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Open Letter: Defend Amsab-ISH — Protect Our Shared Cultural Heritage

To the Government of Flanders and Flemish cultural policymakers

We, the International Association of Labour History Institutions (IALHI), an international network of archives, libraries, research and cultural heritage institutions, express our deep concern about the recent cuts to cultural heritage funding in Flanders and their impact on Amsab-Institute of Social History (Amsab-ISH).

Amsab-ISH is an institution of international significance. Its unique collections preserve the histories of workers, social movements, emancipation struggles, and collective action that have shaped our societies. Through its archival work, research, publications, exhibitions, and educational activities, Amsab-ISH keeps these histories alive, accessible, and relevant to present and future generations.

This heritage is irreplaceable. Its protection is a public responsibility, not a discretionary expense.

The consequences of funding cuts extend far beyond the institutions directly affected. They threaten the preservation of collections, the continuity of expertise, the accessibility of historical sources, and the international networks of research and cooperation on which our shared understanding of the past depends. Once professional capacity is lost and essential activities are discontinued, the damage may be difficult or impossible to reverse.
We recognise the need for responsible public budgeting. However, austerity measures must not undermine the very cultural institutions that preserve our collective memory, strengthen democratic understanding, and give a voice to histories too often overlooked.

The long-term costs of dismantling cultural capacity far outweigh the short-term savings.
We therefore call on the Government of Flanders and its cultural policymakers to:

- **Reconsider and substantially mitigate the recent funding cuts** affecting Amsab-ISH and the wider cultural heritage sector.
- **Guarantee sustainable structural funding** that enables heritage institutions to preserve their collections, retain expertise, and fulfil their public responsibilities.
- **Engage in meaningful dialogue with the heritage sector** and develop cultural policies that recognise the long-term social, scientific, and democratic value of its work.

As international colleagues, we stand in solidarity with Amsab-ISH, its staff, its partners, and the communities whose histories it preserves. The defence of this institution is part of a broader commitment to protecting cultural heritage as a shared public good, across borders and generations.

We urge the Flemish Government to act before lasting damage is done.

Do not sacrifice our shared history to short-term savings. Protect Amsab-ISH. Protect cultural heritage. Invest in the future of our collective memory.

Yours sincerely,

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director of the Archive of Social Democracy,
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https://ialhi.org/