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WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

### *JUAN SOMAVIA AT THE WCL*

On 21 November, the director-general of the ILO, Juan Somavia, paid a visit to the WCL to exchange views on several topics and particularly on the conclusions of the 25th Congress. The director-general was received by the WCL secretariat and by Luc Cortebeeck, president of the ACV-CSC and vice-president of the WCL. While handing Juan Somavia the text of the Policy Resolution as adopted by the Congress, the secretary-general of the WCL, Willy Thys, drew special attention to the paragraphs on the importance of strengthening the social dialogue through the ILO and on the constitution of an Economic and Social Security Council. Eduardo Estevez, deputy secretary-general, presented the special resolution on the ILO, pointing out the necessity of supporting and strengthening the ILO standard-setting system, which must form the basis of a genuine international labour legislation.

### *PREPARATION OF THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2002*

Eduardo Estevez, deputy secretary-general, represented the WCL at the 2nd meeting of the International Committee of the World Social Forum (WSF), which took place in Dakar, Senegal, from 30 October to 1 November 2001. The WCL is the only international workers' organisation present in this Committee.

On the first day, the debates were centred on an analysis of the current international situation, particularly since the events of 11 September, and on the process of "criminalising the social movements".

The other days were devoted to the political and organisational aspects of the Forum 2002. Three types of activities are planned:

1. Morning conferences (large attendance): organised by the Forum itself;
2. Afternoon seminars (several days - large attendance): proposed and organised by the participating organisations;
3. Workshops (limited participation): conducted by the participating organisations. The number of workshops is limited by the number of available meeting-rooms. The Organising Committee will make the rooms available as far as possible.

Besides its participation in several conferences during the WSF, the WCL expressed its will to co-organise a Workers' Forum and a seminar on decent work, which would assemble all the interested trade union and social leaders present at the WSF. The Workers' Forum could be organised in co-operation with the national, regional and international trade unions participating in the WSF.

The International Committee also discussed the venue of the 3rd World Social Forum, in 2003. The candidacy of India was endorsed. It is up to the International Committee to make the final decision; it will meet again shortly prior to the Forum 2002.

For further information on the WSF, we refer to the web site: http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

### *DAY OF THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL FOR THE CANCELLATION OF THE DEBT*

On Friday 5 October, the Socialist International organised in Paris a day of reflection on the cancellation of the debt. Luis Enrique Marius, deputy secretary-general of the CLAT, took the floor besides other personalities such as Mats Karlson, vice-chairman of the World Bank, René Passet, chairman of the Scientific Committee of ATTAC-France, and Raul Alfonsin, former president of the Republic of Argentina and vice-chairman of the Socialist International. *According to Luis Enrique Marius,* "It is more than ever essential to break the vicious and fateful circle. Without genuine development the debt will never get paid. And if the debt is left unpaid, one denies oneself genuine development. Without cancellation foreign debt is nothing but a new synonym for dependence. So, the only solution lies in an alternative development model."

### *SEMINAR OF EUROPEAN WOMEN IN THE WCL*

The seminar of European women was held in Bucharest on 18-20 October, prior to the WCL Women's Conference and Congress. Its purpose was to prepare the participation of the European women in both important events of the WCL. The main themes of the seminar were the trade union policies and strategies facing the influx of women in the labour market and the advancement of their rights. Twenty-three women trade unionists from all over Europe had the opportunity to acquire knowledge, to express themselves and to propose trade union actions for a better integration of women into the labour market and the trade unions. They benefited by the contributions of several experts who fed their reflections and decisions. All this resulted in a concrete and realistic plan of action in which the accent is on networking through exchanges and the circulation of information both within and outside the WCL (ETUC, ILO, etc). Further aspects of the plan of action were the systematic introduction of the gender concept in collective bargaining and a better

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preparation of the participation of European women in the forthcoming WCL Women's Conference and Congress. In conclusion, the participants made it a permanent goal to pursue a stronger participation of women in the decision-making bodies of the WCL.

### *EUROPEAN UNION/MERCOSUR AND CHILE RELATIONS*

On 24-26 November, the ICFTU/WCL/ETUC workshop, set up to follow up on the EU/Mercosur and Chile relations, organised in Brussels an enlarged meeting with representatives of the CLAT, the ORIT, the CCSC (co-ordination of trade union confederations from the Southern Cone) and the CTCS (workers' council of the Southern Cone).

The meeting on 24 November, chaired jointly by Emilio Gabaglio and Willy Thys, the respective secretaries-general of the ETUC and the WCL, was devoted to setting up the best co-ordination and working mechanisms for the workshop and the CCSC and the CTCS. Within the framework of the talks between the EU and Mercosur and Chile, it is absolutely necessary for the trade unions to go beyond the level of discourse and to take effective account of the workers' rights, opting for the following instruments as a legal basis: the Declaración Socio-Laboral de Mercosur and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The workshop also analysed the initiatives that should be advanced and support with a view to the best possible protection of the workers' interests.

The workshop members, accompanied by Bill Jordan and Willy Thys, the respective secretaries-general of the ICFTU and the WCL, also met Francisco Da Camara, who is in charge of the relations with Latin America on behalf of the European Commission.

On 26 November, the ambassador of Argentina in charge of the Mission with the EU, Roberto Lavagna, invited the ambassadors of the Mercosur countries and Chile to a meeting with the leaders of the trade unions composing the workshop.

### *FOR GENUINE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY*

On 13 December the WCL took part in the demonstration organised by the ETUC, the ACV-CSC and the (socialist) ABVV-FGTB on the occasion of the Laeken-Brussels Summit of the heads of state and government of the European Union.

The purpose of the demonstration was to affirm clearly that the trade unions in particular and the civil society in general demand the building of a social Europe based on solidarity both within and across the borders of the European Union.

The WCL entirely shares the concerns of the European organisations when they demand the establishment of an economy at the service of a better quality of life. The WCL can only support their demands: the guarantee of quality public services accessible to all the citizens; the preservation of social protection system; the extension of the rights to all the wage-earners in the companies; more gender equality, better working conditions and health and safety conditions at the workplace and, lastly, the struggle against poverty, exclusion and all forms of discrimination.

### *SECOND CONGRESS OF DIGNITÉ*

The *Confédération des Syndicats Libres* (CSL) from the Ivory Coast, better known under the name Dignité, assembled its 2nd Congress on 28-30 November in Abidjan. This young organisation – founded on1st May 1988 – has developed in particularly difficult circumstances, as until recently the "official" trade union, linked to the single party, monopolised the social relations in the country. This resulted, in 1994, in the imprisonment of the organisation's secretary-general and founder, Basile Mahan Gahé, and several activists and members of Dignité were assassinated during strikes deemed unlawful by those in power. In 1998, the armed forces even looted the head office of *Dignité* in Abidjan.

*Dignité* is now recognised and this recognition, as was pointed out by Willy THYS, WCL secretary-general, in his address during the closing session, found expression in the presence of the president of the National Assembly of the Ivory Coast at the Congress.

The Congress passed a number of resolutions on the functioning of the organisation and on topical issues, the most important ones being the rise of the minimum wage and the requirements in case of dismissal.

Basile Mahan Gahé – elected president of the WCL by its recent Congress in Bucharest – was re-elected secretary-general of his organisation. Dignité is now the country's most important trade union. Even if the principle of trade union freedom is now recognised in the Ivory Coast, it remains necessary to get it accepted by the companies in the country, which in the past were hardly if ever confronted with genuine trade unionism.

No doubt this organisation will be able to take up this challenge in its permanent struggle for workers' dignity and trade union democracy.

**Schedule of activities**

25-29 January 2002: WFBW/ European meeting, Murcia, Spain

31 January - 5 February 2002: World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil