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WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

# BETWEEN PORTO ALEGRE AND DAVOS: NEO-LIBERAL GLOBALISATION NO LONGER INSPIRES CONFIDENCE

*Porto Alegre woke up on 23rd January to the rhythm of the heartbeat of the alternative global movement. They were 20 000 in 2002. This year, 100 000 people of all ages and from all corners of the world assembled in this Brazilian city to carry on with their denunciation of unjust neo-liberalism and propose alternatives. Six intense days in which a strong WCL delegation participated, adding its voice to the alternative global movement.*

### A DEMONSTRATION DURING THE OPENING OF THE WSF 2003: «FOR PEACE, FRUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE»

This 3rd edition of the WSF began with a big demonstration that filled the long avenues of Porto Alegre. The member organisations of the WCL were certainly there to stress their faith in a more united world and in a globalisation that ensures peace, fruit of social justice. This WSF was indeed held in a sad atmosphere of the threat of war against the Iraqi people, while throughout the world, misery and the lack of decent jobs are also killing people. For the WCL, the expenditure on arms today would serve peace better if it were used for development.

**Demonstration for peace**

### «THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AT THE HEART OF CIVIL SOCIETY», SLOGAN OF THE 2nd WORLD TRADE UNION FORUM

Even before the launch of the WSF 2003, the tens of trade union organisations present in Porto Alegre had gathered in response to the call by the WCL, ICFTU and ETUC to assert their presence in Porto Alegre.

«*What has brought us together again, is our common desire to express our revulsion at the neo-liberal model – a model in crisis, in the face of a unique thought which justifies, sows selfish practices and gives rise to social conflicts and violence*», declared Willy Thys, Secretary General of the WCL, during his speech. «*This initiative is a response to a process which relies on the capacity to transform diversity into strength. This is a challenge to trade unionism. This is a development that is probably historic. We are here to move from resistance to the development of alternatives to eventually enable the progressive forces to impose a model that is more democratic and more just*», he added.

During the opening ceremony, Mr. Juan Somavia, Director General of the ILO, expressed his satisfaction with the election of President Lula, a former President from the trade union movement, and emphasised the political effect of Porto Alegre and the challenge this forum represents against an unfair and exclusive globalisation system.

The tens of delegates present, including a large number of women, then took the floor. Between opposition to war in Iraq, solidarity with the Palestinian people, support for models that are more just and more sociable and confidence in another possible world, the fiery and passionate speeches of the leaders straight away set the tone. Only one point of discord: the situation in Venezuela, for which the CLAT – which has just held its 27th Latin-American Council Meeting (Lima, 14th -18th January 2003) requires that the voice of the Venezuelan people be heard by respecting the country's Constitution and by supporting a political, peaceful and democratic process through mass consultation.

**TELE-FLASH** is a two-weekly information bulletin containing brief trade union messages, edited by the information department of the WCL.

*Responsible editor:* Willy Thys
*Information officer:* Mathieu Debroux.

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**WCL**
Trierstraat 33
B-1040 Brussels
Tel : 02/285.47.00
Fax : 02/230.87.22
E-mail: info@cmt-wcl.org
Internet: www.cmt-wcl.org

***DECENT WORK AT THE CENTRE OF THE DEBATE WITH OTHER SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS***

On 24th and 25th January, at the joint initiative of the WCL, ICFTU and ETUC, decent work was retained as the basic point of a two-day debate with various representatives of social organisations. How do we create decent jobs? Is it possible to ensure the respect of labour standards with the present instruments such as the codes of conduct? How do we incorporate a social dimension into integration agreements? And finally, what do we think of the debate on global governance?

It's on the basis of these four main considerations that the debates between the representatives of trade union organisations and these other civil society organisations were held. Added to these were representatives of the ILO, including Jean-Claude Javillier, Director of the Standards Department, who emphasised the importance of a system focused on justice, and Gerry Rodgers, Director of the Department for Integration Policies at the ILO.

Having recognised the high level of debates and the excellent quality of speakers from the trade union movement and also from the civil society, some however regretted the absence of final conclusions of this seminar, proof that this initiative was largely appreciated.

***SEEKING A REFORM OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS***

A change of course for the present neo-liberal globalisation will only be possible by understanding the profound debate on global governance. Numerous initiatives were organised as part of the WSF 2003. What should be remembered however is the world campaign for the reform of international institutions launched under the auspices of Federico Mayor, former Director General of UNESCO, with a coalition called «Ubuntu». Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General of the WCL, participated in a conference organised by Ubuntu recalling the main points adopted by the WCL during the Bucharest Congress. The establishment of an Economic and Social Security Council within the United Nations presented by the WCL largely retained the attention of participants.

***BEHIND THE WSF, ITS INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL***

Right from the moment the idea of a World Social Forum was floated, the WCL has adhered to its International Council and participated in all preparatory and evaluation meetings. About one hundred organisations are today affiliated to it and direct the course of this initiative which, today, exceeds all expectations. A true sign of hope, the WSF is an instrument for stimulating change. To begin with, the people who conceived the WSF thought of an association of some thousands of representatives from various social backgrounds. From 20 000 in 2002, the WSF has assembled around 100 000 alternative globalists, active in more than 1000 workshops and seminars. It should be recognised that the forum is today a victim of its popularity. The difficulties associated with its organisation have complicated the participation process and there have been some attempts at manipulation which have been rapidly suppressed. The fact still remains that the WSF continues to be the reference.

During its intense days of deliberation, the International Council resolved that the next Forum would be moved from Porto Alegre to India, but that

**The international Council of the WSF**

it would return to Brazilian territory in 2005. This will moreover remain an open space and a horizontal process of permanent reflection so that another world can really become possible.

***A SEMINAR FOR AN ECONOMY AT THE SERVICE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT***

For the WCL, the economy must be at the service of human development. It is a means and not an end in itself. From 18th to 30th January 2003, over 20 trade union leaders from all continents met in Porto Alegre concurrently with the World Social Forum to reflect on the modalities in the presence of experts. This seminar made it possible to recall the major considerations which direct the WCL and its regional organisations, including a criticism of neo-liberal globalisation.

This neoliberal globalisation has no future, recalled Rodolfo Romero, Deputy Secretary General of the Latin American Central of Workers – CLAT.

The conceptual reflection combined with the numerous concrete examples highlighting the submission of the worker to economic and financial requirements have led to the conclusion that the concept of globalisation needs to be rethought. The conclusions of this seminar reaffirmed the relevance of courses of action established in the action programme adopted in Bucharest.

Among the priorities emphasised are the need to rethink world governance, as well as placing further emphasis on any campaign towards the WTO, World Bank and IMF, the strengthening of the gender dimension in WCL strategies and paying greater attention to the informal economy (notably to the normative framework to protect these workers) and to the notion of a decent minimum wage.
Let us also stress the action taken by the CAT (Central Autônoma de Trabalhadores), our organisation in Brazil, assisted by the CNPL (Confederação Nacional de Profissões Liberais), very much present in the region of Rio Grando do Sul. We cannot help but be pleased about their support for the WCL.

***DAVOS TRIES TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE***

Whereas in Porto Alegre, the alternative globalist movements developed and discussed new proposals for a more just globalisation, the economic and financial institutions gathered in Davos for the 33rd Edition of the World Economic Forum tried to «restore confidence» in a climate of war paradoxically creating extreme uncertainty. In Porto Alegre, we were looking for solutions for more democracy, in Davos, there seemed to be more concern for defending one's own interests.

The joint ICFTU/ETUC/WCL declaration prepared for Porto Alegre and Davos recognises that *«if an assessment is made of development, it's one of failure from all standpoints. And unless the international community has the capacity to react, this failure will continue and within one year, the achievement of better living conditions, of decent jobs and development objectives of the Millennium will still be a distant objective… The international trade union movement is seeking urgent action to ensure an effective management of the world economy and to guarantee basic rights and creation of decent jobs*».

Willy Thys, Secretary General of the WCL, and Luc Cortebeeck, Vice-President of the WCL and President of the CSC – Confederation of Christian Unions of Belgium, recalled in their respective speeches in Davos that the confidence of workers throughout the world can only be restored if their fundamental rights are respected, promoted and guaranteed. In this respect, the ILO, whose Director General was also present, has a decisive role to play, on an equal footing with institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO. Often in search of innovative proposals based on their social or environmental responsibility, the multinational firms have the tendency of omitting their first responsibility, which is also, and especially to contribute decisively to development by paying taxes and by guaranteeing the rights of workers. The duty of the democratic State is to redistribute the wealth created to support economic activity.

Even if the trade union presence in Davos is working hard to change the course of discussions, even if the speeches of trade union representatives are distilled and «smoothed out» in conclusions sterilised by the organisers, it remains decisive in holding direct discussions with the destroyers of neo-liberal globalisation, to look for allies or convince the sceptics of this globalisation by instilling a ray of hope and social justice to a process which is inevitably leading to a dead-end.

Like the WCL, Ignacio «Lula» Da Silva made the trip from Porto Alegre to Davos carrying the same message. During the meeting with some trade union leaders, Willy Thys showed the support of the WCL as well as the CLAT (the regional Latin American organisation of the WCL, which met in Lima the previous week.) Lula seized this opportunity to emphasise his concern about the situation in Venezuela. *«It is »,* he said, *«essential to emerge from the crisis by democratic means and with respect for the constitution, otherwise it will be dangerous for all democracies in Latin America».*

***A DEMONSTRATION AT NOVO HAMBURGO. SUNDAY, A DAY OF REST***

*Concurrently with the WSF programme and to pursue the actions started in 2002, the delegation from CAT – Autonomous Workers Union – and from FETRALCOS – Latin American Federation of Commercial Workers – received the support of delegates from various countries representing the WCL, all of whom expressed their opposition to compulsory work on Sunday for employees in the commercial sector.*

*As mentioned by Maritza Chireno, President of FETRALCOS, Sunday is a day reserved for rest, the family and, in Brazil, a day of worship. The WCL delegation thus went to a commercial centre in Novo Hamburgo, a town near Porto Alegre, to recall these principles and express its solidarity with the workers affiliated to FETRALCOS and CAT.*