**Statement of Guy Ryder, General Secretary, International Trade Union
Confederation.**

Employer Campaign against the Employee Free Choice Act

Yesterday, 18 March, the US Chamber of Commerce and the US Council of International Business sent a communication to leaders in the US Congress that purports to explain the meaning of international labour standards and argues that the Employee Free Choice Act is contrary to them. The International Labour Organisation, the only tripartite body in the UN system (representing workers, employers, and governments) sets and deals with these standards with an authoritative and well-tested supervisory system. It has never contracted out that central function. It is tried and trusted and it brings results. There have been literally thousands of complaints over the years. If the ILO had taken the kind of politicized approach now being adopted by the US employers, would it have helped to change the nature of the world in which we live through, for example, its action in Poland?

But, if this crude move by the US employers to capture the ILO's authority was not bad enough, any objective reading of ILO standards and case law exposes their misleading arguments. And, they know it. There is absolutely no way that an argument that the Employee Free Choice Act violates ILO standards can be sustained.

The mission and purpose of the ILO is not to defend the powerful few against the weak. It is to ensure that those who have little power, workers, have a chance to form their own trade unions and defend their own interests without living in fear and running the gauntlet of intimidation and discrimination, including dismissal. Invoking ILO standards to protect those who already have too much power turns the rules and the raison d'être of the ILO on its head.

The principles of freedom of association protect equally the rights of workers and employers to form their own organisations and defend their interests. Employer organisations are not nor can they be the representatives of workers. If you apply the logic of the Chamber, one would even have to question their legitimacy to represent business interests unless, of course, they were the designated representative of a majority of US businesses as determined in a secret ballot vote.

Tens of millions of working people are losing their jobs, their houses, and, in some countries, like the United States, their health care coverage. They are not asking for millions of dollars in golden parachutes. They are only seeking simple justice – the right and freedom to form their own organisations and to work and live in dignity.