



PHOTONNEWS

INTERNATIONAL
FEDERATION OF
CHEMICAL, ENERGY,
MINE AND GENERAL
WORKERS' UNIONS

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Organising the Caspian

Oil service contract workers in the Caspian Sea region have been organising at an unprecedented rate in 2006, ever since some 2,000 Azeri workers struck US-based contractor McDermott twice in November 2005 to gain union recognition.

This wave of new union organisations into ICEM affiliate Oil and Gas Industry Workers Trade Union of Azerbaijan (OGWU) marks the first time that oil service and construction workers in the Caspian region have organised. The union, prior to McDermott, had exclusively represented only workers at the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR).

"The events that took place at the end of 2005 that were triggered by the McDermott workers' strike played a huge role in organising workers by other foreign companies operating in Azerbaijan," said OGWU President Jahangir Aliev. "But most importantly, these new union organisations are headed by people who truly are able to protect the interests of contract workers."

OGWU has seen its membership soar since the McDermott strike. In the months since the Azeri workers struck the contractor for pay equality and the same medical benefits that expatriate workers receive, some 10,000 contract workers in the Caspian oil and gas sector have organised.

On 19 December 2005, 1,600 workers at the offshore BosShelf site, a French-Azeri construction project partly owned by Bouygues, held a founding conference and won union status. In late December, workers at PCH, an Australian heavy equipment firm, also organised. Another union formed among workers of Azfen-Tekfen, an Azeri-Turkish joint venture.

And then on 1 February, workers of



Irish-based Kentech, a contractor of BP, SOCAR's largest partner in the region, staged a short strike which won them pay gains and union recognition.

As the Caspian region becomes a pivotal geopolitical area for production and transport of oil and gas, so too has it become a hotbed of workers seeking rights and their just rewards. The McDermott case serves as example.

The US firm had been working for BP and SOCAR since 2001 building offshore oil platforms in the massive Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli field, an area in which western companies will spend US\$15 billion to explore and develop. Much of those supplies will be shipped through the newly opened Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline to Turkey, while other supplies will flow through pipelines across Russia and Georgia, eventually reaching Europe, as Azerbaijan prepares to double its 2005 crude exports in 2006 to 26 million tonnes.

McDermott operates with 500 foreign workers and 2,000 Azeri workers. The



Jahangir Aliev
President, OGWU

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Statement

A delegation of the ICEM, led by Gen. Sec. Fred Higgs, visited Palestine 11-14 December 2005 at the invitation of and hosted by Mohammad Mousa Jadallah, President of the General Union of Petroleum, Mining and Chemical Workers in Palestine (GUPMCWP). Together we visited Ramallah, Bethlehem and Nablus. Discussions were held with Abdullah Abdullah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Salah al Tamari, Governor of Bethlehem, as well as senior officials of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, led by Gen. Sec. Shaher Sae'd. The group also toured facilities of Birzeit Pharmaceutical Co. and paid tribute to President Yasser Arafat by laying a wreath at his grave in Ramallah.

The delegation resolved that ICEM would deepen its relationship with GUPMCWP and in 2006 initiate a program of joint work that would begin with a project to assist women activists of the union.

The delegation was horrified to see at first hand the disruption to the free movement of people throughout the West Bank caused by both fixed and mobile checkpoints operated and manned by the Israeli military. Their method of operation was clearly used by the IDF as a means of collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

This lack of free movement also has major implications on the movement of goods and on employment, exasperating the already massive unemployment of Palestinian workers.

The most visible attack on the free movement of people is the massive wall under construction across the West Bank which divides family from family, runs through Palestinian villages and is estimated to have taken in the order of 55% of Palestinian land in the West Bank.

This wall, including observation points and potential gun emplacements, is an affront to human dignity and a constant visible emblem of Israeli oppression and occupation, dividing the Palestinian Nation. It is the view of the ICEM delegation that this wall should be immediately demolished.

Another constantly visible sign of occupation is the continually expanding Israeli settlements. An immediate halt must be made to the construction of new settlements and the expansion of existing settlements, prior to their eventual negotiated total removal.

We call on the international community to increase their efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to the current conflict. This will require the creation of a viable Palestinian State together with extensive international financial assistance to ensure the economic viability of the newly formed Palestinian State. Such a State clearly needs to have complete freedom of movement throughout all of its internal territory and land borders with neighbouring countries as well as with Israel.

The delegation firmly feels that a peaceful settlement to the conflict is possible but that job creation and investment in Palestinian production and infrastructure is an essential part of that.

The delegation was strongly impressed by the strength of the Palestinians and their determination to achieve a peaceful solution and the creation of a viable Palestinian State.



The Wall in Bethlehem

Palestine Visit: 'Collective Punishment of a People'

We need your voice. We need the support of the whole of the International Labour Move-ment," and with those words Palestine Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) Gen. Sec. Shaher Sae'd welcomed an ICEM delegation led by Fred Higgs to his office in the West Bank town of Nablus.

The delegation also included ICEM Director of Organisation Jim Catterson, the contact person for the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) Region. The invite to visit Palestine had been made in 2005 by President Mohammad Mousa Jadallah of the Petroleum, Mining, and Chemicals Workers in Palestine (GUPM-CWP) at a meeting in Jordan of ICEM affiliates and other unions in MENA, where trade unions present had emphasised the importance of increased work with trade unions in ICEM sectors inside Palestine.

Israel's Chokehold on Jobs

Shaher Sae'd described in graphic detail the problems faced by his organisation and workers in Palestine. The official unemployment figure is 36%, with 45% of the population living at or below the



Inside PGFTU's conference room, Gen. Sec. Shaher Sae'd shows ICEM's Fred Higgs a bullet hole from an Israeli weapon fired during an outside disturbance

poverty line. Some 350,000 workers who had previously worked in Israel were no longer able to do so, with the very few who continue to have permission frequently unable to cross the military checkpoints. Those who succeed are often pushed into "illegal" work and paid at best minimum rates.



At PGFTU headquarters in Nablus, Gen. Sec. Shaher Sae'd (seated, left - center) and Mohammed Moosa Jadallah, president of Palestine's Petroleum, Mining and Chemical Workers, seated at right next to ICEM's Fred Higgs

Union action is mainly limited to providing legal assistance. Employment in the West Bank itself, with the exception of the Palestinian Authority where 150,000 workers were funded mainly through European Union aid, is close to non-existent. Many past factories had been forced to close due to restrictions on freedom of movement of both goods and workers by Israel's military. Israel clearly imposes a state of collective punishment on the Palestinian People.

ICEM experienced this first hand. The trip from Ramallah to Nablus had taken just over an hour. The return on the same route was to take over four hours.

Pharmaceutical Visit

One of the few economic success stories in the West Bank might be Birzeit Pharmaceutical, a maker of generic drugs

ICEM Palestinian Visit Launches

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News of Affiliates

Turkish Oil Workers Again Block Refinery Privatisations

Istanbul, Turkey National oil workers' trade union Petrol-Is continues to block the government's plans to privatise Türkiye Petrol Rafinerileri AS (Tupras), the state oil company. In February, the union won a Council of State judicial decision suspending a US\$4.14 billion sale of 51% of the oil refiner to Turkey's Koc Holdings and Royal Dutch Shell.



Petrol-Is had been conducting day-long strikes at the four refineries and one petrochemical plant of Tupras. On 26 January, the day the government and Koc rushed through finalisation of the deal, workers staged a mass strike at all worksites. The union also conducted a broad public relations campaign entitled, "Tupras is Our Future, It Cannot Be Sold Off," using billboards and print and television advertising.

The decision by the appellate court, Turkey's highest administrative court, upheld a lower court decision by stating conditions of the sale failed to comply with Turkish privatisation law. Following the 2 February court decision, Petrol-Is President Mustafa Oztaskin said, "The sale has been cancelled. Tupras must be returned to the public immediately, without losing time and without harm to the buyer."

The union has now won some five court and regulatory agency rulings over the past two years against gas and oil refinery privatisations, utilizing both legal means and public campaigns.

IGBCE, Other German Unions Seek Common Agreement with Vattenfall

Hannover, Germany Three German unions, including ICEM affiliate IGBCE, are campaigning together against Swedish state-run electric utility Vattenfall to grant a common labour agreement. The campaign has the support of Swedish electric workers' union SEKO, which has pressured the government at home, saying that removing pay disparities and bringing uniform work terms to 20,000 German workers is in the best interests of the company.



The German unions, including Ver.di and IG Metall, have been negotiating with Vattenfall for two years in efforts to harmonise pay and work terms of the business enterprises the company has purchased over the past few years. The unions also seek a commitment that any operation sold off to another company would include the common collective agreement. The company's German managers have refused. The Swedish parent this spring begun an effort to buy out the minority stake of Vattenfall Europe AG, Germany's third largest utility.

The three unions have demonstrated against the company's refusal, and on 1 March held a mass protest at Vattenfall Europe's AGM in Berlin. "Vattenfall is an enterprise that must conduct its business activities outside Sweden the same as it does here," said SEKO Chairman Janne Rudén. In Germany, the company operates power utilities in Berlin and Hamburg, as well as power generation, distribution and lignite coal mines in the eastern portion of the country.

Amicus Begins Industrial Actions against International Paper

Aberdeen, UK Workers at International Paper Co.'s Inverurie Mill near here began industrial actions against the US papermaker on 23 March. The 231 workers with their union Amicus are protesting a proposed pay freeze for 2006. The action began with a four-hour strike on that day, and another work stoppage a week later.

A pay freeze, Amicus believes, is out of line, considering labour agreements with other UK paper companies included raises of up to 2.5%. Since 2004, workers at the Inverurie Mill have conceded three percent of their weekly pay in order to fill a gap in the company's pension scheme.

Contract Labour Issue Causes Canadian Paper Mill Lockout

Port Hawkesbury, Canada A lockout by Finnish-Swedish paper company Stora Enso here in the province of Nova Scotia has deprived 600 union members of their livelihoods. The lockout of a local branch of Communications, Energy, Paperworkers (CEP) began 26 January 2006, and by the end of March, negotiations to end the dispute have not occurred.

CEP Local 972 has been without a labour agreement at Stora's only Canadian paper mill since May 2004. Labour and management resolved all economic and other issues, except one: contracting-out policies. Stora Enso, the last paper producer to meet with the CEP in this round of negotiations, is seeking to break from the pattern labour agreement already established for eastern Canada on outsourcing policies.

All other paper companies operating in eastern Canada have agreed with CEP to status quo on existing memorandums and agreements that cover contract labour. Stora Enso wants more flexibility to use contractors, posing a real threat to permanent jobs.

The union held a manifestation on 18 March attended by 2,500 locked-out workers, their families and supporters. Criticism of Stora's action has been especially acute in Finland, where the company led a six-week lockout by the paper industry of 25,000 workers last year. In a message to locked-out workers in Nova Scotia, Finnish Paperiliitto President and ICEM Paper Sector Chairman Jouko Ahonen said, "Your struggle is our struggle, as last year our struggle was your struggle. We were not alone last summer and you are not--and will not be--alone in this dispute." The union also received strong support from Stora Enso's European Works Council.



Paperworkers march in Nova Scotia, 18 March

German Chemicals Company Cognis Out to Break Union in US

Cincinnati, USA Employer intransigence toward resolving a strike has meant members of United Steel Workers (USW) here have been on picket lines for over a year at a chemical plant. In February 2005, German chemicals company Cognis Corp. entered into a joint venture agreement with a Malaysian company for the oleochemicals portion of the plant, thus creating a new enterprise.

In bargaining at the plant, USW sought to extend the collective agreement to the new area, where about half of the plant's 300 workers are employed. Cognis refused to consider such a "successorship" agreement, preferring instead to operate the plant non-union. On 7 February 2005, USW members struck.

Cognis then began hiring replacement workers, placing neighbors of the urban plant at great environment risk. USW Local 14340 has also documented health and safety problems since the strike began. In bargaining since, in order to meet the company's flexibility programme, the union has offered significant work-rule concessions, much like it has since 2002 to keep the plant profitable, but Cognis declined, preferring a union-free operation.

That fact was borne out when, early this year, the company refused to consider a union request to end the strike and for a return to work of the striking steelworkers. The ICEM, together with affiliate IGBCE of Germany, intervened with corporate management in Europe, but leaders of the company are content to allow American managers to continue union-busting. The ICEM has issued an alert to affiliates in the chemicals sector, with affiliates being asked to take action against Cognis in their home countries.

Caspian Oil/Gas Organising... ***from Page 3***

company, with workers consent, had set in place 65-hour work weeks, which brought earnings per worker to US\$600-700 per month. In October, ahead of schedule, the company cut back to 40 hours per week, which reduced earnings in half. "This evoked workers' discontent," remembers Aliev.

But even worse, Azeri workers--equal in skills and experience to the Indian, Burmese, Filipino and Romanian workers--were earning up to 50% less, and had inferior medical benefits. On 16 November, a letter signed by 800 Azeri workers was sent to McDermott demanding the firm deal with 15 issues. But when that was ignored, workers on 22 November took strike action and contacted the OGWU. They stopped the strike after one day and gave McDermott a week to make changes.

But on 28 November, Aliev learned that BP and McDermott managers had gone directly to workers to discuss the issues without OGWU. He then informed managers they had created a situation ripe for further confrontation, and the next day workers downed tools again. At the same time, trade unions of the ICEM's Caspian Region Energy Project were

meeting in Baku, and European and regional trade unions used the union-building conference as a trumpet for Azeri workers' rights.

Within a day, McDermott and BP acquiesced to all demands, and awarded Azeri workers a 20% wage increase effective 1 December, and 12% effective 1 January 2006. The rush to form unions was then on and a very telling comment came from BP Azerbaijan President David Woodward, during a mid-December press conference: "This is their right and nobody can stop them from doing this. If they wish, we see the right of employees to take collective action."

Another development that will also spur Caspian union development came at the Congress of ICEM affiliate Russian Oil, Gas & Construction Workers (ROGWU) in Moscow later in December. OGWU and the Russian union signed a protocol agreement to begin joint union-building activities in the region in 2006.

The emergence of trade unions in the Caspian region among contract workers, and the inherent protections brought to workers, comes at a most opportune time as Azerbaijan ramps up to become a major energy player in today's world.

Launch of Women Project in Palestine... ***from Page 5***

employing over 200 workers. The facility opened in 1974 with just 20 workers. Workers are represented by the GUPM-CWP and benefit from good wages and conditions, including medical aid and a provident fund.

Most production stays in the local market, although 20% is to Algeria, Eastern Europe, Azerbaijan and Russia. Although exports experience few difficulties at the Israeli ports that must be used, the importation of raw materials is another matter. Delays of up to 12 months have been experienced in the clearance of raw materials by Israeli authorities. Consequently, the company must keep major stocks of raw materials on hand

despite the extra costs involved.

In discussions with the host union, ICEM resolved to deepen its relationship with GUPMCWP and in 2006 would initiate a program of joint work that would begin with the project to assist women activists. The union struggles to operate from tiny offices in Ramallah. Their previous offices, close to those of the PGFTU in Nablus, had been completely destroyed together with computers and other equipment, in rocket attacks by the Israeli military.

The ICEM is grateful to Norwegian affiliate NOPEF, which has agreed to fund the program.

NUM Holds Women Conference

Rosherville, South Africa The National Union of Mineworkers' (NUM) Third National Women's Conference was held here 16-18 February against the backdrop of South Africa's 50th Commemoration of the Women's March to Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956.

The theme of the conference, "Mobilise, Organise and Lead Against Chains of Domination, Exploitation and Oppression of Women," re-emphasized NUM's focus on developing women in positions of leadership, and empowering all women in South Africa.

The conference's aim was to mobilise more women into the union, and to assist women with mechanisms to build confidence and self-esteem. In 5 of 11 of NUM's regions, women are in major leadership roles in union structures.

In 2004, when the country's Mining Charter was adopted, women comprised 1.5% of workers in South African mines. Now that figure is at 6% and on the way to 10%. In comparison, more women are

employed in the energy sector.

The conference elected a national leadership team, put in place a workable plan of action, and developed a concise and practical blueprint that will be presented at NUM's National Congress in May.

The NUM's Women's Structure was formed in 1998.



NUM Women's Conference leadership, from left, Treasurer Joyce Gumbi; Deputy Secretary Patricia Letsike; Secretary Faith Letlala; Deputy Chairperson Nomasonto Magagula; and Chairperson Lydia Makhubela.

Work-Life Balance UI Zensen's Focus

Tokai, Japan Japanese ICEM affiliate UI Zensen launched a campaign entitled "Action 2006: Men and Women Equality" on 18-19 February, designed to foster better understanding on equality between men and women in the workplace. The action period of the campaign is to May 2006, and will focus on what local unions are doing to address the issue and to foster daily activities.

The emphasis is on women and men working together to achieve equality. UI Zensen, a general trade union of private sector workers, will campaign on the work/life balance with the slogan "Both Work and Life Are Very Important!" The campaign is a response to a newly-enacted law which obliges Japanese employers to submit plans to improve childcare for their employees and to organise forums to promote childcare leave.

UI Zensen has organised three workshops to date, and will include five more

regional sessions through the spring. The union is using a diagnostic survey for work-life balance that includes a checklist to define job satisfaction, as well as practical indicators for life fulfilment. This gives workers the ability to analyse immediately their situations, and to take necessary measures for change.



UI Zensen Gender Equality Bureau Officer Megumi Tokugi addresses a work-life balance session in Tokai Region, Japan.

March 8: Women's Day Activities

Argentina: FETERA, ICEM's energy union affiliate, is fighting for public policies for dignified employment from a gender perspective, a national plan to combat violence against women, sex education at all levels of schooling, decriminalization of abortion, and re-institution of the Women's National Council.

Australia: The Howard government's WorkChoices Act will affect women in adverse ways, claims an academic from Griffith University. The legislation's dismissal law and awards system adversely affects female-dominated industries; women will be more at risk to increased casualisation and reduced workplace protections; and they likely will have to increase work hours to maintain income.

Brazil: CNQ-CUT and its local unions demand decent minimum wage, actions to fight poverty and violence against women, legalisation to decriminalization abortion, and equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market.

Canada: 8 March marked the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. ICEM affiliate CEP used the day to reiterate its call for a strong safety net with programmes that benefit women and their families, such as the National Childcare Programme. Two-thirds of women with children under the age of three work outside the home, and the federal government is currently attempting to change an agreement it made only last year on child care agreements with provinces.

Central America: The ILO issued a report 8 March stating that women account for 42% of the workforce in Central American countries, a doubling over the past 30 years. Despite this, women typically face unequal treatment in the workplace and earn from 16 to 50% less than men. The report also states that many young girls are forced into sexual exploitation due to being trapped in a cycle of poverty.

Germany: 8 March took place against the background of elections to works councils. Works councils are all the more successful when women are involved. ICEM affiliate IGBCE's motto for 2006 is, "We Have Influence: Women for Successful Works Councils."

Nepal: Women are fighting against autocracy, as well as patriarchy, as evidenced by demonstrations and a mass meeting in Pokhara on 8 March. National labour centre GEFONT's theme was "For Trade Union Rights and Gender Equity, Decent Work, Sustainable Peace and full-fledged

Democracy!" The political coalition opposing the monarchy will work together on a women's agenda for the first time, and the common agenda includes: complete democracy, sustainable peace and human rights; 33% women's participation in all sectors, including political, state and civil society entities; equal property rights for both male and female; reproductive rights for women; and human rights protections and rehabilitation of conflict-affected women.

Nigeria: Women from NUPENG, ICEM's blue-collar oil workers' union affiliate, joined the Nigeria Labour Congress to celebrate, and issued a call for "Women in Decision Making."

Spain: National labour centre Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO) called for Equality Plans and actions against precarious labour, against discrimination, unemployment, temporary contracts, and women's double burden. Even as Spain's government introduced a wide-ranging Gender Equality bill the week before 8 March, a report from the National Institute of Statistics finds that men earn 40% more than women. The new legislation contains a workplace provision for up to two years of maternity leave, as well as other gender-equality provisions, which companies will have to include in collective bargaining agreements.

Turkey: Just prior to 8 March, EU Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimir Spidla, upon visiting Turkey, called for more to be done on workers' rights and women's rights. He said that in order for accession to occur, Turkey's informal economy, made up disproportionately of women, must be reduced. He did praise legislative progress affecting women's rights, but said discrimination, domestic violence, education and illiteracy must be addressed.

United Kingdom: At the TUC's Women's Conference in Eastbourne 8-10 March, union women attacked the country's Woman and Work Commission report for failing to recommend mandatory pay equity audits by private employers. Delegates lashed out at the Confederation of British Industries for vetoing any measure that would achieve a zero pay gap between women and men. "We have got one of the largest pay gaps in Europe and we should be at the forefront of the campaign, not lagging behind," stated T&G Union Equalities Officer Diana Holland. The TUC conference also heard about the fight for gender equality and labour rights from Iraqi and Kurdish trade union women.



GLOBAL

Responsibility ... Sustainability!

By Fred Higgs, ICEM General Secretary

In the near future, I will enter my fourth decade as a trade union official spanning a career from local shop steward to General Secretary of the ICEM. Over those 40 years, companies and trade unions have changed--sometimes changing beyond all recognition. However, the underlying philosophies of companies and unions haven't changed to anything to the same degree. Trade unions continue to seek to defend the material interests of their members, to fight injustice and to promote fairness and equity. Companies continue to seek to make profits, to grow and to have a long-term future. Sometimes these aims are mutually compatible; sometimes they lead to conflict and the need for dialogue and resolution.

From early in my life as a trade union official, I have worked in some of the most dangerous and dirty industries. They also happened to be in some of the most economically and socially important sectors. And through this, the environmental and developmental movements began and evolved to the level of sophistication, organisation and support they have today. We should all welcome that development.

There is now also a vocal and articulate movement demanding that companies accept their social, ethical and environmental obligations, and demanding it to get demonstrable and credible results. This has had a profound effect on the way that we monitor, assess, value, perceive and deal with companies. There has been a proliferation of initiatives designed to ensure companies develop, implement, and then monitor this ethical duty. The socially responsible investment movement has become a growth industry, judging alone from the great increase in the number of 'ethical initiatives' that are developing.

With this background, I found myself early in the year reflecting on the direction that public opinion is heading on corporate behaviour. More specifically, my thoughts turned to the role the ICEM is playing in light of these developments. Our communications have vastly increased, a new Website has the very latest postings, and in this issue of GlobalInfo we address some of the challenges and opportunities we face in meeting the expectations of our members, potential members, and the broader public.

As I look forward to celebrating my 40 years of service as a trade union official, it is my aim to ensure that the ICEM continues to be recognized as the representative at the global level supporting the fulfilment of needs and aspirations of workers around the world.

To do so, I am convinced there are a number of principles that are as important today as they have been in the past: Fundamentally, trade unions were established to deal with employers and that remains their prime role; Secondly, dealing with employers involves developing certain skills, in dialogue, by fighting, disagreeing or striking compromise with employers; Third, trade unions are not NGOs, we represent and are accountable to workers, and their major stake holding--jobs, and that security and sustainability is vested in principle number one above; Fourth, trade unions cannot be effective or credible if they demonstrate that they are not prepared to defend the indefensible; Lastly, we need to grind all these principles into a strategic and long-term perspective. That perspective would include the recognition that we seek always to keep the door open to dialogue with companies employing our members ... even in the face of serious differences and disputes.



Fred Higgs

Asbestos Ban Campaign Continues at ILO, Global Forums

In June 2005, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and all Global Union Federations launched a campaign for a world ban of asbestos at an ILO conference special event in Geneva.

Only a month before, the ILO's International Conference on Occupational Respiratory Diseases, held in Beijing, made a recommendation that

have not banned asbestos but either import or export it in varying degrees.

The ICFTU is urging trade unions and other bodies to establish their own asbestos ban policy and to report such a policy, since names of such organisations will be posted and publicised.

Already, the International Commission on Occupational Health, a grouping of physicians and nurses working in occupational health, has joined the campaign, as has the World Federation of Public Health Associations. And the International Society of Doctors for the Environment also has joined.

Adopting an asbestos ban resolution or policy is important for trade unions in all countries, since asbestos stocks still exist. It is in the interest of trade unions in all countries to support the ban on international trafficking of asbestos, to ensure that such products do not make their way into global markets. Many countries that have banned asbestos still continue to import or export the product, since effective transition to non-asbestos uses is a long-term process.

At the ILO Conference this year, employer and trade union representatives will be in Geneva to finish negotiating a new promotional instrument for occupational health and safety. To coincide with this activity, efforts will once again be made to circulate a special communiqué on the asbestos ban campaign.

There is a call for action at all levels to raise awareness to asbestos and its impacts. Whatever your union can do to coordinate activities with those planned on the international level would make these actions more effective. It is hoped the call for an asbestos ban is brought to the attention of as many international forums as possible.

ILO's 'SafeWork' project will be approached to help develop a very basic awareness raising process for trade union leaders about asbestos and its dangers.

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all parties should pursue a global ban and reduction in the use of asbestos.

In 1986, ILO Convention 162 was enacted, which is often called the Asbestos Convention. It advocates for organisational, technical and medical measures to protect workers against hazardous asbestos dust. Only 28 countries have ratified this convention.

The global unions' launch included the sending of letters to government, employer and trade union representatives of all countries attending the ILO Conference, requesting that they become involved in the ban asbestos campaign in some fashion. The content of the letters differed according to country groupings, based on countries that have already banned or expect to ban asbestos (some nations no longer import or export asbestos), countries that have not banned asbestos and where the use of asbestos has been documented, and countries that

British Labour Acts Against Asbestos on Jobsites

While asbestos is banned in the UK, the British Trades Union Congress

(TUC) figures fatal fibres could still be lurking in up to 1.5 million shops, factories and offices in the UK. The TUC has started a major new safety drive aimed at preventing asbestos exposure.

Since 2004, UK employers have been required by law to investigate and keep records on the levels of asbestos on their

properties. This includes carrying out regular inspections, and ensuring all workers know where the fibres are, and receive training on the risks they pose.

The TUC believes many employers are either unaware of their legal obligations or they ignore them.

The average UK jobsite receives a visit from a safety inspector, on average, once every 8 to 20 years. Negligent employers only are safe in the knowledge that they are

unlikely to get found out.

"All forms of asbestos are dangerous, no matter what some

employers might say," stated TUC Gen. Sec. Brendan Barber. "The cancers caused by the killer fibres can take years to develop, so someone who breathes in asbestos dust now may not become ill for another 25 years."

Asbestos-related diseases in the UK currently take the

lives of 4,000 people annually. Because it can take years to detect, the TUC estimates that in 10 years that figure will be 10,000 deaths yearly. The TUC wants safety reps in all workplaces, everywhere, to ensure that no worker's health is jeopardized by asbestos exposure. Be vigilant about the materials that are inside workplaces, and be vigilant that employers live up to their legal obligations on asbestos and asbestos exposure.

I Came Here to Work ...



Not to Die

Asbestos Ban Campaign... from Page 12

The World Federation of Public Health Associations has agreed to produce a simple PowerPoint display that can be circulated. The World Health Organisation's Occupational Health Collaborating Centres (if one is located in your country) are in a position to provide educational materials on asbestos-related diseases. In addition, contacting your local ILO or WHO representatives to request aid on

the health effects of asbestos or silica as part of the joint ILO-WHO project on the same might provide additional resources.

The ICFTU would like to hear from you on asbestos activities, because information will be incorporated in upcoming versions of its country profiles. Information should be forwarded to Lucien Royer at royer@tuac.org.

European REACH Headlines

Chemical Safety in 2005

Significant developments have occurred in the past year on chemical safety. The European Council's political agreement on a comprehensive new system aimed at ensuring greater safety in the manufacture and use of chemical substances was a major event. It established an integrated system for the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals (REACH).



EMCEF, the European Mine, Chemical, Energy Workers Federation, has been involved throughout in REACH's long path toward consensus.

REACH is intended to ensure that gaps in existing information on hazardous properties of some 30,000 chemicals are filled, and that necessary information on safe use of substances is transmitted all along the industrial supply chain, leading to reduced risks for workers, for consumers, and for the environment.

REACH effectively reverses the burden of proof, meaning industry, rather than public authorities, will have to assume greater responsibility for information and to take effective risk management measures. The European Parliament adopted its first reading of REACH on 17 November 2005. The formal Common Position of the Council should be approved under the Austrian Presidency in May 2006, leading to the second reading of the proposal by the European Parliament.

The new REACH regulation will replace 40 existing legal acts and create a single system for all chemical substances.

It introduces a new European Chemicals Agency to be established in Helsinki, Finland, which will manage the registration of substances. It will play an important role also in the evaluation and authorisation of substances.

REACH will require manufacturers and importers to gather comprehensive information on properties of their substances produced or imported in volumes over one tonne per year and to submit the necessary information, demonstrating their safe use, in a registration dossier to Helsinki. Failure to register will mean the substance cannot be manufactured in or imported to the EU market.

It is expected that the final decision on REACH will come to the European Parliament and Council in autumn 2006. The Commission expects entry into force of the Regulation for spring 2007. Thereafter, it will take about a year for the European Chemicals Agency to become operational. Accordingly, the operational requirements of REACH are expected to start in 2008.



Developments Globally, As Well

In addition to EU developments, there has also been activity at the international level in the field of chemical safety. Foremost is the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

This new strategy was approved by governments at the 9th Special Session of the Governing Council of the UN

Strategy Approach
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Sago: Remembering the US Coal Mine Disaster of 2006

The Sago Coal Mine disaster of 2 January in the US will be remembered in many ways. For some, it calls to mind family members, gathered in a church, becoming jubilant when told by managers of International Coal Group (ICG) the 13 trapped miners were alive and well. They learned later that 12 of the miners were dead.

For members of ICEM affiliate United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the tragedy recounts how emergency-response teams from nearby UMWA-staffed mines were first on the scene to assist at ICG's non-union mine.

They also recall the aftermath; many of Sago's 150 miners asking that UMWA's skilled investigatory team come in for the post-accident probe, their right under US mine-safety rules, only to have ICG's security guards block the UMWA at the mine's plant gates. They will know that it took UMWA's legal department to assist in gaining a US federal court injunction granting the Sago miners' request.

For others, the Sago mine explosion in the state of West Virginia may bring to

mind the origins of start-up mining firm ICG. A company of billionaire US investor Wilbur Ross, ICG is a collection of 21 non-union coal mines in America, most bought during bankruptcy proceedings in which Ross gained tax deferrals and was allowed to cancel UMWA collective agreements. (Some 3,000 UMWA members lost job security, bargaining rights and retiree health care benefits this way.)

Some might know that soaring energy demand and high coal prices have pressed marginal and unsafe mines the world over into service, creating vast wealth for profiteers like Wilbur Ross.

And others will read US press reports about Sago. They will see an injury rate three times higher than the US mining average and the fact that Sago was cited for 208 safety violations in 2005, 96 of them "significant and substantial," including 12 roof collapses. We must memorialise the tragic loss of lives at Sago and other jobsites this 28 April, Workers' Memorial Day, but we also must contemplate the reasons why.

Strategy Approach to Chemical Safety... ***from Page 14***

Environment Programme's (UNEP) Global Ministerial Environment Forum, Dubai and Nairobi on 7 February 2006.

SAICM is a global initiative aimed at making chemicals safer for humans and the planet, and includes assessments of chemicals, harmonized labelling, and tackling the difficult area of stockpiled or obsolete chemicals. It also seeks to set up national centres--specifically in developing countries--to train staff in chemical safety handling, including dealing with spills and accidents. The initiative contained in the Dubai Declaration and agreed to by over 100 environment and health ministers is expected to be an important contribution to meeting the safe chemicals commitment made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. It

is among the first concrete outcomes of the 2005 World Summit held in New York in September attended by heads of state.

SAICM is a voluntary agreement and comes at a time global chemical production is estimated to climb by as much as 80% over the next 15 years. Between 70,000 and 100,000 chemicals may already be on the market, with an estimated 1,500 new ones each year.

Governments prior to the 9th Special Session of the UNEP governing forum, also gave support to a multi-million-dollar fund called the 'Quick Start' Programme aimed at giving financial support to national action plans, targeted for the least developed countries and small-island states.

Engage the Fight against HIV/AIDS

Over 40 million people are living with HIV and AIDS--and most of them are workers. In 2005, 3.1 million people died from AIDS, 500,000 of them children, and nearly five million became newly infected. Young people, especially young women, account for half of all new infections.



The impact of this epidemic is deeply felt in the world of work. Discrimination in the workplace threatens people's rights and jobs. AIDS reduces skills and productivity. Household incomes are decimated as sickness and death affect people's ability to earn a livelihood. AIDS exacerbates poverty and inequality, increasing the burden on the most vulnerable people in society: women, children and the poor.

The workplace has vast potential for limiting this. Workplace programmes that protect rights, support prevention, and provide access to care and treatment can reduce the spread of the virus and help people manage the impact.

Trade Union Involvement a Necessity

For the ICEM, engaging in the fight against HIV/AIDS is not an option but a necessity. For some time, the ICEM has supported its affiliates in their awareness raising campaigns and, equally important, in anti-discrimination, anti-victimisation drives that are included in collective bargaining agreements. A number of

affiliates have formal agreements with major mining companies for pro-active education and awareness campaigns.

In the past year, the ICEM has intensified work on HIV/AIDS. Since January 2005, a Global HIV/AIDS Coordinator organises this work from Geneva. A Regional Coordinator based in Johannesburg manages our Africa project. Training courses for national coordinators from 12 sub-Saharan countries have been organised, and in a number of countries, coordinating committees of all affiliates carry the fight against HIV/AIDS. A manual on all aspects of HIV/AIDS in collective bargaining has been published. In 2006, the programme will expand to selected Asian and Latin American countries.

In 2005, the ICEM has also put its information policy on HIV/AIDS in place. Our Website, www.icem.org, incorporates a site on HIV/AIDS, which gives information and practical tools for affiliated unions, such as power point presentations and links to materials on other websites. We have published a leaflet on HIV/AIDS in English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Swedish and Japanese, and a monthly e-bulletin on HIV/AIDS is also posted on the ICEM Website.

Pilot Medical Clinics

The ICEM has identified areas where it can make a real contribution. The concept of pilot projects in cooperation with major mining companies for health clinics, providing functioning medical services to their workers and immediate dependents. These clinics can be used to expand their services to the broader community in the area and provide voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), as well as antiretroviral treatment (ART). We work with our affiliates, the mining companies and all of civil society to build public/private partnerships with the objective to expand, to accelerate access to VCT and ART. The projects are to be implemented in line with the national HIV/AIDS policy

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28 April: Day of Action On Health and Safety

April 28 is universal Workers' Memorial Day, and this year's theme is Union Workplaces-Safer Workplaces.

Each year, some 2.2 million people die from work-related causes, and more than 1.2 million are injured on the job. Of those deaths, 350,000 occur as a result of workplace accidents; 400,000 happen because of exposure to chemicals; and chemical exposure accounts for nearly a quarter of the 160 million cases of occupational sickness recorded worldwide.

And each year, 1,500 new chemicals come on the market and together with over 100,000 different chemicals in use each day, the potential hazards multiply each year.

Trade unions are strongly encouraged to commemorate the day with activities that call attention to workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses. Such actions could include the global "Ban Asbestos" campaign (page 12); workplace awareness and education on HIV/AIDS; or the 70 different ILO Conventions and Recommendations that cover occupational health and safety.

These include, predominantly, Convention 155, in which general workplace health and safety is spelled out.

Others are Convention 162, the Asbestos at Work Convention; Convention 176, on safety and health in Mining; Convention 148, the Work Environment Convention; Convention 170, on Chemicals; Convention 175, the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention; Convention 119, the adequate protections around machinery convention; and Convention 136, the Benzene Convention.

A useful exercise would be to see which of these Conventions your country has not ratified, and then build a national campaign toward government ratification.

Workers' Memorial Day activities can include a wide range of things from rallies, to sector-specific issues, to education and lobbying on HIV/AIDS and national ratifications of ILO Conventions on safety and health.

Statistics will always miscount the real number of people killed or made sick at work each year, since reporting and data is non-existent in many countries. But what counts is that direct action can work to shape any specific item inside occupational safety and health. That means a safer workplace, and a healthier environment.

The Fight against HIV/AIDS... from Page 16

and the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work.

The strength of such co-investment projects lies in the added value, which different partners can deliver. Companies make existing medical facilities and medical staff available. They also bring managerial expertise and accounting skills. The union has initiated the idea because it represents workers' interests, and the collective agreements provide the safeguards against discrimination and victimisation.

Union officials and shop stewards are

persons who have the confidence of workers. Advocacy by such peers leads to increased readiness to go for VCT. And having the ART provision is a highly useful incentive.

The ICEM is negotiating for additional resources that are required for these pilot mining projects. The ICEM, through cooperation with several partners, is in a unique position to have a real and sustainable impact on the lives of people in rural mining areas.

China's Coal Mines: ICEM's Safety Project Gets Focus

The ICEM has no affiliates in China, but it has a very important interest there: China has the unenviable reputation as the country with the worst record on coal mine safety in the world. Moreover, the dominant mining companies employing workers affiliated to the ICEM are increasingly investing and operating in China.

This is why the ICEM, together with the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) and the ILO, have agreed to work together to help improve mine safety in China.

The initiative dates back to 2003 when the scale of the problem of Chinese mine safety first became clear. ICEM visits brought receptive openings from Chinese authorities on the depth of the problem, and it was evident an urgent need existed for advice and assistance to those responsible for mine safety. It was also clear that such an initiative with the potential to have a profound and positive effect on Chinese mining, needed the full support from the major mining houses, and it needed a clear strategy and programme of activities.

The ICEM has developed a relationship with the ICMM through involvement in the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development initiative. The ICEM approached the ICMM in 2004, and proposed a joint fact-finding visit to China to better understand the scope of the problem and to gauge official Chinese response. Contact with the All China Federation of Trade Unions and its affiliated Energy & Chemical Workers' Union, the Chinese State Administration for Workplace Safety, the China Enterprise Confederation, the China National Coal Association, and ILO's Beijing office. All parties agreed that the meeting and the follow-up coordination would have the fullest possible participation of the ILO.

At a first formal meeting in Beijing in December 2004, two days of discussions were aimed at seeking a way forward.

After some difficult negotiations, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by all involved.

In December 2005, the ICEM, ICMM and ILO met again with the Chinese representatives in Beijing at a meeting that also included visits to two mines in Shandong province. One of the mines was the Jining No. 3 mine, part of the Yankuang Group Co. Ltd, a large Chinese industrial conglomerate including chemi-



PHOTONEWS

icals and other industries across Australasia.

The Chinese welcomed the possibility of appropriate technical cooperation and acknowledged the benefits of the tripartite approach. The participants agreed to explore the feasibility of developing and implementing technical aspects of a safety and health plan for Chinese mines, including but not limited to:

- Identifying the principal mine safety issues;
- Capacity building in risk assessment and risk management techniques and practices;
- Capacity building in gas and dust management;
- Developing and implementing a safety culture throughout Chinese mining;
- Training workplace safety representatives; and
- Safety equipment and technology.

**See Mine Safety Project in China
Pages 19**

Honest Chinese Assessments Can Spur Safety Culture Changes

Chinese officials have taken a remarkably open and earnest view on safety inside coal mines: they recognise they're death traps, and must be improved. That's why the Chinese, at nearly all levels, have opened a door to global trade unions and social partners to bring technology and methodology into the safety culture of Chinese mining.

Statistics can always be misleading, but many times words and actions will not be. In China, with industrial growth driving coal output to double-digit increases yearly, small-scale mining has provided quick riches for a few. It also provides unsafe, and oftentimes unlicensed, workplaces that kill people nearly every single day of the year. Despite the official yearly death toll decreasing, non-inclusive of the thousands each year in small-scale and artesian mines whose deaths go unreported, the number of coal mine accidents occurring in large-scale mines, killing ten or more miners, jumped nearly 400% between 2004 and 2005.

Chinese authorities do not hide the fact that mine safety deficiencies exist. And they admit that 60% of the mines that were officially shut in 2005 for safety or licensing reasons still operate today.

Chinese Mining Deaths

	<i>Coal Mine Accidents</i>	<i>Deaths</i>
2003	4,143	6,434
2004	3,639	6,026
2005	3,341	5,986

Source: SAWS

Actions sometimes speak volumes: the government this year has blocked individual investments by Chinese officials into coal mine enterprises. The total amount halted is surprising: nearly US\$100 million. The government says 4,568 Chinese officials have stakes in mine ventures.

China's State Administration for Workplace Safety (SAWS) said it would mandate provinces to reduce the death rate by 3.5% in 2006. That does not seem like much, but considering the depth and complexity of Chinese mining, it is a worthy target. The ICEM and its affiliates, together with global social partners, stand ready to assist the Chinese people to reduce even more the epidemic death rate plaguing the nation's mining industry.

Mine Safety Project in China... ***from Page 18***

The programme will take on technical seminars and workshops, visits by relevant experts and officials, cooperative projects, including pilot projects, and, most significantly, training. It was agreed to embark on two concrete activities within six months, and to develop and implement them on the basis of mutual agreement between the parties.

At the end of the week-long visit in December 2005, a proposed course of action was supported by all Chinese representatives present. A large technical workshop, for the primary purpose of setting a programme of activities aimed at

providing effective assistance in Chinese coal mining, will commence.

The project will require funding. The ILO has indicated that it will seek potential donors, and the ICEM will contact potential donors. Importantly, the ICEM will look to its mining affiliates to release their safety specialists to assist in the programme of activities. However, ICEM understands that affiliates may not be able financially to support this work, thus it will seek donor support to cover travel and other costs for up to four or five safety specialists. Hopefully, unions will cover the costs of salaries of their experts for the time they are involved in the programme.

WHY ?

**Workers' Memorial Day
28 April 2006**

*Fight
for
Safe Jobs*

