

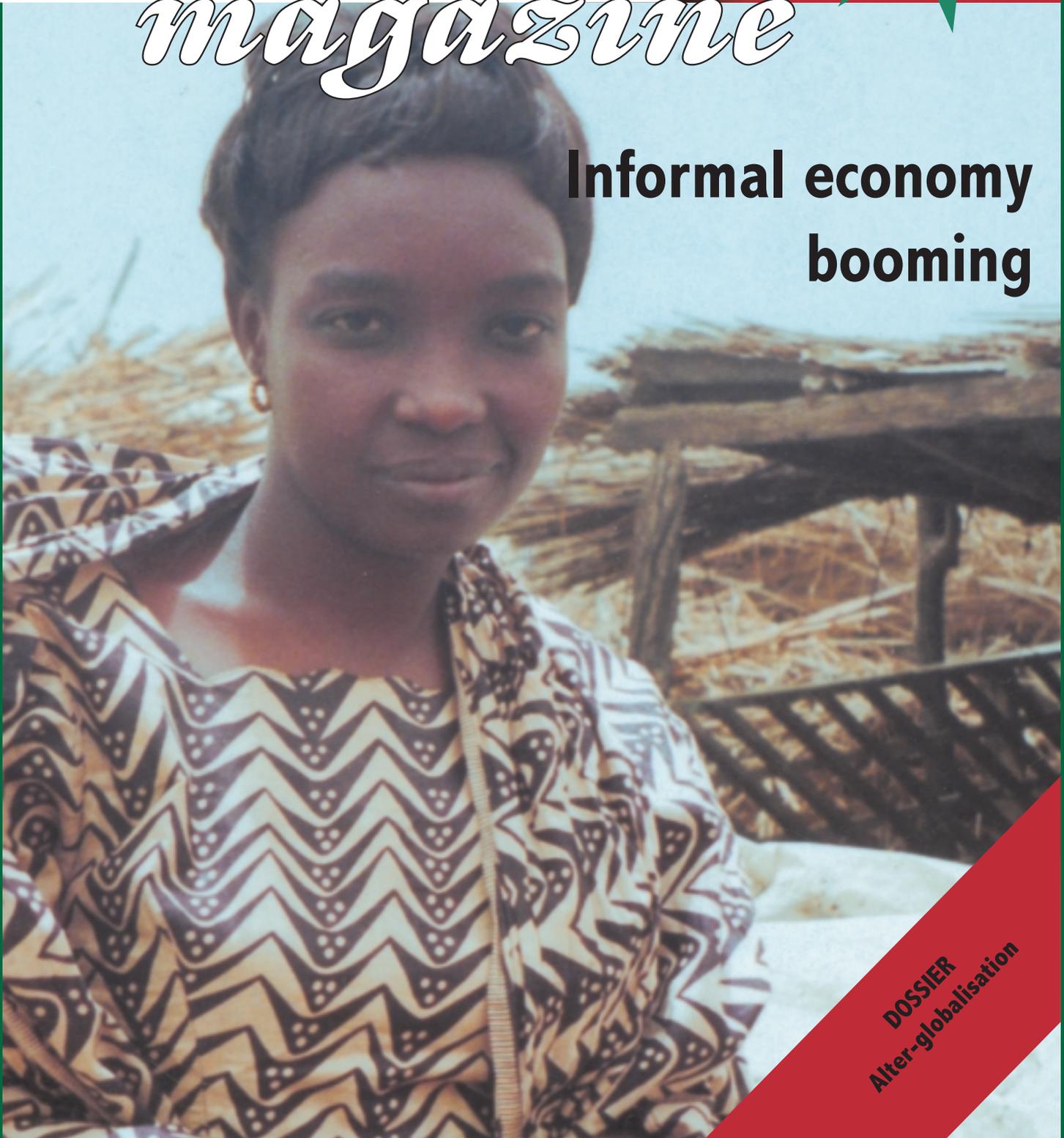
LABOR

magazine



WCL
CMT
WVA

Informal economy booming



DOSSIER
Alter-globalisation

80th year, number 2004/1
1st quarter

Responsible editor: Willy Thys

Three-monthly review
of the World Confederation of Labour
Rue de Trèves, 33 • 1040 Brussels

Review of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) for training and information.

Editorial address

Rue de Trèves, 33
1040 Bruxelles
Tél.: 32 2 285 47 00
Fax: 32 2 230 87 22
E-mail: info@cmt-wcl.org
website:
http://www.cmt-wcl.org

Editorial board

Willy Thijs,
Edouardo Estevez,
Jaap Wienen,
Paul Tennasse
(IMF, IBRD, UNO),
Mathieu Debroux

Editorial office and secretariat

Mathieu Debroux,
Stijn Germeijs,
Doris Baudewijns

Graphics

Média Animation
Imprimerie Havaux, Nivelles

Pictures

CMT

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Payment by transfer to WCL account no 799-5500605-28 with DEXIA, Swift address: BACBEBB.

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ISSN 1562-5427

Picture

Women workers booming in the informal economy

PORTRAIT

So, you started your career on the radio?

Yes, I started my professional career as a radio journalist for a communication agency in Togo. I worked there for ten years! Then I returned to school to study administrative management at the international school of administration before taking a job at the Ministry of Communication. There I led an administrative department. After all these stages, I began to work full-time for the trade union movement. You must know, however, I've been an activist in a youth association right from the start. Officially, I entered the trade union movement when I became a public servant.

LAST SEPTEMBER, THE LATEST ORDINARY CONGRESS OF THE DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN WORKERS' TRADE UNIONS (DOAWTU), THE AFRICAN REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF THE WCL, OFFICIALLY ELECTED FORMER RADIO JOURNALIST ADRIEN AKOUETE SECRETARY GENERAL. ADRIEN, A WELL-KNOWN FIGURE IN THE WCL, IS NO DOUBT ONE OF THE IMPORTANT ACTORS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONISM IN AFRICA.

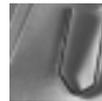
Adrien Akouete Beliki



Weren't tensions the order of the day at the time?

They were! I remember that in 1981, on October 31st to be precise, the authorities arrested a whole group because it opposed a system marked by a very harsh political power and a single trade union movement. I was the spokesman for this 26 strong group. The group was released after a while, and as from then people trusted me. My trade union career was marked by very important events. One of the most resounding of these events occurred no doubt in 1991. When employed at the Ministry of Communication, I led a group to claim some bonuses they had "forgotten" to pay for more than ten years! The most important effect of this action was that it triggered off a whole protest movement. The talks with the Ministry of Communication were not easy, and all the ministries and even the head of State intervened to unblock the situation. The events ended in the creation of the "Trade Union of Journalists of the State Press", a movement uniting radio, television and newspaper journalists. Shortly afterwards, the Secretary General of the trade union was appointed personnel manager, with the non-admitted end in view of breaking the trade union. On October 22nd 1992, we organised an extraordinary Congress and I was elected Secretary

Continued on page 23



2004, year of challenges!

First in general.

How will the Iraqi conflict end? How will the United States and the coalition pull out of the hornet's nest after the destructive and pointless war and the risk of destabilisation of the subregion, resulting in a flare-up of terrorism which is gradually spreading over all the world regions?

When will the international community put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The relevant UN resolutions must serve as a guide during the talks. A sine qua non for restoring stability in the world and for achieving that the astronomical amounts some states are spending on armament are earmarked for development. This requires among other things that the United States changes its policy radically. This year's elections will be followed attentively throughout the world. The chaos of recent years was certainly not conducive to the protection of the workers' interests and rights. The large transnational companies are still doing well, however. The insane accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small minority is just going on. This causes the democracies to lose more and more power and makes it more difficult for them to pursue a progressive policy without being economically punished for this.

In Cancun, there was a spark of hope when the new industrial countries from the third world formed a front against the unfair trade agreements. It remains to be seen now if these countries can put forward consistent alternatives. Fair world trade indeed requires a sizeable catch-up movement on the part of the weak economies. To do so, it will be necessary to call a halt to the neo-liberal policy, which advocates a total opening of the market.

The enlargement of the European Union with ten countries from the former Eastern Bloc is another challenge. It is now a matter of preserving and promoting the European social model. According to this model the state must ensure above all things the redistribution of wealth through social security, education, access to essential services...

In 2004, the WCL will continue its struggle for the workers' rights, freedom of association, social justice, against discrimination, for decent work for all, indeed an excellent means to eradicate poverty. In our opinion, democracy without social

justice is a hollow concept. Yet, these ambitious aims cannot be attained without the help of others. That is why the WCL is open to each form of discussion to strengthen the international trade union movement, either through the creation of a joint trade union front or by other means upon which we must jointly reflect.



Willy Thys
Secretary General

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Trade Unions and International Financial Institutions

RELATION BETWEEN TRADE UNIONS AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION

The fast changes the global economy has undergone in recent years have compelled the social forces to take up new challenges and to reconsider their role in society. These social changes have had a direct impact on the world of work. What role will the workers' organisations be playing in future? What will be their function in the new millennium? What will be the role of the World Confederation of Labour in the context of globalisation and the international financial and economic institutions?

The acceleration of globalisation has this particular feature that it provokes far-reaching changes, modifying year after year the international context and facilitating the arrival of new phenomena and processes that are very hard to predict and to explain. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, new forms of production and consumption are emerging. To this have to be added the exhaustion of the natural resources and the rise in poverty. This is the context in which globalisation is developing.



Poverty eradication in the South is a priority

Globalisation as an economic, political and social process is not new, for commercial transactions and relations among countries worldwide have existed for a long time already. Yet, the developing countries are now embracing this process as a specific conditions for achieving economic growth and reducing poverty. It has never been the intention, however, that globalisation should serve as a model for economic development. It is rather a frame regulating the international economic relations among the industrial countries. The term refers to a growing process of internationalisation of the financial, industrial and commercial capital, new international political relations and the emergence of multinationals, new, relocated production, distribution and consumption processes and an unprecedented extension and intensive use of technologies.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The free world market gives multinationals the opportunity to invest or disinvest in any country of the world, in accordance with advantages or disadvantages provided by the economic and social structures of the country in question. One of the criteria such companies apply when making decisions is the situation of the industrial relations and the extent to which these relations are protected by national law. They look in particular at the wage level, the availability of manpower and the labour code. Further criteria are the tax system, the human rights laws, the environmental laws and the possibilities of the market in the zone concerned.

In all cases the reasoning of the multinationals seems to be the same: they invest where the situation produces most advantages and yields the highest profits. This aspect is inevitable, considering the cut-throat competition that has started between multinationals to conquer markets and to gain economic power. At the same time, the governments are more and more often willing to support the activities of these compa-



nies, even if this subordination of the political to the economic power leads to social imbalances or the relinquishment of human rights and the environment, or even very simply the weakening of democracy.

ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

The workers, men and women alike, need strong organisations that cooperate on the protection of their rights, nation-, region- as well as worldwide. Trade unions are necessary in order to achieve that the new economy is synonymous with social progress and not of commercial arbitrariness, equality of women is a reality in all the workplaces, safety and health take precedence over pursuit of gain, the welfare state grows and flourishes worldwide, stable jobs and rights are more important than exaggerated labour flexibility. Finally, the organisations that protect the rights and interests of the workers and women workers must see to it that the internationally recognised labour and social protection is observed and decent jobs are created.

By “decent work” the World confederation of Labour understands work done with full respect for the rights and the dignity of the workers as defined in the international Conventions of the International Labour Organisation. Decent work has to make the worker an economic force who is at the service of the human being and therefore more than a mere production factor. The World Confederation of Labour takes the view that the challenge of this millennium lies in the promotion and protection of decent jobs. Our organisation will therefore have to propose concrete measures to achieve this goal at the national and international political level and to make it the main concern of each policy and each decision worldwide, particularly in intergovernmental institutions like the multilateral economic and financial bodies.

The strategy of the World Confederation of Labour is unequivocal. It wants to have a say in the international institutions that constitute the legal framework



Workers need strong trade unions

of globalisation (World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and World Bank), so to add to the policies and regulations of these institutions aspects that are related to the workers’ rights and to the control over the activities of multinationals or capital markets. The World Confederation of Labour is physically present in them through its permanent representation in Washington (head office of the Bretton Woods institutions) and Geneva (head office of the World Trade Organisation). The WCL has entered upon a dialogue with these multilateral, which has find concrete shape in biennial meetings at the highest political level as far as the Washington-based organisations are concerned, and in the start of relations with the World Trade Organisation at its permanent representation in Geneva.

Ramón Vivanco Mugarra

THE WCL IN CANCUN

The 5th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, one will remember, ended in a failure. In the view of the WCL, the whole credibility of the Organisation is at stake. The Confederation reminded on that occasion that the civil society had to find its place in the WTO and that a greater integration of the social standards and the environmental dimension in its future proceedings was necessary. We add here that also the foreign debt remains a basic issue. The WCL hopes that the absence of a multilateral agreement during this Ministerial Conference will not lead to the conclusion of bilateral agreements, to the detriment of the developing countries.



How does the WTO work?



Supachai Panitchpakdi

ORIGIN

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) was created on January 1st 1995. Its head office is located in Geneva, in Switzerland. Director General is the Thai Supachai Panitchpakdi. 148 countries are members of the WTO.

WORKING

The WTO is an international organisation that operates outside the United Nations system. It is a forum at which issues and problems related to trade between countries can be solved. Generally speaking, the World Trade Organisation provides for standards regulating world trade. The WTO was created on January 1st 1995, but the trade system it applies has existed for almost half a century already. As early as in 1948, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) defined the rules of the trade system. Shortly afterwards, this Agreement led to the creation of an unofficial international organisation, informally known as GATT. In the course of time, the embryo of the present WTO developed during a series of trade rounds. The last and most important GATT round was the Uruguay Round, which took place from 1986 to 1994 and resulted in the creation of the WTO. The GATT occupied itself chiefly with the trade in goods, whereas the WTO and its agreements cover the trade in goods, services, inventions, creations, plans and models that are the subject of commercial transactions (related to intellectual property).

New at the WTO are the agreements that result from negotiations and are signed by most countries participating in world trade. This is the legal basis for international trade.

The highest body in the WTO structure is the Ministerial Conference, which meets every two years. This forum makes policy decisions on the organisation's working during a given period of time. The second body in the WTO hierarchy is the Geneva-based General Council, which acts as the highest decision-making body. The General Council meets regularly to ensure the working of the WTO. It is composed of representatives of all the member states and can act on behalf of the Ministerial Conference, which meets only every two years. The third level are the ad hoc councils, which are competent for specific matters (goods, intellectual property...) and consist in turn of committees and working groups that deal with even more specific matters. In many cases commercial interests stir up opposite interests and give rise to disputes. Such disputes are brought before the WTO court. This court is exposed to a lot of criticism on account of its arbitrary nature and little transparent working.

AN ORGANISATION UNDER FIRE

Other international organisations and groups from the civil society often blame the WTO for its lack of transparency and its arbitrary decisions and policy. Most government representatives in Geneva have expressed their concern about the pressure on and threats against them during the negotiations at the WTO head office. Several people also wonder if the organisation is healthy, considering the failure of the latest Ministerial Conference in Cancún, in September 2003, and the fact that the organisation's sanctioning power is undermined by structural shortcomings that need to be removed.

RV

VIEWPOINT OF THE WCL

The World Confederation of Labour points out that the civil society must have a place within the WTO. The WCL demands a reform of international institutions like the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. Its Bucharest Congress advocated the constitution of an Economic and Social Security Council within the United Nations. This body would be competent for the socio-economic regulation of the globalisation.



Human rights in Colombia

Freedom of association and the human rights crisis in the Republic of Colombia are issues that require a special approach and maximum objectivity. It is indeed important to avoid biases that would cause to lose the place; on the other hand, it would be proper to collect all the pieces of a puzzle of half truths in an attempt to shed a light upon of the whole truth.

Colombia is seriously affected by a domestic conflict that is bleeding the population, slowing down development and turning the country, in the eyes of the international community, into a society of barbarians in which all the rights of the people are violated. As a matter of fact, foreigners have plenty of reasons to consider Colombians backward people just able to kill one another.

It is in these circumstances the trade union movement is struggling to survive, in conditions that are very dangerous for its future. The number of assassinated trade unionist sends shivers down the spine, coming within a hair's breadth of genocide. Thus, as odd as it may seem, the basic question for Colombian trade unionism is about the **urgent need** to avoid extermination: "*While mourning our deaths, we are confronted with a dark campaign the first aim of which is to liquidate trade unions. Witness the successive reforms, imposed in the past fourteen years, to dismantle and eliminate the Colombian trade union movement*".

In present-day Colombia it is easier to create a guerrilla front than to organise a trade union. The neo-liberal axiom, which says that **the best trade union is the one that does not exist**, takes its full meaning here. Our country has landed in such an aberrant situation that, in the face of the will to dismantle collective bargaining, merely two —most questionable— possibilities are left. The first one lies in the possibility for the employers to advance counter-demands. This is the world of work upside down, a world in which the employers are presenting their platforms of demands to the workers. The second possibility, for trade unions intimidated by such practices, consists in preferring to extend collective agreements. The workers' organisations don't dare advance their demands anymore, a fact that agonises trade unionism and puts its subsistence on jeopardy.

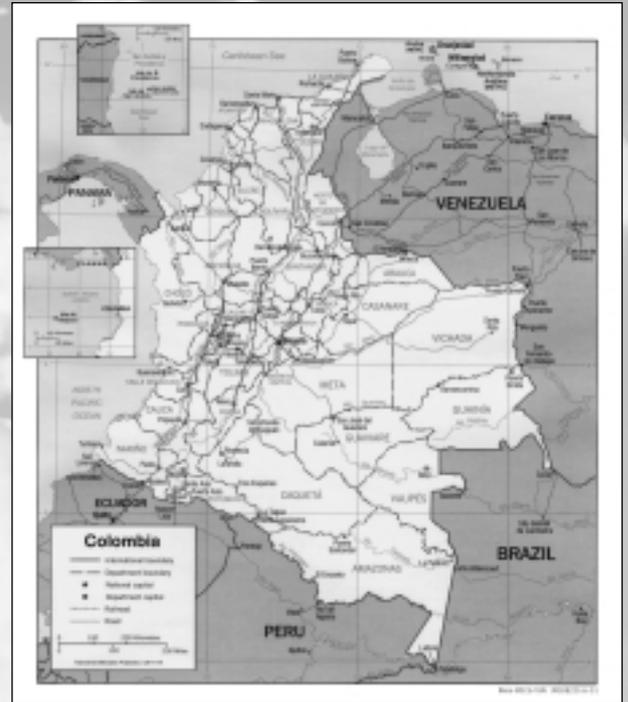
For all these reasons it is not that simple to talk about human rights in Colombia, for reality demands an integral approach to the issue. And let it be understood in this regard that the most sacred right is the right to life, a right that must go hand in hand with the application of other rights: to organise, to bargain collectively, to strike...

But we, Colombian trade unionists, have decided to take up the historical challenge to prevent the disappearance of the trade union movement, knowing that a democracy without trade unions is a mere caricature of democracy.

Everybody knows that trade unionism has fallen prey to a persecution threatening its future. And these acts of aggression are to a very large extent the doings of paramilitary organisations, but also of rebel groups, the riot police and even the state itself, through successive governments using and abusing their power.

The deterioration of the domestic armed conflict, the humanitarian crisis, the excesses of the dirty war and the fatalism of those who are looking upon us as a nation without any prospect of a future, all this induces us to send an SOS to the international community, calling on it not to abandon us. Colombia and its working class are more than ever in need of the best expressions of solidarity, particularly from our brothers and sisters trade unionists from other parts of the world. The CGTD, affiliated to the CLAT and the WCL, has reiterated its commitment to the country, another reason to hold out our hands to it.

Julio Roberto Gomez Esguerra
Secretary General CGTD



THE COUNTRY

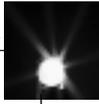
Capital: Bogotá

Population: 42 million inhabitants

Number of inhabitants living below the poverty line: 27 million

Percentage of the active population working in the informal economy: 56%

Rate of employment: + 20%



208th WCL Confederal Board session



Willy Thys at the Congress of NAPFE



Latin American delegation at the WCL head office

● BOLIVIA Opposition to neo-liberalism runs high again

For three years already, the Bolivian trade unions and people (Indians, peasants, students, pensioners, unemployed) have fought a dogged struggle against neo-liberalism, the trade in services and the pursuit of gain of multinationals. In 2000, there was the revolt against the privatisation of the water supply in Cochabamba. At that time it could be prevented by a narrow margin that the “blue gold” would become unpayable and therefore inaccessible for large sections of the population. Early this year, the spark was put to the tinder again, when the Bolivian government announced that it would raise the tax on wages by more than 12%. The sad balance: 33 people killed and over 200 injured.

For a very short while things remained more quiet... until president Sanchez de Lozada announced in mid September that he would export Bolivian gas via Chile to the United States. As this implied that a large part of

the country's natural resources would not benefit the population anymore, the protest exploded again. The army removed in a harsh manner the road blocks of the peasants, killing six of them. The “Coordination in Defence of Gas” —a group composed of trade unions, the socialist opposition party and the Bolivian people— called a general strike that paralysed in no time the country. Again, the army used ball ammunition: during riots in the capital La Paz, 76 people lost their lives. The Bolivian people stood their ground, however, and on 17 October President Sanchez fled to the United States and was replaced by Vice President Carlos Mesa. The trade union Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) has published a platform of demands against the liberalisation and for the abolition of the Privatisation of Fossil Fuels Act. In the meantime, the National Assembly is keeping a close eye on the doings of the government...

● ROMANIA Protest of employers and workers against lax government

For the first time in the history of Romania, three trade union confederations (CNS Cartel Alfa, CSDR —both affiliated to the WCL— and BNS) and five employers' associations have formed a block against the government. They decided to develop a joint plan of action to force the government to take up its responsibility and to enter again upon a dialogue with the social partners. What exactly is going wrong? During the latest meeting of the “Committee on Social Dialogue” of the Ministry of Economy and Trade, it had been decided that the trade unions had to meet without delay the Ministry of Finance to discuss the increase in prices of public-utility services. When the trade unions could eventually, with utmost difficulty, talk with a government representative, the latter appeared to have no competence or decision power in this dossier. The em-

ployers' and workers' organisations regard this as a deliberate move of the Romanian government to push through unhindered a new rise in the gas price (as from 1 November). Moreover, this measure ignores a prior directive of the International Monetary Fund, according to which the gas price was to remain stable this year, after the rise in July. Furthermore, the social partners consider it inadmissible that budgets for all the Romanian state-owned companies were fixed without any form of tripartite consultation. As a further expression of their indignation and concern over the unbearable situation, CNS Cartel Alfa, CSDR and BNS organised on 15 October last a mass demonstration in the capital Bucharest. No less than 15 000 people demanded the resignation of the government and the restoration of the social dialogue in the country.



There is no denying the extent of globalisation. Unfortunately, it is the neo-liberal approach to this phenomenon that seems to be taking the upper hand. This way to deal with the issue presents a very clear characteristic: man is at the service of the economy, not the other way round. In parallel with this terrible situation the “alter-globalisation”

movement has developed, chiefly since the failure of the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle, in 1999. Incidentally, the WTO Conference suffered another failure this year, in Cancún. This movement, in many cases wrongly interpreted, is not against globalisation as such, on the contrary, but fights the

neo-liberal approach to it. It pursues a globalisation that respects the human rights and pursues the development of all. The movement consists of a wide variety of groups, particularly NGOs, workers’ representatives, students’ associations and other organisations. This dossier is intended to give an insight into the current stakes of this phenomenon.

SUMMARY

“Another world is possible”

Allies in one struggle

What future for World Trade Organisation?

In the view of the WCL, life is a stake!



VIEWPOINT OF THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

“Another world is possible”

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO WRITE A DOSSIER ON ALTER-GLOBALISATION WITHOUT MENTIONING THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM, THE REAL INTERNATIONAL MEETING PLACE OF ALL SORTS OF ALTER-GLOBALISTS. TODAY, IT IS EVEN THE PLACE WHERE “ALL THE SPHERES” FEEL THEY MUST BE PRESENT.

BRIEF REMINDER

At the time we are writing these lines the fourth edition of the World Social Forum is being prepared. For the first time it will be held in Asia, in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) in India, from January 16th to 21st 2004. The first three editions of the Forum were organised in Porto Alegre, in Brazil. But let us go back to the origin of this adventure. In 1998, there was the public announcement of a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). It had to be signed by the most powerful countries on the

planet before being presented to the other countries. The Agreement provided for the free movement of investments among other things. It was at that very moment the Alter-globalisation movement started mobilising. Under the leadership of the ATTAC movement — Association for the Tobin Tax for the Aid of Citizens, today Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions— and with the help of other organisations, this mobilisation has got gradually organised to stand up to the globalisation according to the neo-liberal model.

It has taken, for instance, the shape of a demonstration against the IMF and the World Bank. The most famous demonstration was no doubt the one in Seattle, in 1999, during the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation. At last a movement challenged the will of the economic power and made itself heard.

DAVOS OR PORTO ALEGRE ?

For 33 years now Davos, in Switzerland, has hosted the World Economic Forum, which assembles the strongest powers of the planet. As its name indicates, it is the cradle

of the decisions that make the economy an end in itself and not a means at the service of human development. As the alter-globalisation movement got organised, it needed its own Forum. [...] “*Beyond mass and anti-establishment demonstrations*”, explains the newspaper *Correio da Cidadania* dd January 22nd 2000, “*it should be possible to enter a stage of proposals, a pursuit of responses to the challenges of building another world in which the economy would be placed at the service of the human being.*” “*Another meeting, of a global scope, should be organised, attended by all the organisations currently linking up in mass demonstrations, a meeting founded on the social aspects: the World Social Forum!*” [...] We add here that the first Forum, like all the others for that matter, was organised simultaneously with the Davos World Economic Forum so to give the event a symbolic meaning.

THE FORUM OF PORTO ALEGRE, A PROCESS

For a good understanding of the World Social Forum it is important to point out that it is process rather than an event. Anyway, no edition of the Forum is concluded with a final declaration, for it is not a voting body in nature. It is rather a process of joint, strategic reflection between various networks and stakeholders of the civil society sharing a perspective. But particularly the unity of



To the WCL, diversity is a force!

action between all these stakeholders is essential. The basic principle of the WSF is the fact that all the participants can deliberate and debate on their actions.

AN INCREASINGLY STRONG PARTICIPATION

The Forum has grown in size in the course of time. The previous edition brought together over 100 000 participants, over 20 000 delegates of over 5 700 organisations from over 150 countries. Also trade union participation has grown stronger, and this is a good sign. The World Social Forum cannot be ignored anymore. All during the Forum's expansion a question kept cropping up: does the diversity of the speakers not thwart the credibility of the Forum (*Labor* 2002-02)? In the view of the World Confederation of Labour, rather the opposite is true, to the extent that there is a common goal. This diversity is rather a force and an un-hoped-for chance of meeting and debate. This is not an astonishing view, coming from an international organisation that advocates pluralism at all levels, trade union and other levels alike. Diversity of thinking is a trump that must be cultivated. "*The main function of the World Social Forum is to be a space for debate*", reminded us Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General of the World Confederation of Labour, "*the forum is a place where alliances and networks are created.*"

A TRADE UNION FORUM ON EQUALLY DIVERSIFIED THEMES

In the past three years, the World Trade Union Forum was held just prior to the World Social Forum, in the same venue. This Trade Union Forum is a joint initiative of the WCL, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). This large international meeting is an occasion for trade unionists from all over the world to exchange views on the themes that affect them in particular, eg globalisation and decent work. The World Social Forum, for its part, focuses on these themes, too, but in addition also on issues such as exclusion, discrimination, democratic development, the debt of the third-world countries and the importance of the media. The dynamics of the World Social Forum obviously tends towards a unity of action that can lead us to a more democratic, juster globalisation model in which social justice is a reality.

MD

A WORLD FORUM AND SEVERAL SUBREGIONAL FORUMS

In 2004 the Forum will be organised in India, but in 2005 it will return to Porto Alegre, in Brazil. We add here that regional forums are organised throughout the world. In Asia, Africa and Europe people are mobilising to make another world possible. These regional forums enable the majority who cannot travel to the other end of the world to follow the debates and to remain informed on the evolution of the protest against the neo-liberal model.



World Trade Union Forum, a growing success



NGOS AND TRADE UNIONS

Allies in one struggle

TODAY'S CIVIL SOCIETY TAKES RATHER COMPLEX SHAPES. WHO IS WHO? WHO DOES WHAT? WHO REPRESENTS WHO? THIS EVOLUTION IMPLIES BY NO MEANS THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TRADE UNION WORLD WOULD HAVE STOPPED BEING BASICALLY CENTRED ON THE ORGANISATION OF THE WORKERS AND THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THEIR RIGHTS AND COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS. IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES TRADE UNIONS ARE STILL THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY. YET, IT REMAINS TRUE THAT OTHER STAKEHOLDERS HAVE EMERGED. FACING THE RISE IN POVERTY, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES, PRECARIOUSNESS AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT, THE CHALLENGE CONSISTS NOW IN WEAVING ALLIANCES IN ACCORDANCE WITH COMMON GOALS.

THE 1990s: A BOOM OF NGOs

The 1990s were marked by a genuine boom of NGOs, NGO networks and even alliances between networks. This state of affairs has given rise to the emergence of a multiplicity of interests, goals, strategies and stakeholders with a great mobilisation capacity, an influence that in some cases even goes beyond their representativeness, internal democracy, and sometimes an opaqueness of the real motives and interests inspiring these organisations.

Their actions are quick as lightning in some cases: they make intensive use of the information technologies, facilitated for some NGOs by

the injection of sizeable funds in powerful marketing strategies. They are also modern, stressing and building their image so to properly propagate their message.

On the other hand, there are also a large number of organisations whose resources are limited and whose actions are more discrete: they operate directly in the field with the underprivileged populations. The third United Nations Conference on the Least-Advanced Countries (Brussels, May 2001) made it possible to identify several of these organisations.

NGOs have existed for many years and are important stakeholders of development.

BRIDGES BETWEEN NGOs AND TRADE UNIONS

Bridges between NGOs and trade unions are not new. Witness the many trade union activists who are also active in associative circles, sections of Amnesty International and other places. So, we should not enter upon a false debate because the links exist either intrinsically or in accordance with common goals.

By the way, the joint action taken since 2001 within the World Social Forum demonstrates that dialogue and cooperation can indeed exist. We are facing here the challenge of working year after year within the Forum to make a juster and more peaceful world possible. And this can only be done in alliance with these stakeholders of the civil society. As has been pointed out by Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General of the WCL, who has taken a very active part in all the sessions of the Forum's International Committee, the WCL is convinced that one should go beyond mere participation in the Forum and strengthen it as an open space for debate. It is in this space the world of work has a fundamental role to play, in full responsibility. The Forum also makes it possible to develop new alliances. This is particularly the case with UBUNTU (World Forum of Civil Society Networks), with which the World Confederation of Labour is actively organising.



Trade unions and NGOs meet in the International Council of the WSF

The international trade unions, too, have established relations in the everyday practice, in accordance with common goals and on specific campaigns. We refer here to the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) — ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation)— WCL working group on themes such as the Cotonou Agreement and other regional integration agreements. This cooperation is developing at other levels as well.

The whole point is to be able to preserve the respective specific natures in order to consolidate a joint project of society based on shared values. This requires mutual acquaintance, mutual recognition, mutual respect, learning from our respective struggles and working in complementarity. And it requires above all things the creation of spaces and mechanisms for meetings and debates.

ALLIANCES AGAINST A NEO-LIBERAL PROJECT

The neo-liberal model seeks to cause competition among the social stakeholders by opposing them or rendering them instrumental. We must be able to decode their language in order to work together and build juster societies in which each and everyone has a space to live and work decently. Societies, also, in which the stake-



Eduardo Estevez: make a juster world possible

TRADE UNIONS, STAKEHOLDERS OF DEVELOPMENT!

In “*Le Courrier*” 1999 dd July-August 2003, Gérard Fonteneau, coordinator of the EU-ACP “Cotonou” Trade Union Group, explains that trade unions are indisputably stakeholders of development. Unlike the NGOs, trade unions are facing the fact that this characteristic is in many cases ignored and even challenged. He expresses the need for a stronger participation of the trade union stakeholders in the implementation of the Cotonou agreement (partnership between Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries on the one hand and the European Community and its member states on the other). “*Besides, he explains, for the European Union [...] the development concept has shifted to the classic options of neo-liberalism, all fantasies and illusions: recourse to private services, economic growth feeding social progress, trade as an instrument of development [...]. These assertions would not be false if a close supervision through precise regulations forced the market to be a factor of social progress and an instrument of sustainable development, but the market forces turn down all social and tax constraints and contribute to the extension of private law to the detriment of public law [...]*”.

holders of the civil society cooperate to consolidate, not to supplant, a model capable of protecting the collective interest through the state and its structures as well as through the law. Without the rule of law democracy, peace and social justice will remain dead letter.

Isabelle Hoferlin



What future for the World Trade Organisation?

IT SEEMS TO BE A MATTER OF COURSE TO EXPLAIN IN A DOSSIER THAT ANALYSES THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GLOBALISATION ACCORDING TO THE NEO-LIBERAL MODEL THE ROLE, ACTIONS AND FUTURE OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION. NOW, THE FIFTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF THIS ORGANISATION ENDED IN A RESOUNDING FAILURE. WILL THE WTO RECOVER FROM THIS ?

BRIEF REMINDER

For a good understanding of what happened in Cancun, let us take a brief look at the history and working of this organisation. The WTO was created in 1995 in substitution for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The organisation has 146 member countries and functions according to the "one country, one vote" principle. The WTO favours world trade and is therefore the centre of globalisation. Its members establish regulations that affect everyday life. The WTO has the power to impose financial sanctions on countries that break its rules. The highest body of

the WTO is the Ministerial Conference.

FROM SEATTLE TO CANCÚN, VIA DOHA

The failure of the Cancun Conference reminds of the one the WTO already suffered in 1999, in Seattle. As a consequence of the alter-globalist protest, no declaration came out of the debates. In 2001, the Conference was held in Doha, in Qatar, following close on the 9/11 attacks and in an atmosphere of absolute distrust. Unlike the two other meetings, it resulted in a ministerial declaration, one with hardly any social accent. True

enough, the declaration contained positive points such as the right of poor countries to use generic medicines in the struggle against the plagues ravaging them. Nevertheless, as far as the International Labour Organisation was concerned, there was no progress as compared to what had been said in Singapore in 1996. The WTO really had the opportunity to make for an effective cooperation with the ILO. It is good to point out that today, in 2004, there is still a status quo. It seems self-evident, now, that the fact of ignoring the social dimension of the globalisation undermines the very legitimacy of the WTO. Last September in Cancun, then, the Ministerial Conference failed in two main points.

THE REASONS FOR THE FAILURE

First, it failed on «entering upon negotiations on investments, the transparency of the public markets, competition and the facilitation of trade». The rich countries found on their way a whole series of other countries that refused to take up these topics in the round of negotiations that should end in December 2004. It seems most unlikely that this round can be concluded as planned. As far as agricultural part was concerned, the rich countries encountered the G21. This group consists of 21 countries led by



WTO: An appeal to include the social aspect!

Brazil, India and China among others. Their chief demand is as clear as daylight: they want Europe, the United States and Japan to stop their agricultural subsidies because the countries of the South cannot compete with them. The leader of the 16 September 2003 edition of *Le Monde* said that “*Europe is willing to compromise by abolishing only the subsidies that clearly harm the farmers from poor countries. [...] It refused, however, to fix a date for the abolishment of these subsidies. As a consequence, the European Union met with the inflexibility of the delegates from the South*”, said *Le Monde*.

AS MUCH RESPECT FOR THE ILO AS FOR THE WTO!

The World Confederation of Labour is, of course, concerned about the consequences and the way of acting of the WTO. Before the start of the debates, the international trade union had launched an appeal to see to it that the trade negotiations include the social aspect and stimulate the development of the poor countries. According to the WCL trade is no aim in itself but a means to improve the living circumstances of the poorest. It had also pointed out the need to set up a technical committee for legal and commercial aid, composed of independent experts, to help the developing



countries during the negotiations, if necessary. But above all things, the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) must be observed to the same extent as the trade agreements states sign within the World Trade Organisation. Why, then, should the WTO and the ILO not create an independent structure to control the observance of the core labour standards and to establish a relation between trade agreements, core standards and decent work?

Immediately after the failure of the Ministerial Conference the international trade union stated that the credibility of the WTO was at stake. Today, a reform of international institutions like the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO seems to be

essential. In this respect, the role of the civil society in these organisations must be taken into account. And we must not forget that the liberalisation of services of general interest such as health care, education and water supply can be hazardous and have disastrous repercussions. In the first place, however, it must be avoided that the absence of a multilateral agreement leads to the conclusion of bilateral agreements to the detriment of the developing countries.

MD



In the view of the WCL, life is at stake!

The World Confederation of Labour is not against globalisation in itself, of course. It is against globalisation from a neo-liberal perspective. For globalisation to have a humane face, it seems essential that the International Labour Organisation is placed at the same level as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO in a new global structure the democratic bodies of which could promote and guarantee the rights of all, including the right to decent work. ILO Director General Juan Somavia has made a huge effort in this sense, through the Committee on the

Social Dimension of the Globalisation. By the way, the Director of the IMF has come to the ILO for a debate with this Committee, which is an absolute first.

According to WCL Secretary General Willy Thys, *“it is important that the trade unions enter upon a dialogue on crucial themes with the other stakeholders of the civil society. It must be possible to debate on themes like the codes of conduct. It is thanks to our respective proposals we can counter the negative practices of the multinationals. They are now talking about regional integration*

without social integration. The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is a typical example of this.

In the current process of neo-liberal globalisation not only the dignity of people, but life itself is at stake. Global governance must be the centre of the debates. The trade unions, including the WCL, have played an active role in working out proposals for a better-governed world. Other organisations of the civil society have also reflected on this issue. We want to debate with them, listen to them”.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.cmt-wcl.org
- www.socialalert.org
- www.ilo.org
- www.attac.org
- www.acv-csc.org
- www.wto.org
- www.un.org/dpi/ngosection
- www.wsfindia.org
- *Ici et là-bas*, the magazine of *Solidarité Mondiale*.
- *Le Courrier*, the magazine of ACP-EU development cooperation.





WCL INFORMAL ECONOMY PROGRAMME

Towards a worldwide solidarity network

The informal economy (IE): an economy in which there seem to be neither rules nor protection. An economy of low incomes, high job insecurity, uncertain working hours, lacking social protection, low training level, low unionisation or none at all, etc. According to figures of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) the informal sector in Africa accounts for 60-90% of the employment, in Latin America between 50% and 60%, and in Asia between 45% and 85%. The percentage of informal economy workers is rising in Europe and the United States too.

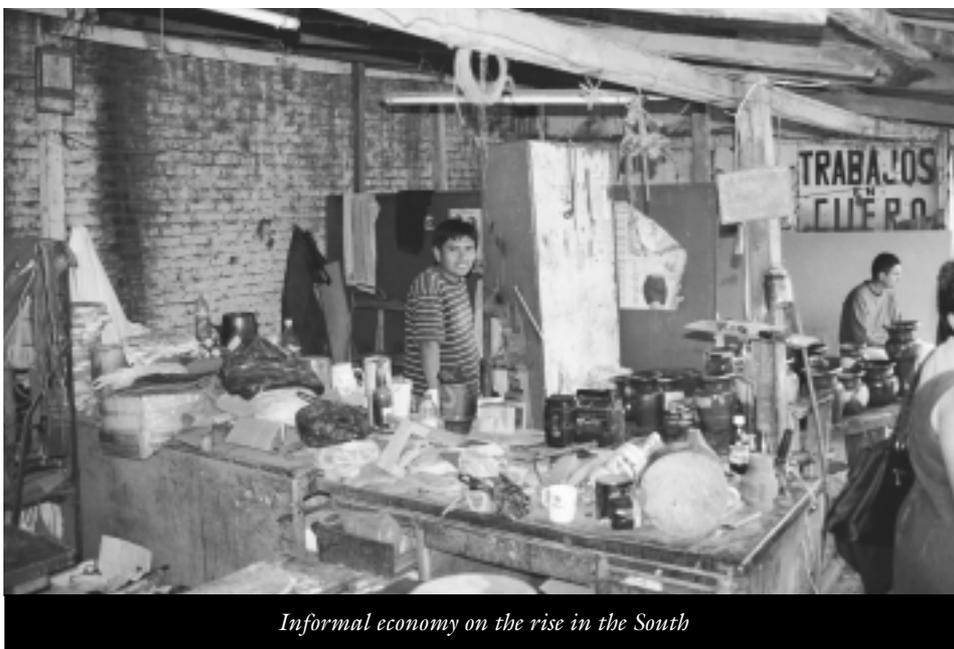
Forms of informal employment are found in all occupational groups: building industry, textile industry, transport, agriculture (100% in certain countries!), metal industry, and also in less evident branches such as the public service and education. At its last Congress in Bucharest (2001), WCL decided to develop a joint strategy within the framework of trade action to improve the miserable situation of the informal economy worker.

A CHALLENGE, AN OPPORTUNITY, AND A RISK

WCL has developed a worldwide network of 100 contact points all over the world in order to turn the tide. The task of these contact points is to design initiatives aimed at improving the position of the informal economy worker within their own organisations. In addition, they will work out plans together with the workers to improve their work situation.

If you know that Maria —today still working in the textile factory— may tomorrow become one of the many unemployed if the company management decides to throw her out, it becomes clear that nobody can stand by doing nothing. North, south, east and west: all trade federations and confederations have to join hands in the complex field of the informal economy to develop solidarity systems for the largest (and often also economically weakest) group of workers in the world.

MARIA HAS BEEN WORKING IN THE “INFORMAL ECONOMY” FOR TWENTY YEARS ALREADY. THE WAGE SHE EARNS IN THE GARMENT FACTORY OF HER TOWN IS NOT VERY HIGH, BUT SHE CAN MANAGE. THERE IS NOT A STRONG TRADE UNION ACTIVITY IN THE COMPANY. FORTUNATELY, A FEW COLLEAGUES MAKE A STAND FOR WORKERS’ RIGHTS. THEY ARE NOT POPULAR WITH THE MANAGEMENT AND TRADE UNION ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN DISMISSED MORE THAN ONCE IN THE PAST. MARIA DOES HER JOB WITHOUT COMPLAINING BUT SHE IS HAPPY WITH THE TRADE UNION PRESENCE. THINKING ABOUT THE HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WAITING FOR A JOB AND HOPING FOR BETTER TIMES, SHE CONSIDERS HERSELF LUCKY.



Informal economy on the rise in the South



It is a matter of presence and representativeness. A union that wants to voice the opinion of the workers cannot remain blind to the needs and challenges of this large group of workers. Not only the “formal” worker, but also the worker in an “informal” economic circuit deserves our concern. That this is a challenge, an opportunity and a risk appeared already clearly from the WCL 2002 Annual Report on “Workers’ rights in the informal economy”.

FROM CONSULTATIONS TO CONCRETE ACTION

A first series of seminars with trade unions from various federations and countries entering into debate has been staged. They have laid the foundation for the WCL IE-network, and developed plans and projects for the future. Several proposals are on the table. At the follow-up seminar in Brussels, the officers of twenty contact points for the informal economy elaborated these plans. Debating with other social, non-union organisations they found larger echo. The main action points are:

- Adaptation of the own trade union structures so as to give IE workers a structural place within the organisation;
- Elaboration of an adapted system of membership dues;
- Search for a suitable (trade union) training for IE workers;
- Targeted rendering of services for IE workers, clearly showing the ‘profit’ of membership;

- Special attention to young people and women representing the majority of IE workers;
- Extension of the network to include other trade unions/trade federations or external groups;
- Provision of legal training (with a new, practical, legal training brochure for the IE worker) to improve the status of the IE worker within labour legislation

INFORMAL WORKERS, ORDINARY WORKERS

The plan of action of WCL insists on not considering the IE workers as a ‘separate’ group of workers—and not drawing up a separate ILO Convention—but on looking for ways of achieving a better integration of the specific needs and demands of this workers’ group into the existing trade union activity. This activity should not be changed but extended and renewed to include the growing group of informal economy workers.

Informal economy workers too will have to make efforts to become trade union executives. Each form of economy (also those that derive revenue from capital!) must indeed deliver a positive contribution to the community. Workers that deliberately stay out of it undermine the system, thus choosing not to be supported by this community. With this at the back of our mind we arrive at a new definition of the informal economy. It is an economy with two types of workers: on the one hand those that do not contribute to a broad community, and on the other hand those that cannot work in dignity and are thus doomed to a “subsistence economy”.

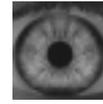
The last group requires special attention from trade unions, for it is our moral duty and task to strengthen the weakest link in society. WCL Trade Action wants to do this through its “Informal Economy” action programme, hoping to strengthen the general chain of worldwide trade union solidarity that way...

WDG

CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE AT ‘OPEN FORUM’

The situation of informal economy workers is a topic of discussion in many national and international forums. On 10 December, WCL Trade Action held an “Open Forum” on this subject in Brussels.

The forum was part of an international seminar on the informal economy, organised by WCL in co-operation with the ACV/CSC International Institute for Workers’ Education (Belgium) from 24 November to 12 December. During the forum, trade union representatives from Africa, Asia and Latin America engaged in a spontaneous and open dialogue with representatives of NGOs, social organisations and other persons interested. They discussed the impact of the informal economy on the world market, searched for ways of improving the working conditions of informal economy workers, and looked at possibilities for trade unions and other social organisations to agitate for this group of workers.

**EUROPE**

Women in the world of work

WOMEN ARE BETTER TRAINED, BUT LESS PAID

A study of the WCL women about the European¹ situation goes to show clearly that young women are better trained than men. Thus, in Portugal, two men per three women are enrolled at the university. As far as vocational guidance is concerned, women tend to take social-science, language or biology courses, whereas men opt rather for natural sciences, computer sciences or engineering. Yet, this trend is slowly changing, in both directions. What does not change, unfortunately, is the number of less-trained women who get no additional vocational training. Lots of companies indeed refuse to provide that kind of training for women. It only remains for these women to stay in these less-paid jobs.

MORE UNEMPLOYMENT

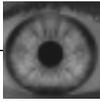
Another observation is that the average rate of unemployment in the European Union is higher among women than among men (10 against 7%), whereas more and more women want to work. The fact of having children influences strongly the rate of employment of men and women. The rate of employment among men between 20 and 44 with one or more children is rising, whereas the rate among women in the same situation is falling.

Paradoxically, the rise in jobs in the European Union benefits women in the first place. At the end of the previous decade, still according to the above-mentioned study, 70% of the new jobs would have gone to women.

THE LATEST CONGRESS OF THE WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR (BUCHAREST, OCTOBER 2001) DREW UP A PLAN OF ACTION COVERING THE PERIOD 2001-2005. SO DID THE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OF THE WCL, FOCUSING ON THE GENDER ISSUE AND A STRONGER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN. SINCE 2001 A LOT OF ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN. A SMALL SURVEY OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN EUROPE.



Gender and equal opportunities: a topical theme



ACV-CSC GIVES IMPETUSES TO FEMALE PARTICIPATION

Since its latest Congress (October 2002) our Belgian affiliate ACV-CSC (General Confederation of Christian Trade Unions) has convened several times a year its National Committee, in the composition of which gender parity is pursued. The purpose of the resulting plan of action is to see to it that the structures of each member organisation of the confederation are composed for one-third of women or a proportional number of women if women account for less than one-third of the members of the organisation in question. One can only be pleased with this initiative, which is a step towards gender equality. Moreover, two women were appointed National Secretary on the ACV-CSC Daily Management Board.

This trend has continued ever since. *“Despite every progress, the gender inequality persists. The rate of employment among women is almost 20% lower than among men; hardly 53% of the women who are fit to work actually work; women account for 80% of the part-time work, whereas 10% of all the working men have a managerial status”*, relativises Kattia Paredes Moreno, coordinator of the Women and Work Department in the World Confederation of Labour. At its latest Congress the WCL ensured the effective participation of women in its second highest governing body, the Confederal Board. Today six women sit on this Board. Even if there is still a long way to go, the WCL has taken an important step towards gender equality.

DIFFERENT JOBS

Many women have recently entered the labour market. Yet, these women remain stuck in a limited number of activities. Men, on the other hand, undertake a wide range of activities and are the majority in factories, the building and transport sectors, agriculture and jobs like train driver and craftsman or in strong growth fields, with higher wages

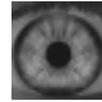
THE OCCUPATIONAL LADDER IS HARDER TO CLIMB

It appears from the latest studies of the European Union that the stronger presence of women on the labour market has a minor effect on the number of women who climb higher on the occupational ladder. A study of the WCL goes to show that merely 3-6% of the managers are women. Women are holding 30% of the middle-management offices, which is an improvement. The same study also goes to show that *“the recent trend towards more horizontal structures and a less pyramidal hierarchy has had a strong impact on the situation of women. Middle-management offices, including specific female offices, have disappeared.”*

The situation was assessed at the European seminar in Madrid, in 2003.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE, AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR

The seminar, an important stage in the capacity building of women, highlighted a number of points: the importance of female trade union participation, the importance of equal opportunities for men and women and of the gender concept in all its dimensions in the trade union action and the importance of more gender



knowledge in trade unions. The action was continued after the seminar, of course. But a number of facts have remained unchanged. First, it is an established fact that social dialogue is an efficient mechanism for the integration of the gender concept in labour issues. Besides, collective bargaining plays an important part in defining and improving the working conditions of many citizens.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, TWO RELATED CONCEPTS

“There are two ways to pursue an equal opportunities policy”, according to the survey² “[...] on the one hand the law, on the other regulations resulting from collective bargaining”.

In Europe collective bargaining has grown stiffer for some time. Firstly, trade union membership is on the increase, and secondly, workers in the new sectors have less access to collective bargaining. In many cases conventional collective bargaining is not adapted to the new structures. Moreover, *“the current collective agreements even confirm the gender differences. [...] Paradoxically, the new women on the labour market land precisely in those sectors and jobs where collective bargaining occurs least: part-time work, self-employment, subcontracting, clandestine employment”*. In brief, the impact of collective bargaining on equal opportunities is very limited. Fortunately, however, there are positive trends such as the fact that sexual harassment is no longer taboo or that sexually tinted language usage is gradually disappearing. Despite the small improvements, the situation of women on the European labour market is capable of an urgent and significant improvement.

MD

EUROPEAN COMMISSION SHOWS SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

Last October, The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) expressed its deep disappointment over the draft directive on gender equality, based on article 13, in which the European Commission opts for a sectoral instead of a horizontal approach. The Commission’s decision implies that the new directive does not cover a whole series of sectors, as was initially planned, but is only aimed to eradicate gender discrimination in the products and services sectors. According to the ETUC, “the European Commission, in making this decision, has yielded to the pressure of the companies and simply forgotten the millions of women who have demanded this directive for years to tackle the inequality in the social status of men and women”.



1 *Trade union policies and strategies with regard to the massive entry of women into the labour market*, WCL, October 2001.

2 *Seminar: The integration of the gender perspective in collective bargaining, activities report*, Madrid, April 2003.



PRESS REVIEW



CAMEROON, INITIATIVE TO ACHIEVE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The government of Cameroon is currently restructuring the management of its more than 110 000 civil servants in order to raise the output and transparency and to reduce corruption. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has allocated US\$160 000, drawn out of its Thematic Trust Fund for democratic governance, to this initiative that also encompasses a modernisation of the civil servants' remuneration and information systems. "This support will help strengthen Cameroon's strategy in the struggle against poverty by establishing a viable public office, capable of taking up the present challenges and enabling the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals", has said Patricia de Mowbray, resident United Nations coordinator and resident UNDP representative. The Minister of Civil Service and Administration Reform, René Ze Nguele, has thanked the UNDP for the solid support of the reforms, which are aimed to improve the social interaction of the Public Office. He has described the Thematic Trust Fund as a "major catalyst that will help the Public Office of Cameroon conform to the international standards".

Oswaldo Ospina, *UNDP.org*, October 2003.

FOOTBALL, RELEGATION OF CLUBS GENERATES DIFFICULTIES

[...] Article 262 of the Football Charter provides it expressly: "*the contract of the player is performed in conformity with the provisions of the Labour Code.*" On account of its legal effects on the players' contracts, particularly relegation generates real difficulties in the area of labour law. To the clubs, the main question is if they can lower the salaries. To the players, the concern is many cases to be able to terminate their contracts so to continue their careers in another club. According to the jurisprudence, a modification of the salaries constitutes a modification of the employment contract. So, it can only be proceeded to with the express consent of the players concerned. [...] The only choices left to the club are either to break the contracts or to relinquish the salary reduction. In case of breach of contract, the damages and interests payable to the players can prove to be extremely heavy for the club. Indeed, since the players are linked to the club by a contract of limited duration, the club shall be obliged, under the provisions of the Labour Code, to pay them damages and interests to an amount that is at least equal to the remunerations they would have received if the contract had been continued until its termination. In view of the

level of remunerations of some sportspeople and the exceptional period of time contracts of limited duration can have in professional sports, the club, already prey to financial difficulties, therefore runs the risk of landing in an even more delicate situation. [...] The out-bidding the clubs sometimes engage in to acquire the best players proves clearly that the conditions are in reality dictated by the player and his agent, and that it is up to the club to make concessions. This is far from being a traditional employer-employee relation. Yet, from a purely sporting point of view it could be justified that a relegated club is obliged, against its will, to release a player if his career and his professional development can be affected. It would therefore be proper to find a legal basis for this breach, no doubt by invoking the "just sporting cause" concept that has already been used in the FIFA regulations on the status and transfer of players, and by establishing it more largely in the texts [...]

Sophie Dion-Loye, Lawyer at the Gide-Loyrette-Nouel cabinet, master of conferences at Paris-I University, in *Le Monde Initiatives* dd September 2003

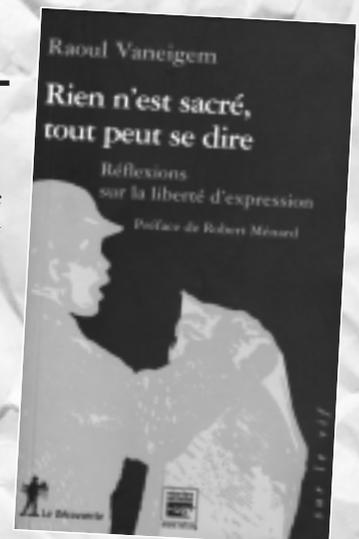
BOOKS AND DEBATES



RIEN N'EST SACRÉ, TOUT PEUT SE DIRE

Nothing is sacred, everything can be said — "*There is no good or bad use of the freedom of speech, there is just an insufficient use*". This summarises expressly the latest essay by Raoul Vaneigem. According to the author, stupidity and ignominy will not be combated and overcome unless the conditions making them possible are removed. The text is indeed provocative and leaves not indifferent. Its merit is that it makes us think and proposes a new alternative. "*Authorise all opinions, we will be able to recognise ours, we will fight them, we will learn to annul the attractive force of pollution [...] We will fight them with the only criticism that can eradicate them: by thinking ourselves...*".

Raoul Vaneigem, *Rien n'est sacré, tout peut se dire*, Éditions La Découverte, 2003, 93 p.



PORTRAIT

General. It was at that very moment the general strike started. I can say today, with a lot of humility, that it was my intervention on radio and television that gave punch to this unlimited strike. It was very difficult and lasted eight months, but going from negotiation to negotiation we reached an agreement. After the negotiations I became Secretary General of the Confédération syndicale des Travailleurs du Togo (affiliated to the WCL). Two years later, I was elected Deputy Secretary General of the DOAWTU at the extraordinary Congress of Ouagadougou.

In 2003 we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the DOAWTU. How to assess this decade?

The DOAWTU was created in 1993. To be honest, we've to point out that its start was marked by problems of internal management, resulting after two years in an extraordinary congress. As from May 1995, we've had in mind to make the DOAWTU an instrument of dialogue, an instrument of strengthening the independent national organisations emerging all over the continent. I can proudly tell you that we're tending towards this aim! Initially, very few organisations were affiliated to us. Today, we count almost forty affiliates, to which eight federations have to be added. Not everything is rosy, of course. For nearly twenty years the African trade union movement had been a monolithic movement. It is hard to get rid of habits, and some people kept reflexes of the single movement, which affected the or-

ganisation. That was why we set up new organisational systems based on a new trade union culture with due respect for the worker, which brought us to where we are now. It was not an easy course. The Congress of 1999 was rather tumultuous, pierced by generation conflicts. After that Congress, substituting for the Secretary General who was absent for reasons of health, and with the cooperation of all the other Board members and of the technicians surrounding me, we developed a new approach. This allowed us to provide the national trade unions with the necessary tools, so that they in turn could develop and constitute a countervailing power in their respective countries. One of the most important things was to make people realise that each worker is free to join the trade union of his choice, according to his personal conviction.

What was the slogan of the latest Congress?

The Congress of 2003 was for the DOAWTU the Congress of maturity. The essential thing today is building the capacities of our workers. We are now in a context of very harsh neo-liberal globalisation. It is important to remind here that a trade union is more than just an instrument of strike. For a company to operate in good circumstances it requires a regular dialogue. It is important that everybody enjoys decent work. The trade union is an essential factor of this dialogue. The Congress also

allowed us to thank Fernand Kikongi, outgoing President, and Alioune Sow, who both resigned their offices after having done excellent jobs.

And what with NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development)?

We had, of course, a round table on this most delicate matter during the Congress. We think we must explain to the people what NEPAD stands for. I can tell you that more than 70% of the Africans do not know what it is about. So, we must give easy access to information on it. Anyway, to us NEPAD is an instrument of the neo-liberal movement. We do not see in it a place for social aspects. If you look at the ten main features of NEPAD, you see culture, information... But to tend towards what kinds of jobs? Decent jobs with due respect for the workers or precarious jobs? I leave it to you to guess. The DOAWTU makes all-out efforts to achieve a humane development for Africa, and I do not believe that NEPAD matches this picture.

Interview by MD

TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES

trade union activities

A new course for the SBSI

Serikat Buruh Sekahtera Indonesia (SBSI), the Indonesian affiliate of the WCL, recently changed its President. Muchtar Pakpahan, symbol of this autonomous and independent trade union, had indeed decided to resign and to engage in a new course. He now leads the social democratic labour party and covets the office of President of the country at the next elections, scheduled for 2004. We point out here that the Constitution of the SBSI, out of concern about the organisation's autonomy, does not allow to hold concurrently political and trade union offices. It is Rekson Silaban who has substituted for Muchtar Pakpahan, not only in the SBSI but also in the WCL in the capacity as Confederal Board member. Rekson is 37 years old, which makes him the youngest trade union President of the world.

The SBSI is based in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. It is the only autonomous and independent trade union confederation in this country, which has more than 220 million inhabitants, predominantly Muslims. Hundreds of dialects are spoken on this territory composed of 17 000 islands.

Last October, the 208th session of the Confederal Board of the World Confederation of Labour assembled in Jakarta. On that occasion the SBSI invited us to go into two of their actions in the field.

A COSTLY SOUP IN TERMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS!

The Chinese soup made in Hong Kong is very good and very famous, particularly thanks to a particular ingredient: the birds' nest! Jaya Mersana is a Jakarta-based company specialised in the sale of this product. In order to bring this about, it employs young people, chiefly girls, between the ages of 12 and 20. These young girls work without protection, without gloves, and they are exposed to many allergies and injuries. This is unacceptable. Until recently they earned 0.75USD per hour, but their employer decided to alter the employment contract and to pay them by results. Some of the girls refused this and were fired. Child labour, non-reimbursement of commuting expenses, absence of social security: such are the abuses denounced by the PK-FUI, the trade federation of the SBSI affiliated to the WFBW (World Federation of Building and Woodworkers' Unions). The SBSI supports these girls, to send the youngest ones to school and develop their education in the first place. Its other aim is to help the others in their struggle. The SBSI is exerting pressure on the Ministry of Labour and has asked several organisations, including the WCL, for support.

THE SUCCESS OF THE CREDIT COOPERATIVES

Another action of the SBSI is the creation of credit cooperatives. One of them, named Kupang, is established in the north of Jakarta. The way it works is fairly simple. Artisans, traders, contract credits with the cooperative to develop their activities. Today they are more than 400 in number. This success is no doubt explained by the fact that the acceptance conditions make the traditional Indonesian banks in many cases inaccessible, the interest rates are too high or the workers concerned are simply excluded. Kupang grants loans on the basis of files, enabling so the development of a whole series of activities such as small catering and telecommunications. The capital supply has tripled in three years' time, and one can only be pleased with this kind of initiatives, as they are proof of the action WCL affiliates take in the field.



SBSI heads for the future