

# GLOBALISING SOCIAL JUSTICE

## TRADE UNIONISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## Foreword

### ■ ICFTU Congress - World Labour at the Millennium

1. The leaders of the world's free trade union movement are gathering in Durban South Africa in April 2000 for a week of discussion about the future of organised labour. The ICFTU's 17th World Congress coincides with the start of the new millennium and increasing awareness that a series of inter-linked social, political and economic changes mark a turning point in the history of the trade union movement. The aim of this report is to focus the attention of Congress delegates and union activists all over the world on the scale and significance of the challenges unions are now facing as globalisation gathers pace. It also offers proposals for action aimed at building a strong international support network for unions and their members.

### ■ New Strategies for New Challenges

2. This report concludes that, while the basic goals of trade unions for dignity and justice, decent work, and an end to discrimination remain as important as ever, many of our policies and organisational methods need to be examined. It takes a cold hard look at what unions have to do to stay relevant to the changing needs of members in a changing world.

### ■ Focus of the report

3. The key points of the report are grouped together in the following executive summary. The six chapters focus on: -

- The need for further progress in spreading and deepening the culture of democracy;
- The need for a new, multilateral approach to integrating economic growth with environmental and social protection to counterbalance the negative impacts of liberalisation and technological change on society;
- The continuing struggle for the world-wide respect for the rights to freedom of association, organisation and collective bargaining;
- Breaking down the barriers to equality between the sexes and ending discrimination in all its forms;
- Organising in a world of work that is rapidly being transformed by the global production networks of transnational business and by the spread of the informal sector
- Reforming the international free trade union movement to meet the needs of unions and their members in a more inter-dependent world.

## Spreading and Deepening Democracy in the Era of Globalisation

- **Democracy - the yardstick for good governance**
  4. With accelerating pace in the closing decades of the twentieth century, democracy has become the dominant system of government in most countries of the world. However, the practice of democracy remains fragile and flawed. Dictatorships survive, corruption abounds and large-scale abuse of human rights continues. In too many countries, women's rights are still non-existent. They are relegated to the lowest rung of society on the pretext of culture, tradition or religion. The foundations of democracy are civil and political rights of all citizens, which must be protected and promoted by a strengthened international system.
  
- **But further progress threatened by massive poverty**
  5. Widening gaps between the poorest and the wealthy within and between countries is a threat to the survival of democracy. Unemployment and poverty create fertile ground for the enemies of democracy. An increasing number of states appear on the brink of collapse and are easy prey to take over by warlords of various motivations. Democratic countries, working through the UN and other international institutions, must be ready to mobilise resources to tackle poverty and, if necessary, to mobilise military forces to prevent aggression against both neighbouring states and a country's own citizens.
  
- **Extending accountability to meet the challenge of globalisation**
  6. Rapid technological change, economic liberalisation and the end of the Cold War have combined to create what has come to be termed "globalisation". Globalisation appears to many to be beyond the control of democratic governments. It is not. While globalisation holds the potential of creating resources needed to eradicate poverty and unemployment, its impact is widening already intolerable divisions in society. Democratic action to address the problems generated by globalisation will require both local level initiatives and strengthened international co-operation.
  
- **Starting at the workplace**
  7. An important focal point for action to meet the fears and insecurity people have in a rapidly changing world is the workplace. Workplaces are being transformed by intensified competition with employers squeezing wages and working conditions all over the world. Insecurity at work spreads back to the home and the community and is weakening the confidence of ordinary people that participating in democracy, including voting in elections can help to solve their problems. Union organisation is thus vital both to addressing workplace problems and mobilising mass participation in the political process.
  
- **Common principles in a diverse world**
  8. Different countries must work out their own constitutional forms for democracy. However, the international community can and

should ensure that international standards on human rights are universally respected so as to ensure that democracy as a culture can flourish. The arguments of “stability before rights” and “cultural anti-imperialism” that are used to attack the universal observance of human rights do not stand up to scrutiny and serve to preserve the control of established elites.

#### ■ Sustainable development needs good governance

9. Modern market economies require the checks and balances inherent in democratic systems of government to prevent catastrophes from famines to the collapse of mismanaged banks. Furthermore, the democratic process of dialogue and debate is essential to the definition of the goals and the means for development. Participative development must begin at the workplace with respect for basic workers’ rights. The best guarantee that governments will focus on poverty eradication is to ensure that the poor have a voice in society.

#### ■ Action to ensure respect for human rights cannot be separated from trade and investment

10. The world must learn the lessons of the international effort to support the struggle inside South Africa against Apartheid. Two of the most important are that international pressure must be firmly based on the defence of human rights and that from the outset the international community must be prepared to escalate the use of economic sanctions. In South Africa, one of the most effective ways of helping the majority of South Africans assert their rights was by supporting their trade unions. Gradually, international companies and their home governments became aware that trading with Apartheid was bad for business. A stronger multilateral system for the protection and promotion of human rights must be based on the key importance of workplace rights and the escalation of economic pressure on governments that fail to co-operate in ending rights abuse.

#### ■ Making workers’ views heard from the workplace to international summit meetings: the challenge for organised labour in the 21st Century

11. Free trade unions grouped together under the umbrella of the ICFTU remain one of the major forces of democratic progress in the world. The union role in building democracy from the workplace up to Summits of Heads of State is more relevant than ever in the era of globalisation. Union action is a vital component in meeting the threats to democracy rooted in poverty, unemployment and social dislocation. Furthermore the process of involvement in union activities helps ordinary people, including the most disadvantaged, make democracy work to improve their own lives and that of the communities in which they live.

## Jobs and Justice in the Global Economy

#### ■ Social ground rules for world economy

12. The goal of the ICFTU is to build social ground rules for the global economy that ensure basic human needs are given top priority in a coherent strategy for growth and development. A major step toward this goal was achieved in Copenhagen at the UN World Summit for Social Development in 1995, and reinforced at the World Women’s Conference held in the same year in Beijing. The special General Assembly sessions in 2000 reviewing the Summits are a major political opportunity for governments to translate the idea of a “human face for globalisation” into a practical programme of reform built on ensuring much greater coherence between the work of the IMF, World Bank, UNCTAD, the WTO, UNDP and the ILO.

#### ■ Democratic development begins at the workplace

13. Over the last five years, governments and others have come to recognise much more clearly that good governance, which for the ICFTU means the democratic principles of transparency, accountability and participation, is essential to effective development strategies. It must apply to the functioning of international institutions as well as nation states. Tackling poverty requires effective public authorities responsive to the needs of the poorest and able to counteract the social divisions that intensified competition is causing all over the world. In a global market economy, spreading the potential benefits of increased trade and investment and diminishing the social costs of rapid change, requires an active role for governments acting within agreed international ground rules. A focal point for developing these ground rules is the workplace where the pressures of the market interact with people’s aspirations for a better life. The launch at the ILO’s 1999 Conference of its programme on Decent Work has stimulated an important new opening for more integrated and coherent international social and economic policies.

#### ■ Respect for human rights of disadvantaged key to social inclusion

14. Improving the international system for protecting and promoting human rights is a key to improved governance and thus development. Inequality does not miraculously disappear with prosperity. Women, in particular, and especially working women must be guaranteed equality of opportunity and treatment if continuing deep disparities between the sexes are to be diminished. Similarly, discrimination against other disadvantaged groups must be steadily eliminated by active policies for social inclusion.

#### ■ Safety net of social protection is a basic state responsibility

15. The market does not and will not provide access to education and health care for all nor a social safety net. Despite numerous studies showing the immense value to individuals, communities

### Lack of Social Protection has catastrophic effects in Asia

The Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s revealed the devastation to working people caused by the lack of proper social protection. The "Asian Tiger" countries had long relied on social safety nets provided by the family, supplemented by high personal savings. However the deficiencies of this approach were revealed when it was unable to support the massive unemployment caused by the recession in countries such as Korea and Thailand.

In Korea workers threatened with redundancy from the Hyundai plant erected barricades of cars and tanks of gasoline, together with steel pipes, gasoline bombs and nuts and bolts to prevent layoffs in Ulsan, the company town of Hyundai. As unemployment surged to eight per cent in Korea, with only 22% of the three million unemployed people receiving any kind of unemployment benefits, 47 unemployed workers a day committed suicide.

In Thailand with 2,000 people a day losing their jobs in autumn 1998, tens of thousands of laid-off textile workers in Bangkok organised weeks of protest demanding compensation. Many complained that the government lacked any plans to deal with the unemployed, apart from giving some lucky individuals small sums of money to set up new businesses. Families sent their children to scavenge on rubbish tips as the adults searched for casual labour.

Building on an ICFTU-APRO seminar in Manila in July 1998 on "Social safety nets", organised with the Japan Institute of Labour (JIL), trade unions in the region have launched various actions to combat this situation. ICFTU-APRO organised a seminar with the ILO on "Social safety nets and the market economy" in Singapore in October 1999. The Conference concluded that one of the main means to help working people was to develop social partnerships between unions, employers and governments. It also agreed that the funding institutions like the World Bank and the IMF should work more at a regional level, where they should consult with the ILO and the trade unions. The meeting also agreed to give greater emphasis to ICFTU-APRO's Charter of Minimum Demands and its Social Charter for Democratic Development.

Trade unions also participated in the Manila Social Forum in November 1999, organised by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. At the meeting it appeared that the ADB was finally taking social issues on board and had made poverty reduction its main focus.

and countries of universal basic education and healthcare, these primarily public services remain grossly under resourced. The state must also provide a safety net of social protection to ensure that children, the elderly, the sick, people with disabilities and the unemployed are not condemned to poverty. National governments, working with employers, trade unions and others, have a responsibility to develop comprehensive social protection policies, and the international community must assist the least developed countries to begin building such programmes.

### ■ Insecurity of informal sector deepens poverty trap

16. Counterbalancing the divisive social impact of globalisation requires a renewed effort to support the least developed countries. The vast majority of the people of Africa and hundreds of millions

more in Asia, Latin America and the transition countries remain on the margins of the global economy. In many regions, they survive on the income from subsistence farming and precarious unproductive jobs in the enormous shantytowns that surround the cities of the developing world. The major focus of poverty reduction strategies must be to help the poorest work themselves out of poverty. The continued growth of the informal sector in the developing world is deepening the poverty trap not curing it. Above all people surviving in the informal sector want security; security from crime, for their meagre savings, for their dwellings and most of all for their children's future. Putting together an integrated strategy for poverty eradication requires a multi-faceted approach based on community involvement; and most of all, political will. Tackling the roots of poverty through programmes to get children into school, create productive jobs for the parents of child labourers, and enforce labour laws, particularly on the minimum age for employment are central to this strategy.

### ■ Bank and Fund shift focus of structural adjustment to poverty reduction

17. After more than a decade of structural adjustment policies focussed on financial stabilisation, deregulation and privatisation, the IMF and World Bank are at last shifting priorities to focus on poverty reduction. Economic mismanagement, notably through the waste of resources on arms, corruption and prestige projects benefiting only the wealthy, should not be supported by international loans. But all too often budget cuts have not focused on waste and have hit the weakest hardest. Translating the promise of a drive against poverty into reality will require a major change in the way the international institutions formulate and implement policy, as well as a big increase in aid. The rhetoric about accountability will only become meaningful when trade unions and other representative non-governmental organisations have a full role in formulating and implementing integrated programmes for poverty reduction.

### ■ For 3 billion people on \$2 a day, money supply is not growing too fast

18. With over 3 billion people surviving on less than \$2 a day and 1.3 billion on less than \$1 a day, and global unemployment and underemployment totalling 900 million, the world economy is clearly running well below capacity. The main constraint on faster growth is instability in finance markets. Inadequate regulation of emerging finance markets, which was the root cause of the boom and bust of a number of Asian economies in the second half of the nineties, coupled with the deflationary conditions attached to the initial round of emergency IMF assistance, provoked a sharp slowdown from which a number of countries have yet to recover. The reflex reaction of central banks in the major industrial countries to increase interest rates at the slightest suspicion that low inflation rates might increase, is inhibiting global poverty reduction.

- **New architecture lacks social pillar** 19. Trade unions value price stability but have stressed that much greater focus needs to be given to social and labour market policies that encourage employment, productivity and wage growth. Governments and international economic agencies are neglecting tripartism and social dialogue as a means for developing policies for higher and more stable growth. The post Asia crisis effort to create a new architecture to reduce financial volatility is necessary but, without a determined effort to develop international social policy guidelines to address poverty and unemployment, lacks the coherence needed to bring the billions of people currently excluded from globalisation into the global economy.
- **Debt burden cuts anti-poverty programmes and threatens breakdown of states** 20. A major international reconstruction effort is needed for the least developed countries. The international financial institutions responded with alacrity to the threat of bankruptcy of major banks following the Asian and Russian crashes of 1997/8, but have taken years to formulate extremely modest programmes of debt relief for the poorest developing countries. The ICFTU has argued forcefully for a number of years for deeper and quicker action to link debt relief to forward looking programmes for poverty reduction. The costs of paying off debts, often incurred and wasted by former dictators, is still siphoning off scarce foreign exchange needed to rebuild reserves and thus allow large-scale investment in priorities such as education and health care. Years of austerity in Africa have seriously damaged fragile social capital and weak public institutions creating conditions in which local warlords, often in league with drug and precious minerals smugglers, are destabilising whole countries causing massive casualties and huge refugee problems.
- **Seattle Conference showed need for social, development and environment focus to WTO** 21. The collapse of the Seattle Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation showed that popular confidence in the multilateral trading system is at an all-time low in both the industrialised and the developing countries. This failure reflects the growing imbalance in globalisation, yet the end of the talks could also be the beginning of a new approach to globalisation. The WTO must start to deal with the issue of how trade and investment can serve social development, and can no longer ignore working peoples' rights. If the lack of consensus in Seattle leads to a reassessment of the links between trade, development, social issues and the environment, the Seattle Ministerial Conference will not have been a failure but rather the beginning of a search for a more responsive and responsible global market.
- **World trade system must include core labour standards and achieve genuine development** 22. The WTO has an increasingly wide remit to promote not only the reduction of border controls but also the reform of national policies deemed to inhibit open competition. The major beneficiaries so far are multinational companies whose recent

growth measured in terms of foreign direct investment has far outstripped that of trade. The ICFTU has campaigned vigorously to place the relationship between trade liberalisation and the observance of core labour standards on the agendas of both the WTO and the ILO. The advantages of a serious dialogue about how to avoid an intensification of competitive pressures released by trade liberalisation from undermining basic human rights at work is being realised by governments of both industrial and developing countries. The next step is to agree on a forum to translate the connections between sound labour practices, a much stronger development focus for trade policies and the building of support for a multilateral rule based trading system into effective action. At the same time, trade talks must ensure that markets are opened up to developing country exports and that the dividends of trade growth are fairly shared.

- **Trade policies must be part of integrated social and economic strategy**

23. Trade policy can no longer be compartmentalised as the exclusive concern of the WTO. With a quarter of world output entering world trade, the impact of changing patterns of commerce has huge positive and negative effects on large numbers of people. Unions are amongst the many organisations anxious to ensure that policies on, for example, public health, the environment or the provision of education services are not driven by a narrow legal interpretation of trade law. In particular, state provided or subsidised broad based education and health care programmes must not be jeopardised in the name of equal treatment for multinational companies that focus on the market of those with highest incomes in the main centres of population. The WTO must open itself to a much broader debate about the role of trade policy, its limits and the positive role of social policies in an open world economy.

- **With no global rules on investment, multinationals able to play off countries**

24. Despite the leading role multinational companies are playing in the process of globalisation and the prolonged rapid growth of foreign direct investment, there are no global ground rules to regulate their behaviour. Companies thus play countries and regions off against each other. They are only required to play by the rules of each country in which they operate to the extent to which those rules are enforced. This allows them to exploit the gaps in jurisdiction this leaves wherever it serves their profits, particularly when it comes to internal accounting practices, tax liabilities and workers' rights.

- **Learning lessons of MAI collapse**

25. The major home countries of the multinationals have, usually at the request of the companies, negotiated bilateral investment treaties to protect their investments. Developing countries desperate for investment have clearly been at a major disadvantage in such negotiations and the treaties place few obligations on

multinationals to participate in national development programmes. The abortive negotiations at the OECD in the nineties were an attempt by some countries to generalise the terms of the over one thousand bilateral treaties into a single Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). The negotiations, however, simply highlighted the vast imbalance between the obligations on governments to treat foreign investors favourably and the weakness of constraints on companies. That fuelled a backlash, where the ICFTU working with the TUAC did much to halt what would have been an unbalanced agreement. The experience has led trade unions to demand that any future attempts to negotiate international ground rules for multinationals remedy the evident weakness of bilateral treaties, and focus with equal force on the responsibilities of multinationals as on the basic legal conditions for their operations. A defining issue for unions is that neither companies nor governments should undermine core labour standards in an attempt to gain short-term competitive advantage.

■ **Employment and environment must get onto sustainable development agenda**

26. Integrated international social and economic policies for the 21st century must be environmentally sustainable. Preventing environmental degradation cannot be an afterthought for government or business or trade unions. Shifting to sustainable patterns of development and discouraging damaging forms of production will have profound implications for jobs and living standards. Trade unions, like many others, hope that a “greener” world economy will create more and better jobs than “a business as usual” scenario. This will not come about by relying solely on market incentives. Trade unions have stressed that sustainable employment strategies must be worked out side by side with environmental programmes to anticipate and avoid a damaging division over jobs or the environment. They have also highlighted the importance of engaging workers through their trade unions in local level discussions about how to set and meet environmental targets. Long experience in tackling hazards at work has convinced unions that a strong worker voice on job design is essential to ensuring that employers do not constantly put off action to ensure safe work until it is too late. Linking union safety and environment committees to the broad international environmental movement is an important means of building practical action on the environment and employment.

## Human Rights and the World of Work

■ **Foundations of democracy in a global economy**

27. Trade union rights are human rights to which all workers everywhere are entitled. They are the foundations for democracy and more essential than ever to ensuring that the global economy works for people and not against them. They are also the building blocks for workers in their struggles for decent work for all and the elimination of abuses such as forced and child labour and discrimination in employment. Yet, abuses of the basic right to form and join a union of one's choosing are on the increase. The spread of democracy has opened up opportunities for workers to exercise their basic rights but intensified global competition is at the same time threatening their ability to organise and bargain collectively.

■ **Confrontation and violence in response to worker protests**

28. The recent global economic crisis provoked worker protests in many countries over job losses and wage cuts, but in too many cases union efforts to engage employers and governments in constructive dialogue over the social dimensions of reform and adjustment were rebuffed, sometimes with violence. Badly planned and hasty programmes of privatisation and deregulation have further served to undermine the ability of unions to represent workers at their time of greatest need.

■ **Repression, intimidation and interference**

29. Free trade union activity is still banned in a number of countries where dictatorship by the army, a single party or a royal family continues. Government sponsored unions continue as an instrument of control and repression in a number of countries. In many more, the beginnings of democracy have so far failed to reach the workplace, with large sectors of the workforce excluded from union organisation. Interference in union affairs by public authorities, often in collusion with employers, hampers the growth of independent democratic unions in many countries. Local level organisers, vital cogs in the development of effective unions, are frequently unprotected from acts of employer discrimination, and in some countries are targets for death squads who seem to have a license to intimidate and murder.

■ **Union-free export zones proliferate**

30. Export processing zones where union rights are suspended or severely restricted are proliferating. Competition between the zones to attract footloose investors is undermining respect for core labour standards and endangering more socially responsible development strategies of governments and companies. Among the consequences of such “union-free havens” are hazardous working conditions where workers’ (especially women’s) lives, limbs and health are sacrificed for short-term profits.



- **Victories as unions fight back** 31. Despite the alarming evidence of violations of basic workers' rights, unions are fighting back, drawing on the inspiration of past victories and developing new internationally co-ordinated campaigns. Recent successes include Korea, Nigeria and Indonesia where unions contributed significantly to breakthroughs towards democracy and respect for human rights including workplace rights.

#### Organising in the Informal Sector

According to an ILO study, up to 60 per cent of the labour force in the developing world work in the informal sector, which has become the only possible source of employment for many young people. Informal sector activities account for the vast majority of new jobs in Latin America and in Africa during the last decade. In countries like Bolivia, Bangladesh, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Tanzania and Uganda, informal sector employment counts for more than 50 per cent of total employment; in Mexico and Brazil the figure is higher than 60 per cent; and in Senegal and India, the figure stands as high as 90 per cent. Most informal sector activities are concentrated in urban areas, where jobs range from street corner services such as money changing and kiosk operators, to transportation such as rickshaw pullers or delivery, to small manufacturing and construction. Low productivity and income combined with a terrible accident record and the absence of social protection or social services put a particularly harsh burden on many of the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly women and child workers.

Clearly trade unions must take up the challenge to organise the informal sector, at the same time as governments make a serious effort to extend the protection of the law to the workers concerned. This call was made once more in May 1999 at the 7th ICFTU World Women's Conference in Brazil, in view of the large number of women in the informal sector. The ICFTU and many ICFTU affiliates and ITS took part in an ILO symposium on "Trade Unions and the Informal Sector" in October 1999, which discussed many further strategies and actions for protecting informal sector workers. Organising the informal sector actually means a three-in-one approach, taking into account that many informal sector workers consist of three important target groups 1) women, 2) young workers, and 3) child workers, who need to be assisted into education.

Various trade unions are currently involved in activities to start organising workers in the informal sector. They are focusing on responding to the issues identified as priorities by the informal sector workers themselves, like social security and protection, health care, child care, housing, and access to credit and loans. In countries like Senegal and Tanzania, such experience goes back decades. The ICFTU is co-ordinating a project (financed by the European Union) to extend the benefits of organisation and trade union membership to different sectors of workers in the informal sector in Benin, and is undertaking relevant pilot research in Ghana, Zambia and Madagascar. The series of activities in Benin has led to the recruitment of over 30,000 workers either into union-related organisations or directly into the structures of the ICFTU-affiliated trade union centres the CSA and the UNSTB.

- **Integrating basic rights into strategies for sustainable development and poverty reduction** 32. Sound industrial relations systems based on observance of core ILO labour standards are a vital component of sustainable development aimed at poverty reduction. If their needs are to be addressed, the poor and vulnerable must be able to make their voice heard through independent, democratic and representative organisations. Trade unions have a vital role to play in helping the marginalised to get organised. Within the international system, the main advocate of decent work for all is the ILO and unions must make full use of its capacity to promote respect for human rights at work.
- **Unity and democracy are source of union strength** 33. Governments must provide a secure legal backing for union rights but it is the unions themselves who have to organise workers and represent them. As history has proved time and again, the strength of unions derives from unity and democracy, which in turn generate the confidence and mobilising capacity to strive for improved living and working conditions. In the era of globalisation, union building is vital to ensuring that workers have a voice and influence over the powerful forces of change affecting the world of work.
- **Ending the scandal of child labour** 34. It is scandalous that at the beginning of the 21st century children still form a substantial part of the working population in many countries. Unions are taking the lead in generating a global campaign to eliminate child labour through action to tackle family poverty, to ensure that school places are available and affordable and clamping down on employer exploitation. Working with a range of non-governmental organisations as well as international agencies, governments and employers, unions aim to root out the causes of child labour and ensure that child workers are able to regain their basic right to childhood and education.
- **Systematic solidarity: the role of the ICFTU** 35. The main task of the ICFTU and the whole family of the international free trade union movement is to add the strength of effective international solidarity to well planned and targeted union campaigns. Opening up space for union organising and preventing violations of basic rights requires a combination of national and international pressure. An important part of systematising international solidarity is the rapid flow of accurate information about rights violations to national organisations in other countries for use in direct pressure on offending governments and through the available international machinery of the ILO and the UN. The ICFTU is developing a world-wide network of union rights monitors, linked through information technology. Among their responsibilities are to help protect and support union organisers at the workplace. The ICFTU is also extending its collaboration with like-minded international

human rights NGOs on a joint agenda to strengthen the international system for preventing abuses. The workplace is a focal point for communities and unions are increasingly aware of the importance of building coalitions with other groups to advance shared values and goals.

## Ending Discrimination at the Workplace

### ■ Discrimination at work remains widespread

36. The most basic aspiration of hundreds of millions of workers today is that the ideal of equality of treatment and of opportunity at work becomes a reality. Discrimination based on gender, race, colour, religion, national extraction, age, sexual orientation and disability remain pervasive despite the fact that 138 countries have ratified ILO Convention 111 on discrimination in employment. As well as a major programme of action on gender discrimination and the empowerment of women, in particular at the workplace and in the trade unions, the ICFTU and its affiliates have undertaken major efforts to address the problems of young workers, migrants and ethnic minorities, workers with disabilities, and older workers and are working on the problems faced by gays and lesbians.

### ■ Nearly half world workforce women, mostly in the worst jobs

37. Some 45 per cent of women world-wide aged between 15 and 64 have jobs or are job seekers today. Yet it is the bottom rungs of the jobs ladder that are filled by women, with little sign of improvement. Indeed, the economic and financial crises in Asia, Russia and many other countries have had a disastrous impact on women and their families. Trade, investment and competition policies, like macroeconomic fiscal and monetary policies, often have tremendous implications for women's employment, women's poverty and women's social burden. A gender assessment of economic policies is long overdue and must also become a central focus for labour market policies and programmes. Unions too need to ensure that a gender perspective is introduced into all their policy proposals for a stronger social dimension to globalisation.

### ■ International action to address global problems of women workers

38. The UN Beijing World Women's Conference marked a breakthrough for unions in their efforts to highlight the problems faced by working women. Considerable progress has also been made on ILO standards which have over the last few years created new benchmarks for rights of women at work on topics such as homework, and part-time work, with maternity protection scheduled for the year 2000. The trade union agenda for the future, which will be developed also with the ILO, includes more and better jobs for women; gender issues in collective bargaining; equal wages for work of equal value; access for women to promotion and high-level positions; gender awareness raising for union members - men and women - as well as for employers; combating violence against women at the workplace; and life-long education for women, in particular vocational training.

■ **Women are a vital force for change in unions**

39. Women's union membership is growing world-wide, but is still lower than female share of the workforce. A major effort is therefore required to break down the barriers to union membership and to women's active participation in the movement. Today women represent around 39% of ICFTU membership, but too often they are absent from leadership positions. Despite the adoption of various resolutions, policies and positive action programmes, the full integration of women into trade unions at all levels is far from being achieved, as is the systematic inclusion of gender perspectives in trade union policies and programmes. The promotion of gender parity in all activities and decision-making bodies, put forward in the ICFTU Constitution as one of our aims, must be vigorously pursued. In the global economy of today, unions need women as much as women need unions. The challenge is to convince women that their place is in the unions.

■ **Recruiting the next generation of members needs major rethink of union strategies**

40. At the beginning of the 21st century, young people will make up two-thirds of the world's population: 64% will be below 35 years and 20 % will be between 15 and 24 years. The trade union movement must make young people visible and enable their voices be heard at all levels of the union. The starting point is to convince older members that unions need a comprehensive rethink of their youth strategy if they are to win the next generation of workers to the union cause. The main components of a new strategy are information geared to young workers on what unions are and why they should join the movement, the development by young workers of organising programmes targeted on youth, a focus on policies to address the youth jobs crisis and a commitment to involve young union leaders, especially young women, in all union activities. The ICFTU is supporting this effort with a global youth programme and campaign launched in 1999 "The Future Starts Now<>Join A Union".

■ **Unions take on, insecurity, racism and "3D" jobs**

41. Unions are increasingly aware that fighting for equality means welcoming diversity. With more than 42 million documented migrant workers world-wide, and many millions more "illegals", most of whom are trapped in dirty, dangerous and degrading (3D) jobs, reaching out to ethnic minorities and migrant workers is a high priority for unions in many countries. Insecurity and racism are the major problems and union representation is one of the most effective means for them to assert their rights and win respect for the vital role they play in the workforce and the community. Unions are developing effective and innovative strategies for organising migrants and ethnic minorities and integrating them into unions.

■ **Ending social exclusion of people with disabilities starts at work**

42. Persons with disabilities represent one-tenth of the world's population. Unemployment amongst people of working age with disabilities is often two to three times higher than national averages,

and when they do have jobs, they are usually unrewarding, badly paid or insecure. More effort is needed to show employers that workers with disabilities can be highly productive and a considerable asset to the enterprise, while penalising more vigorously those that try to avoid the laws aimed at promoting their employment. Benefit systems also need to be reviewed to encourage integration of people with disabilities into the job market and avoid pushing them into long-term unemployment or special sheltered workshops. People with disabilities are turning to unions for representation and support on training, equality and workplace design.

■ **Older workers put discrimination, pensions, health care on union agenda**

43. The population of the world is greying with a growing percentage over 75 years of age, the majority of whom are women. Unions are responding to this dramatic trend by focussing more attention on discrimination against older workers and the problems they face in retirement. High unemployment has forced many older workers to prematurely curtail their working lives, putting new strains on pension systems, health care provision and children, especially on their daughters. Unions are leading the struggle to establish social protection in the developing countries, and to maintain systems established in the industrialised countries. Working with older union members and retired workers' associations, unions are increasingly focusing on how to plan the last stages of working life and prepare for retirement. In many countries the age of retirement has become a hot issue posing difficult questions of how to encourage those who wish to stay in employment while not penalising those who are ready to retire.

■ **Unions responding to discrimination against gays and lesbians**

44. The trade union movement has been at the forefront in defending and promoting human and trade union rights for all workers, but this struggle has, up until recently, rarely included an explicit commitment for equal rights, respect and dignity for gay and lesbian workers. But equality for all must mean all and gay and lesbians are often targets of discrimination at the workplace. Unions are increasingly taking on the concerns of gay and lesbian workers, aiming initially to identify organised homophobia at the workplace and build networks to fight back against bigotry and discrimination.

## Organising International Solidarity

### ■ Multinationals driving globalisation

45. Multinational enterprises are creating an integrated world production system both by their direct investment and also through complex chains of sub-contracting. Foreign direct investment is growing faster than world trade which in turn continues to outstrip the expansion of world output leading to increased interdependence between countries and workers.

#### Information Technology – A Tool for Solidarity

New information technology has not only changed the world of work. It has also begun to change the way trade unions work. As a relatively cheap and quick means of communication, e-mail has become an important tool for many unions in developed countries and its use is growing in many developing countries as well. Information technology is also becoming an important asset for international trade union solidarity. E-mail is even being used in some organising campaigns. Cybercampaigns, where the internet is the centrepiece of the campaign, are methods to exchange views on a company, to raise public awareness of a company's business practises and to give union members as well as other interested people a chance to forward their concerns to the company. The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) launched the first ITS on-line corporate campaign on the internet in 1996 in support of the ultimately successful United Steelworkers of America struggle against the global tire giant Bridgestone. This was the first of many ICEM campaigns that include a cybercampaign element. Several other international trade secretariats have used the internet as part of campaign strategies, usually against multinational enterprises. As part of the UN's Global Compact, a web site has been established which is intended to be interactive and may help to encourage social dialogue. Participating in this web site are trade unions, business and NGOs. This potential of this tool will only be fully realised when there is greater access to computers and to the internet. Although the biggest gaps in this form of communication remain in developing countries, there are also many workers in developed countries without internet access. In several countries, including Sweden, Australia and the USA, trade unions have been setting up programmes to offer their members discounted computers and online services at reduced rates. Offering computers at affordable prices is not only a service to million of trade unionists, it also ties unions closer to their members and provides an opportunity to contact and mobilise union members.

### ■ Global players need global rules

46. Given the significance of multinationals' investments, one of the biggest gaps in the emerging framework of international rules is a global agreement on investment and the responsibilities of business. The failure of the effort to negotiate the Multilateral Agreement on Investment shows that a new more balanced approach is needed which incorporates amongst other things labour and environmental standards. Rising concern about labour practices, especially in supplying contractors of major multinational companies, has stimulated a wave of new corporate codes. A swing back in the political pendulum towards greater awareness

of the social responsibilities of multinationals, coupled with criticisms of the inadequate follow-up of corporate codes, is reviving interest in the role of the multilateral codes of the OECD and ILO.

#### ■ Engaging the multinationals

47. As well as trying to use all the various codes to open up opportunities for unions to organise and represent workers in the sub-contracting chain, unions are trying to engage companies in direct dialogue at the international level. Common ground has been found on the issue of tackling bribery and corruption and on enlarging the concepts of corporate transparency and accountability to include stakeholders, such as workers. Unions are also starting to use their influence on the investment policies of pension funds to encourage companies to commit themselves to sound labour relations practices world-wide. Multinational companies are also opening up to regular dialogue with unions at an international level through the International Trade Secretariats. Most progress is being made in Europe, where agreement with employers has led to new laws providing for regular information and consultation meetings between workers' representatives and management.

#### ■ Developing dialogue and making agreements

48. Unions are developing comprehensive strategies to equip themselves to represent workers in multinational companies and in the companies that depend on the multinationals for their business. They are building up their International Trade Secretariats to provide information and advice to national and local unions, expand international contacts between unions in different countries, enlarge agreement over common strategies and actions, create and service international union structures to act as focal points for global or regional discussions with multinationals, and equipping union representatives with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in growing international union networks.

#### ■ Building networks, using information technology

49. The breadth and depth of unions' international reach and thus their ability to identify and co-ordinate pressure on companies in pursuit of common objectives, is already making an impact on companies. However, it must be expanded still further so that unions position themselves to initiate action rather than having to react to company initiatives. Unions must pay equal attention to enlarging the scope and content of their relations with companies that take a positive attitude to their role as well as counteracting anti-worker behaviour. Unions must continue to exploit the potential of information technology to ensure rapid dissemination and discussion of information.

#### ■ Linking workers in the global production chain

50. Workers still need unions to even up the imbalance in their relations with their employer. And to represent working women and men effectively, unions need to organise as large a proportion of the workforce as possible. Downsizing of large plants in sectors where

unions were traditionally strong has eroded the base of union movements in many countries. New units of employment are smaller and more scattered as a result of technological changes and a shift by employers to sub contracted sources of supply and services. The end of this global chain of subcontracting is to be found in the informal sectors of most developing and transition countries. Most informal sector work pays poverty wages and offers no security of income. Such work constitutes a development trap.

#### ■ Organising at the informal frontier gives the excluded a voice

51. Workers in the informal sectors of the developing world need unions more than most because they have no recourse to law or social insurance. But there are huge obstacles to organising erected mainly by the inability of the public authorities to protect activists and the transient nature of much informal work. Nevertheless, all sorts of community and trade based organisations are springing up and many deserve the support of established unions, public authorities and the international community. Poverty reduction policies will remain ineffective until the voice of the poor can be heard through the organisations of their own choosing. The poor need honest and effective government. The vacuum created by the crisis of the state in many developing and transition countries is not creating a deregulated miracle economy in the form of the informal sector but fertile ground for the growth of criminal gangs who impose their own rules and method of enforcement.

#### ■ New laws for new systems of work

52. Work is being "informalised" in many industrial countries too with a rapid growth of "atypical" employment. Governments, with the employers and trade unions, need to review labour laws and update them to the reality of the sub contract system. The ILO must lead the way in ensuring that new "flexible" forms of work contract do not leave the worker without recourse to legal remedies in the case of arbitrary and unfair treatment nor create obstacles to union organising. Unions too must adopt new organising techniques to meet the needs of "atypical" workers and help them to win their rights.

#### ■ New methods of organising to reach a more dispersed workforce

53. Breaking out of a trend of steady decline in union membership requires the investment of money and people in new organising activity. Unions all over the world need to mobilise members, in particular women and young members, to become active in union affairs and take on office bearing responsibilities at local level. Every unit of employment should have a union representative who can act as a link to union structures and has received training from the union in the skills needed to speak for members. Laws will need strengthening to protect such local union organisers from acts of discrimination by employers and to ensure time off from work for training and union activities.

■ **Workplace organisation key to personal development, family and community participation**

54. New “flexible” forms of work organisation demanded by employers, while in some cases encouraging individuals to develop their professional abilities, can also be extremely destructive to family life and communities. A major challenge facing unions, and employers too, is to find new ways to ensure that family responsibilities and participation in the community can be combined with productive and fulfilling employment. Healthy democratic institutions are built on the engagement of individuals in voluntary associations that enable them to enlarge and achieve their aspirations in life. Workers, by forming unions, help protect themselves from the fear and insecurity which would otherwise block their individual development and full participation in society. The workplace is one of the most important focal points for social organisation and trade unions are thus a vital component of civic society.

■ **Building respect for workers in a changing world**

55. Globalisation is intensifying competition for markets worldwide and this pressure is transferring to the workplace. The cost cutting rush to keep up in the race for market share is damaging efforts to create the genuine teamwork required for efficient production. Engagement and initiative at work is only possible where workers, men and women, are treated with respect. Quality output is directly linked to the quality of working relations. Constructive union/management dialogue, which seeks to find solutions to conflicts and identify areas for improved performance, is the key to improved conditions of employment, a good rate of return on investment and increasing employment.

■ **Spreading the organising reflex and changing attitudes to unions**

56. The foundation of an organising strategy is to establish and spread the idea that joining and participating in the union is a natural part of working life. This is easier in an environment where union activity is not only tolerated but is welcomed by employers, public authorities and the media. In only a handful of countries is this the case. The most effective way of enlarging membership is through personal contact in which members talk to new colleagues explaining what the union does, how it works, what it costs and how to get involved. Organising has to be a reflex throughout the union, starting by helping volunteers make the personal contact with new members that glues unions together. In a changing world, unions also have to constantly adapt what they do and how they do it. Pay and hours of work remain central questions, but issues such as childcare, the quality of employment, pensions, health and safety, discrimination at the workplace, benefits and services are increasingly important for working families.

## Trade Unions in the 21st Century: the Impact of Globalisation on Trade Union Structures and Activities

■ **Campaigning for social justice in a globalised world**

57. In most countries organising is an uphill struggle to overcome the fears of working people that somehow or other joining the union could expose them to the hostility of their employer or the public authorities, may not yield them much immediate tangible benefit and is, therefore, not worth it. Enlarging union membership is often focussed on articulating very basic demands for social justice and building confidence amongst working people that the union can change things for the better. Identifying issues and working out a campaign strategy to achieve widely supported goals is vital. This means selecting targets and pressure points for action. In an ever more interdependent world, dominated by multinational companies, such pressure points may be in other countries and call for collaboration with unions in those countries. Dialogue and negotiation are vital to social progress and democracy. One of the main effects of globalisation is to shift some of the dialogue and negotiation to the international level. Union internationals, like the ICFTU and the ITS, have a major task ahead in getting workers' voices heard in board rooms and conference chambers of multinational companies and international institutions.

■ **Changes in employment lead to new patterns of organising and bargaining**

58. The economic, social and political environment in which trade unions organise and represent working people is changing dramatically all over the world obliging unions to rethink their role and strategies, including the structure and functions of international union bodies like the ICFTU. The era of concentrated mass production is ending and in the future unions will have to organise and represent workers in large numbers of much smaller units of employment. Collective bargaining is likely to become more dispersed. Unions will therefore have to recruit, train and support large numbers of local level representatives and back them up with up-to-date and high quality information and advice. Costs per member of organising and providing services are likely to rise.

■ **Shifting resources to meet new challenges**

59. The structure of employment is changing with most new jobs in the private service sector. The old “commanding heights” of trade unionism in manufacturing, energy and transport are declining in employment in many countries. The movement will thus have to find ways of shifting financial and human resources to new service sectors. Bargaining is also getting tougher in the public sector as governments become ever more cost conscious and old distinctions between private and public sector unions are diminishing. The world-wide trend for union mergers is part of the response to these changes in employment structure.

### ■ Exploiting new technologies

60. The rapidly falling costs of sharing information is helping unions to meet the challenges of rapid change in the labour market but requires a major overhaul of old methods. With an increasingly dispersed membership, information technology provides a potentially vital tool for strengthening union action not only within countries but also internationally. Although the take-up by unions of information technology is impressive, more must be done to ensure that unions, especially in developing countries are in a position to work out and adapt information strategies as an integral part of their work.

### ■ Intensification of competition forces unions to refine tactics

61. Economic liberalisation, through the reduction of barriers to international trade and investment and national deregulation and privatisation, has sharply increased the intensity of glob-

#### WTO Debacle could mark beginning of Globalisation with a Human Face

In December 1999 the much-heralded WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, which some had expected would lead to the start of a "Millennium Trade Round", collapsed in acrimonious failure. One of the main reasons was the WTO's failure to deal with how trade and investment affected social, environmental, development and gender questions. There was an overall feeling that WTO policies and practices are not fair for developing countries, and that the economic policies and practices of organisations like the WTO, World Bank and IMF are having a negative impact on peoples' lives - especially those living in developing countries.

Seattle got the message across that if governments don't pay attention to basic human rights at the workplace, to making trade achieve benefits for women and men in developing countries, and to addressing the environmental implications of globalisation, then the whole agenda of world trade talks risks breaking down.

All over the world, trade unions participated in the ICFTU lobbying campaign in the run-up to and throughout the conference, which, combined with the massive public demonstration organised on the eve of the ministerial by our American affiliate, the AFL-CIO, contributed to that message.

In its press release at the close of the Conference, the ICFTU said that the collapse of the WTO Ministerial must mark the beginning of a search for a more responsive and responsible global economy. It must stop the present race to the bottom where footloose capital and far too many governments seek competitive advantage from the violation of the fundamental rights of workers.

Governments need to act on the message they got in Seattle. In order to be credible, they must face up to the fact that the WTO has to achieve broader support in society at large, including with trade unions. The protection of basic labour standards, the legitimate concerns of developing countries and the need to make the trading system environmentally sustainable are issues that have to be addressed simultaneously, through action by the WTO in conjunction with the ILO and the other organisations concerned.

al competition. This in turn is dramatically changing collective bargaining, requiring new, more sophisticated union tactics based on well-prepared and argued claims, a high degree of membership awareness and involvement in bargaining, and skilled union negotiating teams equipped with the knowledge to probe and challenge management responses. Especially when negotiating with multinationals, unions need to be able to draw on international union analyses, information and solidarity support.

### ■ New concept of social partnership in era of globalisation central to political strategies

62. Even though unions have had to become much more aware of the pressures on employers of changes in world markets, they still need to exert influence on the political process to ensure that laws and institutions governing the world of work, and supporting and protecting workers in a rapidly changing economy, fully reflect workers' concerns. In working out new political strategies, unions have to adapt to the changes engendered by the end of the cold war and its effect on democratic parties, in particular, of the left. Old allies in both industrial and developing countries have yet to work out a new model for social partnership in the global market economy. In the transition countries, unions have had to practically reinvent trade unionism after decades of Party control corrupted even the language of democratic worker solidarity. In all countries, however, unions are pressing the case for a much stronger recognition of the vital role of a sound industrial relations system, based on the core labour standards of the ILO, to stable economic and social development in a global market economy.

### ■ Bridging social gaps through focus on working families in the community

63. In virtually all countries, unions are extremely concerned about the growing divide between a small core of relatively well-paid, well-trained workers in secure employment, and a much larger group of lower paid less skilled, often women, workers shifting between periods of unemployment and insecure jobs. These divides are most pronounced in developing countries with large informal sectors but are growing in industrial countries. Insecurity and the pace of change are increasingly serious problems for all workers and particularly for those facing discrimination on the grounds of their sex, age, religion, ethnic background, disability or sexual orientation. With the steady decline of the extended family as a social safety net, unions have to focus on how to help working people, especially women, to reduce the stresses and strains of combining work with family responsibilities. Adequate and comprehensive systems of social security are needed more than ever before. A new focus on organising young people is especially important to the regeneration of union membership. Unions have a vital role to play as a bridge between the workplace and community, helping workers through changes at work and in employment.

■ **Goal is social component in new global ground rules**

64. Globalisation has shifted power from the national and local level to the international level. This requires unions to focus on new targets for action and is provoking a major review of international union functions and structures. A particularly important component of unions' efforts to add a social dimension to the emerging ground rules for the global economy is to establish a much higher standing for the ILO within a more coherent system of international co-operation for social and economic development. Achieving these ambitious goals means that international union organisations must do more to target campaigns and speed information flows despite the pressure of reduced financial resources.

■ **ICFTU is focal point of series of networks whose strength depends on links with affiliates**

65. Within the family of the international trade union movement, the ICFTU is the focal point of a series of inter-linked global networks of labour solidarity. Its ability to influence events depends mainly on the coherence, quality, timeliness and vigour of affiliates' contributions to common policy positions and their implementation. The ICFTU is a mechanism for organising international solidarity. The first priority in strengthening the ICFTU is thus ensuring that affiliates integrate the international dimension of their work fully into their own strategic plans for the future. Using new technologies to speed information flows within the free trade union movement internationally is essential, but must be linked to plans that integrate information management into all aspects of affiliates' work.

■ **Pursuit of priorities yielding results**

66. Following the decisions of the 1996 Congress, the ICFTU targeted five broad priority themes: jobs and justice; human and trade union rights; equality; multinationals; and organising. Already there are some signs of success. The ICFTU is increasingly a respected voice in the debate about the governance of the international economic and social system. Governments now know that they cannot kill and jail trade unionists, impose conditions of forced labour, allow discrimination or the exploitation of child labour without the ICFTU calling them to account before the court of world public opinion as well as the ILO. On equality issues and in particular the role of women, the ICFTU has brought a new dimension to the international debate with its focus on the world of work. The ICFTU in partnership with the ITS have helped to put the issue of corporate social responsibility onto the business agenda. And unions everywhere are pushing back the barriers to union organising and bargaining, changing attitudes and demonstrating the practical value to employers and governments of working with unions.

■ **Targets for international union action**

67. In pursuing priorities, the ICFTU has four main targets: affiliates, through providing services in the form of information, advice, training and the mobilisation of solidarity support;

intergovernmental organisations, and the governments that control them, at global and regional level; employers, especially multinational companies; and public opinion in general and more specifically, opinion formers on the international stage, such as key NGOs, and political parties. .

■ **Reaching out, communicating and reviewing structures**

68. Another way of looking at priorities is to focus on how unions, and especially international union bodies, have to change to achieve their goals. Unions have to reach out to new unorganised groups of workers, build coalitions with non-governmental organisations, and get their message understood and relayed by the media. Unions have to get workers' views heard in the international organisations and inside the multinationals. And unions have to rethink their own functions and structures to enhance democratic participation, speed information flows, target campaign activities and adapt and improve the services they provide to members. For the ICFTU, this means working with its own regional organisations and increasing and deepening its partnership with the ITS, TUAC and ETUC to increase collaboration and joint work, and examine whether closer constitutional ties could further improve the effective use of scarce resources of people, time and money.

■ **Clear vision of value of international union work must drive reform**

69. Improving the structures of the international trade union movement requires the consent of all the organisations concerned and full respect for trade union democracy. This in turn requires a clear vision of the value of change not just as a cost-saving measure but also as a means of strengthening the work of trade unions at the international level.

■ **Unions ready to build 21st century movement**

70. Congress will be requested to discuss the need for and the possibility of effective structural reform within the international trade union movement. This process will analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the current structures, the major challenges anticipated for the start of the new millennium and the potential for strengthening relationships and means of co-operation between national, regional and international trade union bodies.



