

### COLOMBIAN TRADE UNIONS BEAR WITNESS TO DIFFICULTIES

The three Colombian trade unions (CGT, affiliated to WCL, CTC, affiliated to ICFTU, and CUT) have conducted a joint mission to



various member states of the European Union. The mission was supported by WCL, ICFTU and ETUC as well as by affiliated and friendly organisations in the visited countries. One of the aims was to picture the dreadful reality confronting the workers in that country. Despite a relatively strong economic growth, poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, underemployment and insecurity are constantly on the increase. At the same time, private companies and public services are restructured, which leads to split-offs and dismissals. As you could read in our previous editions, there is a constant heavy pressure on the organisations. This has an enormous impact on the rate of unionisation and on the protection through collective bargaining. A mere 1 percent of the population is protected by collective bargaining agreements, and a mere 5 percent is organised in trade unions. With this mission the Colombian trade unions wanted to point out these problems to the governments, employers and public opinion in the EU member states, requesting them for help to guarantee the application of the human rights in Colombia. They also want the EU member states to share the stand of the international trade union movement during the International Labour Conference, from 31 May to 17 June. Further details are available on: [www.cmt-wcl.org](http://www.cmt-wcl.org)

### MEASURES AGAINST YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN SWITZERLAND

*Travail Suisse* is a Swiss workers workers' organisation that was created in December 2002. It unites federations and unions that were formerly affiliated to the *Confédération des syndicats chrétiens de Suisse* (CSC) and the *Fédération des sociétés suisses d'employés* (FSE). In view of the growing youth unemployment in Switzerland, the organisation published a report entitled: «*Chômage des jeunes: il est urgent d'agir*» (youth unemployment: urgent action necessary). The report analyses the situation and provides solutions to this phenomenon. As compared to the rate of youth unemployment in the rest of Europe, Switzerland achieved good results. However, if the rate of

youth unemployment is compared to the rate of total unemployment, the report is less optimistic, because Switzerland is here on the European average, which was not the case before. It indeed appears from the report that youth unemployment almost tripled between 2000 and 2004. Several factors explain this. Besides the cyclical and seasonal factors, there are the demographic factors: Young people born in the period of strong increase in population will jostle each other on the labour market in the next ten years. The report contains a few demands to remedy this: raise the number and the quality of the apprentices' monitors, make big companies train at least three apprentices per one hundred workers and improve the integration of young migrants. The full report is available on: [http://www.travailsuisse.ch/uploads/media/07\\_03\\_2005.pdf](http://www.travailsuisse.ch/uploads/media/07_03_2005.pdf)

### TRADE UNION ACTIVIST ALREADY SEVEN MONTHS IN INDONESIAN PRISON

Since around seven months, since 29 September 2004 to be precise, Fauzi, 32 years old, worker and trade union activist at the company PT Batam Expressindo Shipyard, has been in the prison of Batam in Indonesia. F-KUI (Federation of Construction, Umum dan Informal), one of the unions of K-SBSI (affiliated to BATU and WCL) has repeatedly

#### TELE-FLASH

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expressed its indignation at Fauzi's confinement. The reason for his imprisonment is weak: he has allegedly stolen goods from the company. According to our affiliate, however, his arrest is rather the result of anti-union practices. Fauzi was arrested just after a period of tensions between the management and the workers, occasioned by the violation of a number of acquired rights. On 3 March last, the World Confederation



of Labour sent the manager of the company and the Minister of Labour a letter of protest to demand the immediate release of Fauzi. Neither replied. The trade union activist is still in prison. On 13 May last, WCL Secretary General Willy Thys sent a letter to the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, by which he again expressed the great concern of WCL and the hope that all necessary measures would be taken to release Fauzi. In view of the circumstances it seems obvious that a formal complaint will be filed with the International Labour Organisation if he is not set free within a reasonable delay.

#### **WORKTIME ACT DISREGARDED IN ARGENTINA**



According to a recent study of INDEC, the national statistical office, three million people work nearly 59 hours a week in Argentina. The legal maximum weekly work-time, however, is 48 hours. Half of the workers are employed in the private sector. INDEC has also found that 760,000 people, ie 12 percent of the total workforce, works 19 hours on average a week. This is a huge contrast. These workers

would like to work more in order to raise their incomes. Most of them have an undeclared employment. Several analysts affirm that over 690,000 new jobs can be created if the workers work the legal 48 instead of 59 hours a week. This is only possible if there is the political will to enforce the law and if the private sector observes the law.

#### **COMMITTEE ON FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS WORKERS OF JAYA BERSAMA**

The Committee on Freedom of Association has passed judgement in the matter of the unjustified dismissal of eleven workers of the company Jaya Bersama in Indonesia. The dismissals run counter to the basic trade union rights. The Committee asked the Indonesian government to take the necessary

measures to make the company recognise the F-KUI union and start collective bargaining sessions on the working conditions. It finds it essential that the government amends the legislation and adopts the necessary measures to call a halt to anti-union discrimination. It goes without saying that the eleven workers should be immediately re-employed. In addition, they should be entitled to suitable damages.

#### **NOT GIVE IN TO BLACKMAIL WITH RELOCATION**

Too many workers in Western Europe have experienced what relocation means. Western European companies often threaten with it in order to raise the flexibility and worktime and to lower the wages. Their argument is always the same: we are unable to compete with lower-wage countries. This is not correct, says ACV-CSC in its weekly *Info CSC* dd 13 May 2005. According to a recent study of Professor Josef Konings of KUL (Louvain Catholic University), not only the wage cost but also the productivity is five times lower in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. Moreover, the low wages in that European region would have no effect on the job demand in Belgium, says ACV-CSC. So, the companies are blackmailing the workers by complaining about the high wage cost. According to *Info CSC*, a mere 5 percent of the threatening companies actually relocate. The conclusion is therefore not to give in to these threats. Further details are available on: [www.csc-en-ligne.be](http://www.csc-en-ligne.be)

#### **Schedule of activities**

##### **Mai 2005**

- 27-28: WCL – Confederal Board (Geneva).

##### **June 2005**

- 31/05 - 16/06: ILO – 93rd session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva);
- 09: CNV – International Commission (Utrecht / the Netherlands);
- 09: International Organisation for Migration (IOM) – 89th session of the Council (Geneva);
- 09-11: IFTC – European seminar and World Board;
- 10: seminar WCL, ICFTU, UBUNTU, CONGO: In greater freedom, positions and proposals of the civil society (Geneva);
- 13-14: FIOST – European Board + European seminar (Vilnius);
- 18-26: WFIW – Congress and world seminar (Dakar).



# Trade Action

## MEETING OF THE VERBA TEAM AND THE REGIONAL TRADE ACTION COORDINATORS

On 11 and 12 May, at the WCL headquarters in Brussels, the VERBA team had a meeting with the regional Trade Action coordinators (Luz Ang for Asia, Carlos Gaitan for Latin America and Joseph Toe for Africa).



Together they evaluated the progress made with the VERBA Informal Economy, Multinationals and Capacity Building programmes. The reactions were by and large positive, even if several parts of the programme could do with some firm prodding. As several trainers' teams are behind schedule, it was agreed with them to draw up a list and planning of themes for the remaining complementary activities. The agenda also included the dues policy of WCL. In this regard nothing has changed: no follow-up activity or project will be started in countries where the confederation has accumulated sizeable dues arrears. The coordinators also reached an agreement on the terms and conditions for presenting the results of VERBA-1 to the Congress of WCL, which is scheduled for November 2005. Jaap Wienen, Deputy Secretary General of WCL and in charge of the VERBA programme, outlined the launching of the VERBA-2 project. These conditions include a positive evaluation of VERBA-1 by the Congress and the availability of sufficient funds to organise a second round.

## WFBW WORLD BOARD APPROVES OF NEW INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATION

The World Board of the World Federation of Building and Woodworkers' Unions of WCL – WFBW – assembled at the end of April in Ostend (Belgium). The two main agenda items were the creation of a new world trade union organisation with IFBWW (member of Global Unions) and the succession of the President, Jacky Jackers. Late in 2003, WFBW and IFBWW concluded an agreement in principle on creating together a new

international trade federation. Their aim is to even better protect the interests of the building and woodworkers in the face of the globalisation and liberalisation to which our era has fallen prey. The new structure, the statutes and the plan of action were negotiated last year already. At the Bulgaria World Congress, in May 2004, the Board of WFBW was given the green light to continue the steps. The name of the new organisation will be Building and Woodworkers International (BWI). The Constitutive Congress is scheduled to take place next December in Buenos Aires (Argentina). A four-year transitional period should guarantee that WFBW has a sufficient place in the new structure. The new world organisation will be pluralistic and respect the specific nature and the autonomy of its members. Stefaan Vanthourenhout, the current national secretary of *ACV Bouw & Industrie* (Belgium) was elected President of WFBW. He will succeed Jacky Jackers, who will retire early on 1 September. Jacky will attend the Constitutive Congress of BWI in order to comment on the history of WFBW.

## SEMINAR OF WFBW ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Prior to the World Board meeting held in Ostend (Belgium) at the end of April, WFBW conducted a world seminar on "global governance, corporate social responsibility and sustainable development". A large number of participants from the continents of the South took part in it. Paul Tennessee, head of the Washington-based Liaison Office of WCL analysed the United Nations institutions and the influence the trade unions can exert on their global governance. Tennessee concluded that the UN was abandoning more and more their solely economic model in favour of a model that integrates more social factors. "Yet, we are still far from a global governance; the role and the weight of ILO, whose due it is to draw up conventions for other international institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO), must be much greater", WFBW concludes. As regards corporate social responsibility, the second great seminar theme, it appeared that many participants did not know its purport. Yet, this way of doing business had been the object of many promotional activities on the part of Global Compact, the global platform of the UN involving governments, private companies, trade unions and civil society organisations. More details are available on the website [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org). The seminar also went to show that, at the international level, employers' organisations and trade unions were concluding an increasing number of framework agreements that are respectful of the ILO conventions. The foundations of what, one day, we might call "Global Labour Agreements"? Moreover, there is a growing

awareness of the fact that ethical investments could be the solution in the struggle to mitigate the excesses of capitalism. The international trade union movement will have to go along with this evolution if it wants to continue to have a say. With respect to the informal economy, the third part of the seminar, the accent was on the importance of a legal status for the informal economy workers, so that they are not considered outlaws anymore. That is why the actors of the "Informal Economy" programme within the VERBA project of WCL go to great lengths to map out the seats of informal economy and to organise concrete trade union actions in them.

### **HONDURAN AND PAKISTANI STREET VENDORS FIND COMFORT IN TRADE UNIONS**

«*CNV-Dienstenbond*», a trade federation of the Dutch Christian confederation CNV, intends to encourage worldwide respect for the basic labour rights of the commercial workers. With this end in view it supports projects of non-Western countries through fund-raising and training. Two projects, both of them initiatives of WCL affiliates, are crucial in the coming period. In Honduras, the federation FENTEAH, affiliated to the *Central General de Trabajadores* (CGT), has taken an interest in the lot of the street vendors. Their legal status is very precarious, and no legal provision regulates their pensions, holidays, health insurance or training. FENTEAH discusses with the municipal authorities their responsibility for the organisation of the market and for the social protection of the vendors. It also grants short-term microcredits and organises management trainings for the small self-employed in the capital, Tegucigalpa. *CNV-Dienstenbond* puts a lot of effort, further, in a project of the All Pakistan Trade Union Congress (APTUC). This project is aimed to unionise women vending hand-made cricket gloves and cricket balls. APTUC arranges for the licenses that entitle them to a place in the street. The trade union also organises trainings on safety and health at work for the informal economy workers.

### **INDONESIA: GARTEKS SBSI DEVOTES ITSELF TO THE INFORMAL TEXTILE WORKERS**

The abolition of the import quotas and the liberalisation of the textile industry have serious repercussions for the conditions of the Indonesian workers. The textile federation Garteks SBSI has explained to us that the competition with countries like China is murderous and that many Indonesian textile workers are being made redundant. In order to subsist, they find themselves forced to work in cobbling or sewing shops where Nike, Puma and Adidas imitations are produced. In most cases each form of social protect has disappeared, and the wages are dependent on the demand at that moment. Engaged in the protection of this group of very vulnerable workers, Garteks SBSI has organised a meeting of fifty owners and workers of informal footwear shops to explain to them the importance of joining a trade union. It remains difficult to convince the informal economy workers, however, on account of the irregular nature of their income and their difficulties in

paying membership dues. Moreover, the police and the military regularly harass the trade union leaders at their homes and try to bribe them. During the aforementioned meeting, Garteks SBSI pointed out to the shop owners that it is illegal to market imitations. They replied that they intended to operate a gradual transition to their own mark but that it was indispensable to have sufficient funds for this. Garteks SBSI is examining the possibility of granting microcredits and is looking for partners to sell informal products.

### **TRADE UNION TRAINING IN BRAZIL IN THE MEDIA LIMELIGHT**

On 29-30 April, the trainers' team of Central Brazil, trained within the framework of the Capacity Building module of WCL's VERBA project, organised a follow-up activity for trade union leaders employed in the banking sector. During the meeting in Marilia / Sao Paulo, the twenty participants discussed the trade union reforms in Brazil and their implication for the workers and the trade union members. The press and publicity officer, José Nunes, managed to arouse media interest in this trade union activity, and the trainers, Erledes and Filho, gave several interviews on radio and television. A successful media operation!



### **WHAT WITH THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL SECURITY?**

Early in May, members of WFCW (World Federation of Clerical Workers, affiliated to WCL) from Central and Eastern Europe attended a conference on the construction, structure and funding of social security in the European Union. Trade union representatives from Hungary, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Serbia, Romania and Austria, assembled in Nagyatat (Hungary), acknowledged the necessity of a modern form of social security. The accent was also on several trends that may do damage to the social security system. The participants wanted, among other things, the privatisation of social security to stop. Private insurance companies, always anxious to raise their profits, must be prevented at any cost from raising their premiums, for this will inevitably lead to the exclusion of part of the workers! The conference also called on the governments to take without delay efficient measures against environmental pollution in order to reduce its disastrous effects on the health and, in the process, the resulting pressure on the social health insurance. Voices were raised against the extension of the weekly working time to more than forty hours and for the right of sectoral trade unions to conclude nationwide collective bargaining agreements. The participants also deplored the fact that the services directive of the European Union limits the workers' rights, undermines social welfare and the wage level and will eventually harm the economy. According to the Conference and WFCW, the Christian trade union movement must continue to oppose this directive.

