

World Confederation of labour

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“Youth unemployment higher than ever before”, says ILO

This conclusion of a recent study by the International Labour Office – ILO –, confirming the current trend, does not surprise us. In the past decade, youth unemployment has been marked by an unprecedented growth. Today, young people between 15 and 24 account for nearly half the unemployed worldwide, with a record number of 88 million! The study, entitled “Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004”, was carried out by the Employment Strategy Department. According to the study, youth represented in 2003 47 per cent of the 186 million unemployed, even if they account for merely 25% of the working-age population (between 15 and 64). Among the 550 million poor workers whose families are living below the poverty line, 130 million young people have to struggle to survive and are working in the informal economy in many cases. It is said in the report that the struggle against this phenomenon would be a significant contribution to the global economy. *“Halving the world youth unemployment rate would add at least US\$ 2.2 trillion to the global GDP.”* *“We are wasting an important part of the energy and talent of the most educated youth generation the world has ever had”,* says ILO Director General Juan Somavia. *“Enlarging the chances of young people to find and keep decent work is absolutely critical to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.”* Most of the world’s youth live in the developing countries. Their fate is largely dependent on the growth rate of the economy and on the improvement of the labour market. A combination of both targeted and integrated policies is needed to *“enable young people to overcome their natural disadvantage against older, more experienced, workers.”* Further details are available on www.ilo.org.

WTO framework agreement: position of WCL

On the occasion of the agreement that was concluded at the end of July between the WTO members who are revitalising the Doha Round, WCL reminds of a number of points it deems of vital importance to attain the Millennium Development Goals. WCL is pleased with the fact that the principle of “special and specific treatment” has been included in the agreement, and it hopes that it will be integrated and respected in all the future decisions on the implementation of the agreement. WCL demands the abolition of all direct and indirect measures to subsidise exports and the adjustment of the definition of “flexibility of sensitive products”. WCL opposes the liberalisation of public utilities such as health care, education, access to drinking water... It demands that public services be excluded from the tenders that can be submitted until May 2005. WCL demands the application of the ILO-promoted international labour conventions in all the decisions made in the context of the agreement, in line with the Doha Declaration. It wants, further, the recommendations of the ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation to be taken into consideration. The full text of the declaration is available on www.cmt-wcl.org.

Argentina: support of workers at Ceramica Zanon tile factory

In October 2001, the management of Ceramica Zanon closed the factory, violating the workers’ rights. The court condemned it for this offensive lockout. The management ignored the severe judgement, dismissed the entire staff and submitted a preventive application for dissolution. Late last year, the management was

dismissed on account of economic malversations and misappropriation of funds. For more than two years the workers have managed the factory, ensuring jobs and the workers' rights. They receive no financial support or subsidies from private investors or the state. They maintain and repair the machinery, pay for services and gradually raise the production. They have created more than 140 new jobs already. They have managed to make head against five relocation orders and against repression. Today, they are more than 380. Thanks to their struggle and to support from the community, they could prevent a hangar on route 7 of Neuquen from remaining empty and hundreds of families of workers from being thrown out onto the streets. This worker management guarantees that the factory keeps running. The workers have also created the "FaSinPat" cooperative to continue the autonomous and democratic management and the struggle for expropriation, so that the Zanon remains at the service of the community, manufacturing tiles for houses, schools and hospitals. Nationwide the workers occupy over one hundred companies, which have been recognised as cooperatives. We therefore reject the attempted repression and demand that the authorities immediately recognise the cooperative, pending the final expropriation of Zanon.

Executive Committee of CLAT / Latin American Political Committee

On 10-16 July 2004, the head office of CLAT in San Antonio de los Altos, Venezuela, was the venue of the Executive Committee and Latin American Political Committee of CLAT. The Political Committee is in charge of the political and organisational preparation of the 12th Latin American Workers' Congress of CLAT (regional organisation of WCL), which will assemble in Brasilia, Brazil, on 21-27 November 2004. WCL Secretary General Willy Thys and Deputy Secretary General Eduardo Estevez attended the meeting as special guests. The first theme of the debates was the assessment of the preparations for the 12th Congress, which started one year ago. Seven Latin American committees are developing projects on the main Congress themes. The Congress will coincide with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of CLAT, in December of this year. It will be the first Congress since the decease of the late Secretary General and leader of the organisation, Emilio Maspero, to whom the event will be dedicated. The second important theme was to reach a consensus on the nomination of the new leaders that will be presented to the Congress. There will also be a thorough debate on the current informal talks between the secretaries general of WCL and ICFTU about the possible creation of a new international organisation that would consist of WCL and ICFTU affiliates, completed with other important trade unions from the continents. CLAT is fully prepared to cooperate on a process that is based on mutual respect in a single organisation marked by openness, pluralism, independence, democracy and respect for the identity and the differences that exist in all the continents. This process must lead to a better organisation and a more efficient action in favour of the workers worldwide. Only that way it will be possible to progress, jointly with other organisations of the civil society, in the struggle for a juster and more social world that is based on central values such as the human person, the precedence of labour over capital and a Universal Social Justice.

Guatemala: acquittal of Rigoberto Dueñas

On 20 August last, we learned the good news: Rigoberto Dueñas Morales, Deputy Secretary General of CGTG, our Guatemalan affiliate, was acquitted. On 8 June 2003, he had been arrested on the groundless accusation of corruption at the Guatemalan social security institute. The arrest of the trade union leader induced WCL and its regional organisation CLAT to launch an international sensitisation campaign. At its recent Conference, last June, ILO organised a debate on

Guatemala. WCL Secretary General Willy Thys was recently in Guatemala in support of the CGTG members and for a meeting with the Attorney General, the President of the Supreme Court and the President of the Republic. The acquittal of Rigoberto Morales follows on the release of 29 other trade union activists, in July. The acquittal is conditional, however. *“Let us hope that the Guatemalan judiciary can free itself from the general corruption that hampers the democratic process in the country”*, says Willy Thys.

WCL support Bangladeshi population and workers, victims of the floods

The floods that ravaged Bangladesh in July have taken a heavy toll. They have cost 400 human lives, and countless workers have lost their job. Besides the peasants whose fields got completely inundated, many employees and workers of factories in the region, among them many members of the Bangladesh Sanjukta Sramic Federation (BSSF), our affiliate in Bangladesh, were affected by the natural disaster. The government, lots of NGOs and BSSF have started with limited resources rescue operations and the reconstruction of the country. WCL supports their efforts and does its utmost to help its member organisation with the difficult reconstruction.

Complaint with the Chinese ambassador in Sri Lanka

The National workers Congress (NWC) is our member organisation in Sri Lanka. One of its recent reports to WCL was about a dispute between the workers and their employer, Dayin Lanka (Apparel) Pvt Ltd, a textile mill. The registered office is in Colombo, and the mill employs 800 workers. The company exports its products to the United Kingdom. It is in the hands of Taiwanese and Chinese owners, with Sri Lankan participation. A few months ago, many workers were wrongfully, and without any explanation, transferred to other activities. Several actions were taken by the workers' representative and the District Additional Commissioner of Labour (ACL), yet all in vain. The situation continued to deteriorate. Today, 109 workers of the mill are jobless. WCL has expressed its concern about this state of affairs. WCL Secretary General Willy Thys has written to the Chinese embassy in Sri Lanka, requesting all-out efforts to ensure that Dayin Pvt Ltd respects the workers' rights and enters upon a dialogue with the ACL and the workers' representatives about the re-employment of the 109 workers and the transferred workers. Let us hope that this request will be complied with, so that social justice becomes a reality in Sri Lanka!

Schedule of activities

30 August-03 September: TA/ Capacity Building: press and publicity training, Lomé – Togo;
06 September: TAC, Brussels – Belgium;
08-10 September: DPI/NGO annual conference (millennium goals), New York – USA;
13-27 September: TA/ Capacity Building: press and publicity training, San José – Costa Rica;
23-24 September UBUNTU: plenary meeting of the World Forum of Civil Society Networks and Conference on the Reform of the International Institutions, Barcelona - Spain;
27 September – 02 October: CGTD : Congress, Bogotá– Colombia;
30 September – 01 October: WCL Executive Committee, extraordinary session, Brussels – Belgium.

World Confederation of Labour

The world of Trade Action

Juan Somavia enthusiastic about WCL manual on informal economy

During its reception on the occasion of ILO's 92nd International Labour Conference, WCL officially presented the new manual entitled '*Ten trade union actions to strengthen the status of informal economy workers*'. ILO Director General Juan Somavia reacted very enthusiastic: "*If there is something trade unions should pursue, in which they can make a difference, it is the organisation and protection of workers in the informal economy.*" WCL entirely agrees with this and continues unabated its work through the 'informal economy' project, which is part of the VERBA programme.

Press and publicity trainings in full swing

The press and publicity trainings within the framework of the VERBA programme are in full swing. In July, a trainer of the Radio Nederland Training Center (RNTC) provided trainings in Asia, in Jakarta (Indonesia) and in Dacca (Bangladesh). Around thirty trade unionists, who are in charge of press and publicity in their organisations, got an intensive one-week training on media, communication, writing of press statements, interview techniques, press conferences...The training was preceded by a period of e-learning (training via the Internet). After their training the trainees can use the RNTC website for another year to publish their articles and press statements. They will get feedback from co-trainees and trainers. The course is meant to allow the participants to inform, through the press, the public at large faster and more effectively of the activities of their trade union and to support their federations that way. In addition, they will support the 'Capacity Building' trainers and 'Multinationals' and 'Informal Economy' coordinators in the promotion of their follow-up activities. In Africa the first press and publicity training took place in Senegal on 9-13 August. In Latin America the training was already provided in Buenos Aires and Venezuela. The last two trainings are planned in Togo and Costa Rica. All the trainees will have been trained by mid-September. The trainings within the VERBA programme will then have been completed, and the attention will then be focused on the follow-up activities and projects.

Capacity Building: leadership training in the Philippines

From 27 June to 1 July, Davao City (Philippines) hosted a training session in the context of the Capacity Building project. Fifteen local members of the Philippine trade union Federation of Free Workers (FFW), seven men and eight women, got a training in matters such as: managerial skills, the local situation of trade union, the art of leading, ways to gain authority, the organisation of meetings on parliamentary procedures... The participants came from various sectors: services, education, informal economy, transport, metal/electronics and food.

WFIW seminar and World Board in Bulgaria

The annual meeting of the WFIW World Board took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, on Tuesday 29 June. As usual it was preceded on a two-day seminar, this year on the "Effects of the enlargement of the European Union on the trade union movement".

This theme was an obvious choice, considering the recent enlargement of the European Union with no less than ten countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Cyprus. Moreover, a few other countries, Romania and Bulgaria among others, figure on the list of candidates to enter the European Union before long. The fact that the last-mentioned country is a candidate member of the European Union was one of the reasons for organising the WFIW meeting in Sofia. During the seminar experts from the European Union delivered papers on the adherence procedures and criteria and on the state of affairs after the yearlong negotiations. Some speakers from trade union circles went into the consequences for the trade union movement. The Latin American unions, and in their wake their Asian and African counterparts, reckon that a strong European Union will also stand up for the basic human and workers' rights in their continents. They take it that a strong European Union will serve as a model and that the European social policy will exert a positive influence on the Latin American politics and economy. This requires, however, a good and permanent dialogue of the trade unions from the European Union with the trade unions from the third-world continents. Another important agenda item was the future of WFIW. The enlargement of the EU also increasingly raises the practical question how to organise the global dialogue between the trade unions in the third-world continents and those in the EU. In Europe ETUC sees to this, but at the world level there are still three world organisations. In addition, many unions from the so-called third world are without any international affiliation. That is why the WFIW World Board calls for supporting and strengthening inter-union cooperation worldwide. The first concern of the WFIW Board is the protection of the workers' interests worldwide by autonomous, pluralistic and solidary trade unions. Other areas for special attention when developing future structures are: participation in international consultation bodies at the United Nations, ILO..., development of a database and an information department, development of a global social dialogue with multinationals among others, development of strong mutual relations...

European Conference and Multinationals and Workers' Interests

The 13th Conference for trade unionists from Central and Eastern Europe was held in Hustopece, Czech Republic, on 13-16 May. The Conference theme was "*Multinationals and protection of the workers' interests*". The meeting was held with the help of the Austrian trade union *Fraktion Christlicher Gewerkschafter* (FCG) in the context of the Austrian *Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten*. It was attended by representatives from Croatia, Romania, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Austria. The trade union representatives discussed the constantly growing concentration of large international companies. Multinationals account for 25 per cent of the international production and for no less than 66 per cent of world trade. They make use of modern technologies and of new means of communication and transport, but in many cases they escape the national laws and regulations. This, in turn, leads to deregulation and liberalisation. The trade unions present demanded the introduction of a code of conduct on the shopfloor, based on the needs of the workers. They also demanded that the politicians see to it that the workers' rights are respected and applied. Worker participation in each national company is very important in this regard.

