

**SIXTH (POLYCENTRIC) WORLD SOCIAL FORUM IN CARACAS PLEADS FOR UNITY AND PLURALISM**

Within the polycentric World Social Forum in Caracas/Venezuela, CLAT and ORIT –



the respective regional organisations of WCL and ICFTU – organised the second ‘Trade Union Forum of the Americas’. On 25-26 January, around 400 trade union representatives assembled for a debate on topics such as integration as an alternative to globalisation and the free market, decent work as a basis for sustainable development, and the gender/work/trade union relation. It goes without saying that the creation of the new international trade union organisation was another main topic. Eduardo Garcia Moure, Secretary General of CLAT, said in this respect: “Trade union unity must emanate from mutual consultations in a pluralist debate. The concrete problems of the workers – unemployment, sub-contracting, informal economy... – must be the centre of these consultations.” In order to tackle these problems in a coordinated manner in the American continent, he launched an appeal to create a large ‘social and trade union power’ that cooperates actively on the creation of the *Comunidad Latinoamericana de Naciones* (CLAN – Latin American Community of Nations). The Trade Union Forum of the Americas was attended by thirteen member organisations of CLAT. A representative of the International Labour Organisation was present as well. Eduardo Estevez, Deputy Secretary General, represented WCL in Caracas.

**EURODEMONSTRATION DEMANDS AMENDMENT TO THE EUROPEAN SERVICES DIRECTIVE**

On 14-15 February, the plenary session of the European Parliament voted on the draft Services Directive (the so-called Bolkestein Directive). The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) seized this opportunity to mobilise its member organisations for a great Eurodemonstration. Under the slogan “Services for the community. Time to change the Directive!”, more than 40,000 workers, trade union representatives and members of social organisations marched through the streets of Strasbourg in protest against certain elements of the Services Directive. During his recent visit to the Greek confederation GSEE, John Monks,

Secretary General of ETUC, phrased the criticism as follows: “We are not against a Services Directive in itself, but against a directive that is based on the ‘country-of-origin principle’”. This principle provides that suppliers of services must be able to supply services all over the European Union on the basis of their recognition and of the



legislation in their own country. “The directive must not be patched up, but thoroughly revised”, John Monks concluded. The strong attendance in Strasbourg, including a sizeable delegation of our member organisation ACV-CSC (Belgium), showed that this criticism of the Services Directive was widely supported by the rank and file. The European Parliament eventually rejected the ‘Bolkestein version’ of the Services Directive, because there were still plenty of unclarity

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in it. By April 2006, the Commission will have to submit a new version, which will be examined by the Council and subsequently by the Parliament.

### **GUINEA: MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF WCL AND ICFTU CREATE SINGLE CONFEDERATION**

The forthcoming creation of a new international trade union organisation (planned for November 2006) is in full preparation and the member organisations of WCL and ICFTU are increasingly making overtures and consulting with each other. The 'Declaration of Camayenne' goes to show this. This statement of the Guinean trade unions CNTG (WCL) and USTG (ICFTU) announces the creation, on 5 January 2006, of the inter-confederation CNTG-USTG. Within this confederation both organisations will draw up in joint committees the legal texts that have to lead to the eventual merger of both national organisations. Through this merger the trade unions intend to tackle the concrete problems facing the Guinean workers even more concretely and to protect the latter's moral and material interests even better.

### **WCL, ICFTU AND ILO SUCCESSFULLY PROTECT TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN NIGER**

By a joint letter to the President of the Republic of Niger, WCL and ICFTU have expressed their strong concern about the anti-union practices at NIGELEC, an electricity company in the Nigerian capital Niamey. Indeed, two years ago, Diamyo El Hadj Yacouba, Secretary General of SYNTRAVE (Syndicat des Travailleurs de l'Energie du Niger) had been wrongfully dismissed at NIGELEC. At the time, the trade unions denounced this dismissal, and its discriminatory nature led several social organisations to start solidarity actions. But the government did nothing. Diamyo was still waiting for the application of ILO Convention 87 (which Niger ratified as early as in 1961!), guaranteeing the freedom of association and the right to organise. Moreover, the working circumstances at NIGELEC proved to be precarious. That is why WCL and ICFTU filed a complaint with the Committee on the Freedom of Association of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This joint action soon bore fruit. On 7 February, the Niamey Court of Appeal declared Diamyo's dismissal null and void. If NIGELEC respect this judgement, the company will rehire the trade union leader and pay his wage and bonuses arrears as well as damages. WCL and ICFTU urge the Nigerien authorities to show in future permanent respect for the trade union rights and also to promote these rights in Niger.

### **ILO IS PREPARING FOR ADOPTION OF THE MARITIME CONVENTION 2006**

On 7-23 February 2006, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) organised with support from the European Union the 10th Maritime Session of the International Labour Conference. This thematic session takes place every ten years in Geneva. The stakes at this year's edition are exceptional, however. The Maritime Convention 2006 will indeed be subject to close examination. It compiles almost all the conventions and

recommendations currently in force in shipping (over sixty texts) and has to guarantee 1.2 million seafarers worldwide decent jobs. Moreover, it has to prevent unfair competition in the sector. This new instrument must be easily understandable, quickly updateable and universally applicable. "It must be a modern and effective response to the problems in a global branch of industry", said Juan Somavia, Director General of ILO. The Convention includes a variety of themes such as health, safety, minimum age, employment, working hours... "The real challenge will consist in making sure



that these provisions are also applied and implemented worldwide", Somavia went on to say. With this end in view, the shipping companies will be asked to pursue a more intensive application policy on the basis of regular inspections. The Maritime Convention 2006 must be the pre-eminent reference for decent working circumstances in shipping, not only for seafarers and shipowners, but also for the governments worldwide.

#### **Schedule of activities**

##### **April 2006**

- 03-05: IDB – Annual session of the assemblies of governors of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Inter-American Investment Society (Belo Horizonte);
- 05: 3rd EU-LAC Trade Union Summit (Vienna);
- 05-07: 4th EU-LAC Civil Society Meeting (Vienna);
- 06-07: ILO - Regional conference on social security spending in the stability pact countries of South Eastern Europe (Budapest);
- 06-08: CLAT – Executive Secretariat (Caracas);
- 23-28: CGT/France – Congress (Lille);
- 24-26: EMF – European Council (Strasbourg);
- 28: International Commemoration Day for dead and injured workers.



# Trade Action

## NEW WORLD TRADE UNION ORGANISATION MAIN TOPIC AT CONGRESS OF THE PAN- AFRICAN FEDERATION OF CLERICAL WORKERS

On 16-18 January 2006, WCL Deputy Secretary General Jaap Wienen attended the Congress of



PFCW in Niger. One of the main topics at this important meeting of the regional clerical workers' federation, which is affiliated to the World Federation of Clerical Workers (WFCW) of WCL, was the integration of the structures of WCL and ICFTU. Prior to the Congress, a trade union delegation had a debate in depth with the Minister of Labour on the social dialogue in Niger. It so happened that just at that moment bargaining over wage adjustments were taking place, which eventually resulted in a strong increase of the minimum monthly wage to 30 euros. The PFCW Congress was attended by around 100 participants, chiefly people interested from our Nigerien member organisation CNT. The first two Congress days were entirely devoted to a debate on the position of PFCW (and WFCW) to the unification process. This proved to be useful as quite a few participants were not fully informed of the background and the state of affairs. The information round was followed by a fruitful debate on basic elements such as risks of the unification, pluralism and the (financial) dependence of the African trade union movement. PFCW eventually decided in its plan of action for 2006-2010 to support the unification process between WCL and ICFTU and to encourage the talks between WFCW and UNI on the one hand and between DOAWTU and ORAF on the other.

## HUNGER STRIKE IN BENGALI JUTE AND TEXTILE INDUSTRY

On 29 January, the jute and textile workers in Bangladesh answered the call of the textile federation of our member organisation BSSF to go on hunger strike in protest against the poor working circumstances in the mills. In a ten-point manifesto they demanded the levelling of the wages in public and private companies and a rise of the minimum wage, which had remained unchanged for a long time. They also gained a group insurance for the dismissed workers of the large jute factory Adamjee. WCL lent BSSF its full support and started a solidarity action, addressing directly the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Jute and Textile. The situation of the strikers is being closely followed. According to recent information the bargaining over the minimum wage will start before long. To be continued.

## FIOST PLEASED WITH THE REJECTION OF EUROPEAN PORTS DIRECTIVE II

At the end of January, the European Parliament rejected in Strasbourg the draft Ports Directive II, which was all about the liberalisation of services in ports. The first draft of the European Commission had been rejected in 2003 already. The International Federation of Trade Unions of Transport Workers (FIOST), affiliated to WCL, welcomes this decision. "*The adoption of such a directive threatens to thoroughly disturb the working structure of the European port companies and creates unfair competition*", FIOST President Michel Bovy said in a statement to the press, adding that "*moreover the working conditions of the European dockers had been in jeopardy, to the point even that they risked losing their jobs*". The main issue for the trade unions remains the so-called self-handling, which allows not only qualified dockers but also sailors to load and discharge ships. According to the transport workers' federation, this liberalisation of the sector – inspired by commercial interests – can only be detrimental to the current working circumstances in the European ports. Also the supervision over safety in the ports would be seriously hampered if self-handling had been allowed.

## POOR SAFETY AND HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE SALMON-BREEDING SECTOR

A member of the VERBA network Multinationals in

Chile has informed WCL of the poor safety and health conditions in salmon-breeding and salmon-processing companies of several European multinationals. At the end of December 2005, for instance, a worker got killed in the salmon factory Nova Austral, a subsidiary of the powerful Spanish multinational Pescanova, established in Tierra del Fuego, Santiago de Chile. The worker was employed in the



filleting department but had to repair, without any instructions or safety measures, an ice-processing machine, part of which landed on him. He was the fourteenth deadly victim in the salmon industry in 2005. The authorities did not punish for all the accidents as the responsibility for several of them was shouldered on subcontractors of the multinationals. Non-observance of the safety and health regulations, the trend to subcontracting and anti-union practices are just some of the complaints filed with the local labour inspectorate. The inspectorate will examine the salmon industry on the basis of the basic rights as described in the free trade agreement concluded with the United States. Many workers are not or insufficiently aware of the social measures contained in that agreement. The social dialogue therefore has to be promoted in order to give the workers more strength, to raise the rate of unionisation and to pursue decent work in the sector.

### **TEACHERS' FEDERATIONS CONCERNED ABOUT SITUATION IN NEPAL**

The World Confederation of Teachers (WCT) and Education International (EI) – the two international teachers' federations that have decided, since the

Seville Congress of WCT late in January, to integrate the structures of both organisations – are highly concerned about the deterioration of the political and social situation in Nepal. In a letter to King Gyanendra they condemned the arrest of a whole series of human rights activists, among whom trade union activists, teachers, professors, journalists, lawyers, women's rights activists and students. They had just made use of their right of peaceful assembly and their freedom of speech to demand the establishment of a full-fledged multiparty democracy in Nepal. WCT and EI also called on the Nepalese government to release these innocent demonstrators immediately and unconditionally. They insisted, further, on the restoration of all the political and civil freedoms in Nepal as well as on a cease-fire to stop the violence and the human rights violations. The local confederations DECONT, GEFONT and NTUC joined in these demands. For ten years now, Nepalese Maoist rebels have fought against the monarchy and for a communist regime. This conflict has cost at least 13,000 human lives already. Moreover, one year ago King Gyanendra sent the then government packing, seizing all the power.

On 8 February of this year, for the first time in seven years, municipal elections were organised, but they were boycotted by an alliance of the most important democratic opposition parties and the Maoists. The alliance took the view that the elections just served to legitimise the Gyanendra regime. The turnout of the voters was therefore very low (around 20 per cent of the population).

At the 9th Congress of WCT, early in February in Seville, Secretary General Gaston De la Haye gave a survey of the talks WCT had conducted for two years with EI to arrive at an integrated structure of both organizations. The draft agreement between WCT and EI – adopted in 2003 by the Executive Board of EI and in April 2004 by the World Board of WCT – was adopted by the Congress of WCT at a secret ballot. So, it is now possible to effectively proceed to the integration of both teachers' organizations. All the member organizations of WCT will be invited to affiliate to the new EI. They have time to do so until October 2006. Gust Van Dongen was elected President of the WCT-EI Group, and Gaston De la Haye Secretary General.

