

ITUC OnLine

ITUC debates global justice with political and civil society representatives

Vancouver, Canada, 23 June 2010: The ITUC Congress's third day of deliberation in Vancouver, Canada, included a discussion with three well-known political and civil society leaders about alliances trade unions should develop with other sectors with which the labour movement shares common goals.

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, President of the Party of European Socialists and former Danish prime minister, spoke of the joint work trade unions and progressive political forces should undertake to obtain concrete achievements to control the corporate greed that was at the root of the current financial and economic crisis, the worst of the past 80 years. He gave the example of the establishment of a financial transactions tax as a specific measure that the trade union movement and a variety of other organisations, as well as different political parties, have joined together to support. Rasmussen also spoke of the importance, in today's globalised economy, of bringing the international dimension into domestic trade union work, and invited trade union leaders to include that dimension regularly in their analyses and speeches to members.

Amsatou Sow Sidibé, a well-known voice in promoting human rights not only in her native country of Senegal but throughout Africa, was a co-founder the African Network for the Promotion of Women Workers. She spoke to Congress delegates of the particular responsibility that trade unions should take on to combat gender inequalities and the exploitation of women in all forms. In reply to delegates' questions, Sidibé said that unions could make a particularly useful contribution if they put additional efforts into organising women workers in the informal economy, where at least 90 per cent of African women find themselves.

Kumi Naidoo, the Executive Director of Greenpeace, told Congress delegates that the global trade union movement set an important example for all of civil society by unifying and creating the ITUC in 2006. Naidoo, a former Secretary General of CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, also told Congress that unity of action can be more easily achieved when organisations from different sectors emphasise common interests as well as their specificities. Asked by a delegate about the current Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster, he noted that corporate carelessness had killed eleven workers in the explosion that preceded the spill, a fact that was little mentioned in international media coverage. The disaster was a major workers' safety issue as well as a huge environmental concern, which unions and environmental organisations should address together.

ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder concluded the discussion by saying that the economic crisis and the need to develop an alternative economic model reinforced the importance for trade unions, civil society organisations and progressive political forces to work together, even more than in 2006 when the ITUC was created.

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