

# LABOR

## magazine



WCL  
CMT  
WVA

### What future for development?



DOSSIER  
WTO

82<sup>th</sup> year, number 2004/3  
3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Wiene,  
Paul Tennesse  
(IMF, IBRD, UNO),  
Mathieu Debroux

**Editorial office and secretariat**

Mathieu Debroux,  
Stijn Germeijs,  
Doris Baudewijns

**Graphics**

Média Animation  
Imprimerie Havaux, Nivelles

**Pictures**

WCL, ILO (J. Maillard)

*You may borrow articles from Labor-Magazine on the understanding that you acknowledge the source and send us documentary evidence. A subscription to Labor-Magazine (4 numbers) costs 38 euros or US\$ 40. By taking out a solidarity subscription (57 euros or US\$ 60), you make sure that we can add a trade unionist from a low-income country during one year to our mailing list.*

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

*Please be so kind as to inform the secretariat of any change (address, number, language...)*

ISSN 1562-5427

*Picture  
What future?*

# PORTRAIT

## Can you tell us about your trajectory in the trade union world?

It's been a long time since I started my career in trade unions. Today I'm 48. I was 24 when I started off. I studied sociology and when I finished my studies, at the beginning of the 80s, I went straight over to the CNV and applied for a position. I must say that I have always been very interested in everything closely or distantly related to the world of Labour. When I first applied, I was very young and I didn't think I had much chance of being hired. I was obviously wrong, as CNV decided to have me. I started off at CNV Bedrijvenbond. From the beginning I was very motivated, as the social situation was particularly difficult at that time. Many sectors,

DOEKLE TERPSTRA IS THE TREASURER OF THE WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR. AN IMPORTANT CHARACTER IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE, HE IS ALSO AN ICON OF THE DUTCH TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AS HE IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CNV —CHRISTELIJK NATIONAAL VAKVERBOND— OUR MEMBER ORGANISATION IN THE NETHERLANDS. INTERVIEW.

*Doekle Terpstra*

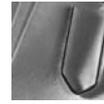
like textiles or naval construction, are still going through difficult times. Not only in Holland, but also in the rest of Europe. During that time I understood and saw what trade union action is all about.

## So, being part of a trade union was obvious to you back then?

I must say that that difficult period ran along with a time of questioning in my personal life. Having finished my studies, I was facing a choice that would influence the rest of my life. I had always wanted to be a pastor. When I finished my social studies, I intended to study theology. But I got the chance to work with a trade union, which was also very important for me. I thought it over carefully and I made my choice: to stay at the trade union. I have never regretted that choice; I am still very happy with it today. I must add that it was out of the question for me to work for any other trade union than CNV, because of the values that this trade union organisation represents. When I started off, I was the youngest person in the team and my responsibilities obviously matched my age. With time, I gained experience and that is how I reached the Presidency of CNV in January 1999. As I was saying, I have gone through all sorts of positions. Some years ago, for instance, I was working more with the federation of industries than with the Confederation. You know, I feel truly privileged to have worked for the CNV. It is certainly hard work and takes up a lot of your energy, but it is also very rewarding.



*Continued on page 23*



# Our aim: social justice!

The dossier in this issue of *Labor* magazine is devoted to the World Trade Organisation. In the past summer, WTO concluded a framework agreement, so for us this was a good occasion to highlight the functioning and viewpoints of this international financial institution, which is so much under discussion and whose policy and decisions have a direct impact on the world population. In this respect the World Confederation of Labour is convinced that the trade in goods and services between sovereign states can benefit economic growth and constitute a basis for real development. But let us not delude ourselves: it is absolutely necessary to get the large-scale economic liberalisation under control. We are thinking here of the liberalisation of essential services, for instance. It is by no means legitimate, which is why WCL demands that these services —health care, education, drinking water...— be excluded from trade liberalisation. Nor can one say that in recent years the developed countries really felt like altering the conditions for the transition to a fairer and more honest trade system, one that does not collide with millennium development goals. The balance-sheet for the 189 member states of the United Nations, almost five years after the signing of the Declaration on the Millennium Development Goals, is indeed rather negative. A lot of words and pledges, but very little action. On the other hand, the armament budgets of many developed countries have risen considerably, unlike their development budgets. It is no secret that poverty reduction is out of the question without development and access to education. This observation, combined with the difficult international situation we have been facing for a far too long time already, is a good reason for questioning our way of acting. This debate within the international trade union movement can only be positive, regardless the outcome. Such a reflection is indeed essential if we want to keep accomplishing our mission, the protection of the workers' rights. Trade unions are the only ones capable of really protecting these rights. So, if society evolves, we have to adjust to gain strength and to realise social justice.



essential if we want to keep accomplishing our mission, the protection of the workers' rights. Trade unions are the only ones capable of really protecting these rights. So, if society evolves, we have to adjust to gain strength and to realise social justice.

Willy Thys  
Secretary General

## SUMMARY

### NEWS - *Echo from the world*

- 4 Ubuntu, an increasingly active World Forum of civil society networks!



### UNDERSTANDING - *In all letters*

- 6 Integrate several mechanisms to solve cases of violation of workers rights



### FLASH - *Instantaneous*

- 8 SGP, seafarers



### DOSSIER

- 9 WTO, questions about the Framework Agreement



### TRADE UNION - *Echo from the sectors*

- 17 Trade Action in Latin America



### WORLD - *Crossed views*

- 19 92nd edition of the International Labour Conference



### DEBATE - *Seen, read, heard*

- 22 Press review  
For reflection: An action in justice made as simple as possible!



### TRADE UNION *activities*

- 24 Solidarity around Guatemalan trade union situation



# Ubuntu, an increasingly active World

FOR SOME TIME NOW,  
THE WORLD CONFEDERATION  
OF LABOUR HAS SET UP STAKES  
IN UBUNTU, THE WORLD FORUM  
OF CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS.  
LET US GO BACK TO THE GENESIS  
OF THIS MOVEMENT, ITS AIMS  
AND ITS ACTIONS.

## A CALL THAT HAS BEEN HEARD

Around the end of 2000, almost four years ago, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, Director General of Unesco from 1987 to 1999, placed a call on several civil society actors throughout the world. In this appeal, Federico Mayor declared that *“the 21st century is immersed in a globalisation process that has an enormous influence on the world based on the boom of consensus, mergers and international cooperation networks among large financial, industrial and service companies. In the presence of such situation, another actor from the international context, the civil society, must seek to organise itself at a world level to have a better chance to bear a greater influence on the important topics that are being discussed in the world agenda and which deeply touch our day to day lives”*. In this context, Mayor’s idea was to create a network of networks, a movement of movements, which would also include the World Social Forum. This networked world could then strive for the defence of the values and principles of democracy.

The least we can say is that the call made by Federico Mayor has been heard. After his appeal, two constitutive meetings were organised. The decision of cre-

ating UBUNTU —the world Forum of civil society networks— was adopted during the first meeting. The confirmation and progress of institutional and operational aspects would follow after the second meeting. In 2002 UBUNTU was launched in Johannesburg in the presence of Willy Thys, Secretary General of WCL.

## WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF UBUNTU?

First of all, according to its definition, the main aim of UBUNTU is the following: *“facing the noticeable gravity of current problems, promoting the construction of a humane, equitable, pacific, pluralistic and sustainable world while contributing to the transition from a culture of force and imposition into a culture of peace, dialogue, justice, equity and solidarity”*. So to achieve this aim, a reform of international institutions, such as the IMF or the World Bank becomes a must as well as the creation of new democratic organisations. In both cases, the participation of civil society remains essential. These organisations, either new or reformed, shall grant, among other things, the smooth flow of the most representative decision, participation and democratic processes. Another essential point is the coherence that must exist between macroeconomic, trade, cooperation and environment policies, *“to make room for a truly humane, social and sustainable environmental development in the whole planet, guided by the principles established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”*. We can also throw in the promotion of a development model based on education and health and incorporating the gender perspective, the defence of life and the rejection of violence and the arms race.

## THE REFORM ITSELF

Several months ago, in the framework of its scheduled activities, UBUNTU launched a large international campaign favouring a deep reform of international





# Forum of civil society networks!

institutions. This reform process is open to all international actors, "to advance towards a world system of democratic governance, participating in the construction of a better world". As part of this campaign, UBUNTU published a Manifesto explaining the aims of the campaign. This Manifesto was accompanied by a list of all the signatories (including the WCL) and it will be submitted at the United Nations General Assembly in the occasion of the set up of a World Conference for the reform of the international institutions system.

The Manifesto is made up by two different parts. The first one describes the disturbing international situation. According to the document, the current process of globalisation as it is significantly deepens the gap between the rich and the poor. Moreover, markets are globalised while the influence of political institutions required for them to function democratically, equitably and efficiently is constantly shrinking. In sum, policies pushed forward by financial institutions such as the IMF or the World Bank, which are guided exclusively by market laws, are being imposed today over those policies that highlight development as the core of their concerns. For this reason, the second part of the Manifesto explains why UBUNTU proposes a deep reform of the international institutions system to favour democratic world governance. To see the entire text of the Manifesto, go to <[www.reform-campaign.net](http://www.reform-campaign.net)>.

## THE POSITION OF THE WCL

The World Confederation of Labour provides full support to this campaign. For a long time now, the inter-

**UBUNTU** is an ancient African word designating humanity-sharing, caring and being in harmony with the entire creation. Its ideal is to promote cooperation between individuals and nations.

national trade union organisation has been posing the problem of coherence existing particularly between institutions of the United Nations System and some trade and financial organisations such as WTO, IMF and the World Bank. More transparency and a greater participation of countries from the South and the civil society

seem essential within these institutions. The conclusion is that a better coordination of policies in a multilateral frame is required within the United Nations. For a long time now, the WCL has proposed the creation of an Economic and Social Security Council. The challenge raised by UBUNTU is a key factor for good world governance. It is crucial that all necessary efforts be made to achieve it.

MD

### EXAMPLES OF PERSONALITIES AND ORGANISATIONS THAT SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN CONDUCTED BY UBUNTU

- Congo Conference of UN Consultation NGOs
- Third World Forum
- France libérés
- World Confederation of Labour
- Social Alert
- Global March
- Butros Butros Ghali
- ...



## Integrating several mechanisms to solve cases

THE WCL WORLD PROGRAMME ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS WAS CREATED IN THE 1990S TO IMPROVE AND STRUCTURE OUR TRADE UNION ACTION IN THIS FIELD. TODAY, IT IS BUILT AROUND A WORLDWIDE NETWORK SET UP IN ALL THE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS AND IT HAS BEEN GIVEN A DIFFERENT GEAR THANKS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH COMBINING SEVERAL PRESSURE MECHANISMS.

### INTEGRATED APPROACH, A NEW STRATEGY

*“The idea is not to denounce just for the sake of denouncing. It is also necessary for the facts pointed out to the authorities through our actions to lead to concrete results”*, as said Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General of WCL during the latest meeting of the World Committee on Human Rights and International Labour Standards (Jakarta, Indonesia, October 2003).

This is why since 2003, the international department has further promoted the joint use of different action strategies. Most of the cases internationally discussed in the network (sixty a year on average) are related to violations of trade union rights, the right to strike and the right to collective bargaining. Traditionally, the main action carried out was filing a complaint at the ILO Freedom of Association Committee. Now, the conclusions of the Committee, which have largely contributed to support trade union struggles all over the world, are also used in a positive way at other levels. As a matter of fact, the WCL acts as an echo *vis-à-vis* the press and uses these conclusions in other procedures while simultaneously denouncing other situations of disrespect for social rights.

### THE GSP, ANOTHER INSTRUMENT

The System of Generalised Preferences (SGP) of the European Union is under constant follow up by trade union organisations by means of the joint action of ETUC-ICFTU-WCL. These three trade union organisations are consulted every time dossiers are filed in the collimator of the SGP. This mechanism allows certain countries to be given or taken certain tariff preferences based on the evaluation of their compliance with fundamental ILO Conventions. Last year, for example, the EU offered greater tariff breaks to Sri Lanka, conditioned to this country's engagement to respect fundamental ILO Conventions. Since then, a trade union affiliated to NWC, an organisation affiliated to WCL, was set up in a free trade zone of this country.

At this moment, a new set of SGP rules is under discussion and trade union groups have voiced their positions in order to influence the performance of debates.

### THE ILO GLOBAL REPORT AND THE ANNUAL REPORT

During the 1990s, important training seminars on international labour standards conducted by the WCL, in cooperation with the IIWE (Institute of International Worker Education), allowed to reinforce the expertise of network coordinators at the regional and national levels, which was acknowledged in several instances. Since then, new procedures have been developed and added to the previous ones. The ILO Global Report and Annual Report, two initiatives included in the terms of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, have complemented the spectrum of strategies at our disposal meant to reinforce respect for the fundamental rights of workers.

Since 1998, the year when this Declaration was adopted, the coordinators network has mobilised to grant better follow-up and a greater participation. In 2003 particularly, thanks to the cooperation between all instances in the network, a document was published as a contribution to the 2004 Global Report (regarding Conventions 87 and 98). This document was submitted to the ILO and it goes through serious cases of violation of these two Conventions, as well as examples of good practices displayed by those trade unions that are active in sectors such as the informal economy or the free trade zones.

### DIALOGUES WITH THE BRETTON WOODS INSTITUTIONS: A NEW SPACE...

The joint ICFTU-WCL dialogues with the Bretton Woods institutions have led to some progress in human rights matters. Henceforth, the IFC —International Finance Corporation— acknowledges that the fundamental rights of



# of violation of workers rights

workers (even if not all of them are included) must be respected in contracts involving World Bank funds. The IFC has thus opened its gates to a notice procedure in case of non-compliance with these fundamental rights.

The participation of the network in these dialogues has also contributed to reinforce the consideration of labour standards in these institutions. Many cases handled by the network have been reported to the World Bank and the IMF. In several occasions they were related to the non-compliance with social rights following the implementation of adjustment policies in different countries.

## THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK: THE ENGINE OF THE PROGRAMME

The solidarity network is structured around national and regional human rights and standards committees in all the organisations affiliated to WCL. Today, the solidarity network has stretched out into other organisations of the civil society.

Through these committees, campaigns can be launched for the promotion of workers rights or related denunciations while acting in solidarity with other organisations from the network when problems arise.

When serious situations of social rights violations come up, urgent denunciation notices are set in motion through the network, urging their receivers to act before the authorities of the countries concerned. A single notice may give rise to hundreds of letters of pressure from all corners of the world. These actions are mostly based on messages of solidarity sent to the victims. They also allow to keep pressure on the authorities until a formal report is written. The most recent campaign started off in Guatemala, where disturbing situations of criminalisation of social action have been detected.

## INTEGRATED APPROACH, MUCH MORE THAN ALL THAT

Our integrated approach goes beyond the actions highlighted in this article. It also covers other procedures. *“The most important thing is to follow up on the reports received with rigorous attention and without pause”*, says the network coordinator. *“It is necessary to make denunciations to obtain results and this is how we operate”*. In these last few years, we have tried to work with more coherence and rigour at ILO. At other levels we do the same thing. It is no coincidence that one Minister of Labour from a particular country touched by our actions referred to these campaigns and recognised the enormous impact of our denunciations thanks to the pressure that has been exercised.

The procedures that must be implemented concerning human rights are not static. They evolve and they must be followed up closely to develop a particular expertise, to promote the reinforcement of the system for the control of human rights and labour standards, and to make it more modern, independent, unbiased, efficacious and quick. The task is important, and the network strives to fulfil it year after year, month after month, day after day.



Eduardo Estevez : “The actions must yield concrete results! ”.



*“Education–Women”  
project of ICL-India*



*Juan Somavia and  
Wim De Groof during  
the 92nd ILC*



*Agriculture in  
Mauritania*

## ● Trade union movement reacts to communication from the European Commission on the System of Generalised Preferences (SGP) for the period 2006–2015

The international trade union movement has always advocated the application of the SGP as it makes it possible to improve the living and working conditions in the developing countries and to achieve a better observance of the basic workers’ rights. That is why it supports a number of elements contained in the communication from the European Commission. In any case the trade union movement endorses the idea to make the SGP uniform and to simplify it while taking up workers’ rights and environmental standards. This addition would put an end to grotesque situations such as the fact that a country like Colombia can benefit from the advantages of the SGP despite the fact that in the past five years more than 600 trade union activists have been murdered in that country. As much attention as possible must therefore be paid to the actual application of the standards in question, and not only to their rati-

fication, says the trade union movement. Fact is that many countries ride roughshod over the international labour standards. *“So, it is important that the next regulations provide in no uncertain terms that countries, if they want to benefit from the system, must have ratified all the conventions, entirely apply them and develop credible procedures to assess this application”*. The trade union movement therefore endorses the reference to a regular assessment of the fact that the governments concerned effectively apply the conventions. In their joint declaration ETUC, WCL and ICFTU state that *“the regulation should make it possible to withdraw preferences granted in the context of the SGP in case of serious and systematic violations of the core labour standards...”*

The complete text of the trade union declaration is available on <[www.cmt-wcl.org](http://www.cmt-wcl.org)>.

## ● Convention on the identity papers of seafarers is taking shape

While we are writing this, the International Labour Office —ILO— informs us that thanks to a sufficient number of ratifications the system to check the identity of seafarers by biometrical means will become operative in February 2005. This measure would apply to more than 1.2 million people worldwide. The procedure can be started because Jordan, after France, has ratified Convention 185. *“The Convention becomes operative*

*because two member states have ratified it”*, says ILO. The Convention is no doubt an important step forward in making the safety measures at sea and in ports more stringent. It will also contribute to strengthening the rights and freedoms of seafarers and provide them with a greater mobility when carrying out their job.

For further details: <[www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)>.



*The World Trade Organisation —WTO— belongs to the closed circle of international financial institutions. The WTO is a powerful organisation, grouping many countries, yet its conferences in Seattle and Cancun have been a tremendous failure. For the World Confederation of*

*Labour, the World Trade Organisation has set itself up as one of the fundamental international bodies in the economic and financial globalisation process currently sweeping our planet. The WTO, in concert with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, is part of what*

*is called “the neo-liberal triad”. Positions taken within these institutions are frequently opposed by civil society groups and the trade union world. This dossier is intended to learn more about the internal functioning of the WTO and the possible consequences of its stances at world level.*

## SUMMARY

History and function of the WTO

---

The Acts

---

Lexicon

---

The position of the WCL



# History and function of the WTO

ATTEMPTS TO CREATE AN “INTERNATIONAL TRADE ORGANISATION” DATE BACK TO THE ERA OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW INTERNATIONAL MONETARY SYSTEM AFTER THE WAR, AT THE BRETTON WOODS CONFERENCE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE CREATION OF THE GATT OR “GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE”.

Signed on October 30 1947, this Agreement was provisional in character from the beginning, since the international community was waiting for the establishment of a real “international trade organisation”. Negotiations towards this goal had begun at the Havana Summit in 1946. The plan however failed due to American opposition in 1948. GATT or the “General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade”, thus still remained in force. Over the years, several “multilateral trade negotiations” have already taken place, namely, Geneva (1947), Annecy (1948), Torquay (1950), Geneva (1956), Dillon (1960-1961), Kennedy (1964-1967), Tokyo (1973-1979) and Uruguay (1986-1994). The international community had to wait till the year 1995 in order to see the establishment of a real international organisation having to set up a forum for discussion and adoption of international standards regulating world trade, namely the “World Trade Organisation”. It was during Uruguay Round in 1994, that the Marrakesh Agreement was signed by virtue of which the World Trade Organisation was created to come officially into effect on January 1 1995.

## TRADE REGULATIONS BETWEEN NATIONS

The World Trade Organisation is an inter-governmental organisation

which deals with trade regulations between nations of the world. Its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. Created in 1995 after the Uruguay Round negotiations, it currently has 148 member States. About 550 people work there with its Director General, Supacahi Panitchpakdi, from Thailand. Since the new organisation started functioning, many ministerial meetings have already taken place, namely, Singapore (1996), Geneva (1998), Seattle (1999), Doha (2001) and Cancun (2003).

The World Trade Organisation emerged on the international scene as one of the most influential and important organisations of the international institutional system. The different agreements reached in this organisation have created the current legal framework for multilateral trade which is not limited only to issues linked exclusively to traditional trade, but extends its ambit to other areas, like trade in services and intellectual property rights. The function of the World Trade Organisation is to facilitate trade negotiations.

## GATT

States belonging to the organisation are in agreement on areas in which negotiations can be opened and under what conditions. The so-called “multilateral” agreements, for example, the General Agree-

ment on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), are part of the nucleus of the WTO trade system. One characteristic of this non-specialised organisation of the United Nations system is that it does not have legislative power. However, its system obliges member States to adapt agreements at the relevant national levels, in order to implement them.

Similarly, the WTO has a legal body that member States can refer to in case of dispute or complaint against other States for breach of standards in force. It is the body for the resolution of disputes. Its decisions are binding on parties concerned. Such a body does not exist in any other international organisation.

## THE WTO GENERAL SECRETARIAT

The WTO General Secretariat is managed by the Director General, who is appointed by the Ministerial Conference. In accordance with the WTO Constituent Treaty, the functions of the Director General and staff of the Secretariat are exclusively of an international character. In the exercise of their functions, they must work independently of any instructions from governments or other institutions outside the WTO. In the same way, Member States must respect the international character of the Secretariat and refrain from influencing its staff in the

exercise of their duties and functions.

### A COMPLEX STRUCTURE

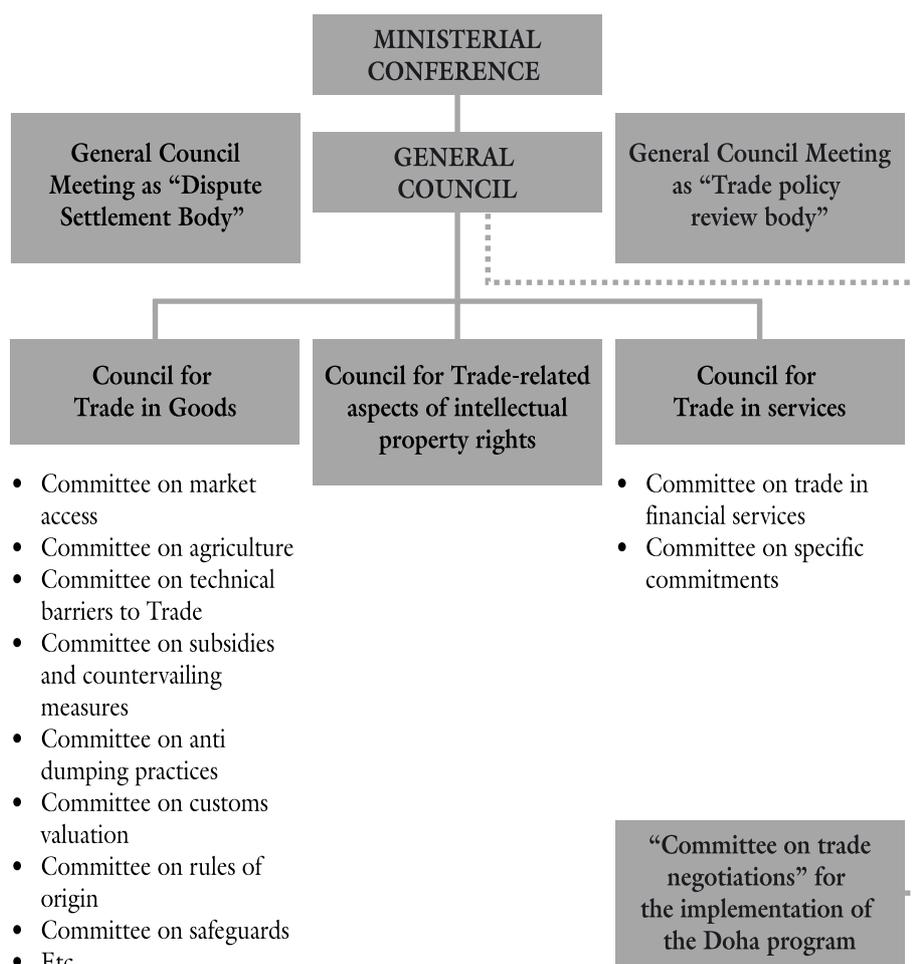
The WTO structure is complex and comprises different authorities and bodies. The highest body in the hierarchy is the Ministerial Conference comprising representatives from all member States. It meets at least once every two years and has the power to adopt decisions on every issue involved in the implementation of all “multilateral trade agreements”, if that is the wish of one of the members.

Then follows immediately in the structural hierarchy, the General Council also comprising representatives from all member States, and which meets when necessary, between two Ministerial Conferences, taking on the functions of the latter.

### TRADE AGREEMENTS

Trade agreements of the World Trade Organisation comprise all regulations that governments of member States must respect when they formulate their policies and practices in international trade of goods and services and intellectual

property rights. These agreements specify the rights and obligations relating to multilateral trade that are binding on governments. Two fundamental principles govern international trade, namely, the clause on the most favoured nation and national treatment. The first principle deals with non-discrimination among member States, whilst the second demands non-discriminatory treatment between an exporting State and importing State.





# The Acts

SINCE THE BIRTH OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION, FIVE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES HAVE ALREADY BEEN HELD.

During the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference at Doha, Qatar, in November 2001, a declaration was adopted, consisting of six texts. Thus on November 14 2004, a series of decisions were taken, known as “Doha Agenda for development”. This programme and the accompanying negotiations were

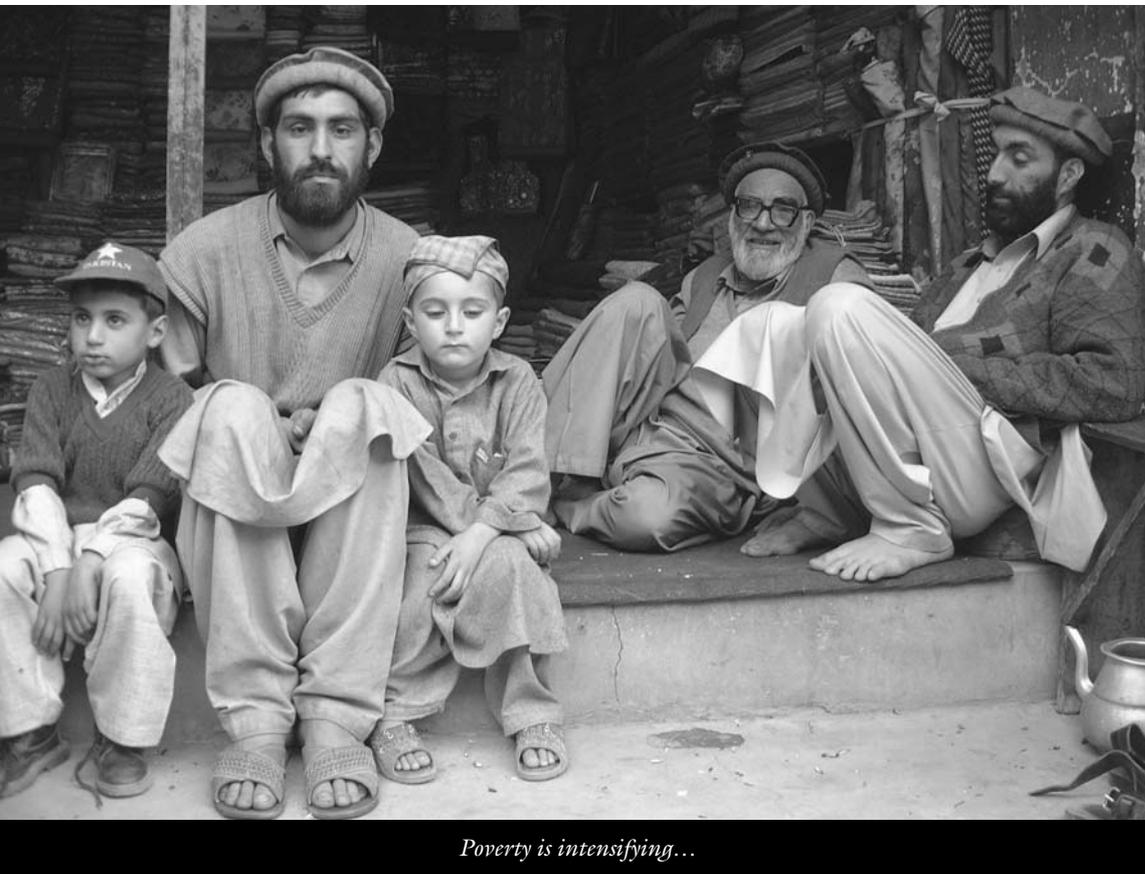
then at a very slow stage of progression. Specifically, the approved texts were the following:

- A Ministerial declaration providing for a programme of negotiations on 21 subjects.
- A declaration on the Agreement on intellectual property rights and public

health concerning access to medicines\*.

- A series of decisions on thirteen points concerning the implementation of existing agreements.
- A document on some extensions contained in the terms of Agreement on subsidies.
- An exemption granted to the European Union and ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) relating to certain tariff clauses contrary to WTO regulations and recorded in the Cotonou Agreement, in force till December 31 2007.
- An exemption with regard to the transit system applied by the European Union in the importation of bananas.

Negotiations were put under the authority of a trade negotiating committee and should be concluded before the fixed date of January 1 2005. The outcome of negotiations from the Doha programme was considered a single commitment. In other words, there was no agreement on anything at all unless there was agreement on everything. However, there were two exceptions to this principle namely, negotiations concerning the dispute resolution body and that on access to medicines.



*Poverty is intensifying...*

### FAILURE AT CANCUN

The 5th Ministerial Conference since the creation of the WTO, in 1995, took place at Cancun, Mexico, in September 2003. This Conference ended in an almost total lack of agreement on items listed on the agenda. The most notable differences had to do with disparities in agricultural markets, export subsidies, direct and indirect assistance, improvement in access to industrial markets and the decision to start or not to start negotiations on so called “Singapore” issues (investments, agreement policies, transparency in public contracts and trade facilitation) During the 5th Ministerial Conference, what was at stake was the credibility of the declaration adopted at Doha because that was where negotiations for the relaunch and eventual implementation of this declaration had to begin. Differences surrounding issues relating to agricultural subsidies and the start of talks on the Singapore topics led to the technical failure of the Conference even though the meeting was considered a success by many delegates from developing countries, non governmental organisations, social groups and trade unions. As a matter of fact, developing countries for the first time were able to get their demands appreciated and thus appeared as a strong, homogenous and alternative block with regard to



*Does the WTO's policy protect the workers' rights?*

the unilateralism displayed by the United States and the European Union.

### A NEW OPPORTUNITY

Negotiations for the implementation of the Doha Declaration having been suspended after the failure of the ministerial conference of Cancun, the World Trade Organisation offered itself a new opportunity to begin the implementation process. Therefore, on July 31 2004 at the headquarters of the Organisation in Geneva, Switzerland, a framework declaration was adopted which ensured the relaunch of the Doha Declaration. This framework agreement established certain criteria for

the reduction of direct and indirect assistance for exports as well as the gradual reduction of agricultural subsidies which distorted the international market by reducing the nominal price of so-called “sensitive” products of major importance for populations that depend on the primary sector for survival in developing countries.

\* On August 30 2003, a few days prior to the opening of the 5th Ministerial Conference of Cancun, a declaration was adopted at Geneva, Switzerland, which allowed member countries capable of manufacturing medicines to export them under a mandatory licence to countries that do not possess the conditions to manufacture them. This decision gave rise to strong criticism from the trade union world. The fundamental issue is the fight by multinational pharmaceutical companies to extend their monopolistic reach to the whole world, thereby denying the poorest the opportunity to produce their own medicines or acquire them from the cheapest producer.



*ILO must be placed on an equal footing with WTO*

### FIERCE OPPOSITION

The problem of agricultural subsidies has been on the table for several years. It is the Gordian knot which has led to failure of negotiations several times, the last of which is the 5th Ministerial Conference held in Cancun, Mexico in September 2003. The fierce opposition from the rich blocks (United States, the European Union and Japan) who subsidise their agricultural markets led to the suspension of a num-

ber of negotiations. Finally, as part of a compromise solution, an agreement was reached, according to which these blocks accepted to eliminate their agricultural subvention policies and developing countries agreed to the opening of their markets to industrial products from the rich blocks. If a framework agreement has been reached, the compromise however lacks numerical criteria for implementation and deadlines. The World of Labour congratulates itself for this frame-

work agreement which sets the minimum criteria, but would like to see much more concrete commitment with regard to the level of reduction of tariffs and deadlines. In the same way, the framework agreement mentions cooperation between the World Trade Organisation and the Bretton Woods institutions, that is the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. To this end, the WCL thinks it necessary that the principle of "special and differentiated treatment" provided for in the framework agreement be respected in all future decisions. It called for this principle to be also included in the cooperation programmes between the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions, for example in the "trade integration mechanism" presented by the Vice President of the International Monetary Fund, Mrs. Anne Krueger, during the 5th Ministerial Conference in Cancun, and partially adopted by the General Council of the World Trade Organisation in May 2004.

The framework agreement offers some criteria for the liberalisation of services, fixing May 2005 as the deadline for member States to present their proposals. The World Confederation of Labour opposes the liberalisation of public services and demands the exclusion of essential services from trade liberalisation, such as health, education, access to potable water etc. In the same way, the WCL is demanding that international labour standards promoted by the International Labour Organisation are respected and also provided for in all decisions adopted as part of the agreement in accordance with the Doha declaration.

# Lexicon

**Marrakech Agreement** · Signed in 1994 after the Uruguay Round and constituting the “World Trade Organization”.

**The Havana Charter** · In 1947, the “United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment” takes place in Havana. At that moment, the Havana charter, through which the “International Trade Organization” is adopted. The ultimate goal of this charter is creating a multilateral organization. Opposition from the United States leads this attempt to failure; the project is suspended and the “General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade” remains in force.

**The most favoured nation clause** · The most favoured nation clause is one of the basic principles ruling world trade. It implies non-discrimination among member states of the “World Trade Organization”, and establishes that the same benefits granted by one country to another in the trading of goods must be equally granted to the rest of the member states. If any two states exchange trade benefits, these cannot be circumscribed to a bilateral relationship, but rather extended into a multilateral relationship.

**Single undertaking** · A principle stating that no decision can be made unless all the rest of the decisions pending are agreed upon.

**Bretton Woods Conference** · A conference held in this US location in 1944 where the decision was made to create the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

**Ministerial Conference** · Highest body in the decision-making hierarchy of the “World Trade Organization”. This entity meets at least every two years and its function is to forward the work of the organization by setting guidelines and lines of action for a certain period. It is made up by representatives from all states. The latest ministerial conference took place in September 2003 in Cancun, Mexico.

**General Council** · A hierarchic body within the “World Trade Organization” in charge of carrying forward the negotiations and fulfilling the duties of the Ministerial Conference in between the meetings of the latter. It is made up by representatives from all member states.

**Trade Integration Mechanism** · An initiative submitted by Anne Krueger, vice president of the “International Monetary Fund” during the 5th Ministerial Conference held in Cancun in September 2003 and formally adopted by the General Council in May 2004. The objective of this initiative is granting resources to those countries that need them to adjust their balance of payments as a con-

sequence of the multilateral trade liberalization envisaged in the Doha agenda. This initiative has been portrayed as a model of cooperation among the “World Trade Organization”, the “International Monetary Fund” and the “World Bank”.

**Dispute Settlement Body** · The “Dispute Settlement Body” is a kind of internal tribunal within the “World Trade Organization”. This jurisdictional instance is one of a kind within the set of intergovernmental organizations. Its function is to settle any differences arising between member states and compliance with its rulings is mandatory for all the parties involved.

**Principle of national treatment** · The principle of “national treatment” is one of the basic principles ruling world trade. It means that imported products entering the market of the importing country cannot be given a less favourable treatment than that conferred to products in the domestic market of the importing country.

**Exports Subsidies** · These are subventions granted to encourage exports. Exports subsidies to agricultural products are constantly questioned because of their negative influence on international market prices.

**The Singapore topics** · The so-called Singapore topics are investment, transparency in public procurement, commercial and political facilities for competition. During the Singapore Ministerial Conference in 1996, several proposals were made to make progress in negotiations related to these topics; that is why they are collectively referred to as the “Singapore topics”.

**Special and Differential Treatment** · This principle exists in operative trade, financial and international cooperation mechanisms. The concept was fostered by the “United Nations Conference on Trade and Development”. This concept implies exemptions in the fulfilment of certain dispositions adopted by developing countries or lagging behind in terms of economic development.

**International labour standards** · A set of standards fostered and adopted within the “International Labour Organization” and mandatory for all those nations that have ratified these agreements and adopted these standards in their national legislations.

**The Neoliberal Triad** · A reference to the international organizations currently seen with a questioning eye due to their policies and considered as the makers and leaders of the neoliberal economic and financial globalization process taking place in our planet.



# The position of the WCL



The World Confederation of Labour is in favour of the elimination of three or four Singapore topics\* from the scope of negotiations but is demanding the inclusion of the principle of special and differentiated treatment for on-going negotiations of the fourth (trade facilitation), as well as an increase in staff for ensuring and improving the capacities of developing countries.

In conclusion, it must be stressed that the World Trade Organisation has set itself up as one of the fundamental international bodies in the economic and financial neo-liberal globalisation process currently sweeping our planet. The WTO, in concert with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, is part of what we already call “the neo-liberal triad”. Thus, policies, decisions and agreements adopted within the World Trade Organisation are often opposed by civil society groups and the trade union world, precisely because of their negative consequences. And also

systematically condemned for their anti-democratic and obscure form through which these agreements and decisions are adopted.

## A CONTINUOUS CONTROL OF DECISIONS

The World Confederation of Labour through its Liaison Office in Geneva, carries out continuous control of decisions adopted within the WTO, by monitoring the most important agreements and decisions for the trade union world. Similarly, the WCL actively participates in Ministerial conferences, forging alliances and contacts with other groups representative of interests that are opposed to those defended by the World Trade Organisation. Recently, the Geneva Office paid a working visit to this organisation and WCL representatives were able to directly tackle subjects of great importance with WTO officials.

The next Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation will take place in December 2005 in Hong Kong, China, and the World Confederation of Labour will be represented.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- [www.cmt-wcl.org](http://www.cmt-wcl.org)
- [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)
- [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)
- <http://www.tuac.org/index.htm>
- <http://www.worldbank.org>
- <http://www.eurofound.ie>

\*Investments, competition policies, transparency in public contracts and trade facilitation...



# Trade Action in Latin America

The sectoral action in Latin America, tells us Carlos Gaitan, coordinator of the Latin America Trade Action Committee, consists in organising the workers on the basis of the economic and production sectors. There are two indispensable structures to protect the workers. The first structure consists of the national confederations. The other pillar is the sectoral structure, which deals with specific and concrete trade-action aspects. *“Today, adds Carlos Gaitan, the great challenge for trade action has everything to do with economic globalisation, as is demonstrated by the monopoly position and decision process of the multinationals”.*

## WHAT FUTURE?

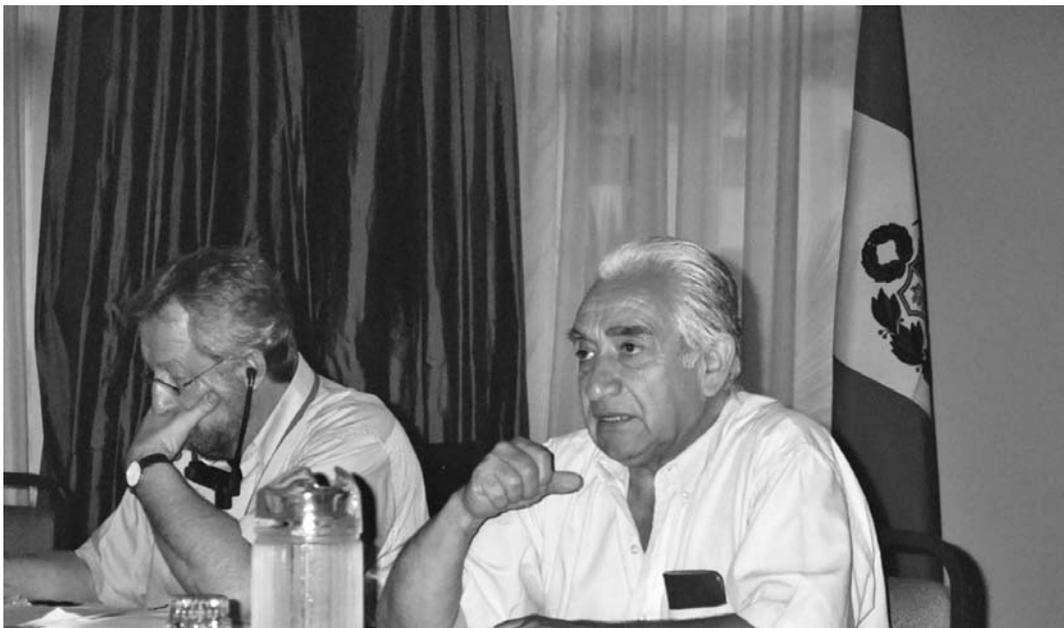
The late 1980s were no doubt decisive. Indeed, it was in that period the multinationals started to apply shamelessly the neo-liberal economic model. One of the direct

consequences was the increased flexibility of the workers. Many of them resorted to the informal economy in an attempt to survive in ever more difficult circumstances. Today, we should turn to the future. And this future depends on the ability of the trade union movement to adapt to the changes in the world of work, the new technologies and scientific and technical development.

## THE ILO REPORT IS IRREVOCABLE

In its report “Panama Laboral 2003 de América Latina y el Caribe”, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) paints a very gloomy picture of the situation of the Latin American workforce. According to ILO, more than 19 million so-called “urban” workers are jobless in the region. Indeed, in spite of a feeble economic recovery in 2003, Latin America is still facing an extremely

THE SITUATION OF THE WORKERS IN LATIN AMERICA IS PARTICULARLY ALARMING. RISE IN UNEMPLOYMENT, WAGE CUTS AND AN INCREASED DEMAND OF FLEXIBILITY ARE INDEED LEGION IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD. MORE THAN EVER, THE LATIN AMERICAN SECTORAL FEDERATIONS HAVE AN ESSENTIAL ROLE TO PLAY IN THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE.



*Carlos Gaitan: Coordinator of Trade Action in Latin America*



high rate of unemployment, an expansion of the informal economy, a drop in wages and a decrease in the productivity of its workforce. Moreover, ILO points out, in periods of growing employment the quality of these jobs tends to lower.

#### **INFLUENCE IN MANY COUNTRIES**

According to Carlos Gaitan, the sectoral action exerts a favourable influence on the workers in many Latin

they are facing serious disputes with companies and governments in most Latin American countries.

#### **THE VERBA PROGRAMME**

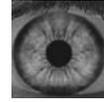
So to strengthen and improve its structures, WCL Trade Action launched the VERBA programme. Through education and training, with the emphasis on “capacity building”, “informal economy” and “multinationals”, it intends to impart as much knowledge as possible to the trade unions concerned. The “press and publicity” training, led by Eric Aarts, was largely provided during the summer.

No doubt, the sectoral federation in Latin America will gain strength thanks to this training. They will be in a better position to protect the workers against the neo-liberal model, which has made the economy the centre.

*MD*

#### **THE LATIN AMERICAN SECTORAL FEDERATIONS**

- CLATSEP (public services)
- CLTTC (communication and transport)
- FELATRABS (banking and insurances)
- FELTRA (agriculture)
- FETRALCOS (commerce)
- FLACTUR (hotels and tourism)
- FLATEC (education and culture)
- FLATIC (industry)
- FELATRACS (press and social communication)



# 92nd Edition of the International Labour Conference

## FUNCTIONING

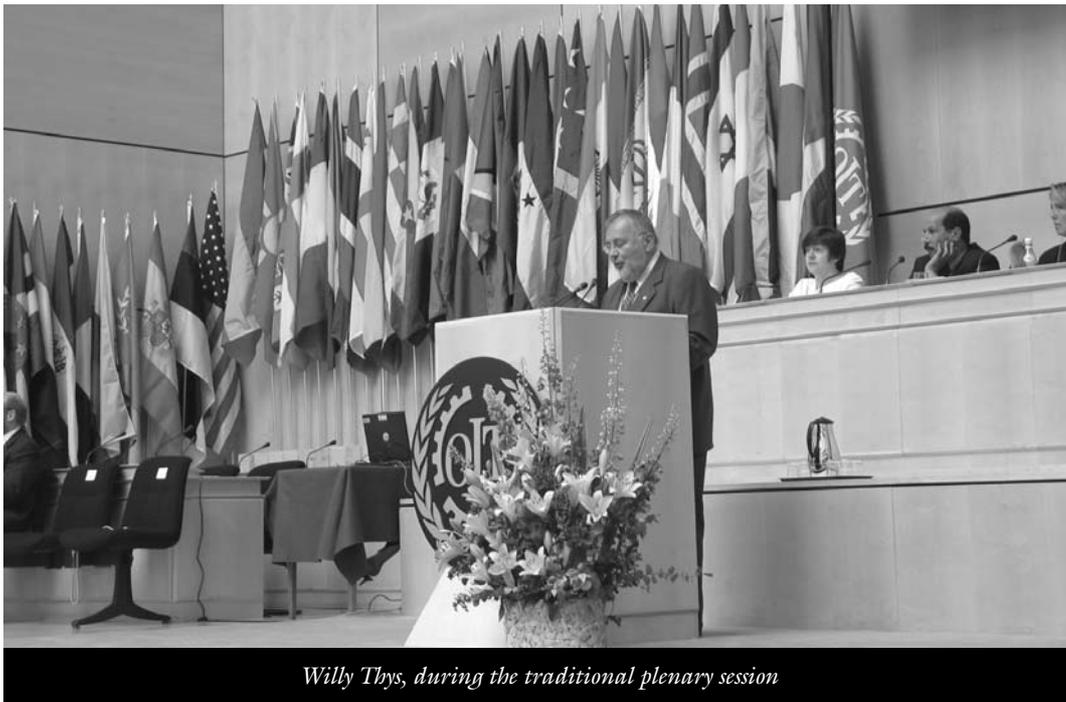
Given the complexity of the ILO and the International Labour Conference —ILC—, it would be useful to provide here a brief description of the way it proceeds. To begin, let us highlight the main characteristic of the ILC, having a tripartite composition: governments, employers and workers. As its definition indicates, each year this Conference gathers representatives of its member States, which so far amount to 175, “*in a joint action to grant long lasting world peace by improving living and working conditions all over the world*”. The Governing Body guides the ILO’s proceedings in between two sessions. The French Philippe Seguin has just been elected to chair this Body. The composition of the Governing Body is also tripartite: 28 members from governments, 14 members from workers’ organisations and 14 members from employers’ organisations. The fundamental role of the

Conference is to adopt international labour standards and to see to their implementation. The delegations representing the 175 member States are made up by two governmental delegates, one employers’ delegate and one workers’ delegate. They are all assisted by advisors. We point out here that the organisations affiliated to the World Confederation of Labour are well represented within the various delegations.

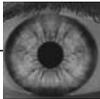
## THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF GLOBALISATION

More than 3000 delegates participated in the Committees of the International Labour Conference at the ILO facilities and the Palais des Nations in Geneva. This year, the elected President of the Conference was Mr. Milton Ray Guevara, Secretary of State for labour matters of the Dominican Republic. He was assisted in his tasks by vice-presidents Youssoufa Wade (employers’ delegate,

BESIDES ITS USUAL COMMITTEES, THE 92ND INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE, HELD AT GENEVA ON 1-17 JUNE LAST, DEVOTED A LARGE PART OF ITS PROCEEDINGS TO THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF GLOBALISATION.



*Willy Thys, during the traditional plenary session*



from Senegal), Guillaume Attigbe (workers' delegate, from Benin) and Mohamed Maatough (government delegate, from Libya)

A large part of the debates during this 92nd Conference was devoted to the conclusions of the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation. Let us bear in mind that this report was published last February. Juan Somavia, Director General of the ILO, declared that the proceedings of the World Commission contributed to put an end to *"the rupture of dialogue"* and supplied initiatives to *"a political, national and international coherence, reinforced at all levels by a process of sensitisation"*.

It is important to point out that the Committee on the Social Dimension gathered 26 personalities from different sectors (heads of State, political decision-makers, representatives of international organisations, trade and industry, the world of work and also the civil society). We must also add that in November 2002, in Brussels, a delegation of WCL leaders and its regional organisations met with representatives of this Committee, thus participating in a series of positions and claims that were summarised in a document and submitted to them. As a matter of fact, WCL has always worked actively to breathe a social dimension into economic, financial and commercial policies in local, national, regional and international plans based on the perspective of the labour world. The WCL welcomed the report written by the Commission. In a document that was made available to the WCL secretariat, the Commission listed some topics and initiatives on which they expect involvement and follow-up at the international, regional and national levels.

### THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

Let us come back to the actual Committees of this Conference. Once more this year, the topics chosen were numerous and varied in nature. Besides the social dimension of globalisation, three other important subjects were included in the agenda: migrant workers, human resources and the fishing industry. We must also add the traditional Standards Committee. Several World Confederation of Labour delegates were elected for the various committees. It is worth pointing out that Luc Cortebeek, President of the ACV-CSC (Belgian confederation of Christian trade unions) and Vice President of WCL for Western Europe, was elected spokesman for the "Worker's" group and Vice President of the

Standards Committee, a task he had successfully fulfilled in the past.

### A NEW ACTION PLAN TO HELP THE MIGRANT WORKERS

On account of its universal subject, the proceedings of the Migrant Workers' Committee raised high expectations (see *Labor* 2004-02.) As a matter of fact, the migration issue is very complex and it involves countries from the North and the South, from rich and poor regions. There are different interests and views: the ones that highlight the security and criminal side of migration, and others with a view focused on labour, social considerations and human rights. The 92nd ILC adopted a new action plan *"meant to make sure that migrant workers are protected by the guarantees contained in international labour standards, while favouring of national labour laws and applicable social laws"*. This new action plan would lead to a multilateral non-restraining framework encompassing, among other things, *"international guidelines on aspects such as bilateral and multilateral agreements between host countries and countries of origin dealing with various aspects of migration, the promotion of decent work for migrant workers, agreeing on and controlling employment agencies by establishing contracts for migrant workers in compliance with the ILO conventions and recommendations..."* At any rate, let us hope that the implementation of this plan will bring on better living and working conditions for migrant workers.

### A NEW INSTRUMENT FOR "HUMAN RESOURCES"

As expected, the proceedings of the Committee on Human Resources Development and Training led to the adoption of a new Recommendation (by a vote count of 338 pros, 98 cons and 14 abstentions.) This instrument comes to replace Recommendation 150 on human resources development, adopted in 1975. *"The recommendation, as explained by the ILO, recognises the development of human resources as a key element for the necessary response to facilitate lifelong learning and employability. It calls on the involvement of the social partners and a new commitment of governments, the private sector and individuals for education, training and lifelong learning"*. Juan Somavia has declared that the new Recommendation on Human Resources Development is crucial to achieve the ILO's aim to create the best possible opportunities for women and men to obtain *"decent employment, productive employment in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity"*.



### FISHING, ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS SECTORS IN THE WORLD!

According to the ILO, a significant step has been made towards the improvement of safety and working conditions of nearly 35 million people in the fishing sector, one of the most dangerous sectors in the world! The first part of the discussions is over. It should allow the implementation of new international legal instruments to modify existing ILO standards (five conventions and two recommendations adopted in 1920 and 1966.) The actual advantage of new labour standards in this sector is the fact that they would extend their coverage to more than 90 per cent of workers in the entire world. It is easy to understand how urgent it is to adopt new instruments knowing that the current standards cover a mere 10 per cent of workers in the fishing sector.

### THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

As we have pointed out above, Luc Cortebeek, President of the ACV-CSC, the Belgian affiliate of WCL, and Vice President of WCL for Western Europe, was re-elected Vice President of the Committee and Spokesman for the “worker’s” group. Each year, the Standards Committee holds different sessions on cases of international labour standards violation. This year, 25 violation cases were reported, among which are Colombia and Guatemala for not respecting the freedom of association. Myanmar alone was discussed in a special Session for the fourth time. As a matter of fact, despite claims from governments about their good intentions, forced labour remains a practice in many parts of these countries.

### THE WCL FAVOURS A STRONGER ILO

The World Confederation of Labour, true to its tradition, was very active during this 92nd International Labour Conference. Not only through the presence of its numerous delegates in the different Committees, as we have related above, but also because of the positions it adopted. The ILC plenary session was the occasion for Willy Thys, Secretary General of WCL, to remind the attendants that the international trade union insist on the fact that the standards control system be strengthened, “*which can only go hand in hand with an increase in the financial supply it receives in a structural way. Labour pressure on the Standards Department continues to build up, as it does on instances for standards control such as the Freedom of Association Committee that*



*requires, more than ever, greater resources”.* The trade union leader added that “*one out of five persons is not covered by enough social protection. The privatisation of this service combined to the meagre budgets of indebted States takes us farther away everyday from integrated social protection for all, all the more so for workers in the informal economy”.* Let us hope that this idea is understood and meet next year at the 93rd International Labour Conference.

MD



## PRESS REVIEW



### AN ACTION IN JUSTICE MADE AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE!

[...] Richard Meeran, an attorney at *Leigh Day & Co*, was the first link in a chain of icon processes (the Cape case regarding South African asbestos workers...) [...] it is worth noting that legal actions undertaken by the “Clean Clothes Campaign” threaten to be both original and complicated. According to this attorney, it is of primary importance to make court action as simple as possible. His instinct tells him that court action brought on by workers forced to work overtime (for money reasons) to the point where it would be considered as “forced labour” would undoubtedly be dismissed by a court of law. It is thus necessary to contemplate alternative options. An approach to this problem could be presenting an industrial accident as being the result of overtime, the latter constituting proof of the risk of overtime being likely to cause of accidents at work. Maybe the case could be about a worker injured by hazardous machinery in a high fatigue context. The demands in this case would be filed on grounds of “the predictability of physical damage” and by default, in the corporate body of the multinational or its representative, and adequate rulings would be issued to correct the situation. If the worker involved in the accident works for a supplier of a particular multinational, it is naturally much better if the latter is the sole client of this supplier. A case may also be grounded on international ILO standards or the standards applicable in the country of origin of these multinationals.

Peter Pennartz, *Justiceability of companies*, GRESEA Echos, nr. 42, April-May-June 2004.

### UNITED STATES: WHAT WITH HEALTH INSURANCE?

In certain rural zones of the Old South and in entire neighbourhoods of large US cities, life expectancy is almost identical to that of Indonesia or Guatemala. In Baltimore, it is the same as in India [...] the economic growth of the 1990s does not [...] equal a better access to health care. The stagnation of emergency services and the closure of numerous establishments are but signs of this deterioration. Facing the rapid increase of costs coupled to the aging of the population and the introduction of ever more complex technologies and procedural inflation, the public powers have been subordinated to “market mechanisms” The onset of managed care or “controlled care”, and fiscal implications has led Americans to resort to private insurance [...] health is no consumption good for “market mechanisms” to deliver efficiently and equitably. There is a fundamental imbalance between the level of information of those who produce health services and those who use them: the system is so complex that, according to a series of studies published by the University of Oregon, only 11% of elder people are able to make a choice that suits their interests between fee-for-service payment and private insurance. [...] State intervention,

which might set these problems right, remains restricted to populations at the edge of their active lives. Wage earning workers depend on medical insurance contracted by their employers and picked as a function of competition related criteria. [...] Considering the lack of a universal social security system, each individual can “choose” whether or not to get insurance: most often it is only persons considered as “at risk” that do get insurance coverage. This reduces the base used to calculate fees and increases the costs of insurance for individuals. These costs are even higher for those who do not have a collective bargaining capability facing insurance companies. The boom in the amount of fees (13.9% in 2003) scares millions of families away from insurance, including those with higher income: in the State of Maryland, 27% of non-insured individuals have a family income above 73,600 dollars per year, while full coverage may cost over 1,000 dollars per month [...].

Olivier Appaix, economist, “Health Insurance, American employers dream on” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2004.

## BOOKS AND DEBATES



### ISSUES

The magazine “Issues” is a publication of the ILO’s regional office for Asia and the Pacific. It appears three times a year. The very didactic magazine provides information on development solutions and trends in the labour system. It also reports on the ILO’s recent activities in the region. The latest number, which appeared last July and which we highly recommend, contains a complete file on the ravages HIV/AIDS commits in Asia and on the effects on the labour system.

*Issues, International Labour Organisation Asia Pacific Region*, Vol. 3, nr. 2, July 2004.



# PORTRAIT

## **At the international level, you now work as the treasurer of the WCL, is that correct?**

As a matter of fact, since I became President of CNV, I have been actively working in the WCL Trade Action. For a very short time, I was the President of the WFIW (World Federation of Industry Workers), one of the trade federations of the WCL. I had to quit that position when I became President of the CNV and was elected as the treasurer of the WCL.

## **What do you do at work?**

I am in charge of political matters and Vik Meeuws, who works at the WCL headquarters in Brussels, is in charge of current matters. He is a true professional and he has done his work splendidly. We are often in contact to solve any problems that may arise. But, you know, working as a treasurer is rather bizarre. You are always seen as the “bad guy” because you need to be strong in the application of your policies. Four years ago, the Executive Committee decided to be more stringent in its dues payment policy. As a treasurer, my job is to do everything in my power to enforce this policy. It may not be obvious, but I am convinced that this is the only way in which we can continue to be strong and efficient. An international organisation cannot function unless all its member organisations pay their dues.

## **Tell us about the current social situation in the Netherlands**

Let's be honest, the situation is tense. To understand it correctly, it

is necessary to know the Dutch tradition, based on consensus, dialogue and pluralism. The quality of dialogue is important. But dialogue takes time, or at least that is what the political classes claim. Today, the government tells us that they no longer have enough time for dialogue. They completely ignore the model of consensus and the positions of trade union organisations as well as other actors of civil society. This is something we obviously cannot accept. Everything now is related to competition. During the decade of the 80s, Margaret Thatcher intended to wipe out trade unions. I have the feeling that I am witnessing the same process in Holland and we are going to do everything we can to stop it! At the moment, there is a conflict on collective bargaining and pensions. The government is increasingly relying on the US model: Do everything for yourself. Where does that leave solidarity?

## **At this time of mondialisation, do you think that workers still believe in trade union action?**

First of all, I do not think we can afford to ignore the process of globalisation. It is a reality. We may organise tons of debates on this topic, but the basic question remains: What concrete action can we take? We do need some action! We must quickly set up a link between brainstorming for ideas and concrete action. Moreover, it is important for trade unions to change. We need to shake up trade union action. The true challenge is knowing how to bring the move-



ment down to the people. Yet, I am confident that in the long run we will succeed. Trade unions will exist for as long as workers need our help! We must make ourselves stronger if we expect to measure up to facing those who pursue profit, at the expense of people.

*By MD*

# TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES

## trade union activities

## Solidarity around Guatemalan trade union situation

The recent months were particularly difficult and stirring for the Guatemalan trade union movement. After the arrest of several trade union leaders, WCL launched together with CLAT an international sensitisation campaign. This summer, 29 trade union activists were released, and Rigoberto Dueñas Morales was fully acquitted! Nevertheless the struggle must be continued for those who are still in prison. The facts:

On 8 June 2003, Rigoberto Dueñas Morales, Deputy Secretary General of CGTG —our member organisation in Guatemala—, was detained on a groundless charge of corruption at the Guatemalan social security institute. On 25 February 2004, 33 trade union activists were arrested, among whom Victoriano Zacaria Mindez, Wilson Carreto and Miguel Ochoa, respectively the Executive Secretary of CGTG, the Secretary General of the Guatemalan union of car drivers and allied workers, and the leader of the truck drivers' union. The reason for their arrest was their support to the members of the truck drivers' unions, who were protesting against the prohibition of truck traffic on eight trunk roads in the capital. As each attempt at negotiation and dialogue proved to be vain, they organised a demonstration. During that demonstration they were arrested on a charge of *“terrorism and activities that endanger the internal security”*!

### REACTION OF WCL

The World Confederation of Labour, together with its Latin American regional organisation CLAT, reacted immediately with an international campaign to demand the release of these workers and trade union leaders. At the recent International Labour Conference there was a debate on Guatemala. The effects were not long in coming. Early in July, 29 of the 33 trade union activists, including the aforementioned leaders, were set free.



*Rigoberto behind bars : an image of the past!*

### TRADE UNIONS REMAIN TARGET IN GUATEMALA

Despite the release of these trade unionists, WCL Secretary General Willy Thys travelled to Guatemala to support the activists who were still in prison. *“Besides, the release of the others was conditional, so that we must keep a close eye on the procedure”*, says Willy Thys. During his stay, Willy Thys visited repeatedly the head office of CGTG to assure the union of WCL's solidarity in its difficult struggle for the protection of the Guatemalan workers. In too many cases the workers' rights are violated, and social and trade union action is criminalised.

### JUDICIARY MUST BECOME CREDIBLE

After his visit to the prison, Willy Thys had an interview with the Attorney General, the President of the Supreme Court and the President of the Republic to protest against the state of affairs. While we are writing this article, we learn that Rigoberto Dueñas Morales was fully acquitted of the accusation. *“Let us hope that the Guatemalan judiciary can free itself from the general corruption that impedes the democratic process in the country”*, says Willy Thys.