

LABOR

magazine



WCL CONGRESS SPECIAL

FILE :
The policy resolution
and the topical resolutions
of the WCL

80th year, number 2002/1

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PROFILE

«Do something! It's intolerable, we can't just stand by doing nothing!» It was June 1999, lobby of the International Labour Conference, Geneva. The year in which the ILO complied with the choice of the Organisation of African Unity and received Henri Konan Bédié, president of Ivory Coast, as a special guest.



*Basile Mahan Gahé :
true to his principles*

An intolerable situation for Basile Mahan Gahé, founder and secretary-general of the Ivorian trade union confederation *Dignité*, whom the regime of that president had imprisoned several times for having created an independent trade union.

In the end, Bédié's visit that day went quasi unnoted. But it really hurt a man who did not understand how the ILO, institution devoted to the protection of the workers' rights, could have invited a predator of these rights.

At the time, Basile Mahan was indeed contending with disastrous situations in a number of

BASILE MAHAN GAHE, FROM IVORY COAST, WAS ELECTED IN OCTOBER PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR – THE RECOGNITION OF A LONG STRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM.

Basile Mahan Gahé

companies where trade union leaders, affiliated to *Dignité*, had fallen prey to harsh repression. In the Ihro Lamé plantation eighty activists of the trade union had been killed. At the Castelli company the shop stewards of *Dignité* had been sacked. At Carena, the ship-building yard, the dispute had been going on for two years already, at the price of nineteen human lives; only *Dignité* had stayed on the side of the three hundred dismissed workers, even though the latter had triggered off the dispute themselves.

What to tell them? How to explain that the head of state who was persecuting them had found the ILO's doors wide open while this same organisation was examining complaints for serious trade union freedom violations in Ivory Coast?

SUFFER WITH THE PEOPLE

Respect for people, for workers, has always been a priority of Basile Mahan Gahé. A few months after this incident in Geneva, a military group overthrew the Bédié regime. At first, the population had a blind belief in a rapid change. In the surroundings of *Dignité*, the shop stewards at Carena, Castelli and other compa-

nies were asking Basile and a lieutenant who had come to see them: «When is it to be?» But things kept dragging on, and the secretary-general of *Dignité*, who knew their suffering, was himself suffering under this slowness.

Another trait of Basile Mahan Gahé is faithfulness to principles. In 1988 he gave up a career in the administration, at the Ministry of Labour, to launch forth into the creation of an autonomous trade union, an extremely risky choice at that moment. A trade union whose name is a complete programme. Ever since, he has been one of the main, if not the main actor in the emergence of free trade unionism in Ivory Coast.

For a long time this country knew a trade union monopoly; it was embodied in the UGTICI, an organisation very friendly to the single party, the PDCI. So, in founding the trade union *Dignité* on 1 May 1988, Basile Mahan Gahé has contributed not only to a correct representation of the workers but also to the democratic process. Today, since the change of government, the trade union has become the mouthpiece for all the confederations in the country, and the dispute at Carena has been solved by the re-employment of the unlawfully dismissed workers.

Continued on page 17

The Congress, a new breath!

From 20 to 27 October 2001, the World Confederation of Labour held its four-yearly World Congress. It was the first time this event, the 25th, took place in a East European country, in Bucharest, Romania. The WCL has strongly developed in that region since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The 25th Congress was renovating in many respects. First, as far as the WCL's internal reform was concerned, it expressed the clear will to deploy Trade Action, which was reflected both in the Statutes and in the changes at the level of the general secretariat. As from now, the secretary-general will be assisted by two deputies instead of by five confederal and executive secretaries. All these reforms are clear, and they have to bring about a new working capacity for more Trade Action in the field.

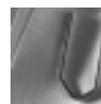
But the novelties do not stop there, for progress was also made at the level of trade union democracy. We are thinking here in particular of the presence of six women in the Confederal Board, the Confederation's highest governing body in the periods between two congresses. Indeed a real progress for trade union democracy, as women now assume more responsibilities than in the past.

As regards the content of its resolutions, the WCL Congress took into account, of course, the terrible events that have submerged the world in tension for too long already. This explains the adoption of resolutions on issues such as peace and solidarity with the Palestinian workers.

But the Congress went further, witness the renovating proposals to humanise the globalisation and to advance social justice by developing an appropriate theoretical and practical framework. Only a trade union and social counter-vailing power, rooted in the grassroots and trade levels as much as in the national, regional and international levels, will be capable of changing the rules of the game. Our first task is now to define the lines of force for the Confederal Board, which will meet in April, so that it can draw up a plan of action and strengthen the WCL's action in the field with a view to an effective protection of the workers' rights. The programme is indeed very full, but no doubt the results will be equal to the challenge launched by the Congress.



Willy Thys
Secretary-general,
of the World Confederation of Labour



Just a word...

EDITO

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n°1 Labor



WHO

The movement for another globalisation

FOR SOME TIME NOW, AND PARTICULARLY SINCE THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF 11 SEPTEMBER, THERE HAS BEEN A NEW TENDENCY TO LABEL THE MOVEMENT FOR ANOTHER GLOBALISATION AS AN ANTIDEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT.

To understand the phenomenon, one must bear in mind that the “antiglobalists” have rarely met with the unanimous approval of the leaders of the planet. One will remember that in an attempt to discourage a large number of them, the World Trade Organisation organised its 4th Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, where it was easy to keep an eye on the comings and goings. Another important element to be considered is that this movement is composed of a wide variety of groups such as NGO’s, workers’ representatives, students’ and other organisations. The name antiglobalisation itself does not tally with the reality, as a large part of the members of the movement do not oppose globalisation as such, but rather the shape it has taken, ie economic globalisation to the detriment of social issues, from a neo-liberal perspective.

SINCE THE EVENTS ...

On 11 September 2001, the world witnessed the greatest tragedy the United States has for a long time encountered on its soil. Some people even go so far as to compare the attacks on the World Trade Center and Washington with the one on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The events brought the world in a state of tension, and a patriotic wind swooped down upon the USA. The starting point may lie precisely there. Indeed, everything that does not fit the standard is now assimilated with antidemocracy. And to many people, the so-called *antiglobalist* movement is part of that antidemocracy. The phenomenon is not confined to just the United States, of course, but has found acceptance all over the world.

Many organisations considered The “*open letter to the antiglobalists*” from Guy Verhofstadt, Belgium’s prime minister and then president of the European Union, a solid snub, even if it had been written before 11 September. First, because he talks about antiglobalists while, as was said above, this movement does not struggle against, but for an alternative globalisation. Moreover, Mr Verhofstadt assimilates the movement with rioters and even with small extreme right-wing groups (sic), present in Göteborg and Genoa. Then, because one of the aspects resented most in the open letter from Mr Verhofstadt is the signature it bears. According to the spokesman for the Belgian prime minister, it was a personal letter. Yet, it was published under the name “*Guy Verhofstadt, prime minister and president of the European Union*”. It is true that this caused great displeasure, particularly in Belgium. José Bové, on the other hand, saw something positive in it, even if he did not appreciate the full content of the letter: “*It is the first time politics takes position with regard to the World Trade Organisation*”.

(*Le Soir*, 27 September 2001)



Movement for another globalisation, below standard?



THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION (WTO) IN QATAR

Another element for a good understanding of the globalisation is the 4th Ministerial Conference, which the WTO organised in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001. As usual the accent on the social aspect was weak, but this Conference distinguished itself from the one of Seattle in that this time a ministerial declaration saw the light of day.

As regards its content, the WCL is pleased with the progress made in the matter of medicine. The declaration indeed reiterates the right of poor countries to use generic drugs. On the other hand, it is deplorable that, as far as the ILO is concerned, no progress was made as compared to Singapore, in 1996. The WTO had a real opportunity to advance towards an effective co-operation with the International Labour Organisation. In the opinion of the WCL, the fact of leaving aside the social dimension of the globalisation undermines the very legitimacy of the WTO and risks deteriorating the inequalities in the world. It goes without saying that side-tracking the ILO boils down to brushing away the whole labour legislation.

According to the WCL representatives, a new round of talks is only justifiable under certain conditions, particularly a substantial structural reform of the WTO and an effective co-operation with the ILO.

THE WORD SOCIAL FORUM, A PROCESS MORE THAN AN EVENT

It is useful to associate the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre, January 2002) with the globalisation debate. Indeed, according to the organisers, *"this Forum is to be considered an international reference in the struggle against neo-liberal globalisation"*.

First, it is important to understand how such a meeting proceeds. More than an event, the Forum is a collective strategic process of reflection, involving various networks, coalitions, campaigns, associations and movements of the civil society (including the World Confederation of Labour) sharing a perspective. It is important for the Forum to preserve the unity between these actors who adopt a position against neo-liberalism and stand up for democracy. The Forum's main ambition is to provide the participants with a medium to discuss and guide their actions. Above all things, says its International Council, it is not a body of power, but rather a democratic way to solve the problems of society, aimed to establish new national and international links.

Among other things the Forum will deal with the contradictions between small enterprises and economic globalisation, and with technical progress, without which the globalisation would never have assumed its current dimensions.

The World Confederation of Labour, for its part, believes that the trade union world is well in place at a

venue for debate like Porto Alegre. It was already present in 2001, not only as such but also through its Latin American regional organisation, the CLAT, its Brazilian affiliate, the *Central Autonoma de Trabalhadores - CAT*, and several national organisations.

MD



The Social Forum of Porto Alegre



Congress of the World Confederation of Labour, the supreme body

HET NEW EXCLUSIVE COMMITTEE

President : Basile Mahan Gahé
Secretary-general : Willy Thys

Vice-presidents :

Africa : Adrien Akouete
Asia : Muchtar Pakpahan
Latin America : Eduardo García
North America : James McGee
Europe : Luc Cortebeek
 Bogdan Hossu
Trade Action : Michel Bovy

Deputy vice-presidents :

Africa : Imrith Rashid
Asia : Necie Lucero
Latin America : Luis Enrique Marius
Europe : Manuel Zaguirre
 Imre Palkovics
Trade Action : Guy Rasneur

Treasurer : Doekle Terpstra

Deputy secretaries-general :

Trade Action : Jaap Wiene
Inter-Trade Action :
 Eduardo Estévez

In the organisation chart of the WCL, the Congress is the supreme body. It brings together more than three hundred delegates of the affiliates the WCL has in all the continents, and of the trade federations. It draws the organisation's policy lines and elects a president, a secretary-general, six vice-presidents and the other members of the Confederal Board. The Congress assembles every four years.

WHAT CONCLUSIONS?

The 25th WCL Congress came up to expectations. It indeed adopted the policy resolution, which contains the organisation's policy options in the next four years (see the dossier in the middle). To this has to be added the adoption of so-called topical resolutions, which deal with subjects of particular concern to the organisation, eg the situation of women in Afghanistan, solidarity with the Palestinian workers, the political situation in Cyprus and the International Labour Organisation.

The Congress also modified the Statutes, which now give women a greater place than in the past in leading offices at the WCL (see box), while restructuring the organisation's general secretari-

at, in which both Trade Action and the inter-trade action are represented.

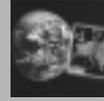
Four organisations were accepted as WCL affiliates:

- the Confederación de Sindicatos Autónomos de Venezuela (CODESA)
- the Congress of Malawi Trade Unions (COMATU)
- the Indian Confederation of Labour (ICL)
- the Confédération Démocratique du Travail (CDT-Morocco)

During the Congress, the WCL Standards Committee adopted a new plan of action. The Labour Standards programme is one of the WCL's main activities and consists in, among other things, complaints and denunciations with the ILO, campaigns and capacity building of national leaders in the matter of the international labour conventions. The main goal of this plan of action is the protection and advancement of the workers' rights.

THE CONGRESS AND WOMEN

The World Women's Committee presented to the Congress a draft modification of the Statutes, which was aimed to favour the effective participation of women in the WCL's second decision-making structure, the Confederal Board. The outgoing, forty strong Confederal Board indeed included not even one female regular member with the right to vote. Only two or three female observers had a seat on it. The Congress approved the modification to the Statutes, which now provide for the participation of at least one woman per regional delegation. This means that six women sit on the new Confederal Board. Thus, the WCL took an important step towards gender equality. Beyond all figures, these women are taking up the challenge to play their role by integrating the gender perspective while taking full part in the decision-making process.



Pakistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan, fiendly brothers?

The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have always been very close on account of their geographic proximity. At the moment we are writing these lines, a violent chapter in Afghanistan's history is drawing to an end. The question is what will happen now.

Many people, especially in Washington and London, think that the defeat of the Taliban is the result of the bombing strategy of the international coalition. The Taliban have lost the power, and the American and English losses have been minimal. "But mind you," declares Shouket Ali, secretary-general of the All Pakistan Trade Union Congress (APTUC), "this success must not make us forget the hundreds of Afghan civilians killed in the bombardments and the thousands of others for whom the same lot is reserved if a humanitarian effort is not made soon."

According to the APTUC, the Taliban government has fallen, deservedly. They proved that they did not belong to the civilised world, and their lack of political experience was no doubt a decisive factor of their defeat.

Unfortunately, the future situation is not so simple. "The Afghan leaders and the international coalition have the possibility of rectifying the errors of the past. If they do, Afghanistan can be heading for a future in peace, stability and reconstruction. If not, violence will be back", explains Shouket Ali. In his opinion, the successive Pakistani governments did not maintain relations with the Afghans out of love, but rather due to a geographic problem. Indeed, the already difficult relations with India got the Pakistani to maintain more or less cordial contacts with their other neighbour. Today, this boundary is not reliable anymore because of the frictions between the Northern Alliance and Pakistan.

From an economic point of view, the Pakistani people expects from the western world larger support, which could find expression in a relief of its debt. Lastly, the Pakistani trade unions are torn between hope and fear. The future will tell, no doubt, to which side the scales will tilt over.

MD.

THE COUNTRY

Capital : Islamabad

Population : 150.6 million
(forecast: 275 million in 2025).

Population density:

189,2 inh/sq km

Poverty index : 84.7%

of the population lives on less than two dollars a day.

Life expectancy : 63 years.

Infant mortality : 126.%

FOUR ETHNIC GROUPS

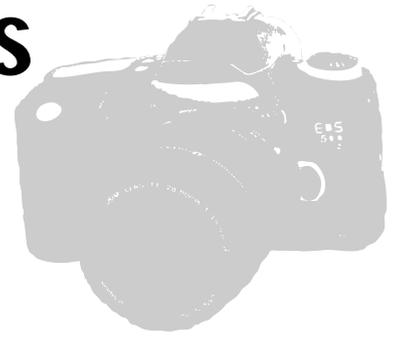
Pakistan is marked by ethnic diversity. Indeed, the Pakistani population is composed for the larger part of four groups: the Baluchis, the Pakhtuns, the Sindhis and the Punjabis.

The Baluchis live in tribes on the borders of Iran and Afghanistan. The Pakhtuns live in the mountains of the North-West; a large part of them are found in Afghanistan as a result of the border line that dates back from the beginning of the 20th century and has divided them in two parts ever since. They were joined by countless Afghan refugees during the war against the former Soviet Union. The Sindhis are concentrated on the banks of the River Indus; they constitute a sizeable rural society. Lastly, the largest group: the Punjabis, who account for 64% of the Pakistani population. This group, too, is a rural society, and their caste system sustains comparison with the one in India.

To this abundance of ethnic groups has to be added a variety of languages, Urdu being the official language and English the language used chiefly in the administration. As a Muslim nation, Pakistan is influenced by the Islamic culture and traditions. Despite everything, it has also undergone Hindu and western influences.

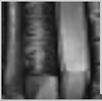


A few pictures



Julio Roberto Gomez, 25th congress of the WCL





25th Congress of the WCL, october 2001, Roumania

FILE

THE POLICY RESOLUTION AND THE TOPICAL RESOLUTIONS OF THE WCL

Build a World in Solidarit

The Workers' Movement in the 21st Century



A few pictures



*The WCL at the trade union demonstration
of 13 December 2001 in Laeken*



TRADE ACTION

Facing faceless employers

Even if nothing revolutionary came out of the meeting of the WCTA* that was convened during the recent Congress of the WCL, the debate on the action towards transnational companies added to the trade union determination in this matter. Thus, according to Freddy Pools, executive secretary, *«it is high time we invested in a clear view on the repercussions of transnationalisation, and on effective responses. That's precisely what we did in Bucharest, with the very large consent of the participants, wherever they came from».*

But what repercussions and, even more important, what responses? These issues have been identified. The workers find themselves in many cases facing faceless employers, transnational companies whose real managers are at a remote distance from the places of production or work.

Moreover, the nature of those employers changes. Subcontracting is spreading, organised on the inter-

national level in some cases. Production units are scattered, a more complicated trade union being one of the consequences of this. And last but not least, in the industrial countries, there is a tendency to pay wages and salaries in accordance with the company results, which is called with an understatement *«participatory methods subject to profitability»*, causing so confusion between the shareholders' and the workers' roles.

Jan Voets, who presented the issue by way of introduction to the debate, pointed out three general tendencies: growing precariousness of employment, social transformations and changes in the labour market. On the one hand, *«the working conditions are physically less trying, but stress, fatigue and mental suffering have grown in intensity. The atypical contracts have disposed of job stability»*. On the other, *«we note a growing inequality between income from labour and income from capital»*. Lastly, *«the changes in the employment contracts tend towards individualisation and flexibilisation»*.

TRADE ACTION HAS AFFIRMED ITS WILL TO GET ORGANISED TO EFFECTIVELY TAKE UP THE NEW CHALLENGES AWAITING THE TRADE UNIONS. A STRONG STRUCTURE REQUIRES A STRONG FOUNDATION.



WCTA meeting during the WCL Congress



GOING INTO ACTION

The analysis met with large agreement within the WCTA, notwithstanding the differences in nuance between the continents. Indeed, said Freddy Pools, «*everybody is aware of the fact that this is the main challenge*». This unanimity in the analysis must not conceal possible differences between the sectors – which does not necessarily imply disagreements – when time has come to go into action.



Real progress, according to the participants

The point in common is the agreement on the necessity of having international trade union structures. This may seem self-evident, but it is not always easy for the workers' organisations to leave their traditional field of action in which they have built a favourable balance of power: the national field. Some have evolved from conviction, others out of necessity, under the thrust of a transnational scope. In Europe transnational social disputes have usually placed the trade unions on the defensive.

The difficulty lies in going into action, of course. Not only are the interests of the sectors and the continents not necessarily identical, even if they are referred to with the same term «*workers' rights*». There is also the fact that an international structure implies funding and organisation, which seems to be not always easy to set up.

In the opinion of the participants, it has been the WCTA's merit to advance in the debate without veiling the difficulties. Thus, one of the proposals consists in «*taking account of the fact that there are different groups and interests*» to build a «*pragmatic trade union movement close to the places of work*». At the same time it is, in the trade union world, a matter of «*networking the trade federations*»; and, in its relation to the outside world, of «*taking root in the civil society*» and «*creating alliances with other groups*». These groups can be

consumers' associations or non-governmental organisations, or even employers in some cases. These actors and the trade unions are all concerned by initiatives such as the attribution of social labels (see the dossier in Labor-Magazine 01-03).

So, the proceedings of the WCTA during the Congress do not induce a choice between work «*at the bottom or at the top*», but a combination of two initiatives that strengthen one another: a structure is not strong unless it rests on a representative basis.

QUALITY OF WORK

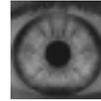
On this point, Trade Action is at one with the WCL as a whole which, in its policy resolution, pronounces itself in favour of «*building a regional and international countervailing trade union power to face up to the globalisation. In the emerging worldwide public opinion, the trade union movement must be much more present*». Together with its affiliates, the WCL will have to develop a Global Economy and Human Development action programme, so to affirm in no uncertain terms that general welfare is the goal, and the economy a means to achieve it.

At the previous Congress already, in 1997, Trade Action had underlined that «*the focus must be not only on the quantity but also on the quality of work. Trade Action must therefore aim at sustainable employment in circumstances and conditions that are socially in conformity with the international labour standards*». The action method agreed on at the time was «*to advance the existing international labour standards and to develop the social clauses both at the inter-occupational level and at company level*».

At the end of such a debate in a world committee, a new challenge presents itself : how to achieve that this global view is taken not only by a few trade union leaders but by all the workers? It is a matter of «*advancing internal democracy, transparency and openness*», which is not only a question of right or wrong, but also of efficiency. Neither the Congress nor the WCTA provided a response to everything. Each step forward calls forth another one.

André Linard

* World Committee on Trade Action, within the WCL



WOMEN

«The new political weight of women»

«Again the gender issue? And if we went into the real problems?» This reflection, not so uncommon in the past, in response to questions from women to their trade unions is history as from now. At least this was the impression that prevailed during the 5th World Women's Conference, which assembled in Bucharest on the eve of the WCL Congress (in the – entirely voluntary – presence of a few men). The Congress, for its part, gave the women additional political weight.

Necie Lucero, secretary-general of the WCL's Asian regional organisation, the BATU, placed the debate right away in its context: «The inequalities in and between the countries have risen, and to many people economic globalisation and restructuring have brought insecurity, incertitude and marginalisation.» But «the consequences for women are more serious when neo-liberalism is combined with patriarchy and cultural domination. In that case they are kept in cultural inferiority, social degradation and economic marginalisation.»

Isabel Yepez del Castillo, from Peru, confirmed this when she pointed out the importance of the qualitative aspect of female employment. Women continue to suffer the weight of household work in addition to employment and remain victims of what Isabel Yepez calls «the double segmentation»: the quality jobs for men, the poorly paid ones for women. Thus, in Latin America, she said, women are the majority in the world of work and in equal numbers present among the employees, but they account for a mere 7% of the university professors and for a minority of the trade union leaders. Free export zones, affirms the introductory report to the Conference, «contribute to job creation in quantity, but the quality leaves much to be desired.»

TRADE UNION RESPONSIBILITY

Yet, profound changes are going on in all fields of both private and occupational life. On the one hand, «the feminisation of labour is an objective reality. (...) The changes collide inevitably with the structures that

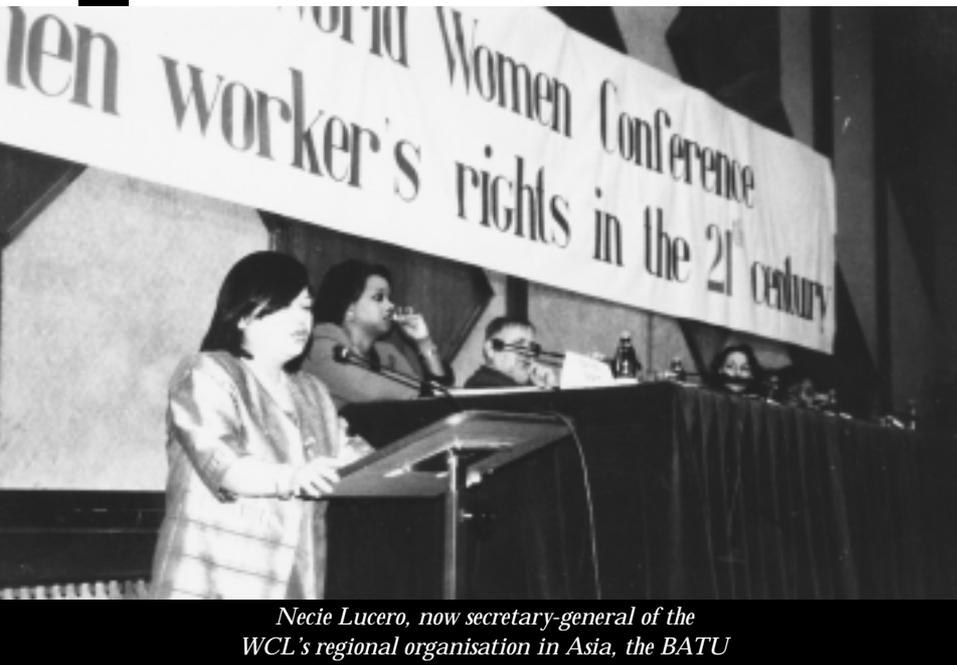
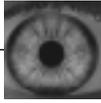
are predominant in family life, at the workplace, in the social institutions and in the spheres where political power is exerted.» (Introductory report). On the other, says Isabel Yepez, «the change in the capital/labour relation requires a restructuring of the trade union action methods.»

It is therefore very logical that the Women's Conference dealt with the place of women in the governing bodies of trade unions. Indeed, as was pointed out by Kattia Paredes Moreno, co-ordinator of the WCL Women and Work Department, «trade unions have a crucial responsibility. As organisations representing the workers' interests, as instruments of pressure, as key elements in the negotiations and as decisive agents of social change, they have at their disposal the primary tools for ensuring equality.» For the situation is paradoxical.

THE «WOMEN WORKERS' RIGHTS» CONDITION TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY. PROGRESS WAS MADE AT THE WCL CONGRESS, BUT A LOT REMAINS TO BE DONE. THE CONGRESS PROVIDED THE TOOLS. IT IS NOW A MATTER OF USING THEM.



Kattia Paredes Moreno, co-ordinator of the WCL Women and Work Department



Necie Lucero, now secretary-general of the WCL's regional organisation in Asia, the BATU

The social dialogue can favour gender equality in society and in employment, but *«problems such as discrimination, equal pay, reconciliation of occupational and family responsibilities, and moral harassment are not sufficiently considered in the social dialogue unless women take an effective part in it»*, explained Mrs Couty Fall, from Senegal, an expert in international labour law. But this necessitates a significant female participation in the governing trade union bodies.



Claudine Akakpo, CSTT, Togo

PLACE FOR WOMEN TO ACT. A MATTER OF DEMOCRACY

According to the report, the rate of unionisation of women varies from 59% in some Asian countries to 16% in North Africa. It would be 45-50% in the developed countries, sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia, and 32% in Latin America and the Caribbean. But *«an examination of the situation of women in the decision-making structures reveals clearly that their influence is inferior to their activities and membership rates»*.

The main causes of this are, according to the participants, the stereotypes with regard to female skills (*«The organisational skills of men are recognised as a matter of course. Women are expected to prove this skill.»*) And also the very masculine trade union style, the venues and meeting hours, the agendas, which are all tailored to men. Not to mention the arguments of a cultural nature which, according to Carmen Urrutia (USO, Spain), *«are used in some cases to prevent the unity of women. Now then, what unites us is stronger than what divides us.»*

Sure enough, a few women are at the head of national or continental organisations in the WCL. But a global strategy remains necessary, and the participants attempted to define such a strategy. In a significant manner, this started with the recommendation that women themselves should get beyond the prejudices about their role. They reaffirmed their confidence in

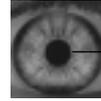
FEMINISATION OF THE STATUTES

Not only the Women's Conference, but also the whole Congress paid special attention to the place of women in the trade union movement. Already before the start of the Congress, Kattia Paredes had underlined that *«despite all the commitments, the participation of women in the decision-making trade union structures remains insufficient. (...) The representation of women on the highest level of the trade union hierarchy is very weak or non-existent.»*

Mrs Couty Fall, for her part, pointed out that *«the political commitment to equality, as asserted by most trade unions, does not alter the fact that the participation of women in the decision-making trade union structures remains insufficient at all levels (national, continental and international)»*.

Complying partially with a demand from its Women's Conference, the WCL has modified its Statutes so as to enhance the representation of organisations that appoint women to the Confederation's governing bodies. In the Confederal Board, the number of representatives of the continents or regions is raised by one *«in case of election of a woman assuming responsibilities in her organisation»* (article 17-1 of the WCL Statutes).

In figures, however, this decision has no immediate results. Pessimists will point out that a mere 15% of the members of the newly elected Confederal Board are women, whereas optimists will reply that there were no women at all sitting on the previous Confederal Board. A half-empty or a half-filled glass? Whichever, there is a marked progress of female participation.



the trade unions, even if *«parallel structures»* were necessary to support the women. And lastly they reminded of the fact that the gender issue had to be the subject of permanent and specific trade union attention because *«entering into the existing organisational schemes would reproduce the existing inequalities»*.

By electing women in its Confederal Board as representatives of the continents, and not only women (see box), the WCL is giving them legitimacy and opportunities which must now be seized advisedly. The women concerned are aware of the fact that just holding an office is not enough; it indeed remains necessary to develop the gender perspective in all trade union activities.

«Women must not be relegated to gender issues, a Moroccan participant said. But one always collides with the mentality of men. How can we change this?» Could this be done by taking up the suggestion of a man, D. Diomides from Cyprus, that *«the theme of the 6th Women's Conference, in four years' time, should be: gender parity in the WCL's governing bodies»?*

André Linard

A JOB WELL DONE

The Conference assessed the activities the Women and Work Department and the World Women's Committee (WWC) of the WCL had conducted since the previous Congress. On the whole, the results are favourable, but some difficulties subsist.

On the *«assets»* side, the women noted *«a structural consolidation of the women's action: the Women and Work Department has become a reality and an important element of the WCL.»* Result: *«for the first time resolutions on women, decided by WCL congresses, are taking concrete shape»*, even if we have to struggle in order *«not to be side-tracked by decisions that should be taken by the WCL's structures»*. And, indeed, *«the funding of activities is a huge difficulty»*.

Another task of the Department was to give impetus to a real involvement of women from the member organisations in this work, both in their respective countries and at the level of the continents. Regional co-ordinators were appointed to achieve this.

The Department implemented, at least partially, the plan of action and pilot projects favouring the integration of women, and the circulation of information between the WWC members had improved a lot, these members noted.

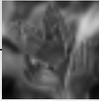
The gender issue is now part of the *«Norm»* programme and occupies a significant place in the information activities of the WCL.

On the whole, and despite the weak points in Europe, in particular, the co-ordination in the regions went smoothly and accounted, for instance, for the success of the so-called *«Convention 183»* campaign, which was aimed to have the ILO's Maternity Protection Convention ratified.

One flaw subsists, however: *«The integration of the gender perspective has not yet been acquired within the international trade federations.»* The teachers (World Confederation of Teachers) and the WFAFW were the first to set up a co-operation with the Department.

So, the Women and Work Department struck a favourable balance and now hopes that the gender issue will be taken on by the WCL as a whole.





PRESS REVIEW

In France :

"(...) the rate of unionisation is 4-5% in the private and 15-20% in the public sector. Result: in 1998, the number of strikes went down about everywhere, except in the public office which on its own accounted for 66% of the annual total days of strikes, against 46% in 1997 according to Dares, at the Ministry of Employment. (...)

With an average of 180,000 working days lost, the SNCF totalled all by itself one-fifth of the strikes in France. (...)

Since the beginning of the year, National Education, Health and Inland Revenue have taken over.

Should we see in this a sign of ill-being in the public office? Its officials are more often ill than the wage-earners in the private sector, and – a striking fact – while the rate of absenteeism amounts to 5.8% in the private sector, it is 10.9% for the civil servants".

Le Nouvel Observateur, no.1848

• FORCED MARCH TOWARDS GLOBALISATION

"Never before have the inequalities been so profound between North and South, and in each society for that matter. These disparities, veiled in many cases by an enervating discourse on the 'happy globalisation', have come to light in a spectacular manner after 11 September 2001. They have aroused a conscientisation: the world cannot be governed anymore as if nothing were wrong. Yet, while the war was going on in Afghanistan, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), proceeding on its forced march towards globalisation, held its summit in Doha, Qatar. Despite some progress in the matter of medicines, this session totally masked the social and ecological impact of trade. And it launched a new "development round" based on the idea, belied by the facts, that open markets are a factor of shared growth." Bernard Cassen and Frédéric F. Clairmont in *Le Monde Diplomatique I*, December 2001

• RECOURSE TO ASSESSMENT

"(...) No youthism on the part of the workers either: a sixty-year-old crane driver is perfectly capable of operating an engine. "Very few apply for early retirement, which is no surprise as the health of people improves: when I started my career, a worker was finished at fifty", Jean Denoel points out. Nor does the company hesitate to have recourse to assessment in order to avoid routine or lack of motivation. "We have thus redirected the career of a fifty-year-old employee, says the HRM of Carmeuse". But what if for one or the other reason the company were brought to dismissals? Wouldn't those of fifty or more

risk being the first ones to get the push? "7% of our staff are temporary", replies Jean Denoel. "In a way they act as buffers, and we avoid having to dismiss the open-ended employment contracts; as for the clerical staff, I can assure you that age wouldn't matter".

J.-F. S. *Le Soir*, Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 December 2001

• REGUS BOSS WORKS FOR FREE

"Mark Dixon, the entrepreneur who founded the Regus serviced offices chain, yesterday said that he will waive his ú400,000 salary as the company announced it has shed a quarter of its staff as part of a plan which cut costs by ú60m over the past three months. Regus, which operates offices in 48 countries, outlined the drastic actions it has taken to combat a slowdown in business. (...) Mr Dixon said the company had a strong order book for next year and he was confident of a turnaround in Regus' fortunes. It will take us a few years to get back but we will get back. It is going to be a long hard slog but we are cautiously optimistic"

The Guardian, 10 November 2001

BOOKS AND DEBATES



DICTIONARY OF GLOBALISATION

Whether in the political, the economic or the cultural work, whether one likes the shape it has taken or not, globalisation is here, to stay. But do people understand this phenomenon? What is world trade, the Kyoto Protocol, MAI, Nasdaq, G8, the Forum of Davos, The dictionary of globalisation reviews and analyses the majority of the actors and questions related to this mechanism. The dictionary has been edited under the auspices of the European Institute of Geoeconomics, under the management of Pascal Loriot to be more specific. It counts more than 300 definitions and is intended for students, workers, research workers, in brief, for all people closely or remotely affected by the globalisation.

Dictionary of Globalisation, under the management of Pascal Loriot, 496 pages, Ed. Ellipses

PROFILE



Respect for the workers has always been a priority for the new WCL president

Basile Mahan Gahé paid for these victories with several periods of imprisonment, one of them in an isolation cell in a clandestine prison, which nobody before him had left alive. The names of the preceding prisoners were engraved on the wall. He, too, wrote down his name, adding: «I, I will get out.» “It’s thanks to the ILO and to the WCL I succeeded», he says today. Being member of Dignité has for a long time been a risk.

«SO STRONG»

Those who know him well emphasise that Basile Mahan Gahé finds it somewhat difficult to share responsibilities, as is often the case with strong personalities. No doubt, his distrust is justified in some cases: Dignité has

had to stand up against attempts at infiltration, proof of the fact that those in power regard the organisation as a threat.

The more so as its secretary-general does not hesitate to give everybody, even the most powerful, a piece of his mind. Like during that meeting, in February 2000, of the country’s socio-economic leaders with the military junta and its chairman, Guei. While the other trade union leaders kow-towed to them, Basile put his finger on the responsibilities of each and everyone, including the government. People sometimes call him a whole-hogger, even reproach him with imprudence, but this is changing little by little, in the face of the responsibilities to be taken up; but it

is also what gives him credibility in the field.

Nobody is perfect, however, and no doubt Basile Mahan Gahé still has to polish up his ability to stimulate his staff, the more so as part of his time will be taken up by his presidency of the WCL. And by structuring his organisation without necessarily reproducing the model of the European trade unions that support him. At 48, this father of two children, qualified as a labour scientist, still has the whole future lying in store for him.

A. L.

Trade union action

Romania

The trade union movement must be independent!

The Social Democratic Party, currently in power in Romania, has contracted a bad habit. It has offered trade union leaders offices in the Romanian government. Even odder is the fact that some of these leaders have accepted them. This practice, now, runs counter to the Romanian Trade Union Act, which provides in the first paragraph of article 1 that “trade unions are organisations without a political character, aimed to protect and promote the occupational, economic and social, cultural and sporting rights and interests of their members, in conformity with the Labour Code and the collective labour agreements”. In the second paragraph of the article, it is added that “trade unions are independent of the State institutions, the political parties and all organisations”. Article 5 of the Trade Union Act adds strength to this concept in that it provides that “employees holding leading offices or exercising State authority in Parliament, the government, the ministries (...), have not the right to constitute trade unions”.



*CARTEL ALFA and CSDR,
two trade unions preserving their independence!*

The paradox lies in the fact that the Romanian Parliament seats trade unionists who remain in office as trade union presidents or vice-presidents (federations or confederation).

Fortunately, the trade union movement in Romania is not reduced to this negative example. A large number of trade unions oppose this attack on democracy and preserve their independence on behalf of the workers they represent, in the name of the law and of the principles of trade unionism. This is in particular the case for the two Romanian affiliates of the World Confederation of Labour: the CNS Cartel Alfa and the CSDR.

GOOD INTENTIONS?

Nobody in Romania denies the good intentions of the government to preserve social peace. The problem lies rather in the way of attaining this peace. It is indeed unacceptable to use trade unions as a transmission belt to get one's ideology accepted. In the opinion of the WCL, it is more efficient and at the same time more democratic to attain social peace through dialogue.

Of course, when interests are at stake, the fact of breaking the law is a matter of little concern. Yet, the rule of law in every democratic society prescribes that trade unions must be independent of the political parties and play a clearly defined role. Trade unions represent the workers and must oppose the leading class whenever the latter acts in conflict with the workers' interests. That is why in the long run the political subordination of the trade unions could destroy their specific role, ie the protection of the workers' interests. Moreover, this subordination can harm the government itself, which needs for the sake of efficiency independent trade unions to enter upon a genuine and constructive social dialogue in line with the principles of democracy.

Costinela Caraene