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WORKERS' UNIONS

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WORKERS' ADVOCATE FRED HIGGS BIDS FAREWELL

ICEM: 'Well Placed to Carry on as a Global Union'

For Fred Higgs, the biggest satisfaction that he carries into retirement is the knowledge that he has fulfilled a mandate placed on the ICEM at the Durban Congress in 1999; the Global Union Federation (GUF) is performing far more like an international trade union than merely a service organisation.

Higgs, who turns 60 in December this year, announced in May that he would retire as ICEM General Secretary at year end. That decision was made on health concerns - he has, amongst other things, been diagnosed with pleural plaques of the lungs, a condition brought about by industrial exposure to asbestos years ago while working in a UK battery factory.

Doctors have advised that international travel, long hours, and the job stress in heading a Global Union Federation would only aggravate the condition.

"I feel very comfortable with the ICEM. It is well placed to carry on as a global trade union," he said. "Over the past seven years, we have made a change of direction, a change that better allows us to take up the relevant issues of workers and our affiliates."

A number of examples surface in an interview with Higgs, who brought 33 years of UK trade union activism to the ICEM when elected at that Durban Congress in 1999. Negotiation of Global Agreements, follow-up on specific aspects to those agreements, HIV/AIDS work in support of affiliates already doing that work, joint partnerships with other GUFs, tackling the complexities of contract and agency labour, all are areas in which work on the global level meets the relevant issues facing workers and their national unions.

For example, the common recognition that trade unions have the most credible structures in which to influence behaviour on a major work-life issue in ICEM sectors, HIV/AIDS, and then having the means to negotiate anti-discrimination language inside Global Agreements, can be precedent setting. Further, moving those negotiating partners into specific projects direct-



Fred Higgs, Turkey, 2005

ly - and positively - affecting workers is evolutionary.

The same can be said for Higgs' desire to enter dialogue with international industry associations. He foresees the day when Global Agreements will be signed with such groups. He cites specific ICEM work with the mining industry's ICMM on child labour, and the China Mine Safety programme with the ILO and ICMM as advances in that evolution.

Such a direction is inevitable, Higgs

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Manfred Warda to Assume General Secretary Duties of ICEM



The ICEM's Presidium, meeting on 5 October, appointed Manfred Warda as Acting General Secretary to fill the term of Fred Higgs.

Warda, currently Head of the International Department for the German trade union IGBCE, has vast international experience, both with the German miners' union and with IGBCE.

Warda, 59, will assume the duties of General Secretary on 1 January 2007. He will serve until the ICEM's Fourth Congress in Bangkok next year, at which time elections will be held.

"It is an honour and privilege to lead the ICEM and its family of trade unions as we continue to unite globally for workers' interests," said Warda.

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Focus on Iraqi Trade Unions

A seminar organised by the ICEM and Nordic oil workers' union NOPEF in Amman, Jordan, last spring illuminated the difficulties of trade union organising inside Iraq's occupied state.

The ICEM tackled that complex issue, together with Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Norwegian, and American trade unionists in Jordan. "The easy way is to sit back and wait," said NOPEF's Lars Myhre, ICEM's Energy Sector Chairman. "We do not have that luxury. As workers we need peace and stability. And in Iraq, building strong and independent unions is essential for peace and stability."

The three-day seminar, attended by Iraqi oil, gas, electric, and petrochemical union leaders, was hosted by ICEM's two Jordanian affiliates, the General Trade Union of Workers in Mining and Metal Industries, and the General Union of Petrol and Chemical Workers. The United Steelworkers, ICEM's US-based affiliate, and trade unionists from Kuwaiti oil and petrochemical companies also attended.

The over-riding theme throughout the seminar was Decree 8750, a union crippling measure passed in August 2005 by Iraq's interim government. The conference's participants also took a firm stand against privatisation of any of Iraq's energy assets.



Some of the Iraqi unionists at the Amman conference, where ICEM committed to help build strong unions in Iraq's energy sector.

Decree 8750 paralyses union development in Iraq because it grants the state control over all union finances. A strong trade union movement, all participants agreed, would go far in helping Iraq avoid the ethnic and sectarian disputes that is plunging the country into civil war.

Decree 8750 is blatant interference in trade union activities, hindering development. The conference was briefed on the ILO complaints against this unjust edict, which have been brought by the ICFTU and the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions. The conference emphasized the importance of the campaign to eliminate Decree 8750.

The conference also focused on a major industrial situation occurring last spring; the occupation and partial destruction by US forces of the Mousseyba power station in which workers were detained and common human rights were ignored.



'Wellhead to Wheel' Project Boosted

The alliance between the ICEM and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) that covers oil and gas workers worldwide, got a boost at the ITF's Congress in August. Meeting then in Durban, South Africa, ITF colleagues gave rousing support to the ICEM/ITF Global Oil and Gas Industry Trade Union Alliance.

A longstanding relationship has existed between the two GUFs that has centered on the offshore sector. This official launch now means that onshore work, from extraction and refining to distribution, will get equal attention.

From "Wellhead to the Wheel," the motto adopted for the programme, will now see all workers uniting in the oil and gas sectors - from exploration, refining, to manufacture, ICEM's traditional sectors, through to distribution, including sea, road, rail, and pipeline, ITF's areas.

A Call for Stability in Nigeria

The voice of ICEM's two Nigerian oil workers' unions, NUPENG and PENGASSAN, has been the one of reason and rationality in the cycle of violence and corruption plaguing the nation's energy industry. Their repeated calls for a safe work environment and integrity-filled measures governing the nation's oil and gas sectors are only too logical.

In September, weeks after PENGASSAN comrade Nelson Ujeya was kidnapped and then killed by troops as he was about to be released, the two unions staged a two-day warning strike. The strike served notice that the unions, acting as NUPENGASSAN, needed to be at the highest table in order for peace and full production to take hold in the Niger Delta oil patch.

The outcome of the strike was elevated dialogue, but as PENGASSAN President Peter Esele, states, "We are at a crossroads. We think we are in the right direction, but we must be certain the government and companies are completely transparent" in policies and development monies.

The unions have issued past mandates, only to see after some level of commitment, conditions deteriorate again. Now, following a wave of 2006 kidnappings, including that of Comrade Ujeya, a Shell employee, grabbed while in the company of Bayelsa state officials inspecting community development sites, Nigeria is at a watershed point. But will government and industry heed the call of workers' representatives who, above all, stand as the voice of social responsibility for the Nigerian people?

That social call manifests itself in simple principles: quit abusing expatriate quotas and begin training and job creating that will lessen the violence and place Nigerian youth in relevant careers; quit undervaluing Nigeria's energy assets, and selling them to unsavoury bidders; root out the vested and corrupt interests in governmental agencies, and grant autonomy and full authority to the Department of Petroleum Resources.

Other demands are equally important: upgrade and modernise the country's refineries, so Nigeria - one of the world's

biggest crude exporters - is not a net importer of refined petroleum products; enforce the laws on the environment, so the Delta's indigenous are not mired in poverty and social instability; insist that oil and gas companies operating in Nigeria apply the same efforts and resources in securing a safe work environment for Nigerian staff as they do for foreign nationals; and stop the cycle of violence by not answering force with force, but by building a social model that creates opportunities for all.

Meeting these demands will create a permanent solution in the Niger Delta that will restore security and the very fabric of sound economic life.

The ICEM recognises that the combined voice of NUPENGASSAN has been one of reason and soundness, one that will move Nigeria to openness and a corrupt-free and unencumbered democracy. The collective voice has stood for education, skills training, and social development initiatives that are transparent, initiatives that Nelson Ujeya himself was employed to monitor.

Now is the time in Nigeria to fulfil the voice of the oil workers' trade unions.



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Oil Bunkering: Social conditions in the Niger Delta bring crime and violence.

Remembering Belgium's Worst Mining Disaster

On the morning of 8 August 1956, 262 coal miners at Bois du Cazier in the Belgian town of Marcinelle died in a horrendous fire 975 metres inside mine shafts. The gruesome circumstances, and the men themselves who perished in the inferno, will forever be remembered in Belgian history.

Those memories, and the awareness of mining as one of the world's most dangerous occupation, were marked in a series of events in July and August in the Wallonian community adjacent to Charleroi. The events included a solemn commemoration attended by 3,000 that saw the unveiling of a bronze sculpture commissioned by the Italian trade union institute, Patronato INCA-CGIL.



Camille Detraux/Raymond Paquay; Musée de la Photographie à Charleroi

Of the 262 who died, 136 were Italian immigrants. They came to Belgium ten years before, following World War II, as a source of cheap labour. Ninety-five others were Belgians; eight were Polish; six were Greek; five were Germans, who worked the mine as POWs in 1945-46 and then stayed on; three were Hungarians; three Algerians, and victims also included French, Dutch, Russian, Ukrainian, and British nationals.

The deadly day of 8 August 1956 at Bois du Cazier stands as the day on which the worst industrial accident in the history of Belgium occurred.

The equipment of the mine was antiquated and an elevator, fully loaded with coal wagons, was on its way up. However



Belgian Artist Depicts Mining Hardships I

Calisto Peretti is a renowned Belgian artist today who knows a thing or two about mining. Not only was his father - an Italian immigrant to Belgium in the early 1930s - a miner, but Peretti himself worked in Belgium's Wallonian coal mines in the 1950s while working in public relations for a mining company.

That choice was his. He sought not only to experience the working hardships of a miner, but also to sketch the unsafe conditions that miners had to endure inside mine shafts. He worked for several years for mining companies, and he has since written several books about the industry. He has also been a vocal advocate for better working conditions and safety for miners.

Thus it was no surprise when Belgium's national postal service, in commissioning artwork for a commemorative stamp marking the 50th anniversary of the tragedy in Marcinelle, turned to Peretti. That stamp became available to the public in August, shortly after the tragedy, in which 136 of the 262 miners who died were Italian immigrants.

The stamp is actually derived from a sketch he did inside the Charbonnage de Tertre in 1957. In all, Peretti has created hundreds of sketches and posters for mining companies operating in Belgium. "It was always after an accident that the bosses would commission a poster," said the 69-year-old resident of Horrues, in southern Belgium, who studied and taught art at the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Mons (Academy of Art).

Interestingly, the director at the Bois du Cazier museum sought to reject his art for the stamp. "He thought it was too dark," said Peretti. As he flips through the hundreds of sketches he did underground in the 1950s, he talks of miners' lives. "They were always having to meet in secret just to talk about working conditions."

It is clear in those black-and-white etchings that his art does indeed reflect life.

the wagons, through a mechanical failure, became unfastened. They clipped high-voltage electrical cables, oil lines, and compressed air pipes on the way up. The result was instant igniting of gas, creating a furnace-like firestorm that rushed through the shaft and adjoining mine tunnels.

A few miners managed to escape, but of Bois du Cazier's 725 workers, the 262 victims met horrid deaths caused either directly by the inferno, trapped and dismembered by crumbling supports, or poisoned by gas and smoke. It took a full two weeks for rescue teams to reach the dead miners.

An Italian rescuer, after being the first to surface, tragically said, "Tutti Cadaveri," or "all corpses."

The catastrophe not only exposed the hazards of decrepit mining equipment in use at the time, but the fact that immigrants - primarily Italian - were labouring in Belgium's coal mines. One of the commemorative events from last summer reflected that. Of the 3,000 that attended the event and sculpture unveiling by Antonio Nocera at the site, now a mining museum, the majority were descendants and friends of the 136 Italians who perished.



Camille Detraux/Raymond Paquay; Musée de la Photographie à Charleroi

The Italian rescuer's first words became the title of a book this year, reflecting the disaster's legal aftermath. *Tutti Cadaveri: The Trial of the Catastrophe at the Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle* is authored by ICEM Vice President and Belgian FGTB Federal Secretary Paul Lootens, with historians Marie-Louise De Roeck and Julie Urbain.

The book, published by Aden Publishers (edition-saden@skynet.be), reveals the story on how management avoided guilt over the safety shortcomings, while the victims' families pressed for the truth. Only the mine's works director was convicted.

Bois du Cazier was closed for a year following the tragedy. It reopened, but closed for good in 1967. Coal mining across Europe, including Belgium, began declining, and over the next two decades, colliery after colliery closed. The last one to close in Belgium was in the province of Limburg. It closed in 1992.

But the memory of Bois du Cazier and the deadly event there on 8 August 1956 shall forever mark the country's mining industry.



Commemorative Stamp

two about the working life of a coal miner. Not
Os - a miner, but Peretti himself spent three years
relations.

ships of his father, who died of mine-related dis-
e shafts. His work was to produce safety posters

Commemorative stamp of the 1956 Bois du Cazier mine
the 50-year anniversary of Belgium's worst mine

Peretti created over 100 safety
call and ask me to do some-
Académie des Beaux-Arts de

ught it was too sad," laughs
es, including trade unionists



Calisto

News of Affiliates

Mauritius: CMCTEU Marches for Bread, Preservation of Social System

Port Louis, Mauritius One of ICEM's newest affiliates, the Chemical, Manufacturing & Connected Trades Employees' Union (CMCTEU) of Mauritius is in the forefront of preserving valuable social programmes for school-age children of the Indian Ocean island-nation. In August 2006, hundreds of union members marched with other trade unions affiliated to the two national labour centres in Mauritius to preserve a primary school feeding system.



In a budget move, the government proposed elimination of the programme, which amounts to the distribution of free bread to children in primary schools. But the public pressure forced the government to rescind its unilateral bread cut. Instead, acting on a recommendation from the Government Teachers' Union, the policy-makers sent a survey to parents asking whether they want the programme to continue.

The CMCTEU is adamant that no child is penalised in the wake of budget cuts. The union will again be a major force in another march, on 4 November 2006, when emphasis will be placed on issues of gender, women workers, and children. CMCTEU's focus, and the

aim of November's march and assembly will be to maintain the government-paid fee for school examinations; reinstate the Tripartite Committee overseeing salary compensation, and particularly removing the tax on lump sum payments; and maintaining the social welfare system of Mauritius.

EPS Trade Union Celebrates Serbia's Sports Games

Nova Varo, Serbia The pomp and splendour that belongs to the EPS Trade Union of Serbia's Sports Games was on full display in June in this mountainous city, as well as in Budva, Montenegro, on the Adriatic coast. The games are an annual event for workers of the 43,000-member union.

They represent the unity and cohesiveness that the union tries to bring to workers of the national power company, spread across several sectors from mining to electric generation to distribution. They are a social event in which workers and their families relax, mingle, and cheerfully compete in some dozen sports, from football, basketball, volleyball, to table games. The games are recognised in the communities in which they are played with Olympic-style opening and closing ceremonies.



"The sports games by our union are an important social aspect that brings workers from the many divisions of EPS together," said the union's President, Miroslav Velickovic. "The camaraderie and solidarity of these games in terms of positive morale for workers can never be underestimated."

The 2006 version was the 33rd annual Sports Games. It started in 1971 in northern Serbia at Palic Lake, with 350 trade unionists participating, split into seven teams.

The only interruption to the games occurred during the fierce civil strife of the 1990s.

Namibian Miners' Win Rights for Gem-Polishing Contract Workers

Windhoek, Namibia The Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) won an important victory for fixed-term contract workers at a diamond-cutting and polishing factory here. In late August, the union successfully completed negotiations with Israel-based Lev Leviev Diamonds LLD, making 356 contract workers permanent employees with full rights and benefits.

The success came as a result of 125 workers striking on 27 July, after Namibian managers of Lev Leviev demanded that the plant's 450 workers again sign individual, 12-month restrictive contracts. The strikers effectively shut down the factory, and then marched to the offices of the MUN inquiring about representation.

The company began operating here in 2004 and this was the third time that fixed-term contracts had been forced on workers.

MUN took up the contract workers' cause, and General Secretary Joseph Hengari convinced managers to begin negotiations with his union. He said the fixed-term contracts failed on all counts of basic workers' rights in Namibia, including negligence of work on Sundays and holidays, as well as disqualifying workers' from earning a basic salary unless they reached production quotas.

Through Hengari's guidance, MUN won the right of representation, and full-time, permanent status for the 346. Another 56 diamond workers were classified as trainees, but will progress to permanent employment in a short period.



NOPEF, Norsk Kjemisk Becomes Industri Energi of Norway

Oslo, Norway On 4 September, two ICEM affiliates merged in Norway, creating a stronger, deeper trade union in the energy and chemicals sectors. The merger between oil, gas, and petrochemicals union NOPEF and chemicals union Norsk Kjemisk to form Industri Energi means that the union's workers will handle 80% of Norway's total foreign export earnings.

NOPEF President Leif Sande was elected Industri Energi's first president, while Liv Undheim, former Deputy President of Norsk Kjemisk, won election as Vice President. Olav Stoylen, the Norsk Kjemisk President, took a well-deserved retirement at the merger Congress after a long and successful career leading the chemicals union.



The merged union has a six-person leadership team, including two elected officers from NOPEF and two from Norsk Kjemisk. They include, Health, Safety and Environment: Jon Arne Mo; Organisation: Torbjørn Teigland; Collective Bargaining: Terje Valskaar; and Industry and Trade Union Policy: Frode Alvheim.

Industri Energi, now with a combined membership of 45,000 members, will have its headquarters in Oslo, and will maintain a very significant office and presence in Stavanger.

"Industri Energi will always stand strong for the labour movement's global commitment," said Sande. "Trade unionists all around the world should know that in Norway, they will find a trade union of industry and energy staff that will support workers' fights internationally, and one that will fight for workers' rights everywhere."

Palestinian, Jordanian Women Meet

Ammann, Jordan The ICEM ran a joint course with the General Union of Petroleum, Mining & Chemicals Workers of Palestine here, 10-12 June, in which 23 Palestinian and Jordanian women took part.

Backed by support from NOPEF, Norway, the course focused on women's health, collective bargaining, and trade union democracy. Women of the ICEM's two Jordanian affiliates, the General Union of Petrol & Chemical Workers' Union and the General Trade Union of Workers in Mining & Metal Industries, also attended.

NOPEF's Turid Øygaard told about women's rights in Norway. She said even though Norway has made much progress on equality, men do still have many privileges there in Norway. But men's attitudes have changed, with more and more fathers at home raising children, thanks to the government's social policies.

Over all, health is one more reflection of gender inequalities. And nowhere is this more evident than in Palestine, where poverty and unemployment are the greatest causes of poor health.

One general indicator to describe gender differences in health is that men are the norm and women are invisible. This is one indication of job segregation. Standards are developed with men in



mind. Safety equipment and tools are based on men's needs, and women often have accidents while using them.

Stress disorders are greater among women, including musculoskeletal disorders. Men develop deafness more frequently as a result of working in generally louder environments. Men suffer more injuries and accidents at work. Women are more likely to report work-related illness than men.

Any real solution to the AIDS pandemic will only come from empowering women, the conference was told.

Other workshops included union-building work and collective bargaining.

In groups, the women decided their priorities for negotiations. The three groups cited their top priorities: Group 1, job security, respect on the job, health insurance, controlling working hours; Group 2, health insurance, job security, safety and health, equal pay. Group 3, respect on the job, more money, controlling working hours, job security.

In the analysis, ICEM's Women's Officer, conference coordinator Carol Bruce, and Turid Øygaard told the Middle Eastern women that in the US and Norway, women's priorities at the table would have been more money. Later in June, conference attendee Laila Shriem of Palestine wrote: "I have been very busy in the union and the Jenin municipality working on the many things I learned in Jordan about working women's rights and gender issues."

ICEM, JAF Present AP Workshops



Work-life balance, Asia pharmaceuticals, and maternity dominated an ICEM women's workshop for in Bangkok. The workshop was supported by ICEM-JAF and 22 trade unionists attended from six countries.

Fred Higgs Bids Farewell *from page 3*

says, using the fact that of ICEM's 20 million declared members, "a relative small percentage is employed by the major multinationals in any given sector.

"The vast majority are employed by national companies, state-owned enterprises, smaller companies, all which have memberships in trade associations," he said. "GUFs are the natural partners with them to implement exact and explicit social responsibility standards."

That overall thread is also found in contract and agency labour and work with inter-governmental agencies, like the ILO and global financial institutions, in meeting the crucial need to achieve recognised standards. Higgs advocates continuing work with NGOs and others, but warns, "The focus must be precise, with meaningful results that make a difference, and we should not engage in areas where others can do better, simply through resources."

Higgs' right to offer such concise advice has been honed by two decades of global union work, dating to his years at Transport & General Workers' Union (TGWU), where he represented the UK union in ICEF and EMCEF work. The 1980s and 90s also saw him having hands-on experiences in European Commission work on chemicals, North Sea oil negotiations with the super-majors, and in UK's domestic chemicals and rubber policy-making process, which then was the dawning of global markets in those sectors in Britain.

The mandate from the Durban Congress was engagement to achieve Global Agreements. Higgs covered that with MNCs in multiple sectors, and then was drafted to

***Fred Higgs,
CUT rally,
Colombia,
2004***



re-draft the founding principles of the UN's Global Compact. The key to all gains on behalf of workers and people, he maintains: "You've got to have legitimate channels to the decision-makers."

The fundamental role of trade unions, he says, is to deal with employers. "There is only one prerequisite - being recognised as a legitimate bargaining partner, and that is as important at the global level as it is on the shop-floor level."

As Higgs' 40-year trade union career, from TGWU shop steward at Chloride Battery to General Secretary of a GUF covering the world's richest resources, ends, there is little question that he is delivering sage advice. And it is coming from a man who has fought the bosses, rallied the workers, and used the power of both to strike accords that bettered multitudes of workers.

"The ICEM has well-intentioned leadership to carry forward the work."



Kofi Annan and Fred Higgs, 2004

Manfred Warda to Assume GS Duties *from page 3*

He is a 43-year member of IGBCE and before that, Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau und Energie (IGBE), the Mineworkers' Union of Germany, which merged with IG Chemie in 1997 to form IGBCE. He got his start in industrial work in 1963 at the petro-trading company, Aral AG, in his home city of Bochum, Northrhine Westphalia. His father was a mineworker of the industrial Ruhr region.

He was a student of history, social science and English at Bochum University. In 1971, he began his career working inside IGBE on a project. He served as an assistant to a member of parliament in Northrhine Westphalia state, and became an assistant in the IGBE president's office in 1985.

Two years later, he became head of that office, before becoming head of the union's International Department from 1990 to 1997. He has served in that position as well following the 1997 merger, creating IGBCE.

ICEM Develops Four-Year Work Plan for Rubber Industries

The ICEM's Third World Conference for the Rubber Industries was held in Istanbul last spring. It was attended by over 100 delegates from affiliates in 14 countries. They adopted a four-year action plan setting out exact guidelines for international trade union action at both national and international levels.

The conference also moved on two special resolutions; one denouncing US-based Goodyear Tire & Rubber Industries' retrenchments across the world, and expressing support to workers made redundant; the other a call to Goodyear, Bridgestone, and Pirelli to "exert common sense and to bargain in good faith" with the host union of the Rubber Industries Conference, Lastik-Is, of Turkey.

This Union then was embroiled in a dispute with the industry, which was demanding concessions to work rules, as well as pressuring the Turkish government to ban strikes.

Leo Gerard, President of the US and Canadian union, United Steelworkers, was re-elected as Chairman of ICEM's Rubber Sector at the conference.

The forward-looking action plan adopted, includes:

- A review of the Global Networks in the ICEM's Rubber Sector, with a view to ensuring their effectiveness through administration and the exchange of information. (ICEM Networks

in the Rubber Sector include Bridgestone and Goodyear.)

- Ensuring that health, safety and environmental protections continue to be well emphasised and strengthened in ICEM's Global

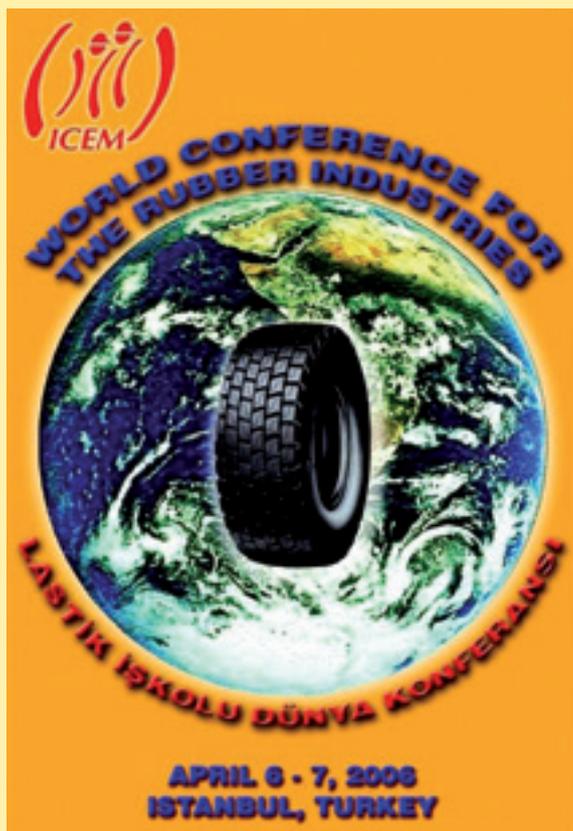
Framework Agreements, and that such agreements include those workers employed in contract or agency labour situations.

- The issue of Contract and Agency Labour be made a priority of ICEM work, with the fullest possible involvement from affiliates. Their role in this critical issue is vital if the push for international standards governing Contract and Agency Labour is to be enacted.

- Dialogue with multinational companies in the Rubber Sector be initiated, particularly with Michelin and

Continental, together with affiliated unions in the companies home countries, in order to seek agreement on the concept of a Global Agreement.

- The ICEM will seek to promote an action plan in the Rubber Sector concentrating specifically on gender equality. To this end, the ICEM will strongly encourage its affiliates to carry out joint union-management audits to establish the extent to which women are or are not receiving equal pay for work of equal kind. The ICEM will aid affiliates by providing information on job evaluation techniques.



A complete report on the Rubber Conference can be found at www.icem.org/en/20-Rubber.