

WCL MISSION IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORKERS AND PEOPLE OF IRAQ

On 12-16 January 2003, Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General of the WCL, and Hanid Sebaly, Coordinator of the Belgian - Iraqi Collaboration Committee went on a mission to Baghdad, in Iraq. The main point of the visit was the meeting with the GFTUI – General Federation of Trade Unions of Iraq – during which points of view were exchanged on the socio-political situation in Iraq following the embargo. We recall that the WCL opposes any form of embargo. Meanwhile, the WCL is of the view that the policy of tit for tat practised by the United States in relation to United Nations resolutions, is unacceptable. All the meetings in Iraq were held within the framework of actions carried out by the WCL against the threat of war and for democracy, freedom of association and the application of labour standards established by the ILO in this country. A joint declaration was drawn up with the Iraqi trade unions.

On the occasion of the mission to Iraq, WCL delegates also went to Damascus, in Syria, where they were welcomed by an ICATU delegation (International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions), led by Deputy Secretary General Rajab Maatouk. This meeting enabled a programme to be drawn up for the ICATU/WCL summit which will be held on 4 and 5 April in Damascus. Consequently, the delegation went to the General Federation of Trade Unions of the Syrian Arab Republic, where they met the President Mohammad Shaban Azzouz and the new members of the Executive Board with a view to strengthening collaboration with the WCL.

FRUITFUL DIALOGUE WITH SOLIDARNOSC
On 6-7 February, Willy Thys and Jaap Wiene, WCL Secretary General and WCL Deputy Secretary General in charge of Trade Action respectively, went to Gdansk, in Poland, for a visit to Solidarnosc. During the first working day, President Janusz Sniadek had convened representatives of 14 of the 16 trade federations of his trade union for a debate. The federations, many of whom are affiliated to the International Trade Secretariats (ITS) united with the ICFTU in Global Unions, despite everything showed a keen interest in the positions and activities of the WCL. According to Jaap Wiene, the WCL has the task of converting «*this interest into effective participation*». On the second day, the meeting with the President and the Secretary brought out the importance and the need for permanent and open relations between the WCL and Solidarnosc.

AROUND THE TABLE WITH SSSS IN SERBIA

On 11-13 February 2003, WCL Deputy General Secretary Jaap Wiene went to Serbia to meet the leaders of SSSS (Confederation of Trade Unions of Serbia), a confederation which joined the WCL in October last year. One of the purposes of the visit was to verify the respect of ILO conventions by the new Serbia labour legislation. Also the issue of future collaboration opportunities was tackled. It became apparent that the SSSS would like to be actively involved in international activities, such as ILO meetings. The SSSS requested expressly for training programmes on social dialogue and bargaining techniques with a view to an even better protection of its members' interests in the future. Regarding Trade Action, practically all the SSSS federations have become members of the WCL trade federations, others are in the process of affiliation. To conclude, the situation in Kosovo was carefully examined. Since the war in Kosovo, the authorities have only dialogued with the BS trade union, which only affiliates workers' organisations of Albanian origin. In order to encourage reconciliation, a joint SSSS/WCL mission will soon be undertaken to Kosovo to see to it that the interests of all workers can be protected.

THE CTUA INFORMS THE WCL ABOUT THE TRADE UNION SITUATION IN ARMENIA

With the aim of studying the political, economic and social situation, and in order to obtain more information on the position of trade unions in the Armenian society, Jaap Wiene, Bogdan Hossu (WCL Vice president for Eastern Europe) and Cornelia Dascalescu (Bucharest WCL Liaison Office) went on mission to Yerevan on 14-17 February. They met there Martin Arutyunian, president of CTUA (Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia). The issue of the Soviet era and the independence of Armenia in 1991 were tackled. Due to the conversion of complex Soviet agro-industries into smaller-scale agricultural ventures, the sector needs (foreign) investments and modernisation. There was also the question of the unending conflict with Azerbaidzhan on the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. The CTUA is the only trade union confederation in Armenia: it has 500,000 members and 25 trade committees, and it maintains good relations with the government of President Robert Kocharian. Little improvement followed changes brought about in December 2000 to the trade union legislation. Apart from this visit to the CTUA, the WCL delegation went to the state

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university as well as to the Romanian embassy. President Artyunian was invited to visit Romania in April for a debate with members of Cartel Alfa, the Romanian affiliate of the WCL. The WCL mission proposed that the CTUA organises a seminar in Yerevan in June.

THE WCL IS PREPARING FOR THE 5TH WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN CANCUN

For the international trade union movement, the economy must be at the service of sustainable development and the human being. In this regard, the WCL has drawn up a background document, which puts forward its positions for the WTO Ministerial Conference. The latter will take place on 13-14 September in Cancun (Mexico). The positions of the WCL are unequivocal: *«Public services must be accessible to all. Negotiations on the GATS (General Agreement on Trade and Services) must be held in transparency, by necessarily giving the floor to the civil population through the active participation of developing countries»*. Let us recall that on 9 February 2003, an important European demonstration – including representatives of ACV-CSC and WCL – took place in Brussels (Belgium) to denounce the threats of the free trade doctrine, which weighs down on education, health care, agriculture, transport or even the water and energy supply. *«Concerning labour standards, in its trade policy, the WTO must respect ILO Conventions. Besides, the policy carried out by the WTO must offer the guarantee that multinationals and foreign investors respect human rights and the labour laws»*. That is why the WCL proposes that all the ILO conventions be integrated into the trade agreements, within a non-protectionist and multilateral framework in which the ILO would be on an equal footing with the WTO.

You will find further information on the AGCS on our web site www.cmt-wcl.org

SOTERMUN MEETING ON ARGENTINA AND PALESTINE

On 14 February 2003, as part of the meeting of the Sotermun Committee, a round table was organised on its priorities for the year 2003. Sotermun (the NGO of the USO – the Spanish affiliate of the WCL – whose activities are centred on ‘Solidarity with Third World countries’) decided to focus on its solidarity with Argentine and Palestinian workers. Kattia Paredes, in charge of relations with Arab countries at the WCL, participated in the debate. She recalled the interest shown by the WCL in the situation in Argentina, its opposition to neo-liberalism and its struggle for a humane policy. Consequently, she intervened on the Palestinian issue and placed the emphasis on the importance of the solidarity campaign that the ISF (International Solidarity Foundation of the WCL) launched in September 2002: *«The WCL is of the opinion that a sensitisation campaign is essential in order to put in place a solidarity network and to advance a constructive dialogue for peace»*. The 50 people present witnessed great motivation to

deal even more actively with the Palestinian issue. Sotermun decided to continue to sensitise its member organisations and to ensure that it would gather the necessary funds to support about 45 Palestinian families.

PREPARATION FOR THE G8 SUMMIT IN EVIAN

On 20 February 2003, WCL Secretary General Willy Thys went to Paris to attend two meetings in preparation for the summit of the 8 most important industrialised countries (the G8), scheduled for April in Evian. During the morning session, John Evans, General Secretary of TUAC (Trade Union Advisory Committee), presented a trade union declaration, which was commented on and assessed by the French and international trade unions present – including the CFTC. The declaration deals with unemployment and its effects on the global economy, the principles of a ‘reasonable economy’, sustainable development and the policy of globalisation. In the afternoon, the diplomatic advisor to the French President, Jacques Chirac, stated the priorities of France within the framework of the G8. Attention was essentially drawn to the importance of the NEPAD programme (New Partnership for African Development) and the mobilisation of funds for the provision of potable water. The importance of social dialogue and the need to find new solutions to the foreign debt of developing countries was also emphasised. The issue of the trade union declaration on the G8 was again tackled on 4 and 5 March, during the meetings of the TUAC working groups on ‘economic policy’. Meanwhile, it was envisaged that the trade union representatives of the G8 and Jacques Chirac meet on 25 April 2003.

BELGIAN - AFRICAN WEEK FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

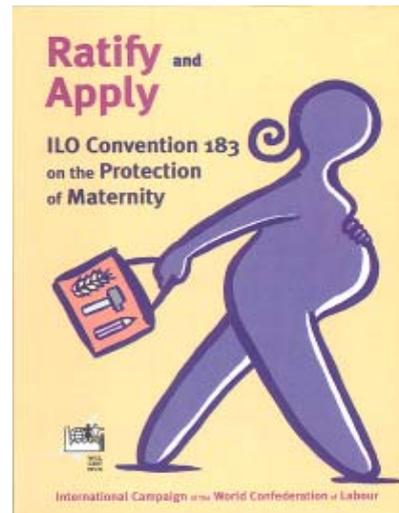
At the request of three Belgian trade unions – ACV-CSC (Confederation of Christian Trade Unions), the ACLVB-CGSLB (General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium) and the ABVV-FGTB (General Federation of Belgian workers) – the leaders of the trade unions of the Great Lakes region (Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda) went to Brussels to participate in an ‘African Week’. Meetings with Belgian government representatives and experts in social and political issues in the region, were organised from 17 to 21 February in order to discuss the role that the trade union movement could play in the fight for sustainable development and peace in the economic and social development of Central Africa. Faustina Van Aperen partly followed the event for the WCL. The unending war has made working conditions abominable in the region, the population is prey to great poverty. A lot of countries are currently going through political upheavals and are looking for peaceful solutions. It came out clearly from the speech WCL General Secretary Willy Thys delivered during the closing session that trade unions have a role to play. *«Trade unions are the barometers of society. Now that they have the opportunity to function independently and without political pressure,*

transparently and democratically, trade unions have the possibility of bringing up the intolerable situations for discussion. On its part, governments must remain open to honest social dialogue». The question of the importance of public services was also tackled: «Every citizen has the right to education, equitable work, health care and clean water.... Efficient organisation of services can contribute considerably to sustainable development». Participants left with the firm resolution to work together for peace in the region. The Minister for Foreign Affairs promised them financial and technical support in setting up an 'Inter-Trade Union of the Great Lakes', charged with promoting the social development of the region. This institution is to be launched during the next International Labour Conference in Geneva.

BATU SEMINAR AIMED AT SENSITISING TRADE UNIONS ON BASIC RIGHTS IN ASIA

In order to promote the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the BATU (the WCL regional organisation in Asia) organised with the support of the ILO a seminar in Jakarta on 22-27 February. The theme of the seminar was: *'The ILO Declaration on principles: A new instrument to promote fundamental rights'*. The Declaration on principles was endorsed in 1998. It reiterates 8 basic Conventions, divided into four categories of rights, ie freedom of association and collective bargaining, non-discrimination in employment and prohibition of child labour and forced labour. This Declaration constituted a great step forward. It was massively ratified. However, several countries, including some in Asia, have not yet done so. Furthermore, several breaches of these Conventions continue to be noticed in practice. The aim of the seminar was to propagate the content of the Declaration and the mechanisms on which it is based. The participants also received information and advice necessary for better use of this instrument and to prepare better contributions for the Annual Report and General Report envisaged for this Declaration. Isabelle Hoferlin, head of the WCL Human Rights and International Labour Standards Department, and Hervé Sea, legal expert at the WCL's Geneva Liaison Office, attended this meeting, which was also an occasion for the various coordinators of the 'Standards' network to assess their activities and to put together their priorities for future actions.

RATIFY AND APPLY ILO CONVENTION 183



Schedule of activities

- 20-21 March: FCSU annual Congress, Mauritius;
- 20-28 March: CGT/France Confederal congress, Montpellier – France;
- 27-29 March: World Steering Committee of WFAFW, Brussels – Belgium;
- 31 March - 2 April: WCL Executive Committee, Brussels – Belgium;
- 31 March - 6 April: WCL European Women's seminar, «*Integration of the gender perspective in collective bargaining*», Madrid – Spain;
- 4 - 5 April: ICATU/WCL summit, Damascus – Syria;
- 8-11 April: World Forum on human sciences, Lyon – France.

Updates on our programmes are available on our web site: www.cmt-wcl.org