

TRADE UNIONS, POWERFUL INSTRUMENTS FOR CHANGE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

On 29 May in Geneva, prior to the International Labour Conference, assembled the World Women's Committee – WWC – of WCL. The women workers in WCL noted that the world had faced in recent years many challenges as a consequence of globalisation. Despite all the commitments of States to pursue policies to reduce poverty and inequality of women, the results are very little convincing. The position of women



on the labour market has deteriorated, particularly for the constantly growing number of single mothers. Equality is still no reality. Moreover, poverty has significantly feminised. The causes of this deterioration are obvious: the neo-liberal policies with their never-satisfied profitability requirements, imposed by the international financial and commercial institutions. In a final declaration the women of WWC took a stand to this unacceptable situation. They are convinced that trade unions can be powerful instruments for change towards equality and that all women should therefore be unionised. They also take the view that women should be equally represented in all the democratic institutions, from the family via trade unions to the State. In this respect, the election of Mrs Rabiadou Diallo of CNTG/Guinea, Chairwoman of WWC, as titular member of the Governing Body of the ILO is a strong and positive signal, demonstrating the political will of WCL to appoint a woman to a high office. Let us hope that other organisations will follow this example. Besides, an informal meeting of women leaders of ICFTU and WCL was organised in Geneva in the context of the creation of a new international trade union organisation. They met to get acquainted, to exchange ideas and to develop joint strategies in order to make sure that their

viewpoints are taken up in the current process. They concluded, among other things, that the process of trade union unity is a crucial opportunity to create favourable conditions for full gender equality, which must be a central theme in the new trade union organisation. According to the participants, the debate was held in a constructive and positive spirit.

SUCCESSFUL GENERAL MOBILISATION AGAINST POVERTY IN MADRID!

On Sunday 26 June, more than 35,000 people answered the call of the Spanish alliance against poverty. Our Spanish member organisation, the *Unión Sindical Obrera* (USO) is part of this alliance. The

demonstration, which took place, in all quiet, in the streets of the Iberian capital, was the first in a series of one hundred others in nearly one hundred countries in anticipation of the meeting of the G8 (the eight most industrialised countries in the world), which was held in Scotland. Huge white banners, symbols of the campaign against poverty, waved next to streamers carrying demands such as equality, the cancellation of the debt and concrete poverty reduction actions. The main demand was the achievement, by 2015, of the Millennium Development Goals, signed in 2000 by 189 chiefs of State: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, develop a global partnership for development. The results so far are poor. A lot of promises were made, but we have seen only few concrete results and efficient measures. Besides, the trade union movement deems it essential to add the promotion of decent employment to this list



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of goals. Initiatives like the demonstration in Madrid should be followed and supported, for they show the will of the populations to put an end to poverty that results from a globalisation that has anything but a humane face!

can be a good thing. Indeed, in some countries



FAMINE RAGES IN NIGER!



Niger has been suffering for some time already from a terrible famine that is ravaging its population. The shortage of food, not only for human beings but also for cattle, is assuming dramatic proportions. The degradation of the sanitary and food conditions is growing increasingly urgent. The extreme poverty hitting the population prevents us from finding viable solutions. According to the Equity/Quality

Coalition Against Expensive Life in Niger, in which our Nigerien member organisation, the *Confédération Nigérienne du Travail* (CNT), takes part, the government has chosen inadequate solutions to face the disaster. In June, the Coalition organised a day of reflection, followed by an extraordinary session on the problem of managing the food crises in Niger. After a thorough analysis of the crisis that threatens more than three million Nigeriens, the Coalition launched several appeals and outlined solutions. First, it called on the regions not affected by the famine to show solidarity and to help to the best of their ability the population in distress. It invites, further, the development partners and friendly countries of Niger to help the country with food and medicines. Lastly, the Coalition asks the government to redouble its efforts in the crisis management, which is now insufficient. One of the solutions would be the immediate creation of a joint ad hoc committee involving the local level, besides the existing mechanism involving the civil society with a view to a healthy and transparent administration of the financial and other resources that are mobilised in this operation. In conclusion, the Coalition encourages the national and international media to give more publicity to the situation. It goes without saying that solidarity at all levels will play a very important role in this crisis.

A DATABASE TO COMPARE WAGES

The principle is as follows: you go to the database on the Internet site of this service to see what workers doing the same job as you do earn. You then type in the amount of your own salary. According to ILO, the more people participate, the more the information will be precise. This service

and for some groups there are collective agreements guaranteeing transparent and fair wages, but this is far from being the case everywhere. The logic of this system, which could extend to the whole world, is to use the Internet for mutual aid; in any case this is the avowed aim. "*In inviting people to create a public database with voluntarily provided information*", declared Friedrich Buttler, Director of the regional ILO office for Europe and Central Asia, "*it is proven that the Internet can be used to disclose and spread formerly inaccessible information.*" The initiative can help obtain more realistic information on the amount and structure of wages and on wage discrimination. It is still too early to analyse the results of the wage indicator, but the initiative, which is aimed to protect the workers, is certainly worth mentioning. **For more details:** www.wageindicator.com, www.ilo.org

A LAND-RELATED CONFLICT IN PANAMA

On 19 April, Ignacio Perez, leader of FITA – *Federación de Trabajadores Agrícolas* – was attacked and injured by members of the Kuna community, which shares the same land. It is not the first time similar tensions and acts occurred. They are the direct result of conflicts related to landownership in the Alto Bayano region. CGTP, our member organisation in Panama, has repeatedly called attention to the conflict, demanding a solution from the Panamanian authorities. Unfortunately, their call fell on deaf ears and the violence continues. Through CLADHELT, which conducted a mission to the region, WCL is well informed of the situation. It has called on the Ministry of Justice to find without delay a solution. Access to land is indeed of vital importance for many Panamanians. The government must do its utmost to enter upon a dialogue with the peasants and the indigenous communities in the zone in order to provide answers to the legitimate demands of all. We will keep a close eye on this dossier, the settlement of which is an absolute necessity.

Schedule of activities

July 2005

- 04-14: Institute for International Worker Education (IIWE) – Seminar on trade union action: What strategies should be followed? (Bangkok);
- 10-14: BATU – Congress (Bangkok).



Trade Action

PARAGUAY: THE PROTEST ACTION OF TEACHERS BEARS FRUIT

Fruitful negotiations with government paid off on 17 June by ending the teachers' strike action in Paraguay. The members, led by the trade union,



'Unión Nacional de Paraguay', UNE, had laid down their tools two days earlier because an agreement between the UNE and government was not implemented. This agreement notably provided for an increase in salary and other economic and social benefits for teachers. Because the teachers stood firm, officials of the Ministry of Education and Finance finally accepted to grant a 10% increase in salary from the last semester of 2005, and an equal increase in 2006 according to salaries paid in that year. This measure already constitutes a major step forward to obtain a salary structure aimed at putting the salaries of Paraguay teachers on an equal footing.

AN OIL COMPANY FLOUTS WORKERS' RIGHTS IN PERU

Our member organisation, 'Central Autónoma de Trabajadores del Peru', CATP, is concerned about the situation of workers of the Maple Gas Corporation Sucursal Peruana, of the Ucayali province. This American oil exploration and processing company systematically violates Convention 87 of the International Labour Organisation on freedom of association and

the right to collective bargaining. The company has already dismissed several trade union representatives and leaders. Workers who are not affiliated to a trade union are rewarded with a 3% salary increase, this undoubtedly is proof that the company intends to discourage workers from coming together to form trade unions. The local trade union has already tried to start negotiations, but management had sent trade union representatives into the oil fields in a manner that makes any consultation with the workers impossible. Moreover, even before negotiations could begin, they were obliged to give a written undertaking not to seek the assistance of a labour consultant. Meanwhile the company has its own advisor on this matter and high-level officials are employed as "inspectors". It goes without saying that in these circumstances, the workers do not have any chance of asserting their rights. It is for this reason that the CATP launches an appeal for international assistance and wants to take advantage of the VERBA project of the

WCL Trade Action with a view to unionise, inform and train its trade union representatives more effectively.

CHILEAN BUS DRIVERS FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Some months ago we informed you in N° 199 edition of Teleflash, about the situation of bus drivers in the Chilean capital, Santiago. The government, through its "Transantiago" project, intends to reform the whole bus

network and reduce the number of vehicles to 5,000 instead of 8,000. Since 9 big companies would be responsible for the management of the fleet, the small groups of independent bus operators face the threat of folding up and 30,000 drivers losing their jobs. For the transport workers' union, CODETT, the vagueness surrounding these projects as well as government's attitude of denial are simply intolerable. Moreover, after 60 days of negotiation



with the Ministry of Transport, no significant progress had been achieved concerning support and retraining of drivers, payment of compensation for services rendered or compensating for low salaries resulting from restructuring. This lax attitude is in striking contrast with the declaration of Jaime Estévez, the Minister for Transport, who in echoing the position of the Chilean government, stated that the government “*is ready to look for solutions for the transition*” whilst CODETT continues to strongly dispute the validity of this assertion, stating “*we have tried hard to negotiate with the government, right now, we will make every effort to defend the rights of workers*”. We consider 31st July as a D-day in this matter. If the political leaders do not put a proposal on the table, trade union actions cannot be ruled out.

BOYCOTT OF CHINESE TEXTILE: AT WHAT PRICE?

Since the ban on textile import quotas on 1st January of this year, it is feared that cheaply produced textile from low-income countries like China will flood the Western market, with its resultant impossible competitive struggle. The textile distributors could

average between 67 and 112 euros in the high season, and between 44 and 55 euros in the off-peak periods. Workers use half of their salary to cater for their daily expenses, besides their transport and medical expenses or possible leisure expenses. In so far as the Chinese law recognizes only one trade union, the All China Federation of Trade Unions, ACFTU, freedom of association is non-existent. In China, the right to strike is also not recognized. Whilst competitive pressure increases in European textile companies, distributors of designer clothing take advantage of the situation to buy cheaply and increase their profit margins. Meanwhile these distributors have a huge social responsibility towards the Chinese workers! By signing agreements with their suppliers and through effective controls, they can ensure that the rights of staff are respected. And what about the final consumer? He can also get there with his opinion. Isn't he the one who always demands to have the goods in the shortest possible time and at the best prices? **More information on:** <http://www.schonekieren.be>



The Geneva International Labour Organisation is organising a tripartite meeting from 24-26 October on the direct economic and social consequences of the ban on textile import quotas. Strategies for a more equitable globalisation of the sector will also be discussed. The role of the group of affiliated trade unions will be essential.

boycott these imports but must however bear in mind that their attitude can also seriously hurt the social conditions of Chinese workers, who are already poor and unprotected. In China, the textile sector employs many immigrant workers, cheap manpower, mostly very young, illiterate women who have no social protection. Since the majority of companies calculate the number of working hours according to their current order books, the law on working hours is flouted. Although that law limits the number of working hours to 8 hours per day and provides for one day of rest per week, during peak production, the workers often do 10 to 14 hours of work per day, 7 days a week! And whilst the demand for textile is low, these same workers are often asked to be content with “unpaid leave”. It must also be added that monthly salaries are particularly low: on the

HUNGER STRIKE IN SALVADOR IS ON THE INCREASE

The Federation of Salvador State and municipal staff, AGEPYM, informed us of the disturbing news that two hunger strikers had joined the small group of six other hunger strikers. The latter started their action some weeks ago following the mass dismissal of 114 workers at the ministry of internal affairs. Although the dismissal took place at the end of last year, it was followed by several trade union initiatives aimed at starting negotiations with the government, but these came to a sudden end. This hunger strike is the workers' final attempt aimed at ensuring respect of their rights. The WCL International Federation of Employees in Public Services, INFEDOP, is following the situation closely and calls on the international community to support the dismissed workers in order to prevent a human tragedy!

