

**WORLD SOCIAL FORUM: THE POLYCENTRIC FORUM CHOOSES BASES**

The International Council of the World Social Forum – WSF –, of which the World Confederation of Labour is part, assembled in Utrecht, in the



Netherlands, from 31 March to 2 April. After the evaluation of the 5th Forum, in Porto Alegre last January, the debates were centred on the future process of WSF. Edition 2006 will be decentralised, polycentric. In clear terms: it will have multiple centres, all of equal importance. One thing has already been confirmed: the 6th decentralised WSF in Latin America will be organised in Caracas, in Venezuela, simultaneously with the World Economic Forum in Davos. As for Africa, the nomination of Morocco was accepted; this country, too, will organise the Forum early in 2006. In Asia the reflection is still going on, but the Indians have signified their interest. In the next few months other events in the context of WSF will take place: the Mediterranean Social Forum in Barcelona on 16-19 June next, the Asian Social Forum in November 2005 and the European Social Forum in Athens in April 2006. The next International Council meeting is scheduled to take place in Barcelona, just after the European Social Forum. **For further details:** [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)

**SOCIAL DIMENSION IN EU-ACP AGREEMENTS**

The Cotonou Trade Union Group, which is composed of WCL, ETUC and ICFTU, has recently asked the European Commissioner in charge of development, Louis Michel, to start without delay negotiations aimed to add a social dimension to the EU-ACP economic partnership agreements. The European Union and the ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) have concluded these agreements to *'promote and accelerate the economic, cultural and social development of the ACP states, to contribute to peace and security and to promote a stable and democratic political environment'*. The demand of the international trade unions is not new: the Trade Union Group

advocated adding this dimension in 2002 already. Though the Group considers it a positive goal to gradually build local and regional markets by means of pertinent forms of cooperation, it points out the risk held by inserting the ACP economies into world trade. A few of the reasons for this fear are the economic and social weakness of many countries, the size of the informal economy and the very unequal knowledge the EU and the ACP countries have of the technical and financial elements of the market. In the view of the Group, the efficiency of the agreements largely depends on the trust the populations and their representatives place in these goals. The social dimension will give them this confidence. This social dimension should include the following elements: the promotion of decent and fair employment, the promotion of social protection through public and private processes and the guaranteed application of the social rights. It is essential for the future of the agreements that the Trade Union Group is heard! **For further details:** [www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)

**JAMES WOLFENSOHN MEETS CIVIL SOCIETY**

James Wolfensohn, the current President of the World Bank, has reached the end of his term. In a few months' time he will be replaced by Paul Wolfowitz at the head of the institution. James Wolfensohn insisted on meeting the civil society



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one last time. He had done this several times already during his term of office. During a video conference directly from the Bank's headquarters in New York, he spoke with representatives of the civil society in Brussels, Lima, Caracas, Tokyo and Accra. As regards the election for the Bank's presidency, Wolfensohn wanted to reassure everybody. The question is now if he succeeded. According to him, Paul Wolfowitz *'will be able to make the difference between his former office and the new one and will do his best to make the Bank function smoothly'*. WCL of course does not share his optimism. Wolfowitz is a neoconservative and a thoroughbred hawk

**TELE-FLASH**

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Responsible editor:  
Willy Thys  
Information officer:  
Mathieu Debroux.

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**WCL**

Trierstraat 33  
B-1040 Brussels  
Phone: 02/285.47.00  
Fax: 02/230.87.22  
E-mail:  
[info@cmt-wcl.org](mailto:info@cmt-wcl.org)  
Internet:  
[www.cmt-wcl.org](http://www.cmt-wcl.org)

of the Bush Administration. His election risks intensifying the neo-liberal policies at a moment the Bank admits that the Washington Consensus has made the poverty-related problems in the world even worse. Besides, it was the perfect moment to elect a president from a developing country. When asked about the debt issue during his interview with the civil society, Wolfensohn declared that it had to be dealt with, of course, but that “*not only this matter should be dealt with*”. In conclusion he insisted on cooperation between the civil society and the World Bank. In his opinion the Bank is not an enemy, and one should opt for cooperation rather than confrontation. Let us hope that his successor has heard this... **For further details** [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

### NO MORE SMOKING AT WORK IN BELGIUM



After Ireland and Italy, another European country has taken a measure against tobacco. Unlike in the first two countries, Belgium will not ban smoking from restaurants or pubs. Normally these places must have a non-smoking zone, but this is rare in practice. Admittedly the sector fears a drop in receipts. As from 1 January 2006, it will be

formally forbidden to smoke at the workplaces. The measure does not apply in relaxation spaces. Until that day, explains *Info CSC*, the social information bulletin of CSC – our member organisation in Belgium –, each company must pursue, in consultation with the staff representatives, a policy to restrict tobacco consumption at work. This is not an innocuous measure. It fits in with a federal plan to combat tobacco addiction. Tobacco kills around 20,000 people a year in a country with ten million inhabitants. Moreover, also passive smoking is an important risk factor, causing around 2,200 deaths a year. And this is the novelty of this measure. It does not take on the smokers as such, but it wants to guarantee non-smokers a healthy space, in which there is no place for smoke. Of course, there will be a transitory period. It is suspected that it will not be easy to enforce the measure. But it is also difficult not to approve of a measure that protects the workers ... in a country 25-30 percent of whose population are smokers.

**For further details** [www.csc-enligne.be](http://www.csc-enligne.be)

### OBSTRUCTION TO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION IN MAURITANIA

CLTM – *Confédération libre des travailleurs de Mauritanie* – is our member organisation in Mauritania. The confederation has brought to our attention, and to the attention of the country's authorities, a number of obstructions to the freedom of association, which constitute violations of the Conventions 87 and 98 of the International Labour Organisation – ILO – ratified by Mauritania. The facts occurred during the elections of the shop stewards at the company SOMAGAZ. The company would have interfered blatantly in the course of these elections. Workers who did not vote for the list in power were threatened, ballots were printed several times, and votes were cast in groups of four people, accompanied by a fifth person in charge of supervising the votes and seizing the ballots of the adverse list. According to CLTM, this kind of practices and violations of the conventions and regulations in force, which are known by the labour inspectors, must be countered by measures that put an end to these practices and create a democratic environment enabling the workers to make their choice freely, far from each influence or

discrimination on the basis of trade union, political or other preference. It is not the first time CLTM fell prey to such practices and its activists were intimidated, harassed, arbitrarily dismissed or prevented from freely exercising their trade union activities. It is time that the authorities of this country make all-out efforts to stop these practices.

### DEMONSTRATION FOR SAFETY OF WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

On 12 April, a terrible explosion destroyed a garment-factory building in Savar, in Bangladesh. Nearly fifty workers got killed and around one hundred injured in the disaster. Secretary General Mukkadem Hossain and President Rahman Mukhlesur of BSSF – *Bangladesh Sanjukta Sramic Federation* – our member organisation in Bangladesh, went to the place of the accident to assess the damages. They were accompanied by leaders of other national trade unions. A march of workers was then organised in Dhaka, the capital of the country. The demands of the workers are clear: compensations for the dead and the injured, and legal proceedings against the owner of the damaged building. It would indeed seem that the materials used for the construction of the building were not according to the regulations. During the demonstration BSSF also demanded to make all-out efforts to ensure the safety and health of the workers in Bangladesh, particularly in the garment factories. Let us hope that it will be heard.

### NEW BOOKLET OF WCL ON INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

WCL has pleasure in presenting you its new booklet: “Manual on the Function of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)”. It has been written by its Socio-Economic Department. IDB is one of the main sources of multilateral funding for economic, social and institutional projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. From this perspective the manual gives a detailed description of this regional organisation, presenting aspects related to its creation, structure, functioning and working method. It is intended to provide an overall survey of this organisation, so that a person without any prior knowledge gains a better insight into everyday activities of the Bank and can take a critical stock of the harmony between its constitutive policies and goals, the results obtained and the policies pursued during the everyday activities. The manual also contains a cyclical economic, social, political and labour view on Latin America and the positions of the workers' movement. **The manual is available in English, French and Spanish. You can order it by sending an e-mail to:** [info@cmt-wcl.org](mailto:info@cmt-wcl.org)



### ILO/EU CONFERENCE: FROM LABOUR INSPECTION TO DECENT WORK

*“The globalisation of the economy affects not only the political agenda, but also working life and the way individuals, organisations and economies work. In this world of economic and social reforms, in which everything changes at the speed of light, it is indispensable to organise a tripartite dialogue in order to limit the risks to which the workers expose their*

health, to improve their safety and to guarantee their well-being. The labour inspectors play a fundamental role in the encouragement and protection of decent work". This is, in a nutshell, the conclusion of the ILO/EU Conference on labour inspection, held in Luxemburg. The European Union and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) undertook to reinforce labour inspection worldwide. They intend to improve the efficiency and the output of the inspection methods by improving the skills of the independent inspectors. The initiative should result in a better supervision of the respect for the core labour standards and in decent work in all the sectors, including the informal economy. Moreover, a special ILO/EU programme is intended to introduce a culture of safety and health in the new EU member countries, the countries in transition, the developing countries and the Maghreb countries in order to eventually raise the efficiency of labour inspection. All during this process, the tripartite evaluation meetings remain really crucial in that they allow the social partners to support each other when reforming and improving the inspection methods. The host country, the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, has already taken the bull by the horns in launching an "integrated labour inspection scheme" (ILIS). It will make it possible to ratify more than twenty ILO conventions on safety and health at work. A nice example for other countries!

### Schedule of activities

#### Mai 2005

- 02: TUAC – 114th plenary session (Paris);
- 04: ETUC – Steering Committee (Brussels);
- 12-18: UN / ESCAP – 61st session (Bangkok);
- 13-14: UGTM / Morocco – Congress of the Women's Department (Rabat);
- 18-20: UNCTAD – Civil Society Consultations (Geneva);
- 24-25: FNV – 37th statutory Congress (Rotterdam / the Netherlands);
- 24-25: TUAC – Meeting of the working group on education, training and employment policies (Paris);
- 27-28: WCL – Confederal Board (Geneva);
- 31: G8 Trade Union Leaders' Meeting with Tony Blair (London / UK).

The world of



# Trade Action

### **SOCIAL SECURITY:**

#### **ALSO FOR THE INFORMAL ECONOMY WORKERS!**

"Work on social security worldwide" is the theme and the goal of the Spring 2005 Campaign of *Wereldsolidariteit*. The benefits of social security are indeed not the privilege of a small group of people. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), merely one out of five people benefits from a sufficient social security. More



than half the world's population has no social security at all! In the most industrialised countries the coverage is almost 100 percent. In the developing countries, however, countless informal economy workers can only dream of a solid social security. They have no refuge whatsoever when they grow old, no health care when they are taken ill, no income in case of unemployment, illness or pregnancy. Yet, the right to social security is a human right, as such recognised by the United Nations! During its Spring Campaign *Wereldsolidariteit* intends to induce the Belgian government to take more initiatives in favour of social security worldwide and to exert pressure on the international community with the help of partners like WCL.

We fully support this Campaign and invite you to contribute your mite by signing the petition you can find on the Internet site [www.wereldsolidariteit.be](http://www.wereldsolidariteit.be)

### **DOES NIKE ASSUME ITS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?**

In the matter of assuming social responsibility to the workers, the world leader in the manufacturing and sales of sportswear and sports footwear, Nike, is badly thought of. NGOs and other social organisations have already raised quite some questions about the working conditions that prevail at the subcontractors of Nike. By publishing a report entitled "Social Security in the Company", Nike tries to wipe these doubts off the minds all over the world. It remains to be seen if the operation will bear fruit. The manufacturer admitted that verbal aggression and sexual harassment constituted a problem, but did not fail to add immediately that there was little tangible proof of this and that the perception of these problems differed from culture to culture, as if dignity of the workers were not a unique concept. Nike is now introducing several complaint services to enable the workers to point out abuses. This could be a good initiative, even if it supplants the role of the trade unions while weakening them. Nike also admits to child labour but shifts the blame on to the subcontractors and even to the young workers themselves, who lie about their age so to be employed and to pull out of poverty. Anyway, the initiatives relating to corporate responsibility must be in compliance with several ethical and deontological provisions, and it is not enough to highlight

them for reasons of marketing, WCL points out in its booklet *“Corporate Social Responsibility and Codes of Conduct”*. In no case corporate social responsibility must substitute for the active role of the trade unions. It would not be proper to compromise on the possibilities of dialogue and collective bargaining with the trade unions and on the freedom of association of the workers. An encouraging measure: Nike recently published on its website the list of its 700 suppliers worldwide. Concretely, this information will make it easier for the trade unions to control the application of the codes of conduct by the company and the extent of its effective respect for the workers' rights. Through the “Multinationals” part of the VERBA programme WCL is actively developing an international network to support the trade union activists in multinationals and to favour the adoption, by the company, of practices and agreements that are respectful of the conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

### **FELTRA DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS ON THE FARMERS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**



FELTRA, the Latin American farmers' federation affiliated to WFAFW, is very concerned about the negative effects of the free trade agreements between the European Union and the United States on the living and working conditions of the Latin American and Caribbean farmers. The European Union and the United States hugely subsidise the agricultural produce and exports. Concretely, Europe invests 48 percent of its budget in the much-vaunted

common agricultural policy so to supply its citizens with high-quality products at low-budget prices and to ensure food security. The United States, for its part, spend 18 billion dollars a year on agricultural subsidies. Moreover, the free trade agreements compel the poorer countries to lower their import taxes. Western products and genetically modified organisms substitute increasingly for cash crops, which causes a strong decrease in income. The multinationals are implied in this policy and benefit from it. According to FELTRA, the Latin American and Caribbean farmers and the small landowners stand no chance at all of measuring up to the murderous competition of subsidised imports. In the opinion of the Federation, the protectionism of the European Union and the United States constitute a real danger for the local agricultural industry and the job security in the sector, and indirectly also for the standard of living of the agricultural population in that all this combined leads to a loss of income (particularly among women and children). On 13 April 2005, on the occasion of a “round table on food security and trade in agricultural produce”, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) decided to reduce the export subventions of the rich countries, yet without defining a term. Sordid detail: the experts of this same WTO failed to abolish the export subventions of the European sugar industry... That is why FELTRA calls on all the farmers and small producers to analyse

this situation thoroughly and to denounce the negative effects of the free trade agreements.

### **CHILE: 6000 BUS DRIVERS THREATENED WITH LOSS OF JOB!**

The Chilean government intends to reform the whole bus network of the capital, Santiago. The national federation of transport workers ASSTTRA A.G. and the council for the protection of the transport workers CODETT have sounded the alarm and called on FIOST and the International Labour Organisation to denounce this situation. At present, some 8,000 buses belonging to around 3,500 small



companies traverse the streets of Santiago. The small companies are grouped in 50 to 70 strong owners' federations, to each of which has been allocated a bus line. The drivers work for the small self-employed owners, and their wages are based on a percentage of the fare per passenger. The workers have constituted small inter-company unions, 132 of which are based in the capital. With its project baptised ‘Transantiago’, the Chilean government intends to reduce the number of buses to 5,000 and to abolish five main and nine auxiliary lines. The whole network will be the property of nine large owners' companies of at least 500 buses each. The drivers will be employed by these companies and receive fixed wages. CODETT estimates that the project will cause the loss of over 6,000 jobs. The federations of small self-employed owners will disappear and, with them, all the inter-company unions! And around 30,000 drivers will lose their contract with the small self-employed owners without any compensation calculated on the basis of their seniority. With support from FIOST, CODETT will institute legal proceedings and organise a large national demonstration.

### **ON THE EXCELLENT MEDIATISATION OF A TRAINING SESSION BRAZIL**

On 30 and 31 March, in the context of the Capacity Building project in the VERBA programme, the training team of Central Brazil (composed of Erledes Elias da Silveira and José Francisco Filho) organised a follow-up activity in Sao José do Rio Preto (district de Sao Paulo – Brazil). On the occasion of this training on trade union reform in Brazil, external experts had been invited to address the trade union leaders about this topic of paramount importance. José Nunes da Silva, who had participated in the Press and Publicity training of WCL, last year in Buenos Aires, managed to have this activity covered by the media. Several journalists interviewed the trainers and the experts. The interviews and articles appeared in several dailies. A nice example of the way a follow-up activity within the VERBA project can attract the attention of journalists thanks to a close cooperation between trainers and press officers.

