

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROPOSAL

HANS BOCKLER FOUNDATION, DESUSSELDORF
GERMANY

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The world is standing at the brink of a crisis whose global impact will be greater than any seen before. My goal is to further investigate both the challenges and opportunities presented by this crisis, for workers around the world. I plan to do so by researching the responses of global trade unions to the economic crisis starting in with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

The majority of my research will be conducted at the Hans Böckler Foundation in Düsseldorf, Germany. The foundation has agreed to sponsor me as a student researcher on behalf of the ILR School. Hans Böckler houses one of Germany's foremost archives for German and European labor research, as well as workers, advisors, and experts in the field of international labor. While at the foundation I will be able to conduct research on: globalization, employment and institutional change, industrial relations, and collective bargaining policy. Hans Böckler is associated with the ETUC which comprises some 82 European trade unions. Through the foundation I will be able to establish contacts within the trade unionists from Cyprus to Slovenia.

This trip will comprise the international fieldwork component of an independent research project that will continue through graduation and include an international credit internship in the fall of 2009. I will start by interviewing workers and leaders of trade unions to better understand their experiences. These interviews will serve as the foundation for the development of a bigger picture of the effects of the economic collapse on the global working community. A large portion of my time spent in Europe will also be centered on collecting data on the current and prior status of European trade unions, and visiting their worksites and headquarters

Aside from the abundant academic opportunity provided by the foundation, the cultural experience will add one more layer to the richness of my ILR education. I expect to meet trade unionists whose work and experiences directly relate to my research and my education. I plan to immerse myself in the culture and customs of the city and the country, and take in as much of the experience as possible. In the words of the Hans Böckler Foundation the purpose of this experience is to be able “to use facts in a critical and constructive way in order to establish a world of work that is fair and to develop it for the future.”

Thank you for your time and consideration.

APPENDIX

Research Thesis

At best, the majority of workers who are part of international trade unions experience the benefits of their collective solidarity on a regional basis. While the negative effects of this crisis will be undoubtedly severe, for trade unions, there may be a light at the end of the tunnel. Prior to the financial collapse workers around the world were engaged in solitary struggles for basic rights and better lives, but this crisis may change that. Aside from the inevitable financial challenges of organizing, ethnic, political and cultural differences provide strong barriers to effective solidarity. The remedy for these divides may be the forced reorganization of a global capitalist economy. My theory is that this reorganization will compel trade unions towards international solidarity as an attempt to increase total bargaining power and support.