

EUROPEAN SECTION MET IN BRUSSELS



The European Section of WCL held its meeting in Brussels on 18-19 March last. The meeting was chaired by Luc Cortebecq and Bogdan Hossu, vice presidents for Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe respectively. The debates were centred on the international trade union relations. Another important agenda item was the report on the situation in Europe, which gave rise to a debate on the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union. After having gone from six to fifteen members, the EU is making ready for the biggest enlargement ever in terms of scope and diversity. Ten out of the thirteen candidate countries were recognised as «acceding countries». These countries are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia. They will accede to the EU on 1 May next. Bulgaria and Romania hope to follow in 2007. The European Section also discussed the report of the Bucharest Liaison Office, the human rights and international labour standards, and the preparations for the 92 ILO Conference, which will assemble in Geneva next June.

GOOD GOVERNANCE: INVENTORY FOR A TRADE UNION AGENDA

Never before have the international organisations spoken so much about good governance and never before has it been marked by so many dysfunctions. It is no doubt the model hidden behind this governance project that prints its outlines, pointed out one of the participants in the international seminar WCL organised in cooperation with IIWE from 25 February to

10 March 2004 at Ter Nood (Belgium). In the presence of the academic world, NGOs, intergovernmental organisations and the trade union movement, twenty trade unions from all the continents, members of WCL-related organisations, reflected on the definition of governance, its implications, its contours nation-, region- and worldwide. Their debates resulted in proposals of actions to guide WCL in the coming years, particularly with a view to its next Congress, scheduled for October 2005.

A REFORM THAT TENDS TO A SYSTEM OF GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

WCL has engaged for several months in the Ubuntu campaign to reform the international institutions. The campaign is promoted by stakeholders of the global civil society who, in view of the gravity of the problems of the present world, want to assert their democratic right in taking part in the decision-making. So, the campaign is pursuing a clear goal: start a process to reform the international institutions and tend that way to a system of global democratic governance participating in the building of a better world. Indeed, the problems and stakes confronting today humanity are particularly serious: poverty, absence of social justice, loss of cultural diversity... Ubuntu published a manifesto, and we request you to sign it. It will then be presented to the United Nations General Assembly with a view to the organisation of a world conference on the reform of the international institutions system.



To read and sign the manifesto, please go to this Internet address: <http://www.reformcampaign.net>

TRAGIC EVENTS IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA

Tension is rising in the Balkans and the tragic events in Kosovo and Metohija only confirm this trend. Indeed, according information received from the Confederation of Free Trade

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Unions of Serbia (CATUS), our Serbian affiliate, several lives were lost, houses and cultural and historic buildings damaged, and holy objects destroyed. The same would have happened in other places like Sarajevo and the village of Racak. The region is violence-stricken and the human rights, including those of the workers, are violated. WCL therefore calls on the international community to make all-out efforts to normalise the situation in this region, to enforce respect for the human rights and to make peace and social justice triumph.

CONGRESSES IN ASIA: BSSF AND ICL CENTRED DEBATES ON GLOBALISATION

The Bangladesh Sanjukta Sramic Federation (BSSF), our affiliate in Bangladesh, organised its Congress on 14-17 March last. The debates were largely centred on globalisation and its devastating effects on the poor countries. Willy Thys, Secretary General of WCL, declared on that occasion that globalisation according to the neo-liberal model was the expression of economic development to the detriment of man and social justice and that the trade union had to stand up against it so to ensure respect for the workers' rights. At the end of the Congress, the Executive Committee of BSSF was enlarged from 20 to 29 members and includes now a woman.

The Indian Confederation of Labour (ICL), one of our Indian affiliates, held its Congress on 18-20 March.



It was preceded by two seminars, on the formal and informal sectors. Even if the transport sector constitutes with the diamond sector the essence of the formal sector, the organisation will henceforth focus its activities on the struggle against women trafficking and child labour, found mainly in the informal sector. Ashok Battacharjee was re-elected President of ICL, and significant room was made for youths and women.

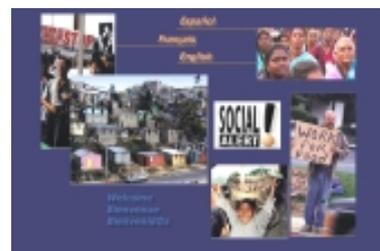
CITIZENS NO LONGER TRUST CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Public distrust of companies is today a reality in all the OECD countries. The crisis is smouldering, says TUAC in a declaration supported by WCL, and major failures like those of Enron and Parmalat are the order of the day: «*Networks of insiders have manipulated conflicting interests to enrich themselves for a song, not by creating wealth but by sharing revenues to the detriment of wage earners, shareholders, tax payers and citizens*».

This dreadful observation shakes the foundations of the corporate governance model that has prevailed in the past three decades. Even in Europe the shareholding model is gaining ground, unsettling the social dialogue that is profoundly anchored in the European societies. In the view of the trade union movement, companies are social institutions that must account to all the parties specifically engaged in them, including the workers! «*It therefore comes to the states*», the international trade union movement goes on to say, «*to ensure an open debate on corporate governance and to make serious efforts to restore the principle of companies accounting to all their component parts*». Let us hope that their call will be heard!

NEW WEBSITE OF SOCIAL ALERT

Late in March Social Alert put a its renovated Internet site into use. Social Alert is an international coalition of social, human rights and workers' organisations. The coalition was set up to pool the programmes of several international organisations and to fight injustice in the world. WCL is part of this coalition.



The address is www.socialalert.org.

VIOLATIONS IN COLOMBIA

WCL has turned to the President of the Republic of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez, to demand an immediate and final solution for the permanent violation of the principle of humanity, unity, impartiality and justice by the Red Cross managers to the detriment of the workers. WCL also demanded respect for the lawful and legitimate exercise of the right to strike and the freedom of collective bargaining.

Schedule of activities

- 03-07 April: WSF, International Council, Umbria – Italy;
- 13-15 April: 3rd meeting of the civil society of the EU and Latin America, the Caribbean and Mexico, Mexico City– Mexico;
- 16 April: 2nd ACP/EU Trade Union Summit, Mexico City– Mexico;
- 15-16 April: IFTC, Seminar, Budapest – Hungary;
- 19-23 April: TA, Seminar on multinationals and privatisation, Bogota – Colombia;
- 21-24 CCOO/Spain: 8th Congress, Madrid – Spain.

Please consult our annual schedule on: www.cmt-wcl.org



TRADE UNION FREEDOM VIOLATION IN SERBIA

The International Federation of Trade Unions of Transport Workers (FIOT) has been informed by its member organisation, the «Autonomous Union of Air Traffic and Aviation Workers of Serbia», about trade union freedom violations at Yugoslav Airways (JAT). The police forced the entry of the office reserved for the shop stewards at JAT, seized part of the files and put the seals on the door. While they were doing that, the company management announced a restructuring plan without prior consultation with the trade unions. Trade union leader Nenad Kukuljac was fired because of his strong opposition to the restructuring. FIOT protests against the absence of social dialogue in Serbia and against the persistent violations of the freedom of association and the international labour conventions, which Serbia ratified. FIOT urges the Serbian authorities to intervene with Yugoslav Airways, so that Nenad Kukuljac is re-employed and the trade union office is re-opened.

FIOT SUPPORTS BULGARIAN DOCKERS



«FTW Podkrepa», the organisation of Bulgarian transport workers affiliated to FIOT, has informed us of the difficulties the Bulgarian dockers are currently facing. To this day, the two seaports and four inland ports of Bulgaria have been under state management. The public

authorities have insufficient resources to modernise the infrastructure. And we know that the obsolete state of machinery and equipment is very often at the root of industrial accidents. That is why a bill is being prepared to authorise concessions and to allow pools of workers to supply their services. On the bases of experiments conducted in the city of Burgas, «FTW Podkrepa» believes that the system offers the workers at least guarantees and advantages, as up to now there has been an undeniable vagueness regarding the payment of the wages. Moreover, in many cases the small private ports render themselves guilty of unfair competition in that they employ children and adolescents. Many Bulgarian dockers refuse to join a trade union lest they lose their job. In many cases they join a trade union temporarily, when

an important collective agreement is about to be concluded, for instance, but disaffiliate a few months later. Hence the countless changes in the rank and file and in the amounts of dues, which harms the efficiency of the unions. FIOT will help «FTW Podkrepa» remedy the situation, which incidentally has certain similarities to the one found in the ports of Lithuania, Romania and the former Eastern Bloc countries.

SECOND-RATE WORKING CONDITIONS UNDERLIE MINING DISASTER IN ALBANIA

On 23 February last, an explosion destroyed the natural bitumen mine of Selenica (Albania), managed by the French company «Selenice Bitumi sh.a.». Five miners got killed and thirteen seriously injured. The disaster was caused by a methane explosion, a direct consequence of failing safety measures in the mine. Besides, investments in this kind of equipment are very low. The Albanian federations SPMSH and BSPSH, both affiliated to the World Federation of Industry Workers, have expressed their sympathy with the families of the victims. They have also organised a solidarity action. WFIW and WCL have filed a protest with the Albanian authorities and expressed their solidarity with the Albanian organisations in their struggle for better working conditions in the mines.



MEETING OF THE PAN-AFRICAN FEDERATION OF BUILDING AND WOODWORKERS IN CONGO

The Board of the «Pan-African Federation of Building and Woodworkers» (PFBW) met in Congo on 23-27 February. Simultaneously, a national seminar was organised for the trade union activists from Kinshasa. The main theme was: «Regional and national ecological problems». Endless armed conflicts have plunged Congo in a crisis. Unemployment is the order of the day in all the countries, the wages are very low and the living conditions precarious. Consequence of the conflicts: hundreds of thousands of people are living in the popular districts in the urban periphery, where running water, electricity and sewers are cruelly lacking. But for many years, it is investments that



have been lacking in Congo. The lack of maintenance and the degradation of the roads and buildings are perceptible everywhere. For these very reasons, out of solidarity with the population and the workers, it was there PFBW wanted to organise its Board meeting. Among the participants were a delegation of the World Federation of Building and Woodworkers' Unions (WFBW) and a delegation of «ACV Bouw & Industrie» (Belgium). Another participant was the Vice President of CSC-Congo, Hilaire Mbuandi, in his capacity as guest and former secretary of the Congolese federation of building and woodworkers. Among the agenda items figured the next World Congress of WFBW and the effects of globalisation on regional and international trade union structures. PFBW is in active search of solutions to strengthen the federation by means of a strict dues policy; in return it sets up training and sensitisation projects for the member organisations. Informal economy workers constitute an important target group.



place in Asia (Thailand). Twelve trade union representatives were trained in trade union items, under the aegis of SBI. Now 24 trainers in all, from eight Asian countries, have been trained in didactic skills and are now experts in trade union items and organisational management. They are able to take up the challenge of organising, per national team, training sessions in each country concerned: fifteen sessions in all per country, spread over 2.5 years. For the whole continent this comes to 120 additional activities in fields such as social security, pensions, trade union management, managerial skills, dues systems...

In Africa (South Africa) and Latin America (Paraguay) the first additional activities have already been undertaken. The proposals for activities of the new trainers are now flooding in from Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Guinea, Argentina, Chile, Mexico...

WHAT WITH THE CRISIS AFFECTING THE TOURISM SECTOR IN ASIA?



Representatives of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as well as employers and workers are saying it in unison: something must be done about the crisis that has affected tourism in Asia and the Pacific. In 2001, worldwide recession and the SARS epidemic destroyed about three million jobs in the region. According to ILO the worst of the storm is past and a slight recovery of the tourism

business would be shaping up in 2004. Nevertheless, a number of measures ought to be taken to reduce the vulnerability of the sector. These measures include a considerable extension of the supply of tourist products. Support for rural and ecotourism could also create jobs and ensure the sustainable development of local companies. WFAFW can only subscribe to these aims...

More details at: www.ilo.org

LAST «CAPACITY BUILDING» TRAINING COMPLETED IN ASIA

On 23-27 February the last training session on the «Capacity Building» module of WCL Trade Action took

INFORMAL ECONOMY: FROM THEORY TO CONCRETE ACTION!

The «informal economy» training programme of WCL Trade Action has been completed as well. The seminar in Bangkok, on 12-17 March, concluded a series of six training sessions. Worldwide, almost one hundred trade union leaders in all took part in these sessions. Today, they are all members of an international network of WCL contacts for the informal economy and an irreplaceable source of information and creativity. The main challenge is now to preserve the enthusiasm that was aroused during the courses. In other words, the theory must now be put into practice so to concretely improve the situation and working conditions of the informal economy workers. All projects, actions and ideas relating to the informal economy are really welcome. The VERBA informal economy programme of WCL will reinforce them to the best of its (financial...) ability.