

SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Social Alert is a coalition focused on economic, social and cultural rights, comprising five international organisations, namely, Wereldsolidariteit/Solidarité Mondial – WSM, International Young Christian



Workers, IYCW, World Movement of Christian Workers, WMCW, Pax Christi International, PCI and the World Confederation of Labour, WCL. For several years, Social Alert has launched an international campaign for the inclusion on the international agenda of the rights of women and men workers in the formal economy. It is within this framework that the organisation organised an international conference from 29 November – 2 December at Brazil, under the theme: Towards social protection for women and men workers of the informal economy. «*The aim of this conference, on one hand, is to study concrete cases of the situation in different countries and local initiatives aimed at improving the situation of these women and men workers. On the other hand, we want to speak to the different international institutions involved, about their strategies with regard to this issue*», explains Gerard Fonteneau, President of Social Alert. During the conference, participants of member organisations from twenty countries will prepare an action plan for the purpose of promoting social protection. The official closing session of the Conference, on Thursday 2 December, will begin with the speech of the new European commissioner of the Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Assistance, Mr. Louis Michel as well as the speech of Willy Thys, Secretary General of WCL. For additional information, you can write to the international secretariat of Social Alert at info@socialalert.org

GLOBALISATION BRINGS ABOUT THE FEAR OF JOB LOSS

This in any case is what is explained in one of the recent International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports

entitled «*Active labour market policies around the world: coping with the consequences of globalisation*». The document dwells on job market policies. According to the report, there is a close link between the manner in which workers subjectively perceive their job security and the amount of government expenditure on effective job market policies. Therefore, the extent of protection accorded workers in the event of them losing their job is one of the factors increasing the workers' sense of job security. It is a key factor to decent work, explains the ILO. According to the study, the more the resources allocated to effective job market policies, the higher the feeling of security. As a matter of fact, there is a big difference between Netherlands and Danish workers on one hand, where the budgets are very high, and workers in Japan and the United States, on the other hand, where they invest a mere 0.2% of their GDP in protective measures in the event of job loss. The two former countries mentioned, allocate 1.6% of their GDP to training and employment creation. Another point worth stressing is that job losses affect all regions worldwide, through globalisation and relocalisation following economic policies carried out in this way. According to the report, job market policies, particularly effective policies, do not only have a positive effect on the well-being of workers but also on the economy as a whole. «*Effective job market policies to some extent act as an automatic stabiliser of the economy, expenditure increases during a recession period and/or during the waves of structural changes and decreases in a period of economic growth*», explains Umit Afendioğlu, one of the authors of the study. Finally, the document concludes that in order to be really effective, job market policies must be long-term and «*become a permanent instrument, but easily adaptable to changes induced by globalisation*». WCL supports this vision. For more information contact www.ilo.org

SOCIAL DIALOGUE IS A PRIORITY FOR CARTEL ALFA

Cartel Alfa, our affiliated organisation in Romania, held its 6th National Congress at Bucharest from 28-30 October. The national trade union confederation, Cartel Alfa was established in 1990, just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, at the time when Eastern countries abandoned the communist model. Cartel Alfa is a totally independent and democratic organisation, with forty trade federations affiliated to it. Cartel Alfa also co-ordinates the activities of 38 trade unions. Its main goals are to defend workers, consolidate democracy, push forward social dialogue and the promotion of social justice. The 6th National Congress of the Confederation was an occasion to meet several representatives of European trade unions affiliated, among others, to the World Confederation of

TELE-FLASH

is a monthly information bulletin containing brief trade union messages, edited by the information department of the WCL.

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Labour, such as CNV, CSC, USO and CFTC. John Monks, Secretary General of ETUC also participated in the event. In his speech, Willy Thys stated that «WCL has a deep conviction that the expansion of Europe is an historic opportunity for the peaceful unification of the people based on democratic values. This will certainly ensure political stability and contribute to social and economic advancement as well as improvement in living and working conditions. It is obvious that the process of the expansion of Europe has had positive impact at the level of both institutional changes and the advancement of democratic process in the country as a result of the transition. Tomorrow, it will be the turn of Romania. Her integration into the European Union we are convinced, will contribute to a mutual enrichment and enable it deal better with the negative effects of globalisation». The Congress witnessed the election of the new Executive Committee: Bogdan Hossu is President, Romulus Nita, Petru Sorin Dandea and Adrian Cojocaru were elected Vice-Presidents. Ion Homos, was elected Secretary General. We wish them good luck with their new mandate.

EXPELLED FROM COLOMBIA

In a letter addressed to the Colombian authorities, Willy Thys, Secretary General of WCL, expressed his strong displeasure with new acts of which trade unionists in Colombia have been victims. Among them, we note the expulsion order announced by the government of the country against Victor Báez Mosqueira, Secretary General of ORIT, the Latin American regional body of ICFTU, Rodolfo Benítez of the Union Network international, Antonio Fritz of ITF and Cameron Duncan of PSI. These trade unionists were in Bogota to take part in an annual coordination meeting between Global Union Federations, GUFs and ICFTU. They were part of a trade union delegation in Colombia to launch an international campaign for solidarity with trade unionists of Colombia. Báez Mosqueira, the delegations from WCL, ICFTU, and GUFs then held discussions with the President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Vélez. The message was clear: it has become urgent to do everything to stop the pressures put on trade union movement, pressures which can even lead to death threats and assassinations. Apparently the message fell on deaf ears !

RUBENS RICUPERO IS NO LONGER SECRETARY GENERAL OF UNCTAD

After nine years as Head of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, Rubens Ricupero has decided to leave his post as Secretary General of the organisation. The Brazilian was considered by many as the architect of the new UNCTAD. It will be recalled that in 1996, the United Nations faced serious financial problems and that the very existence of UNCTAD was in question. Ricupero therefore began restructuring the organisation. This was not easy because the period coincided with the economic consequences of globalisation, monetary crises etc. According to the former Secretary General, the challenge facing UNCTAD is to assist countries, especially developing countries to deal with the situation. Civil society was largely heard during its time. The World Confederation of Labour especially was received several times by Rubens Ricupero to discuss the policies to implement in order to improve development. WCL thanks Rubens Ricupero for the work he has done during these nine years. The Chilean Carlos Fortin will be the interim head pending

the election of a new Secretary General. For more information contact: www.unctad.org

ONE OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IS THE REDUCTION OF CHILD LABOUR



The International Day of the Child was celebrated last 20 November. According to the International Labour Organisation, more than 211 million children worldwide between the ages of 5 - 14 years are economically active. In addition, more than 180 million children below 18 years are trapped in the worst forms of exploitation such as slavery or forced labour. Kattia Paredes, Coordinator of WCL Equality Department, in charge of child labour, explains the importance of MDG. «The achievement of the Millennium Goals, among others, should enable progress in the eradication of child labour. Especially the Goals relating to poverty reduction, education and reducing infant mortality». For WCL, the gradual eradication of child labour will be the result of efforts accomplished at the national as well as international scale. To this end, it is vital to review policies carried out by international financial institutions, IMF and the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation in order to opt for a new world governance in the service of social justice.

Schedule of activities

December 2004

- 05-10: ICFTU Congress (Japan);
- 09-12: European Women Seminar (Cyprus);
- 10: European Social Observatory – 20th Anniversary (Brussels / Belgium);
- 13-14: OECD – China Seminar on “Socially Responsible Investment in North-East Asia. The Role of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises” (Beijing / China);
- 15: CLAT-Netherlands – Jubilee Conference (Doorn / Netherlands);
- 18-21: ICATU– Congress / Working Women Conference (Damas / Syria).

January 2005

- 10-12: ILO – Tripartite meeting on employment, social dialogue, rights at work and industrial relations in transport equipment manufacture (Geneva / Switzerland);
- 14-15: EZA – Start-up Seminar on the main thematic points of 2005 European Social dialogue (Malta);
- 18-19: UNCTAD – World Summit on the Information Society, Thematic Meeting on the Economic and Social Implications of ICT (Antigua / Guatemala);
- 25: World Trade Union Forum (Porto Alegre / Brazil);
- 26-31: World Social Forum (Porto Alegre / Brazil);
- 26-30: World Economic Forum (Davos / Switzerland).



Trade Action

WCT, HIGHER EDUCATION AND GLOBALISATION

Early in November, the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT) attended in Paris two international activities on higher education: a meeting of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on the "Academic community and education for all" (3 and 4 November), and a seminar on "Education, research, innovation and mobility of high-trained staff" (5 November). The centre of the debates was the professional situation of teachers. In higher education two conflicting trends are clearly standing out: one stresses the social importance of education, the other its commercialisation.

The crucial question for UNESCO is to ensure now, and also in future, a quality teachers' education, particularly in the poorest countries, where the demand for quality teaching staff is strongest. The report: "*Attirer, développer et retenir les enseignants efficaces*" (*attract, train and keep capable teachers*), which was officially presented in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) on 17 and 18 November, contains a number of important results for the OECD countries. WCT expressed its concern about the impact of the conclusions of this report on the jobs of teachers. Indeed, the report pleads for more flexibility, mobility and decentralisation in education...



SERBIAN EMPLOYERS VIOLATE WORKERS' RIGHTS

In Serbia the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia (CATUS) tries to enforce respect for the international labour standards and seeks for this support from several international organisations and institutions. CATUS is convinced that this democratisation process will benefit the country's economy and social development. But it is certainly not an easy task! Serbian employers have recently been taking unprecedented actions against trade union members and leaders.

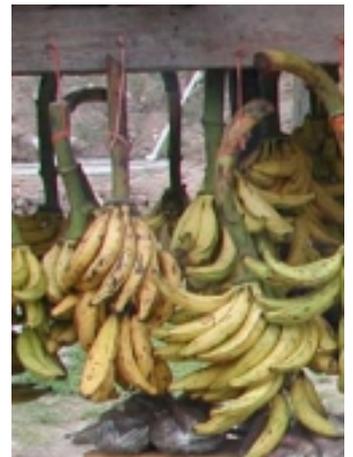
At the company "JUGOREMEDIJA" in Zrenjanin, for instance, 142 workers, all members of the Autonomous Union of Chemistry and Non-Metallic Workers, were fired after a legal strike. If they want to be rehired, they must (orally) distance themselves from their union and join another union in which the employer pulls the

strings. Moreover, they must confirm in writing that they will not take action during the working hours anymore! The management of the company "ZUPA" dismissed 39 workers and 'declared the war' against the workers and the union leader. For fear of 'sabotage' he denied them access to the company. Later on he destroyed the individual employment contracts with the workers concerned and asked them to publicly cancel their membership of the union. He ignored the order of the Labour Inspectorate to let the workers work until the court had pronounced judgement. Both examples are cases of violation of ILO conventions 87 and 98 on 'trade union freedom and protection of trade union rights', and on the 'freedom of association and collective bargaining'.

CHIQUITA DEBATES WITH WCL AND KAURI ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

The organisation Kauri (www.kauri.be), a think-tank and working group of people from companies and NGOs, recently organised, in cooperation with WCL, an information evening and debate on the functioning of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), on the role of international trade unionism in the globalisation and its relation to multinational companies, and on the initiatives of Chiquita in favour of the fruit plantation workers in the South. Eddy Laurijssen, Director of the Brussels Office of the International Labour Organisation (www.ilo.org), Jan Voets, who is in charge of the trade union action in multinationals at the World Confederation of Labour (www.cmt-wcl.org), and George Jaksch, Senior Director of corporate responsibility and public affairs Chiquita, took part in the debate.

Chiquita presented its code of conduct, in which the company's basic values are summed up. They include several aspects of corporate social responsibility as well



as ethical and legal obligations (www.chiquita.com). An employer, for instance, must ask himself if his actions are legal and if he acts “correctly”. Would he act in the same way if he knew that the media were following the matter? Would he feel all right if he had to explain his decisions or actions to his family or children, or to the Board of Chiquita? Such and other questions must help the employer make ethical justifiable choices.

During the debate Jan Voets pointed out the importance of corporate social responsibility and the necessity of a strong (and strengthened) involvement of the trade unions in the social dialogue. In his view, cooperation with NGOs is a plus and, besides this, necessary to remain in dialogue and in touch with the broader community. “*An active participation of the trade union movement can a better relation between companies, NGOs and trade unions*”, Jan said.

Further information is available on the above-mentioned websites or at jan.voets@cmt-wcl.org

AFRICAN INDUSTRY FEDERATIONS LAUNCH AMBITIOUS PLAN OF ACTION

During a seminar prior to the second Congress of the Pan-African Federation of Industry Workers (PFIW), in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), a number of bottlenecks within the African trade union movement were discussed. In the general resolution of the seminar, which was adopted by the Congress, it is stated that the African trade union movement is still having difficulty in adapting to the liberalisation and globalisation of the economy. The trade union movement, which is still a chiefly urban matter, threatens to weaken for lack of solidarity. Child labour seems to be still on the rise, and the working



circumstances in the free trade zones have improved only very slightly. The informal sector keeps growing. In response to all these problems, PFIW wants to give industry workers more training, start in all the African countries a social dialogue that starts from the acceptance of the international labour standards, and involve women more in trade union work. Solidarity and social justice are the starting point, and the trade union structures must be better adapted to the new reality. DOAWTU (our regional organisation in Africa) and WFIW (World Federation of Industry Workers) pledged through Secretary General Adrien Akouete and President Bart Bruggeman that they would support these ambitious goals. In a special resolution PFIW called on its members to fulfil (even) better their dues obligations in order to strengthen the organisation. The Congress elected a new Board; Romuald Nuwokpe (Togo) is Secretary General.

CAPACITY BUILDING: TRAINING ON OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES IN BRAZIL

In Brazil, in the context of the VERBA Capacity Building project, a trainers' team has been trained in organising follow-up activities. Norberto Beck, Vladimir Fagundes and Rosanne Gieburowski organised in the southern part of the country a number of successful activities. On 27 and 28 October last, there was in the Porto Alegre region a two-day training on 'Occupational diseases, how to trade them and what to do to prevent them'.

Several experts told the twenty participants – among whom twelve women – how they could best deal with occupational diseases. It appeared from the debates that employers in very many cases still shun the responsibility for the health situation of their staff and are chiefly interested in the profitability of the company. Most of the participant suffered themselves from physical and/or mental diseases, caught at work in many cases. The concrete had to ensure that workers and unions get more familiar with the 'occupational diseases' theme, so to reduce the number of victims in future. Congratulations for all the initiators and the participants!

