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DOSIER
**To the health of the
agricultural workers**



**Copenhagen + 5:
Can do better (p 4 - 5)**

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Picture cover:

*Market in Ségou (Mali):
retail trade, of vital
importance for human
development*

PROFILE

Thirty years in the banking sector, and an appointment as Secretary General of the Federation of Banks of the CFTC (France), such is the unionist track record of Sylvie Martin-Pernot, up till the day in 1999 when she explained for West Africa, to participate in a seminar on the effects of relocation of businesses in the region. There were discussions, yes, but also a visit a day to businesses in the industrial area of Abidjan. The shock of a first visit to a developing country – that is often the case. “I did not expect

“I came back pondering over it. I never imagined that people could be made to work in such conditions.” Sylvie Martin-Pernot, a French woman and an employee in the banking sector, did not return unscathed from a trip to Africa. And she has not folded her arms on her return.

Sylvie Martin-Pernot



For Sylvie Martin-Pernot everything began on the spot, with the people

to see such poverty, a dull and sad environment, whilst the people are so cheerful and optimistic”. Sylvie Martin-Pernot herself, without denying the ambiguity, recognizes that in France “people negotiate and go on strike for little things, whilst over there, people make do with a third.”

SOCIAL SAMU

After the initial shock, another delicate moment of such a visit is going back to the consumer society, where one must continue to live and work. Many are frustrated and depressed, blaming themselves entirely or coming up against

a wall in their bid to react to the complexity of things. Sylvie Martin-Pernot, chose to use certain gestures within her power. “As an individual, I no longer buy just anything”, she explains. “I find out the conditions under which the products have been manufactured”. She is also involved in the social sector: “I had done first aid work in the past. I am now engaged in emergency social service (SAMU), at Paris, in the night to help homeless people in the street”. Thereby also involving the family, since “my son has understood it very well and is also engaged in a social activity”. But this

commitment is also translated to the trade union environment, because the companies visited in Abidjan, even those in which the women risk their health to can tuna, for example (see also p 19-21), are subsidiaries of parent companies located in France. Sylvie Martin-Pernot therefore decided to visit the workers, the trade unionists and even the bosses of *Saupiquet* and *Pêche et Froid*. “I sometimes get upset with unionist colleagues”, she says. “They have a big problem in defending employment in France, and they do not understand why they must fight for working conditions in the foreign subsidiaries. Some do not believe me when I tell them that a family sometimes lives on 300 FF a month”. (± \$47, note) Not to talk about cutting comments directed at that “privileged woman who went to spend some holidays at a seminar in Africa”.

LOWER MIDDLE-CLASS OUTRAGED

For some, they needed time to get over this negative reaction, and to direct attention to working conditions in the subsidiaries where, during this time, women workers were also fighting. On the trade union front, this is no longer easy. «During an initial discussion with the Human Relations Director, the reaction was that of a lower middle class outraged by what I dared to tell him. The second discussion was more positive”. The main question still remains: what is the common ground of action for workers in parent companies and the subsidiaries of the company that relocates, when everything is done to put them into competition?



We were not in Davos. All the better...

The Davos World Forum, “the elite” of capitalism, held at the end of January, once again showed its will for power. What role reversal, to see private businessmen (and some businesswomen) invited by political leaders to express themselves!

The WCL was not in the rooms at Davos. This no doubt could be debated: must the trade union world run the risk of being made party to the setting of the business world? Do not forget, that Davos is one of the places, which has put into heads the so-called need for globalisation, as we know it. Participating at such a Forum under these conditions, to make the voice of workers heard could be a pretext. The business world has thousands of occasions to listen to this voice, if it so desires, beginning with the concrete ground of companies themselves, where “labour” only rarely benefits from such a concern.

Trade unions are at their place within the framework of negotiations, when it comes to guaranteeing workers’ rights, even at the price of compromise. But, from the trade union point of view, other areas are devoid of legitimacy, because they embody the very essence of the globalised economy.

Davos is of the former. So also is the WTO, in its current form and practices. Such instances are to be called into question from the exterior, without compromising there, without yielding to the illusion of contributing to outline the future of the world.

On the contrary, in June, there will be an event where the presence of workers’ organisations is indispensable, for NGOs and governments: the evaluation meeting on the Copenhagen Social Summit, called Copenhagen + 5.

Social development, more than being an issue of funds for co-operation, is a matter of socio-economic mechanisms.

Working relations, level of salary, child labour, access by developing countries to markets of industrialised countries, reduction in external debt... are directly linked to the social aspect of development. That is where we should be. Not, as Mike Moore, head of WTO wishes, to “include development in trade activities”, but on the contrary, to incorporate trade activities in the dynamics of development.



Willy Thys,
General Secretary of the WCL

SUMMARY

NEWS - *Echo of the world*

4 Copenhagen + 5: could do better



UNDERSTANDING - *Everything in letters*

6 Poverty



CLOSE-UP - *Regions of the world*

7 Romania



FLASH - *Instantaneous*

8 Colombia, World, Europe, Zambia, Latin America



DOSSIER

9 To the health of the agricultural workers



TRADE UNION - *Echo from the sectors*

17 CEEC: Privatising for whose benefit?



GLOBALIZATION - *Crossed views*

19 Report: Hope for Ivory Coast



DISCUSSION - *Seen, read, heard*

22 Press review



22 To meditate on: Third Route (repeat)

NEGATIVE - *Stop on picture*

23



Copenhagen + 5: could do better

JUNE 2000: AN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY WILL EVALUATE THE PROGRESS MADE IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. FIVE YEARS AFTER THE COPENHAGEN SUMMIT, EVERYTHING, OR NEARLY EVERYTHING, REMAINS TO BE DONE TO ELIMINATE POVERTY.

The first World Summit on Social Development held in Copenhagen in March 1995, was one of the biggest conferences organised by the United Nations. The number of participants (4,000) and the large presence of Heads of State and political leaders testify to this.

A Declaration comprising 10 commitments and a programme of action were adopted by consensus to tackle the huge problems, which are engulfing society. At the top of the list are poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. The number of unemployed people is estimated at more than 800 million. More than 1.3 billion people live on less than one US dollar a day. The World Bank estimates that at the beginning of the new millennium, 1.5 billion people could fall below this threshold.

Five years later, what has become of these commitments? What are the results expected from them? A special session of the United Nations General Assembly to be held in Geneva from 26 to 30 June will be devoted to such an evaluation.

MITIGATED REPORT

On the poverty front, although there has been a bit of progress, the news is not encouraging. In terms of income, global indicators have hardly gone up in the last ten years.

Though poverty reduced in Eastern Asia and the Middle East, it increased everywhere else. According to the UNDP, the income gap between the 20% richest and 20% poorest is now 74 to 1. The United Nations itself acknowledges that the report is mitigated. In the light of this observation, the Geneva meeting should address the causes. Meanwhile, preparatory work has brought out the different perspectives and even divergences of explanations to this report, as shown by the deliberations of the Social Development Commission which met in February.

Being neutral, United Nations officials put forward the fact that "*The Summit had anticipated many of the*

concerns", but that financial difficulties have hampered its implementation. And so, Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, recalled the objective of poverty eradication affirmed in 1995, and observed that, "*resources for poverty eradication were not yet meeting the challenge*". A limited number of countries have applied the 20/20¹ concept to increase resources allocated for social programmes. But representatives of the different groups of countries have made known their ideological differences.

On behalf of the group called the 77 (countries of the South) and China, the Nigerian representative described the Copenhagen objectives as "*pipe dream*" for developing countries. According to him, what is in question, are international mechanisms such as the deterioration in the terms of trade, increase in foreign debt, structural adjustment programmes... Poverty reduction will be achieved through full employment, continued Mr Apata.

IN EUROPE TOO

In the light of these criticisms against the forms taken by globalisation, the United States representative had the opposite to say. According to Mr Gallagher, in fact, an effective fight against poverty must deal with two essential concerns: good governance and sound economic policies. For Washington, this means, "*Open markets and rule-based trade were the best engine to lift living standards, reduce environmental destruction and build prosperity*", he said.

Changing international mechanisms or adapting to them: it is difficult to reconcile the two statements. The European Union for its part has a very different reasoning. Good governance is necessary, affirmed its Portuguese representative. But, the latter recognises that although changes in trade practices, new technologies and the globalisation process have created new possibilities, they have also brought about new risks and problems. Besides, Europe cannot es-



Two faces of one country, French Guiana: Kouro, inhabited by "luxury" foreigners ... and a reception village of Surinamese migrants

cape from it, since Mr Monteiro acknowledges that social exclusion still prevents several people living in the EU from exercising their social rights.

The solutions outlined by Europe correspond to its peculiar situation, that is, maintaining a high level of social protection in Europe and increasing international assistance to developing countries. The wealth gap in the world shows that there are resources to do this, but that they are confined to private wealth. The European representative made mention of the effective application of labour standards established by the ILO, which needs to be emphasised.

Under the present circumstances, *"there is a major contradiction in asking poor countries to become integrated into the international trade system and to eliminate poverty"*, declared a Senegalese parliamentarian, during the 29th Joint ACP - EU Assembly in October 1999. (IPS, 13 October 1999). That was also the trend that emerged last February, at the 10th UNCTAD conference.

André Linard

FOR THE WCL: WORKING ON BOTH COUNTS

In a document distributed before the WTO meeting in Seattle, last December, the WCL established a cause-effect relationship between growth in trade liberalisation and the gap in social development. Consequence: it is by tackling the form that globalisation takes, that one can really fight against poverty. According to the WCL, "There is therefore the need to work on both counts. On one hand, carry out aggressive policies to fight against current poverty. (...) On the other hand, at the risk of filling a bottomless hole, one must at the same time deal with the causes and international mechanisms which cause poverty."*

* Trade must be of service to social development (see Teleflash 2000-02).

1 The 20/20 principle, for a country, consists in devoting 20% of development aid and 20% of its national budget to social action programmes.



Poverty

LONG LIVE POVERTY?

Poverty does not always have negative connotations. In 1978, a book entitled *La pauvreté, richesse des peuples*, ("Poverty, the wealth of the people") was published, in which Albert Tevedjre contributed in launching a trend at odds with the stated vision of the West, of progress and the needed change for societies in the South. To this author, material poverty coincides with wealth in social relations and culture, which materially "endowed" countries have lost. This is debatable...

We often talk about it, but what is poverty? It is difficult to say. Is it a question of income? Is it a matter of quality of life? Is it a question of social relations? Is the poverty boundary the same all over?

IN FIGURES OR IN LETTERS?

There is a **mathematical definition of poverty**, used in fixing the poverty "**threshold**" according to income. The World Bank uses a threshold where a person who has less than a dollar a day to live on, is poor, no matter the standard of living in the country.

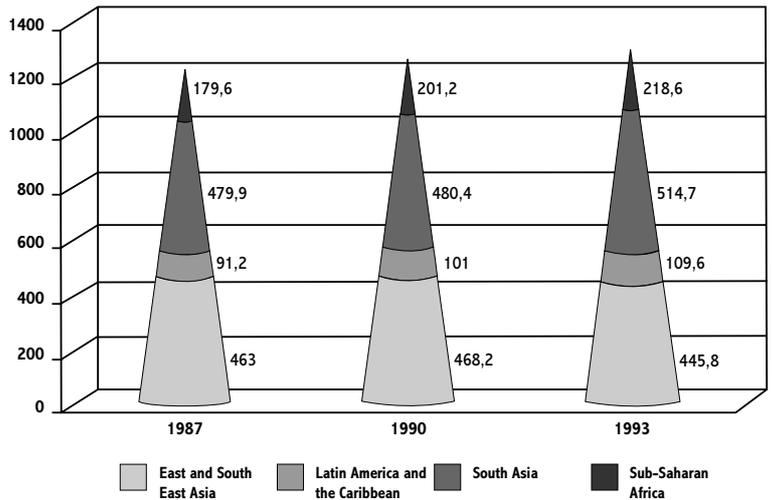
But, the "*poor*" are also those who live below what the majority considers, at a given place and time, as the acceptable minimum level.

Fixing a uniform threshold is therefore unrealistic. The European Commission henceforth proposes to fix the (relative) poverty threshold in member States at the average individual income, whereas the World Bank maintains absolute thresholds, varying according to regions: US\$14.4/day/person in the industrialised countries, US\$2 in the Caribbean, etc.

- Poverty could also be qualitatively defined according to the **unsatisfied basic needs**. For example: according to the World Bank, "*being poor is not being able to reach the minimum standard of living.*" (World Development Report, 1990).

Fundamental needs are those which when not satisfied, bring about harmful drawbacks to the physical, psychological, intellectual and social development of the hu-

The poor in the developing countries



Source: www.ilo.org/public/english/comp/poverty/perspect.htm

man being. Absolute poverty (or misery) is the situation where these needs are not satisfied at all.

- Certain needs are universal: sufficient food, housing, healthcare, potable water, clothing, basic education... In this case, it is a matter of individual and family needs.

Besides, **certain needs are social, according to the particular environment** in which a person lives: social status depending on the consumption of certain goods (designer clothes or mobile telephone, for example), access to culture, means to organise parties, reception of family members...

In the definition of this minimum, we find objective and subjective elements (individually or culturally), which cannot be universally defined. Poverty can therefore only be measured according to the given technical, social and cultural context...

CONQUERING POVERTY?

Ideas are developing, even in international institutions. Economic growth is considered as a means of conquering poverty, but the need to take bold measures to fight social inequalities, as a condition not only for better sharing, but also for more growth, is making headway. Will the Keynesian vision (a policy action discussed as a factor for economic growth) retrace the neo-liberal vision (economic growth, accompanied by social measures to reduce their negative consequences)?



Romania

How to pay pensions?

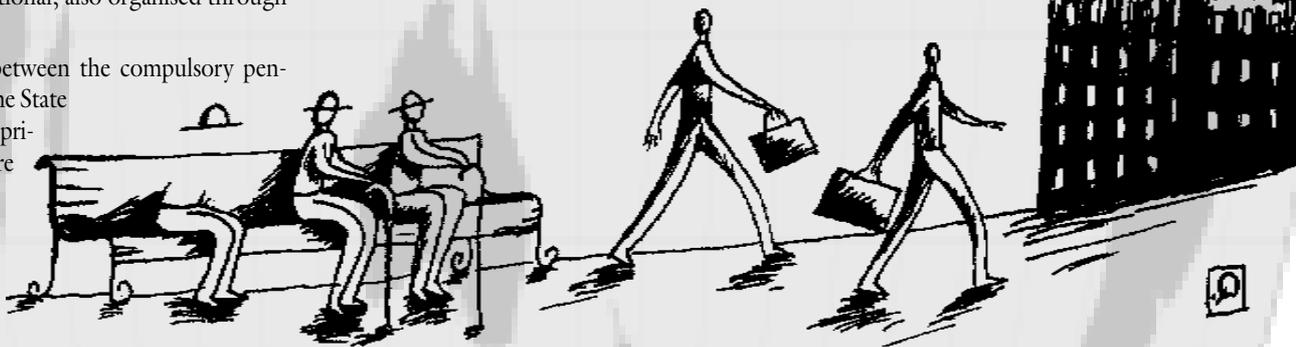
Since mid 1996, the number of retired Romanians has exceeded the number of salaried workers. There is henceforth a major imbalance between the number of salaried workers and the retired (6.2 million retired people and only 5.4 million salaried workers). Maintaining this public pension system in its current form, as the only form of pension insurance, could thus lead to a drastic reduction in pensions, which is already below the average national salary level.

In the light of this unprecedented situation, two successive governments proposed to change the social security pension system. In principle, the new system should be based on two types of insurance: a compulsory, tripartite managed scheme (the "pay as you earn" public system type in force); the other, a compulsory scheme, administered privately. This system could be completed by a third type of insurance, this time optional, also organised through a private system.

The main difference between the compulsory pensions administered by the State and those administered privately is that the latter are

capitalised. Another difference is the modality for the management of funds. Under the current system, the State has exclusive responsibilities in this management; under the private system, it will only have the role of monitoring the activities of private companies, which will manage the funds.

There are also significant differences with regard to the position of social partners in the new system. Under the public system, insurance contributions are fixed by law, and the use of funds depends exclusively on a tripartite body (government, employers and trade unions). There is a major problem in the capitalised pension system: the government plans to block access of social partners to the Monitoring Commission supervising the activities of private bodies who will be managing the funds. The trade unions have already announced that they would ask Parliament to reject the draft law if the government maintains this position.



CAPITALISED PENSIONS?

Under the current Romanian retirement system, pension (as financial income) comprises amounts paid by salaried worker and companies into the National Insurance Fund. Under the new system, pension will form only part of the amounts, which are paid regularly. Another important aspect of this pension will comprise profits from investments made during a certain period by private companies, which administer the fund, with the inherent risks in this management system.

In countries where such systems already exist, pension funds are an important source of financial speculation.

ROMANIA

Area: 245,000 square kilometres

Population: 22,607,720 inhabitants; natural growth rate: - 0.23%; -14 years: 19.5%; + 65 years: 12.5%; unemployment trends: 1996: - 24; 1997: +33.9%; 1998: + 16.3%

GDP/inhabitant: US\$4,580 (- 4% in 1999)

Human Development Index (HDI): 0.738.



Congress of the World Federation of Industry Workers, the Netherlands, March 2000



Congress of the Confédération nationale des Travailleurs Burkinabé (Burkina Faso). Adrien Akouete (second from left), deputy general secretary of the DOAWTU, learned over there that a warrant for his arrest had been issued in Togo (in the meantime withdrawn)



Symposium of Eurofedop, January 2000, in Lissabon, on the future of the public service

● COLOMBIA: ILO Mission

In February, the ILO sent a direct contact Commission to Colombia, to evaluate the state of trade union freedom there. Several complaints have been lodged against this country, especially after the assassination of several hundred trade unionists. In Bogota and Medellin especially, the Commission met local trade

union leaders. Colombia is considered as one of the leading countries in the violation of trade union freedom. A condemnation by ILO would carry significant moral weight. Meanwhile, a *Human Rights Watch* report again provided evidence of collaboration between the Colombian army and para-military groups.

● World: Increase in foreign direct investments

The total amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the world increased by 25% during the last quarter of 1999 alone, according to UNCTAD data. For the first time since 1988, the United Kingdom took the place of the United States as the main foreign investor. FDI to developing countries increased by 15% in 1999

to 198 billion dollars (+ 32% for Latin America). Asia received almost half of this amount, with China alone taking 40 billion. Morocco and South Africa were the main recipients in Africa. In principle, direct investments, which are more productive than portfolio investment, ought to bring about employment.

● EUROPE: Family grouping for migrants

The European Commission on 1 December 1999 adopted a guideline proposal on the right of family members to join migrant workers. Taken from the implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty, this measure does not apply to the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, non-signatories to this Treaty. The proposal recognises the right of families to join

immigrants legally settled in a European union country, under certain conditions. It will become definite only after approval by the Council of Ministers. But it will be a slow process: as a matter of fact, it is a delicate issue, especially with regard to unmarried couples.

(Culled from the European Social Observatory)

● ZAMBIA: No sex trade union

Zambian sex workers (mostly women) proposed to form a trade union to defend their rights. They came up against criticisms from political and religious circles, as well as the powerful Zambia Congress of Trade Unions, main-

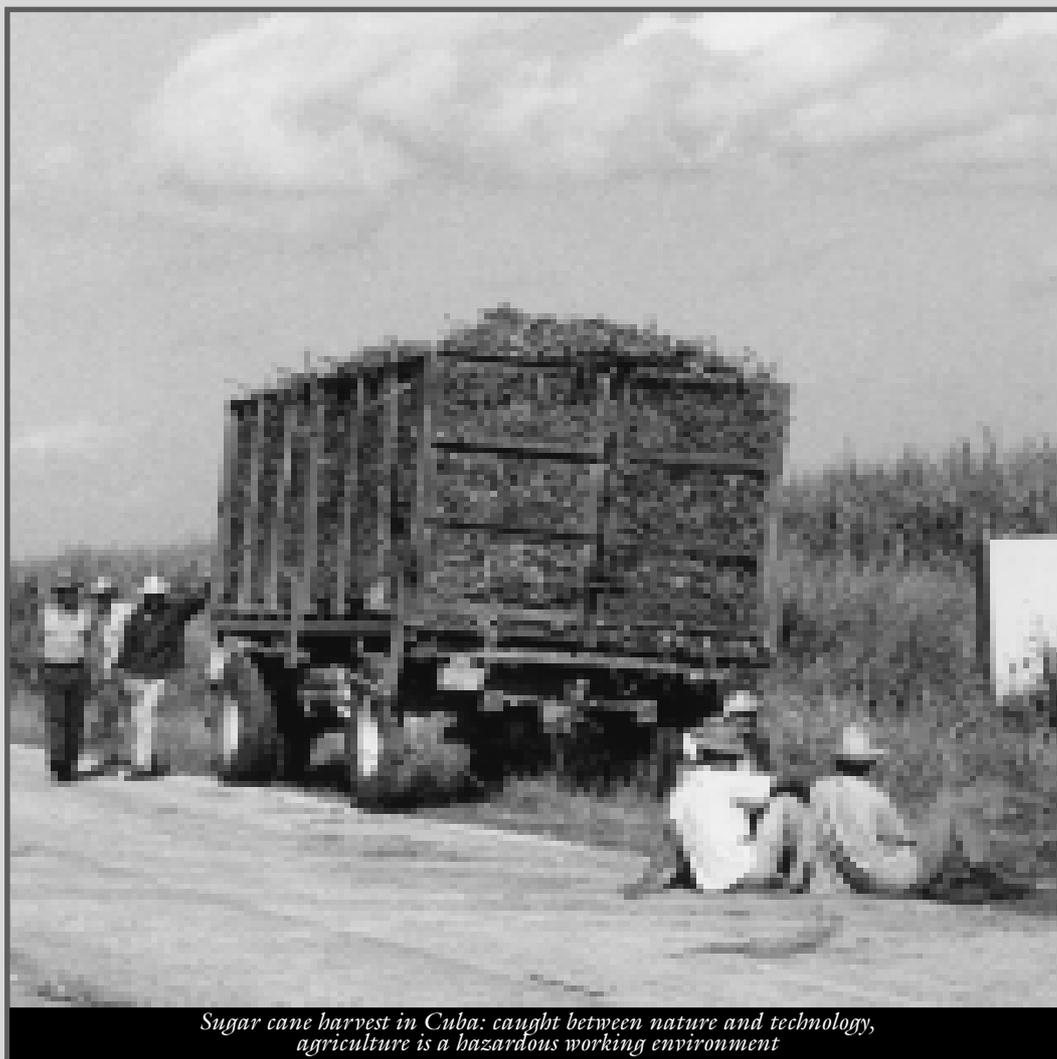
ly for moral reasons. A hypocritical attitude, stated one prostitute: "*These same ministers and preachers who condemn us during the day, are our clients at night*".

IPS (Lusaka), 15 Dec 1999

● LATIN AMERICA: agriculture conducts electronic conference

In February, the WFAFW organised an international seminar on the workers' movement in agriculture, food and tourism. Particularity: the seminar was conducted elec-

tronically with the aid of the new communication technologies. Many participants responded to this experiment which, unfortunately, could take place only in Spanish.



Sugar cane harvest in Cuba: caught between nature and technology, agriculture is a hazardous working environment

Modernisation Without Progress

The debate, first, over genetically modified organisms, then the issue of junk food, mad-cow disease, dioxin and other unwholesome elements found in food all serve to highlight the link between agriculture and the health of consumers. But what of rural workers closely linked to production, be it agricultural, food or otherwise?

The 88th International Labour Conference, to be held in Geneva in June, will deal with this question. Apart from the case of bananas, which have been widely debated in recent years, this subject is hardly ever mentioned. However, work related accidents and illnesses caused by poisoning are very common.

47% of the world's working population is engaged in agriculture. Paradoxically, modernisation in agriculture increases productivity, but not the protection of workers. This paper exposes the health and security problems in agriculture. Above all, it calls for greater controls to enforce existing safety regulations.

SUMMARY

Modernisation without progress

INTERVIEW
Enforcement of controls is a priority

OVERALL VIEW
The market against health?

SEEN FROM BELOW
Accidents and sicknesses are very common

OPENING
To know and act

**INTERVIEW:**

Enforcement of controls is a priority

“THE MODERNISATION OF AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES IMPROVES AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY BUT NOT WORKING CONDITIONS”, SAYS JOSE GOMEZ CERDA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, HOTELS ALLIED WORKERS . ON THE EVE OF THE DEBATE BY THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION ON HEALTH AND SAFETY IN AGRICULTURE, HE EXAMINES ALL THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS.

Labor: *What are the main health and safety problems faced by agricultural workers?*

José Gómez Cerda : Most problems are work related accidents which occur during harvesting and planting. They result from the dangerous nature of the tools used, especially for cutting as well as ignorance concerning their use. I have observed this with Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic. These people are believed to be experts at cutting sugarcane and are therefore assigned this task. But this is not true, as they are not prepared for the job and often injure themselves with machetes or other cutting implements. 60% of work related accidents in the Dominican Republic are of this nature and the victims are Haitians.

Some cases of poisoning and other illnesses are due to working conditions. For example rice growers work in a wet environment and contract malaria. Of particular note is the banana industry, where hundreds of workers have become ill or sterile through the excessive use of pesticides, especially those sprayed from airplanes. It is one of the most well known aspects and has led to litigation in the United States and the payment of compensation.

Doctors have noted that there is overuse of pesticides. Costa Rica is considered the most notorious example, but is far from being the only one. The same is true for Guatemala, Honduras, the Philippines, and Columbia.

Q: *What are the main causes of accidents?*

A: Lack of vocational training is one of the main causes. Almost all training is geared towards urban areas, with 80% of all training centres worldwide focusing on urban businesses, agriculture does not feature. The same goes for Trade Union

leaders. Few of them are from rural areas and this influences their priorities. In most countries, especially in the Third World, formal education is available in urban areas and few programmes are aimed at the rural sector, even in technical and vocational training.



Harvest and packaging of ginger, near Acosta (Costa Rica)...

Q: *Does modernisation have a positive influence on health?*

A: Modernisation has brought about increased productivity and trade but has also increased health and safety problems. The use of genetically modified organisms, for instance, leads to the use of products which most workers are not familiar with. At the forefront of progress, these organisms are developed in laboratories, sometimes with secret formulas, but those whose job it is to apply them do not always know how to protect themselves when handling them.

There is a risk to consumers, but also to those involved in production. It may well be that we may become aware of the consequences five years from now, even though at present there is no proof that genetically modified organisms are dangerous. Apart from allergies, there are currently no known cases of diseases caused by them.

Q: *Do workers protect themselves?*

JGC: Since they do not know the exact nature of what they are working with, they are incapable of protecting themselves properly. For example, pollen from genetically modified organisms has an effect on fish and other animals. To what extent are workers also affected by the pollen they inhale? Modernisation in agriculture improves productivity but not working conditions.

Q: *Are certain kinds of rural businesses safer for workers than others?*

JGC: In theory there should be fewer problems in large enterprises that can afford to improve health and hygiene standards by funding dispensaries, doctors and health services. Such services are out of the reach of smaller or family based

rural enterprises. Even though larger companies are better able to provide such facilities, not all of them do.

I would like to highlight a problem which is not unique to workers, but whose effect is felt in agricultural areas. Aids affects thousands, even millions of people. Due to the lack of adequate health and hygiene facilities, rural areas are the most affected. It is not a question of modernising work conditions, as Aids is not a work-related disease. It affects predominantly the working class, which has less access to protection, Aids awareness programmes and health care.

Q: *If an urgent course of action had to be chosen to improve the health and safety of agricultural workers, what would it be?*

JGC: Apply the ILO Convention (no 129) on inspection of work in rural areas. Controls must be tightened, be it through Inspectors or Supervisors from the Ministries. Sometimes there is no regulation, but when there are laws they are either wrongly applied or not applied at all.

Where there are Inspectors, they rarely bother with agriculture, not to mention the cases where they receive pay-off from companies. Less attention is paid to health in the rural areas than in industry. Business owners do not apply the laws unless there are sanctions.



...The work, day and night, is not finished until all orders are processed.

Q: *Does occupational health function well in rural areas?*

A: In rural areas many people rely on Traditional Healers who are effective due to their knowledge of traditional illnesses and medicinal plants. However, these Healers are not familiar with new diseases resulting from the use of dangerous products, for instance, and as a result cannot deal with them.

Some companies arrange for public health services to provide healthcare to agricultural workers. However, most doctors prefer to work in cities where patients are not as poor, or in well-equipped hospitals, rather than in rural areas. Less than 5% of doctors in the world work in rural areas, while 47% of workers are in rural areas. Hospitals, information, and modern technology are available in urban areas. Governments hardly ever try to rectify these imbalances.



OVERVIEW

Business versus Health?

IT IS HARD TO FATHOM BUT AGRICULTURE, MORE THAN OTHER SECTORS, IS OFTEN NOT COVERED BY OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH LAWS. THIS IS THE CRUX OF THE ILO'S FIRST PUBLISHED REPORT BEFORE THE DEBATE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE TO BE HELD NEXT JUNE

There is hardly any State labour codes defining agricultural work. For example, in the United Arab Emirates, it includes "*Work involving the ploughing and cultivation of the soil, the harvesting of crops of any kind and the breeding of cattle, poultry, silkworms, bees, etc.*" Existing definitions either list activities or are repetitive. In California, for example, the law defines agriculture as "*farming in all its branches, and, among other things...*"

It is the International Labour Office, which makes this point. The definition offered by the ILO itself is not any better. Several of its conventions (nos 11,14, 141...) refer to agriculture without defining it. In 1985 the commission of experts for the implementation of agreements and recommendations defined agricultural undertaking simply as "*the direct exploitation of vegetable and animal resources*", while stating that certain state laws add processing. A federal law of the United States explicitly includes processing, canneries, packaging plants, and seed production.

From the beginning of the chapter dealing with health and safety issues in agriculture, the report of the International Labour Office is clear (refer to p 16): "*The application of safety and health measures in agricultural work and agricultural workplaces is more difficult than in industry. Many agricultural jobs involve multiple tasks and multiple locations, both on a daily and seasonal basis.*"

DANGEROUS MACHINES...

Confirming the views of Jose Gomez the World Federation of Agriculture, Food, Hotels and Allied Workers, The International Labour Office establishes a negative relationship between the modernisation of agriculture and the health of agricultural workers: "*The introduction of increasingly complex machinery and numerous chemical compounds, each bringing potentially harmful human and environmental effects in their wake, fails to be accompanied by appropriate information and training.*"

In developing countries, the sustained pace of work in large organisations reduces the level of vigilance, causing accidents. Machines and tools which are mainly imported have sometimes been banned in industrialised countries because of a lack of safety measures. Due to the lack of adequate funding, they are used for purposes for which they are not intended, they become even more dangerous since "*Most new technology (...) is rarely appropriate either to the climate and working and cultural habits of the developing countries or to the body size and physical strength of workers in these countries*", explains the ILO report.

As for the industrialised countries, they use more and more sophisticated equipment, which if not properly operated can cause accidents. Conclusion: "*Agriculture is one of the most hazardous sectors in many countries.*" The report also contains statistics on work-related

accidents in various countries. In Brazil for example, 52% of accidents result from the use of machines, 7% from falling and slipping, 7% from repetitive movements and straining, etc. In France, 25% of accidents are caused by mechanisation whereas in Africa, "*a number of countries have registered a significant increase in occupational accidents since tractors and trucks have been introduced in sugar-cane production.*"

...AND POISONOUS PRODUCTS

The other category of health problems in agriculture is that of sickness. There are three kinds according to the ILO: illness directly caused by work, illness linked to work as well as other causes, and general illness which is not linked to work conditions but can be worsened by them. There are lists of work related illnesses but they do not necessarily cover all sicknesses caused by work. Nevertheless, says the International Labour Office, "*There is, of course, always the legal option for individuals to have recourse in disputed cases*".

The main illnesses linked to agricultural work are contagious diseases; notably those transmitted by animals; respiratory problems, allergies, cancer etc. The list is endless.

Here too, modernisation has negative consequences on the health of workers, especially through the increase in the use of chemical products. Certainly, apart from Africa, the rate of increase has diminished in the Southern Hemisphere. But it is still high.



The effect of these products on one's health is often that the pesticides penetrate the human body through the respiratory canal and the skin, and in rare cases, through the digestive system, when meals are eaten in the fields. Damage is also caused by less obvious factors such as the practice of blowing air through the nozzles of the spraying equipment, in order to clean them out, which has been observed by the ILO. Another frequent cause is the absence of, or the failure to use protective equipment. In 1990, the World Health Organisation announced that at least 3 million people are poisoned by pesticides each year and that 20,000 of them die.

PREVENTION IS THE FIRST STEP

The steps to be taken in order to reduce the threat to health are now of a different nature. Some are statutory. They involve imposing (as well as verifying) preventive measures, or eventually banning,

certain products. Other steps depend on individuals, who must agree to submit to what they perceive as restrictions in order to be protected. Thus a survey conducted on 39 farms in South Africa has revealed that there was protective equipment available on most of them, but only on two of the farms, were workers obliged to wear it.

Prevention and education, though matters of priority, are sometimes not carried out sufficiently. Healthcare centres should therefore take them up, but *“All these shortcomings are compounded by problems of distance, geographical dispersion, poverty, cultural differences and difficulties of access to the various services”*.

According to the ILO, all these efforts must recognise the fact that *there is no clear dividing line between living and working conditions in this sector*. Malnutrition and poor living conditions reduce the productivity of farmers and farm workers, as well as their resistance to disease.

According to the ILO, the best healthcare systems for farm workers are found in Sweden and Finland. One must note that these are not exactly poor countries. In developing countries, large farms sometimes make appreciable effort, while others *“are mainly concerned with gearing their production to export to meet the standards of international markets rather than adopting a sustainable approach to agricultural development.”* For this reason they resort to techniques that are hazardous to health. The workers are the primary victims, but consumers also pay the price eventually.

A.L.



ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Accidents and illness are the order of the day

THE HARMFUL ASPECTS OF AGRICULTURE HAVE BEEN DEBATED IN THE CONFERENCE ROOMS OF GENEVA, AND IT IS A REALITY EXPERIENCED BY MILLIONS OF WORKERS. TAKING THE CASE OF ONE COUNTRY, AMONGST OTHERS.

Jacquerville is 40 km West of Abidjan. SICOR (an Ivorian company that produces shredded coconut) harvests and processes coconuts, and exports the product mainly to the Netherlands, where it is used for making Bounty chocolate bars. They are gathered on the plantation, treated, chopped, and grated in a fairly modern factory. There is a settlement nearby where the workers are given lodging by the owner of the plantation, in accordance with old colonial regulations. The manager initially allowed a tour of the factory, and then changed his mind. The workers

appeared to be more willing to talk about safety conditions in the workplace.

WORKERS KEEP UP BY USING DRUGS

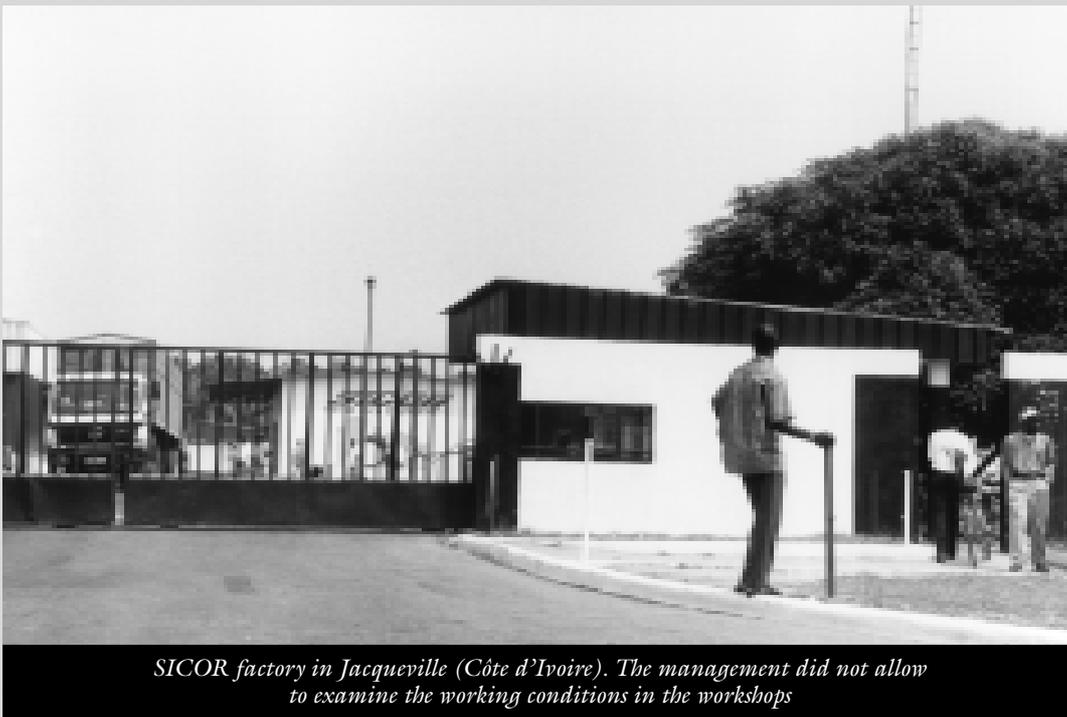
The first aspect to be studied by the trade union representatives was the production target. The new manager had raised the daily quota of each coconut harvester from 800 to 900 for an 8-hour working day, in standing position. Furthermore, the coconuts are harvested manually, with a small machete that is struck close to the fingers. Then they must be peeled with a

special knife. According to the trade unionists, injury to the hands is high, more so, because the labourers work under the influence of drugs in order to work faster and achieve the set targets. The reason is simple: low salaries force the workers to meet their targets as quickly as possible, leaving enough time for them to pursue a second job to supplement their income. That is, provided their hands remain intact.

In actual fact the plantation workers receive the minimum wage for the agricultural sector (SMAG), which is two times lower than the industrial minimum wage (SMIG): about Fcfa18,000. Those factories that are on the plantation site should pay the SMIG, but in order to cut costs, the managers prefer to pay the minimum wage for the agricultural sector (SMAG). According to Abou Yapi, Secretary General of the group of affiliated agro-industrial trade unions in Cote d'Ivoire (SYNTRIF), there are countless cases of accidents in the workplace amongst its members: wounds and cuts, falls on the slippery floors of oil factories, steam burns from heaters, etc. Abou Yapi says that no doubt, many studies have been conducted on the subject, but the results are yet to be seen.

BOOTS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE

Agriculture itself cannot be left out. On banana plantations in



SICOR factory in Jacquerville (Côte d'Ivoire). The management did not allow to examine the working conditions in the workshops

Côte d'Ivoire for example, 90% of the workers are casual labourers, poorly paid, uninformed and poorly protected. In the oil palm industry, the spikes of the trees are cut right from the base, and often fall on the harvesters, branches and all.

As in other places, the use of protective equipment leaves much to be desired. Boots are one example. On certain plantations, the workers are given a pair once in three years, but they wear out within a year. Working barefoot, they are then exposed to thorns, snake bites, falling on slippery ground, etc. On the Ilho Rame tree plantation, there are 9 cases of snakebite every three months. The irony of this is that the snake serum that is administered to victims on the plantation costs more than the boots does.

Women and children are also involved, more so because they are employed to spread fertilizers and pesticides, which can be dangerous. A study conducted at the Santa Casa faculty of medicine in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil revealed that women in the agro-industrial sector have less access to health services.

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL WORKERS ON THE FRONTLINE

La Côte d'Ivoire, cited often here, is not the only country in question. The situation is similar in all countries where export-based agriculture, which is highly competitive, is a major source of foreign exchange.

Amongst agricultural workers, certain categories are found to be in an even more serious predicament as far as health is concerned. For example, the migrants, especially when they have to live and work clandestinely. Often they have no alternative but to accept their lot

or be expelled from the country. According to two consultants¹ who conducted a study of banana plantations in Costa Rica, "These illegal workers often live under unsanitary conditions, resulting in a higher risk of infection and disease. Most of these male workers avoid going to healthcare centres, for fear of being referred to the department of immigration". Their housing conditions are no better. They are unhygienic, due to their temporary nature. Amongst the most common illnesses are anemia and malaria, which, according to doctors of the local university, is due to the lack of primary health care in the rural areas. Another factor is the use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides like paraquat, which may be a cause of cancer in human beings. Apart from being harmful to farm workers, these products, when sprayed from airplanes, contaminate rivers and poison those who drink from them.

Another category of victims is the seasonal workers, because employers feel no obligation to ensure their health and safety. Last, but certainly not the least, there are the workers who are in a state of semi-slavery. In Brazil for example, some plantation workers are exposed to heat, steam and fumes expelled from ovens all day long. In Pakistan, they are treated as beasts of burden, and beaten when they attempt to escape.

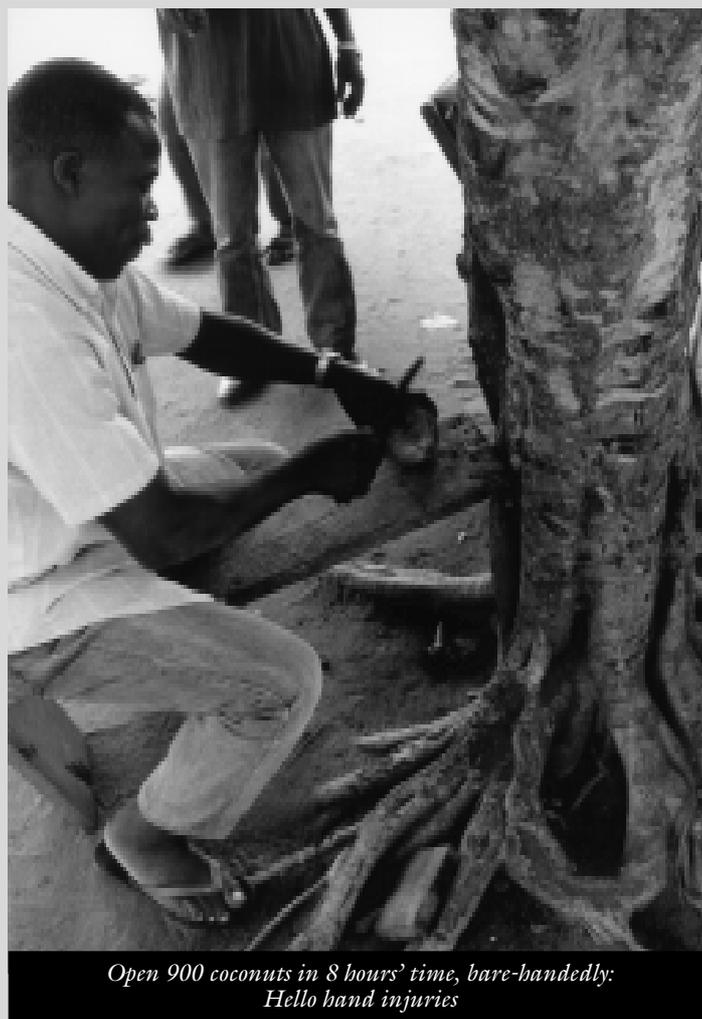
One point is common to all these examples: neither fatality nor poverty can explain these deplorably unsanitary conditions.

¹ S. Dressalaers and I Vangodtsenhove: Banana: areas of conflict; IHEC (Brussels), 1994.

Asia: Even breastmilk is contaminated

Rural areas are becoming increasingly toxic due to high residue from fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and the dumping of urban and industrial toxic wastes. This is especially hazardous for women and children with the rise of contamination of breast milk, the first food of infants. Toxicity is increasing risks of cancer, making traditional sources of foods unsafe (i.e. river and pond fish) and resulting in a general reduction of rural health. In addition, Structural Adjustment Programs, instituted by countries in order to fulfill the agreement with IMF/WB have significant detrimental effects on women and children given the invariable reduction or elimination of health and social services to the needy.

Asia-Pacific People's Assembly Forum



*Open 900 coconuts in 8 hours' time, bare-handedly:
Hello hand injuries*



Bangladesh: Tea - the key to good health?

Forty-five tea plantations in Bangladesh are participating in a project of prevention and education, which was started by the Ministry of Labour, together with employers and the trade unions. 100,000 workers (60% female) and their families are involved. They are basically the descendants of immigrants who have virtually no contact with the local community.

The project is concerned with reproductive health, which is not directly related to agricultural labour but rather to the social setting within which this work is carried out.

The first phase consists of training the plantation administrators, medical person-

nel, trade union leaders as well as "peer" educators. The underlying principle of "peer education" is simple: it is easier to accept instruction from one's peers, than from a superior person or an outsider. In this way, workers are prepared to collaborate in a training programme amongst colleagues.

Secondly, the activities consist of family health sessions and information, motivational sessions, and even stage productions for mass education.

This is possible in the short term for an ancillary aspect of working conditions. Is the same possible in the long term for working conditions themselves?

Culled from: *Spotlight*: (labour and population bulletin of the ILO, no. 16 June 1998)
"Reproductive health for plantations"

ILO CONVENTIONS

Issues pertaining to health and safety in the agricultural sector:

- 110 (and recommendation no. 110) on plantations (1958)
- 119 (and recommendation no. 118) on protection from machinery (1963)
- 129 (and recommendation no. 121) on inspection of the workplace (1969)
- 155 (and recommendation no. 164) on health and safety of workers (1981)
- 161 (and recommendation no. 171) on health services at the workplace (1985)
- 170 (and recommendation no. 177) on chemical products (1990)



Further information

- The ILO has already published two preliminary reports in French, English and Spanish, for the debate on health and safety in the agricultural sector to be held next June (88th session, point VI on the agenda).
- Health and safety in the agricultural sector: 1. General overview of the problem; practice and legislation, 1999, 108p (plus numerous bibliographical references).
- Health and safety in the agricultural sector: 2. Responses and comments from member countries, to issues concerning an eventual international legal instrument on the subject, 2000, 201p.
- ILO website: <http://www/ilo.org>
- The ILO also spreads a CD-Rom *Your safety and health at the workplace*, which has been brought about with Italian support. This instrument contains twelve didactic modules, data files on the safe handling of chemicals, the ILO texts on this matter, thirteen video sequences and a list of specialised organisations. The Bureau for workers' activities (ACTRAV) ensures the production.



TOWARDS PRIVATISATION

CEEC: Privatising for whose benefit?

For privatisation to take place, one must first have public assets and companies. Although no country in the world can avoid this general trend, the phenomenon is clearly more serious in countries where the economy is largely controlled by the State. In effect, privatisation covers two types of activity in these countries. First come the sectors that are traditionally controlled by the public service (health, transport, energy, telecommunications, etc), just like in market economies. The existence of public service concerns is the outcome of what the WCL International Federation of Public Services (INFEDOP) calls “the concept of universal service” which aims at “ensuring that everyone living everywhere has affordable access to a certain quality of essential services.”

Next come the productive sectors which were already in private hands in the capitalist countries. The former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) whose productive sector was largely state-controlled, are therefore found in the front line. The ensuing general observation is that even if it is a macro-economic success (Poland, Slovenia,...), privatisation leads to serious social damages: fall in the standard of living and rise in unemployment and inequalities. For example, Croatia lost 70,000 jobs. Hungary and Russia are other examples of this trend. It appears that the only exception is Slovenia “Central Europe's Small Switzerland”, which enjoys very special conditions.

LESS JOBS AND LOWER INCOMES

Achille Dutu, WFIW co-ordinator for CEEC qualifies the issue by providing differences depending on the groups of countries: “Countries like Romania, Bulgaria or Lithuania suffered the most because of the communism, the stalinist inflexible kind.(...) The small private enterprises have been, most of them, destroyed. Meanwhile in Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Yugoslavia these enterprises survived”. He adds: “The whole system of political and economic decision-making

is influenced by the collective mentality because the very system is made up of people who act upon habits, common characteristics of the mentality, the cultural traditions if you want.”

The same market economy rules will consequently have variable effects but the above observation remains true. According to *Le Monde* of 9th November, 1999, “The dark spot of the transition (is) the general regression due to the disappearance of health facilities which, together with education, added to the social reputation of these countries (...) Everywhere, unemployment was on the increase and forgotten diseases (e.g. tuberculosis) resurfaced...” Be it mining in Romania or metallurgy in Lithuania, the trend is the same.

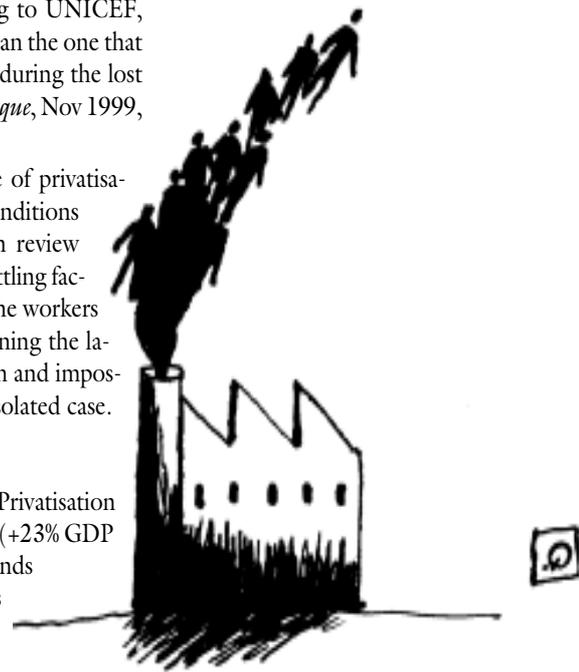
According to UNDP (1999), 14 million inhabitants of the communist bloc each lived on an income of less than US\$4 a day. The figure was 148 million in 1996. In Poland, 66% of the children suffer from malnutrition. The figures abound. According to UNICEF, the crisis suffered by CEEC is worse than the one that occurred in Latin America and Africa during the lost decade of the 80s (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, Nov 1999, p 6).

Job losses are the initial consequence of privatisation; the deterioration of working conditions is another. The Russian trade union review mentions the case of the Coca-Cola bottling factory in Ekaterinburg in the Urals. The workers are accusing management of contravening the labour code, suppressing trade unionism and imposing unpaid overtime. This is not an isolated case.

FOR A BETTER LIFE

Not everything is negative, however. Privatisation has been of benefit to certain countries (+23% GDP in Poland since 1990), sectors (thousands of jobs created in the SMEs) as well as certain social categories (a youthful middle class to the detriment of pen-

THE DEBATE ON PRIVATISATION IS NOT A PURELY THEORETICAL ONE: IN THE AFFECTED COUNTRIES, IT FINDS EXPRESSION IN VERY CONCRETE EFFECTS ON THE PEOPLE AND, ESPECIALLY, LABOUR. THESE EFFECTS ARE GENERALLY NEGATIVE. A BRIEF STUDY OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE.





sioners and civil servants). This situation makes neo-liberal economists say that the “sacrifices” are worth the trouble to ensure the modernisation of the CEEC economies. This sometimes leads to “*a strange obsessive inclination to consider social welfare aspects as inheritance of socialism*” which, according to Drago Gorupic, founder of the Zagreb Economic Institute, has to be proscribed.

Modernisation or otherwise is not an issue. Indeed, it is impossible to keep afloat obsolete or perpetually unprofitable enterprises. No one is missing the state-run systems. Yet, how, at what human cost and in whose interest should modernisation take place? Should we sacrifice everything to neo-liberal principles which give priority to the market as against human beings? Which place should be given to social profitability? Is privatisation the only means of modernisation?

Many PECO countries use their expected admission into the European Union to justify the rapid submission to market rules. They can find support in the statements made by the European Union’s Commissioner in charge of the domestic market, Frits Bolkestein to the effect that “*in order to have a healthy economy, one must be prepared to face competition rather than erect new barriers*”. However, is foreign capital not the factor most directly involved in the opening up process? At the end of 1997, there were 47,000

wholly or partly foreign-owned enterprises in the Czech Republic.

Another widespread argument has to do with bureaucracy and corruption in the wholly state-controlled public services. This reality does not disappear with privatisation. Achille Dutu observes that a series of commissions and institutions were set up for the privatisation process. However, they, in turn, became bureaucracies in which privatisation was relegated to the background. The essence was the benefits that the member derived from these organs. We know that in Russia, the desire to dismember the State has left the field free for all manner of Mafiosi to control the economy in their own interest.

Communist regimes fell because the people wanted to lead a better and free life. It is in the light of these criteria that privatisation must be judged: What are its consequences on welfare? Do these consequences occur transparently to suit democracy?

A specific question for the European Union candidates: if it is so imperative to make CEEC countries respect the Union’s economic standards, will action be taken in similar fashion to make the social status of workers in the CEEC countries fall into line with that of the 15 nations?

André Linard

A case among others: Lithuania and her unemployed people

Lithuania witnessed three phases of privatisation: 1991-1995, 1995-1997, and from 1998 onwards. The first affected about 2 million citizens (out of a population of 3.7 million) and involved state enterprises, land, housing and agricultural concerns. In all, 8,050 enterprises, ie 70% of the total company shares, were generally privatised through the public sale of shares. The state earned about US\$58 million from this procedure. At the same time, individuals submitted 600,000 applications for the purchase of houses; 95% of former state property was privatised in this way. In the area of agriculture, 1,160 kolkhoses went the same way.

The second and third phases further sped the process up. Big nationally important state enterprises were privatised in sectors like transport, energy and telecommunications. Their shares varied between US\$0.5 and US\$190 million and they employed between 200 and 10,000 workers.

The Lithuanian Labour Federation has observed that privatisation has given rise to a big contingent of unemployed people (8.1% of the active population). Personnel cutbacks occur the most in the big companies. There are various reasons for this trend: inability of domestic capital to finance modernisation investments, drop in demand and outlets and, where foreign capital has taken over, investments have been made to increase productivity yet there are no jobs. Most of the metal construction enterprises have either folded up or heavily down-sized their staff.





REPORT

Hope for Cote d'Ivoire

About a hundred people were crowded in the courtyard of the group of affiliated trade unions, Dignité, in Abidjan: delegates and workers of Carena, ASH, Castelli, Ihro Lamé and other companies, listening to the commander sent by the military junta which took over power on December 24 in Côte d'Ivoire, and asking questions. The labour world is obviously expecting a lot from the new "transition" leaders. And, on the part of Dignité, they are counting on them to resolve labour litigation cases, some of which have been pending for several years now. For example, at Carena, the ship building company, it has been three years since more than 300 workers were dismissed because they went on strike. Originally, and against the advice of the trade union which was then dominant, they protested against the refusal of management to consider Carena as a shipping company, a sector where salaries are higher than if one were just a mechanic. Meanwhile, the expatriate employees had definitely higher salaries and were considered as working in a shipyard. Sangaré Mamadou, their representative explains that since then, *"we have been without salary and income, with no possibility of employment elsewhere."* The scenario is the same at the Castelli company (see box), where Dignité delegates were dismissed. In the case of Carena, the ILO on several occasions admitted that the workers were right, but was not able to force the government to put an end to this injustice.

In mid February, the Minister for Labour received from Basile Mahan Gahé, Secretary General of Dignité, a complete record on eight conflicts of this kind, to which he promised to find *"a concerted solution"*.

Beyond these specific cases, it is the social situation of the Ivorian labour world,

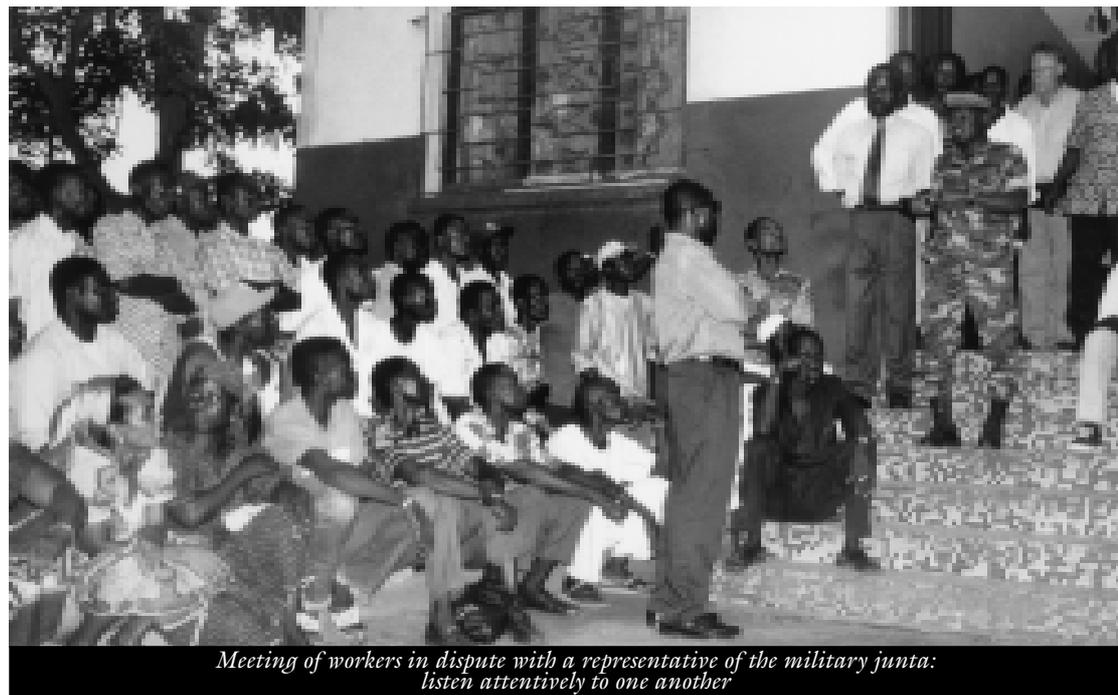
as a whole, which leaves much to be desired. The grievances of workers are numerous. For example, the non-registration for social security. Thus, on February 3, the daily, *Argument*, reported on the case of a company, ECO-CI, where all the workers have the same registration number on the CNPS. This means that only one person is really registered, but then, the employer deducts contributions from all of them.

SMIG OR SMAG?

Another frequent problem: resorting to day labourers or to contracts of fixed duration, which are continually renewed. Also, keeping workers in low categories and paying bonuses, depending on the goodwill of the boss, which also has negative repercussions on the amount of pension.

In the agro-industry sector, workers assigned to the

PARADOX: THE IVORIAN LABOUR WORLD HAS A LOT OF HOPE IN THE MILITARY REGIME WHICH TOOK OVER POWER ON DECEMBER 24. A BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS PRESENT? THAT IS YET TO BE SEEN: THOUGH THE POLITICAL TRANSITION HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED, THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRAMME IS VAGUE.



Meeting of workers in dispute with a representative of the military junta: listen attentively to one another



processing of products (coconut, palm nut...) are often considered as farmers.

The advantage to the employer is obvious: the SMAG (Minimum Guaranteed Agricultural Wage) is about two times less than MIGS, its industrial equivalent.

Since the beginning of the year 2000, social agitation has been strong. Strikes are increasing. Before the coup d'état, the country was on the verge of social explosion, due to unfulfilled promises. The military intervention relieved the tension, but for how long? Intuitively, workers feel that the time has come to demand a rise in salaries, which they are waiting for, which the former regime refused to give them. The

rise is necessary, since the cost of living is high in the country.

Three unions (UGTCI, FESACI and Dignité) react differently to this new deal. During a meeting of employers, trade unions and the military, the deputy Secretary General of UGTCI spoke about "*bad mistakes of some comrades who (...) have for a long time suffered and are taking advantage of the situation to let off steam*". Marcel Etté, of FESACI stressed on the lack of dialogue on the part of the leaders of employers, whereas Basile Mahan, who was often applauded said, "*support all the strikes. The economy will not be prosperous if social issues are not addressed*". He asked the President, General Guéi "*to ban day labour and put all workers on the CNPS.*"

Remain within the framework of the law

Six questions for Mr. Hubert Oulaï, Minister for employment, Labour and Civil Service, former education trade unionist.

Labor: *What do you think of the current strikes?*

The demands of workers are not new. Some are just, others acceptable, others excessive. I am sorry that workers are resorting to wildcat strikes instead of remaining within the law.

L.: *What first steps have you taken?*

I was particularly concerned with opening my doors to social partners, individually or in groups. I told the trade unions that I was ready to open all the files. And, I asked the authorities to put an end to the inopportune interventions of certain military people in labour conflicts.

L.: *How do you see the role of trade unions in a democratic society?*

Trade unions are part of civil society. They have a fundamental role in democracy: to express clearly and objectively the interests of workers and the population, within the framework of the law. Trade unions can take a stand on important political problems to the extent of influencing labour issues.

L.: *Do you wish to re-examine the labour code which trade unions say is too favourable to companies?*

Companies drew up the labour code to facilitate "crises management". It contains loopholes exploited by unscrupulous employers. I intend to start a debate on a new law, but currently, the general political debate is too intense to proceed at the same time with the revision of the Code. This will be the task of the next government.

L.: *What do you think of conflicts like the Carena one and of the disputed role, played by labour inspection?*

I know about the Carena issue. A just decision in favour of the dismissed workers should be arrived at quickly. With regard to labour inspectors, they have lost the confidence of workers because they have less power than they had in the past and limited material resources, which makes them succumb to financial pressures.

L.: *Will Côte d'Ivoire ratify ILO Convention 182, which restricts child labour?*

It is one of the current issues. But, my task in the short term is to put out the social fire. In addition, I do not know about the issue in detail. In principle, no one is for child labour, but people have acquired habits, and it is also a question of employment and remuneration for parents. Families must be able to live.

Remarks compiled by André Linard, Abidjan, February 4, 2000.

MILITARY AND TECHNOCRATS, THE SAME STRUGGLE?

In any case, on the ground, Dignité is on the road to success, having won social election upon social election, whereas the UGTCI was very close to the former single party, which is out of power today. For example, at the Hotel Ivoire, (600 workers), Dignité took 15 of the 18 delegate seats. And so, the expectation of workers in this independent trade union of political power must not be disappointed!

But, can one really expect a favourable social policy for the populace from the new Ivorian leaders? There are too many uncertainties, to be able to reply to this question, at the time of writing this article (beginning of March). A pessimistic scenario is however unfolding: that of elections contested by the losers and an alliance between the military and technocrats. The former would remain in power giving the reason that civilians are incapable of tak-



ing over; the latter, led by Alassana Ouattara, responsible for ensuring the credibility of Côte d'Ivoire in the eyes of donors through a policy of structural adjustment and economic orthodoxy.

According to observers*, *"the euphoria of change has been likened to the tradition of the king who rules the village. The king listens, with his dignitaries, he is then the one who speaks once and for all. It is not certain whether this is very democratic."* Faced with the temp-

tation to appeal to the general/president/king who listens and speaks once and for all, workers must rather put their hopes in the democratic functioning of the Rule of law, including its legal section.

André Linard

* Foreign observers, who wish to remain in the country, must not be quoted.

Hell for women in the factory

They are three, three young women, trade unionists in a fish processing company. Dismissed for militancy, they revealed, sometimes hesitantly and looking at each other as if to encourage one another. *"It was on July 30th. The company was on strike. You are taken on in the afternoon, and at 5 p.m. you are outside. Without compensation of course."* In this factory, in the Treichville area, which is a branch of an Italian company, 90% of the 700 workers are women, generally employed at about the age of twenty, when they have neither experience nor family responsibilities. Their salary is 60,000 CFA francs (92 US dollars) per month.

Officially, they work 8 hours a day, but when they need to finish a stock or meet an order, the day could easily go up to 10 hours, either paid or unpaid, depending on the goodwill of the boss. *"Hundreds of us are employed as day labourers, from fortnight to fortnight. Obviously, they do not dare say anything. To get out of it, one has to bow and scrape to the boss, denounce one's colleagues, or offer one's favours to the boss."*

It is difficult to image, without seeing, the conditions of work at this cannery. The fish comes out boiling from the disinfecting plant, and must be immediately cleaned, the bones removed, cut and put in cans. With bare hand, standing for eight hours. With permission, one can go to the toilet twice a day, under surveillance, for a maximum of five minutes.

APARTHEID SALARY

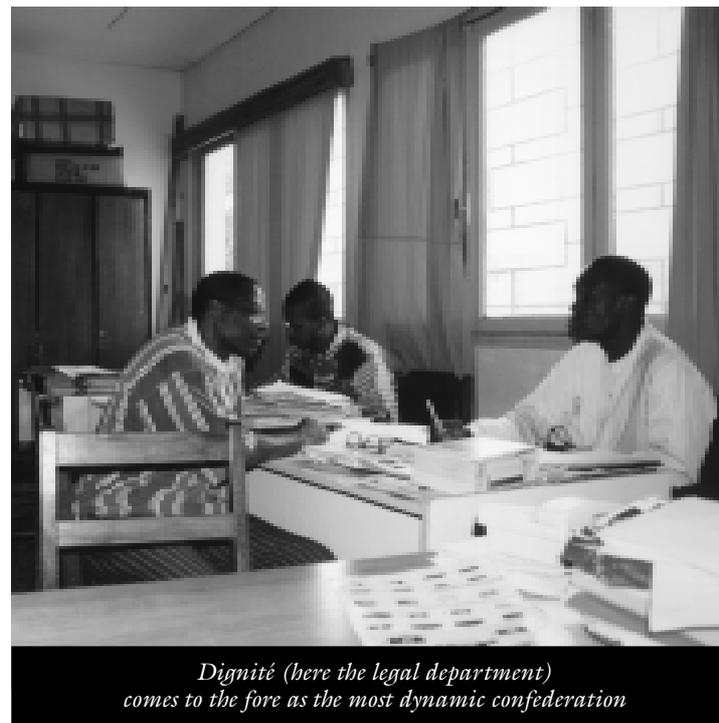
This is only one example, confirmed by several other testimonies. The practice, especially of contracts of fixed duration renewed successively, the non-payment of over time and the arbitrary payment of bonuses, the elimination of trade unionists and bad security conditions.

In the fish cannery, the women are made to put their hands in the cans... and they frequently cut themselves. At the other end of the town, in a factory where they manufacture hair pieces, the women handle products which could be toxic, but the instructions on the mode of use and the precautions to be taken are written... only in Korean.

Not to talk about two women, employed on the same day for the same job, but one paid better because she was a foreigner. This, which some call *apartheid salary*, is in fact a reality. During a meeting with the Minister for Labour, Basile Mahan cited the case of a Carena Ivorian official who earns 4.5 times less than what his expatriate secretary earns. It is for the same reason that salaried workers of Blohorn went on strike on February 18, with quite relative success.

No doubt, Côte d'Ivoire has a labour code of conduct (to be reviewed according to trade unionists), inspection and labour tribunals. But, as a journalist cautiously said, *"before December 24, the latter sold themselves out easily. Since then, we have been waiting to see."* Just as everything else.

A. L.



Dignité (here the legal department) comes to the fore as the most dynamic confederation



TRADE UNIONS OUTMODED?

"In ten years, associations will replace trade unions", declares Jacques Marseille, a French professor, because we will be living in a mass society comprising isolated individuals. Because the citizens have become consumers, even in politics. And the feeling of belonging to the same social class is fading. (*Liberation*, 10 January 2000).

The workers' movement is just one stakeholder among others in a society based more on networks than on structures. "Trade unionism is unprepared to take on the problems arising in a society, where in and outflows, networks and the individual are expressions of a new modernity", add two Belgian researchers, Bernard Franço and Xavier Leloup.

It is however imperative to seriously consider the relevance of alternatives, such as new social movements, which nobody regards as a possible replacement for trade union counter-power.

Trade unionism must surely modernise its way of thinking and doing things, conclude two French sociologists, StÉphane BÉaud and Micheal Pialoux. But it is not clear which social stakeholder could replace it. Which NGO could in future offer workers a strike force as powerful as what exists in their trade union organisations?

According to Jean Sloover, *Le Soir* (Brussels), 21 January 2000.

PRESS REVIEW

• ANDALUSIA: IMMIGRANTS IN PLASTIC

"This desert region is henceforth named "the sea of plastic" This plastic miracle has attracted immigrant workers. More than half are illegal. These are the people who have largely contributed to the building of this Eldorado. When they leave, economic activity in El Ejido (a village where racists riots took place in February 2000) would collapse. However their living conditions leave a lot to be desired. Working conditions are also very difficult, in fact tedious and often dangerous. (...) Also to be blamed are the European fraudsters who use every means to employ the illegal immigrants, but that is another matter".

LE QUOTIDIEN DU MAROC (10 February 2000)

• THREE FREE ZONES IN IRAN

Since Iranian law is unfavourable to foreign investments, the government has created three zones which

are not affected by the law. Their regulation and cost are their main advantages. The salary of a qualified worker there is equivalent to \$260. There is free capital inflow and outflow and the labour laws are favourable to the employer, who elsewhere in the country, finds it almost impossible to dismiss staff.

LE FIGARO (France), 9 December 1999.

• GREAT BRITAIN: ETHICAL INVESTMENTS ON THE INCREASE

Ethical investments have increased from £1.7 billion in January 1998 to £2.6 billion in January 2000. More than 300,000 people have put their money in funds that guarantee a use, which conforms to social and environmental ethics. After two years of struggle, students have been able to get pension funds of British universities to become ethical as well.

THE GUARDIAN, (GB), 15 February 2000

BOOKS AND DISCUSSIONS



THIRD ROUTE (REPEAT)

A social, "mixed capitalism", between liberal capitalism and communist collectivism, is not possible? Does social democracy constitute the answer? Broad questions, frankly discussed not in a book, but in an issue of the Spanish review *Revista de Fomento Social*. Yes, reply the authors, a "third route" is possible, and they attempt to define the conditions: an active civil society, a new mixed economy... This review often touches on interesting topics for the trade union world, which go beyond the Spanish borders. A synopsis of this issue, are among others, "Neoliberalism and the social State", "Globalisation of the world economy", "The African challenge"... It is thus for those who have mastered the language of Cervantes, to find out.

Revista de Fomento, no 215, July-September 1999 (ETEA, Apartado de correos 439, 14080 Cordoba, Spain).

NEGATIVE

Stop on picture



The WORLD PRESS PHOTO Foundation offers annual awards to the best photographs appearing in the world press. This selection confers an award on photographers whose works capture current events in the world with vividness and emotion.

This photo received the second prize 1999 in the category: General News stories. It was taken in Sudan by Tom Stoddart, UK, Independent Photographers Group Sudan's Catastrophe. ©TST/IPG 1998.

I find in this photo the very essence of my commitment, at the same time a number of evils in our society: social exclusion, inhumanity on the part of some human beings...

Here is a person, very young, who should be standing, but is on all fours like a beast. On the side is an adult passer-by, holding a full bag.

An adult who should show a sign of solidarity. And even failing that, to be willing or able to share something, at least by a look or a word to show that one understands.

Here, it is indifference that is very striking to me. How can one remain insensitive? I am a believing trade unionist, and my faith requires me to have some minimum

consideration for the disadvantaged. This picture reminds me of the phrase "Hell, is others". Then all my struggle leads me more to solidarity, humanism and human justice.

Choice and comments of Joseph Toé, Secretary to DAOWTU Trade Union Action, Burkina Faso

trade union activities

INDIA

WHEN THE POLICE HELPS TO NEGOTIATE...



Willy Thys amidst demonstrators

“Compared to European practices, it was odd”, recounts Willy Thys, Secretary General of the WCL, on his return from a trip to India. “A police superintendent was the negotiator during a strike, it is rather rare”. Kampur in Uttar Pradesh, India. A shoe manufacturing public company, has been closed since 1995. The reason: unpaid electricity bills had led to a cut in power supply. But it was said that there was another real reason: a shady deal between the army, the main client, and a rival company. Result: 673 workers have been left in the cold, with however, a little income obtained from the trade unions, to enable them survive. For 5 months now, however, the company no longer pays even this reduced earnings. So the workers have occupied the premises.

“When I arrived”, recounts Willy Thys, “they were deep in negotiations, with the police playing a dual role: on one hand, in the compound, with jeeps and guns; on the other, at the negotiating table as the intermediary between (ex) managers and 14 trade unions.” Fourteen trade unions for 673 workers? «Exactly. This number can be explained by the fact that each political party wants to have its trade union there as a source of influence, which divides the workers. An acceptable compromise was being worked out, but the delega-

tions were wrangling among themselves. I asked them to be united, reminding them that 673 families were depending on their decision.” Finally, 11 out of 14 unions signed. The workers left with the certainty that they would have something to live on.

Will the factory re-open? It is not very certain. The equipment is obsolete, due to lack of investment for modernisation, but in perfect working condition. The State, as the owner, wants to sell, but a private investor will never take a business where no investment has been made. This is the drama of this Kampur region, with its old industry, hit by recession and privatisation in a country where the State was the main economic actor. The private investor takes what suits him and leaves the rest. And the State obviously, does not want to engage in a battle of wills with the private enterprise.

“In the afternoon”, continues Willy Thys, “I came across former factory workers, in a shantytown, who had set up small workshops and were making sandals and slippers as a craft, sometimes putting very young children to work.” Confirmation: neither the informal economy nor child labour falls from the sky.