



Global Solidarity News

No. 15 Winter 2010

In this Issue

No money to the IMF **3**
New publication "Ethical Consumerism
– A Guide for Trade Unions" **3**
Abolish child labour **3**
We Do Care **3**
Colombia feature **4 – 5**

Solidarity with Lesotho **6**
International solidarity news **6**
World Day for Decent Work **7**
Global Solidarity Champions **8**
Congress mourns the passing of Neil Kearney **9**
Seminar on forced labour **9**
Forced labour: a sign of our times **10 – 11**

Solidarity Committees

The Solidarity committees (NI and ROI) continue to be the vital link between Congress and affiliates on solidarity issues. These committees work closely with the Global Solidarity Project to ensure that it reaches affiliated unions of Congress and meet regularly during the year. They continue to act as a link between the project, their individual union, and the membership.

These Committees encourage affiliates to engage with the project and look to embed solidarity linking within trade union structure.

Some affiliates (for example NIPSA, IMPACT and PSEU) have formed their own structures to engage with international solidarity issues.

Northern Ireland

John O'Farrell

Northern Ireland Committee
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Carlin House, 4-6 Donegall Street
Belfast BT1 2 FM

t: + 44 (0)28 9024 7940
e: info@ictuni.org
w: www.ictuni

Republic of Ireland

Stellan Hermansson

Global Solidarity Officer
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

t: +353 (01) 889 77 04
e: stellan.hermansson@ictu.ie
w: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity

Congress would like to acknowledge the continued support of Irish Aid for our Global Solidarity work.



Congress would like to acknowledge the support of Concern for our Global Solidarity work in 2009/2010.



The ideas, opinions and comments within this publication are entirely the responsibility of its author(s) and do not necessarily represent or reflect Irish Aid policy.

Welcome

From Copenhagen to Mexico

2009 ended negatively at the Copenhagen Climate Summit COP 15, as governments failed to reach a binding agreement for decisive action to avoid catastrophic climate change. Commitments on greenhouse gas reductions in particular fall short of what is needed. A binding agreement in 2010 is a matter of urgency.

With the UN's scientific advice clearly showing the consequences of inadequate action, a fair and binding agreement in 2010 needs to set far-reaching targets for emissions reductions by industrialised countries, combined with ambitious actions in developing countries. Pledges by industrialised countries to provide assistance for adaptation and mitigation measures in developing countries must also meet at least the minimum level estimated by the UN.

A positive feature of the Copenhagen negotiations concerns the support from many governments to include reference to decent work and a just transition for workers within the framework of the UN's efforts on climate change. Addressing the Summit Plenary, the President of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharan Burrow stated that "we would like to express our satisfaction that this process has recognised the importance of a Just Transition as a driver for decent work and good quality job creation."

The COP16 meeting in Mexico later this year has to reach a binding agreement that delivers a habitable planet, decent work, binding emissions reductions and financial support for the most vulnerable. ICTU Global Solidarity will in 2010 actively participate in the work to mobilise as many Irish trade unionists as possible for an environmentally ambitious and socially fair deal in Mexico.

Solidarity with the Palestinian trade union movement

In 2010 Congress will also develop its solidarity work with the Palestinian people. Congress gives its full support to the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) in their call for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel. The assault on Gaza confirmed that Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people can be likened to the oppression of the black majority in South Africa under Apartheid. A non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions helped to bring Apartheid to an end. The same kind of campaign can actively contribute to end Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. The goal is a viable two state solution; Palestine and Israel, independent of each other, peacefully coexisting.

As you can see in this issue of our Newsletter, Congress has developed strong Global Solidarity work in 2009, and we look forward to developing it further in 2010.



Images, left to right: Dochás "We Do Care" demonstration, September 9. Concern's "Stop Child Labour" demonstration, June 12. Anti-IMF street theatre, December 8.

No money to the IMF

Members of ICTU Global Solidarity were among the campaigners who gathered outside the Dáil on the 8th of December, the day before budget day, calling on the Irish government not to support the International Monetary Fund with a payment of US\$ 1 billion in the next financial year unless the institution is radically reformed to support impoverished countries. Nessa Ni Chasaide, Co-ordinator of Debt and Development Coalition Ireland said in her speech; "We are outraged that the Irish government is promising a potential US\$ 1 billion of taxpayers' money to an institution that pushes damaging economic policy conditions on impoverished countries. Recent IMF loan negotiations show that the IMF may do more harm than good in countries impacted by the financial crisis."

New publication "Ethical Consumerism – A Guide for Trade Unions"

Congress is very pleased to be publishing the latest in our series of publications – 'Ethical Consumerism – A Guide for Trade Unions'. One might question the timing of the publication of such a guide given the global economic crisis that is having such a devastating effect on workers around the globe. However, the evidence suggests that the predicted demise of the ethical market – 'ethical is a fad and a luxury and now that hard times are here we'll forget this nonsense and get back to old fashioned value for money' – is not true and in fact shoppers interest in ethical products has risen despite the credit crunch.

If you are interested to receive a free hard copy of the Ethical Consumer Guide please contact the ICTU Global Solidarity Office, or download it at: <http://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/keyissues.html>

Abolish child labour

On the 12th of June, the International Day against Child Labour, Concern Ireland organised a meeting in the Irish Aid Centre. ICTU Global Solidarity was invited and took part in the event. After speeches and a theatre play; 60 children marched along O'Connell Street with kites and signs. They were singing "Do us all a favour and stop child labour/ Stop the chalk line or children's rights will decline." The "chalk line" refers to the line used by those who recruit child soldiers in some developing countries. If you're taller than the chalk line-drawn on the wall of the school, you will be recruited. If you are lucky enough to fall short, you will get to stay in school.

According to the International Labour Organisation more than 200 million children in the world today are child labourers. They work because their survival and that of their families depend on it. Nearly three-quarters of working children are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking, armed conflict, slavery, sexual exploitation and hazardous work. The effective abolition of child labour is one of the most urgent challenges of our time.

We Do Care

ICTU Global Solidarity took part in the "We Do Care" demonstration on the 9th of September against further cuts in the development aid budget. The demonstration outside the Department of Finance was organised by Dochás (which unites 44 Irish aid agencies). There were 222 demonstrators in total. This number represented the €222 million cut from the aid budget. The campaign "We Do Care" has gained significant support from important Irish organisations, including Congress.

Dochás and several Development NGOs also joined the Congress campaign "Get up Stand up" and took part in the national demonstrations on the 6th of November. But the government did not listen and cut another €25 million from the aid budget on the 9th of December. This came on top of a massive 24% cut previously in 2009. The Government also announced that it will not keep its promise to spend 0.7% of our national income on aid by 2012 and has moved the target date to 2015. By moving the date (which is now in line with most of our EU partners) the Government has once again broken its solemn word to the world's poorest. These cuts and broken promises will have devastating effects on the programmes across the world to assist these people.



Robert Ballagh's print raises funds for Gaza
Page 6



Tara Scott, ethical fashion
Page 7

Colombia

Successful solidarity work



Join Justice for Colombia

More than 100 trade unionists have joined the Irish branch of Justice For Colombia to date. If you are interested in joining the solidarity work too, please contact the Global Solidarity Office.

Congress' solidarity work with the trade unions in Colombia has recently been very successful. The Irish branch of the trade union network "Justice For Colombia", that was established in December 2008 by members of ICTU Global Solidarity, is the main organiser of these activities.

Colombia remains the most dangerous country on earth for trade unionists. The atrocious human rights situation has to be addressed. The lobby work of Justice For Colombia has focused on convincing Irish politicians on the need to suspend the EU negotiations with Colombia on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). EU should not give special trade benefits to a government that has repeatedly failed to implement their international obligations, including basic human and trade union rights.

Irish MEPs against the FTA

In October 2009 all Irish Members of the European Parliament co-signed a letter written by Congress' General Secretary David Begg to the EU Trade Commissioner asking her to suspend the negotiations with Colombia.

"I am proud that Ireland is the first country in the European Union where all MEPs have a united position on this issue. It shows a firm commitment to defend human rights not only in words but also in action" said David Begg.

Similar trade agreements between Colombia and Canada, Colombia and the EFTA group of

countries and Colombia and the United States have all been delayed owing to human rights concerns, with President Obama himself publicly citing anti-trade union attacks as the principle reason for his opposition to the deal.

On the 9th of December ICTU, along with the Trade Union Congress in the UK and the European Trade Union Confederation organised a public hearing in the European Parliament in Brussels. More than 100 people, including several MEPs, from all around Europe attended the hearing. Several European speakers mentioned the Congress letter to the EU-Commission, co-signed by all the Irish MEPs, as a good example to be followed. Congress was represented at the hearing by the chairperson of the Irish branch of Justice For Colombia Mick Dowling, SIPTU and the ICTU Global Solidarity Officer Stellan Hermansson.

On the 25th of January, a new hearing on Colombia was organised in the European Parliaments Development Committee by MEP Gay Mitchell (Fine Gael) in conjunction with ICTU Global Solidarity.

TD's and Senators took action

In November David Begg sent a letter to all TDs and Senators, where he asked them to support the work to suspend EU's negotiations with Colombia on the FTA; "It is of utmost importance that our Government takes a clear position within the European Unions in favour of this demand. In the end, this is a question of showing Colombia and the world that crimes against human rights are not to be rewarded."



A trade union demonstration congregates in Plaza de Bolívar, the central square of Bogotá.
Photo: Justice for Colombia

The Labour Party and Sinn Féin gave their full support for this demand. Also several TDs and Senators of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Independents took action. On the 15th of December the independent Senator Joe O'Toole tabled a motion in support of the Congress' position.

On the 16th of December, Yessika Hoyos Morales, a Colombian Human Rights Lawyer, met with the Foreign Affairs Sub Committee on Human Rights in the Dail. She made a very passionate presentation on the situation in Colombia, which was followed by an intense debate in the Committee on the need for suspension of the FTA-negotiations until Colombia shows respect for human and trade union rights. Congress and several Development NGOs also took part in the meeting.

The Sub Committee decided to ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheal Martin to attend a future meeting to discuss his reasons for not fully supporting the suspension. Congress leadership will also meet with Minister Martin seeking a strengthening of the Government position.

Congress and Amnesty in common work for human rights

Yessika Hoyos Morales was the main speaker at a solidarity meeting in Liberty Hall on the 16th of December. It was the first co-organised meeting by Congress and Amnesty International Ireland. ICTU President Jack O'Connor remarked that "this is the first step in a more developed cooperation between our organisations in common work for human rights around the world and here in our own country". Colm O'Gorman, Executive Director of Amnesty agreed and is looking forward to working with Congress and Justice For Colombia.



Colm O'Gorman Amnesty International, Yessika Hoyos Morales and Jack O'Connor ICTU
Photo: John Chaney



Mick Dowling Chair of JFC Ireland, MEP Gay Mitchell, Luis Alberto Vanegas, Stellan Hermansson Global Solidarity Officer, Liam Craig Best Director of JFC in the UK

Our Colombian friends live under death threats

Yessika Hoyos Morales who visited Dublin on the 16th of December is a Colombian Human Rights Lawyer, and the daughter of a murdered trade union leader. Her father was murdered by two paramilitaries acting on the orders of a lieutenant of the Colombian National Police. Whilst still mourning the loss, Yessika's family began to receive anonymous threats and their home was raided several times. Continuous harassment forced them to move to the capital Bogota but even there the threatening phone calls continued forcing Yessika, her mother and younger sister to move five times in less than two years. In 2003, as Yessika was finishing her third year of law school, she began to work for the CAJAR legal collective, a renowned human rights law firm who was also handling her father's assassination case. In 2007 Yessika co-founded the organisation 'Sons and Daughters Against Impunity' a group composed of the children of victims of disappearances, torture and murder. When Yessika spoke at the public meeting in Dublin she emphasised the need for continuing active international solidarity; "help us to make sure that Europe does not put commercial interests before the lives of thousands of men and women, and that you will not allow any more young people to suffer the pain of seeing their mothers and fathers assassinated, as I had to see".

Luis Alberto Vanegas, who was invited by Global Solidarity to take part in the ICTU Biennial Delegates Conference in Tralee 7-10 July, is the Director of the Human Rights Department in the Colombian Trade Union Congress (CUT). His Department is responsible for assembling all the facts and details of crimes against human and trade union rights in Colombia. Luis Alberto's work contributes to unveiling the truth about what is really happening, and it sometimes proves that the Colombian Government is complicit in serious crimes against human rights. Unveiling the truth is very dangerous. This is why Luis Alberto needs two body guards wherever he goes in his own country. Luis Alberto is married and has three children. As any other human being living under death threats he fears what can happen to him and his family, but he has decided to live with that fear. According to Luis Alberto there is no alternative if things are going to change for the better in his country. In a letter he sent to Congress after his visit, Luis Alberto emphasised that "the warm solidarity shown by the Irish trade union movement is inspirational and makes it clear to us in Colombia that we are not alone in our struggle against repression and for basic workers' rights".

Solidarity with Lesotho

"This project is rescuing embattled and marginalized workers of Lesotho and their families"

The General Secretary of the Lesotho Congress of Democratic Unions (LECODU) Mr. Elliot Ramochela together with board member Mrs Adelina Maile were invited to Ireland at the end of August last year. They participated in the Global Solidarity Summer School in Waterford where they reported on the ICTU and LECODU partnership project.

The first year of this trade union capacity building project has been successful and LECODU is now represented in all 10 districts of the country. Previously they only had committees in two of the districts. The HIV/AIDS information campaign, which is a part of the project, is expanding. In Lesotho, where 25% of the population is infected and more than 300,000 children are orphans due to the epidemic, HIV/AIDS is an issue of high priority for the trade union movement. The existence of the ten district committees has contributed to more decentralised and effective HIV/AIDS information and campaign work.

One important LECODU affiliated union in this work is the Lesotho Association of Teachers (LAT). Adelina Maile emphasized how vital the Irish assistance is to the work of LAT in terms of HIV-education for teachers. Many adults in Lesotho have contracted HIV/AIDS and, in common with other countries across Southern Africa, the education sector in Lesotho is losing so many teachers to this deadly disease that schools are being forced to shut down. This project enables the LAT to continue their life-saving work with teachers and enable schools to remain open.



Young girl from Lesotho. Photo: Eileen O Leary.

The project represents the first time ICTU has formally engaged in a "capacity building" programme with a trade union congress in the developing world. It has been co-funded by grant assistance from Irish Aid (€20,000) and by contributions from Congress affiliates, IMPACT (€10,000) and PSEU (€15,000). This project now needs funding for the second year. Congress is confident that it will be ensured by new contributions from several affiliated unions in 2010.

During their stay in Ireland the LECODU representatives also met with TDs, Irish NGOs and several affiliated unions. Elliot Ramochela said that he was "Grateful, beyond expression, to the Irish Government and ICTU who, despite experiencing economic hardships, through this project are rescuing embattled and marginalized workers of Lesotho and their families"



David Begg ICTU and the LECODU delegation Adelina Maile and Elliot Ramochela.

International solidarity news

€102,117 for Medical Aid to Gaza

Congress' Gaza emergency solidarity campaign in 2009 raised an impressive €102,117. All the funding was directed to Irish Medical Aid for Palestinians (IMAP). €43,200 came from direct contributions from affiliated unions and €58,917 came from a separate campaign where artist Robert Ballagh had produced a limited edition print to raise funds for medical aid to Gaza. Individual trade union members Mags O'Brien SIPTU, Noirin Green UNITE and Anne Casey ICTU ran this successful campaign. At a special solidarity event on the 23rd of June in Liberty Hall most of the funding was given to the Chairman of IMAP Mr. Mick Lanigan. There are still a small number of Ballagh's Gaza prints available, if you are interested in buying one (€150), please contact the Global Solidarity office.

Do not recognise the elections in Honduras

In a letter of 4th December to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the General Secretary of ICTU David Begg expressed his deep concern over the situation in Honduras; "The military coup that overthrew elected President Manuel Zeleña and seized power in June is seeking to legitimise its illegal government through international recognition of the elections that took place on the 29th of November. It poses the greatest threat to Latin American democracy in decades." David Begg asks the Irish Government "not to recognise these elections under the military coup regime."

Economic sanctions against Sri Lanka

The civil war in Sri Lanka ended last summer. 300,000 Tamils remain interned without trial in concentration camps. In a letter to the Irish Government, David Begg wrote that "as long as the Sri Lankan government rejects the calls for access and fair treatment of the Tamils interned in the camps, economic sanctions and an arms embargo should be imposed against Sri Lanka. The extensive and systematic human rights abuses have to stop."

World Day for Decent Work



Stacey Dooley, Tara Scott, John Douglas, Silvana Cappuccio and Sally Anne Kinahan.
Photo: John Chaney.

Solidarity with the garment workers in the global south

On the 7th of October, the World Day for Decent Work, ICTU Global Solidarity organised a meeting "Recession Ethics – how the current crisis affects garment workers in the Global South and retail workers here".

The meeting in the Teachers' Club in Dublin, attracted more than 40 people, and was chaired by Sally-Ann Kinahan, the Assistant General Secretary of Congress. She emphasised the importance of solidarity in the trade union movement for securing decent work for workers across the world.

Increased exploitation

Silvana Capuccio from the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) outlined how workers are always at the forefront of historical and social changes and during the current crisis are the first to be affected.

Highlighting the years of unregulated production that has made decent work an unrealised goal, Silvana spoke about how in the global south wages have fallen by 25% while working hours have increased by 25% and buyers are now driving down the price paid to suppliers by as much as 30%. These costs are passed on to the worker.

The ITGLWF is campaigning for "the living wage" which Silvana said must come from brands and retailers paying suppliers a fair price for production. Crucially, workers worldwide must have the right to organise and bargain collectively to secure their living wage.

Child labour exploitation is a serious problem and continuous short-term contracting has become commonplace. While it is not unusual to hear about the outsourcing of labour from the north to the south, Silvana pointed out that the migrant labour force is moving, and is often trafficked, from the South to Export Processing Zones in other countries of the South. These textile workers, mostly women, endure appalling working and living conditions and are exposed to new illnesses, isolation and social marginalisation. Silvana emphasised the need of constant monitoring and a good system of industrial relations on a global scale would start to promote a decent work agenda.

Love Fashion – Hate Sweatshops

Tara Scott and Stacey Dooley, who took part in the BBC programme 'Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts', spoke about their experience of working in sweatshops in India. This experience had a huge impact on their lives and it also affected their opinions about clothing. Both said they now think a lot more about where, and from whom, high street fashion comes. In the UK, Tara and Stacey are campaigning under the theme "Love Fashion. Hate Sweatshops" and they emphasised the need for Ethical Fashion.

John Douglas, the General Secretary of MANDATE, reminded the audience that Irish retail workers in the clothing sector live on low incomes and are similarly affected by the global recession. John pointed out that the present day contracting costs in business are also passed on to workers in Ireland and it was important to realise how widespread this was. John agreed with Silvana that a global and vibrant trade union movement is essential for securing decent work for all workers. The meeting concluded with a discussion on the need of an Irish branch of the "Clean Clothes Campaign" (CCC).

On the 8th of October a second World Day for Decent Work meeting (with the same international speakers) was organised in Belfast by ICTU Global Solidarity in conjunction with UNISON. Patricia McKeown, the regional secretary of UNISON, chaired the meeting which was attended by more than 20 people. Several of them also expressed an interest in working with a future Irish Branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign.

WDDW

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) organised the first World Day for Decent Work (WDDW) on the 7th of October 2008. As every person should be able to have a job that enables them to live a good life in which their basic needs are met, decent work is the focus for the WDDW. The meetings in Ireland were links in a global chain of activities. Trade unions in more than 100 countries, from the eastern Pacific to the west coast of the Americas, mobilised on 7 October. Hundreds of thousands of trade unionists around the world took part in the 2009 WDDW activities.

CCC

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is dedicated to improving working conditions and supporting the empowerment of workers in the garment and sportswear industry in the global south. Since 1989 the CCC has worked with trade unions, NGOs and workers across the globe. CCC educate and mobilise consumers, lobby companies and governments and offers direct solidarity support to workers as they fight for their rights.

ICTU Global Solidarity is in contact with Trocaire, Comhlámh and the Ethical fashion group Re-dress, to form an Irish CCC. If you wish to be involved in the CCC, please contact the Global Solidarity Office.



The UNISON delegation at the Global Solidarity Summer School in Waterford. From left to right: Pamela Dooley, Dominic Murray, Rita Murray, Mary Ferris and Audrey Stewart.



The second group of ICTU Global Solidarity Champions; John King SIPTU, Niall Mc Guirk PSEU, Mutale Kampuni IMPACT, Stellan Hermansson Global Solidarity Officer, Ciara Melinn CWU, Mamadou Diallo ITUC, Vivienne Lawler intern ICTU, Adrienne Power CWU, Bernie Power UNITE, Robert McDaid Sligo Council of Trade Unions, Deirdre Cauty SIPTU. Photo: John Chaney.

Global Solidarity Champions

On the 1st of december 2009 Congress finished its second Global Solidarity Champions training course. The course covered human and trade union rights, climate change, gender equality, globalisation and migration and it showed why international trade union solidarity is the key to progressive change. 11 trade unionists from 8 affiliated unions took part in the course.

The main speakers came from the international trade union movement and progressive NGOs. There were trade union speakers from Colombia, Senegal, Denmark, UK, Netherlands, Belgium and introductions made by representatives of Irish Aid, Trocaire, Oxfam, Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland. Evaluation of the training course was made each course day and several proposals were made on how the training course can improve.

The participants received their certificate as "Global Solidarity Champions" from the final speaker at the course, the representative of the International Trade Union Confederation, Mamadou Diallo.

A new Global Solidarity Champions training course will start in March 2010. If you want to join the course, please contact the Global Solidarity Office.



Mutale Kampuni, IMPACT Dublin:

"The course enhanced my awareness of the many issues affecting the lives of workers in different parts of the world, from climate change, to entrepreneurship development, forced labour and trafficking.

"More importantly, I learnt that it is possible to actively contribute to international solidarity work by developing relationships with trade unions in less advantaged countries. We can engage in positive actions through setting up solidarity committees within our workplaces."



Niall Mc Guirk, PSEU Dublin:

"The Global Solidarity training course brought human faces to the issues I have been reading about over the past number of years. It was a privilege to hear first hand accounts from people faced with huge inequality and often in situations where being involved in a trade union are a matter of life and death, as in Colombia.

"It is not solely confined to the Global South however. Domestic and Migrant Workers dreadful and shocking experiences in Ireland were highlighted. It gave a rundown on organisations like the World Bank and IMF and how they fit into the global jigsaw.

"Most importantly though, it spoke about how we as trade unionists can help to make this world a fairer and better place for all. You can do this through organisations like ILO and ITUC, but can start at your very own workplace. I would heartily encourage anybody interested in human and workers rights to attend this course and share in this experience."

NIPSA Global Solidarity Champions

NIPSA has completed their first Global Solidarity Champions training course. The goal is to educate and equip 40 NIPSA members with the knowledge and skills to play a key role in educating and mobilising other NIPSA members in international solidarity work. The Champions will also raise awareness and to encourage members to contribute to the NIPSA development world fund.

At an event on 14th December 2009 in Belfast, NIPSA presented their first fifteen Global Solidarity Champions with a certificate in recognition of completion of the training course. The Champions, along with other NIPSA members, also heard a first hand account from Yessika Hoyos, a human rights lawyer in Colombia, of the horrors faced by Colombian trade unionists and the need for international solidarity

Global Solidarity Summer School in Waterford

70 trade unionists from the north and south of Ireland attended the Global Solidarity Summer School in Waterford on the 28th and 29th of August.

The Summer School was opened by the Assistant General Secretary Sally Anne Kinahan. In her speech she emphasized that "Congress continues to play a leading role campaigning in support of the UN-recommended 0.7% of Gross National Income to be given as aid and sought to ensure the Government's commitment to reach this target by 2012."

The Minister of State for Overseas Development Peter Power, T.D, who took part in the opening of the Summer School, used this opportunity to commit funding of €3 million to combat child labour, human trafficking and debt bondage in the developing world. The funding, which will be channelled through the International Labour Organisation (ILO), will also be used to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities and is part of a three year programme of cooperation with the ILO.

The Summer School had four themes; ICTU's Trade Union Development Cooperation project in Lesotho, Climate Change and the trade union movement, Trafficking and forced labour, Global recession and human & trade union rights. The speakers were invited from Lesotho, ITUC in Brussels, LO Norway and several Irish NGOs.

On Friday night the Summer School celebrated the Waterford Council of Trade Unions' centenary with a nice dinner. Tommy Hogan, President of Council of Trade Unions, gave a much appreciated speech. The participants were also entertained by a fantastic African Church Choir, an African Dance group and a saxophonist from Moldova.

Congress mourns the passing of global trade union leader Neil Kearney



The tragic death of Neil Kearney, aged 59, has robbed the international trade union movement of a truly inspirational leader. Neil served for over 20 years as the General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. He was a brilliant and passionate defender of the rights of those workers worldwide who fall prey to the worst excesses of the international outsourcing of garment and footwear production.

Neil died the way he lived. He had completed a day-long series of engagements with trade unions, company managers and government officials in Bangladesh aimed at secured respect for labour rights in the sector when he suffered a fatal heart attack in the early hours of the 17th of November. It is a measure of what he meant to the workers in Bangladesh that three days of mourning was declared in the sector. ICTU Global Solidarity had invited Neil to speak at meetings in Dublin on the 25-26 November. Neil was looking forward to come back to Ireland, but this was sadly not to be.

Born in 1950 in Donegal, Neil moved to the UK at the age of 17 in search of work. He joined a union on his first day at work. Neil was a lifelong socialist who resigned from the Labour Party over the Iraq war. He will be remembered as a fighter who was tireless in his defence of trade union rights and who made it seem like anything was possible. Congress extends its deepest sympathy to Neil's wife and two daughters.

MRCI/ICTU - Seminar on forced labour

On the 1st of October the Migrant Right Centre Ireland (MRCI), in conjunction with ICTU Global Solidarity, organised a seminar on Forced Labour attended by 70 people. Moira Leydon, Chair of the Global Solidarity Committee, gave the opening speech and emphasised "the rights to collective bargaining and to trade union recognition in the workplace are absolutely vital to tackling all exploitative forms of labour and creating a climate where forced labour is totally unacceptable in society."

Roger Plant of the ILO was the main speaker. He said; "forced labour and trafficking, while serious crimes, must also be addressed as labour market concerns, as labour as well as human rights, and that criminal and labour justice must combine their efforts to tackle the problems. There are also systemic problems on labour markets – the most egregious of these being the failure to curb abusive practices and excess charging by a range of recruiting agencies – that need to be addressed together by governments, employers and workers organizations, and committed NGOs like MRCI."

The Guest Contributor

Jeroen Beirnaert:

Forced labour: a sign of our times

In this column the Global Solidarity Newsletter publishes interesting and thought provoking articles written by various international trade unionists.

Jeroen Beirnaert from Belgium is our second guest contributor. He writes about forced labour, the modern slavery in our world. Jeroen Beirnaert is the coordinator of the International Trade Union Confederation's Global Alliance to combat Forced Labour and Trafficking.

Slavery in the 21st century seems hard to imagine. Two hundred years of antislavery legislation and abolitionist campaigning, not in the least by trade unions, has not been in vain. Slavery is no longer perceived as acceptable. Moreover, it is revolting to imagine that it once was promoted as an instrument for humanisation of "savages". Consequently, forced labour exacted by states and governments has decreased consistently. However, slavery has never been completely eradicated. In 2005, the International Labour Organisation did some groundbreaking research to come up with an actual figure of how big a problem persists. The result was that at any point in time an astonishing 12.3 million people worldwide are still in forced labour today. The reservation of the researchers is that since forced labour is largely hidden, their figures only uncover the tip of a much larger iceberg.

Whereas forced labour is still used systematically and on a wide scale by the military junta in Burma, forced labour of prisoners persists in countries such as China. 80 per cent of today's forced labour is to be found in the private economy, mainly in informal work and in remote and isolated rural areas. However, increasingly forced labour is filtering into supply chains of local and multinational businesses in mainstream economic sectors. Traditional slavery as we know it from the history books is still not eradicated and continues in certain countries in western Africa, but far greater numbers of workers are exploited through subtle means of coercion. Contrary to what one might initially think, forced labour is not a problem of the developing world alone. The research mentioned by the ILO showed that almost every single country in the world is affected by forced labour in one form or another, mostly in agriculture, domestic work, the construction industry, hotels and catering. Nowadays, this is being corroborated by ever growing evidence.

A very specific group vulnerable to forced labour is domestic workers. Often confined in private homes they completely depend on their employer, some are abused and exploited. After centuries of unprotected work their situation is now finally getting some of the attention it deserves on the international level, as trade unions from around the world have been lobbying for a new regulatory instrument in the ILO that would better protect the rights of domestic workers. The essence of the problem is that female dominated domestic work is generally not recognized as employment in the legal sense because labour legislation does not automatically applying to domestic work it makes it very difficult for household workers to claim their rights. The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) reported some cases of forced labour in Ireland. "... a domestic worker worked 7 days a week from 5.00am until 10.00pm. She did not have any days off. She was paid €150 per month ... deductions were made if the employer believed something was damaged or broken in the course of the worker's duties. ... Domestic workers were regularly told not to communicate with anyone if they were out of the house. A domestic worker and trade union official reported incidences of physical abuse. ...

When [a domestic worker] contacted the Labour Inspectorate they explained that they are powerless to enter a private home.” But ICTU succeeded in 2006 to have a code of practice for domestic workers in Ireland adopted as a part of social partnership “towards 2016”. This code of practice guarantees domestic workers labour rights in Ireland.

Domestic work as well as forced labour-prone sectors mentioned above have a high proportion of migrant workers. An important element that makes migrant workers and undocumented migrant workers even more vulnerable to exploitation and pressure from their employers is their precarious residence status. Very often, residence status depends on employment and sometimes even on a particular employer. When migrants lose or would prefer to change their jobs, most legislation does not allow or grant much time to do so. When residence status is linked to a specific employer, switching jobs is even completely out of the question. Such migration policies prevent migrant workers from denouncing abuse by their employers because of fear of deportation.

This takes place in a context of globalisation and an ever increasing mobility of workers. The growing welfare gap between rich and poor countries combined with massive unemployment in developing countries and at the same time high demand for labour in industrialised countries leads to abuse. As long as restrictive migration legislation prevents flexible migration for labour and does not acknowledge the demand on industrialised labour markets for migrant labour, trafficking for forced labour is bound to increase further. The ones who benefit from these circumstances and the key players in what could be called a modern form of slave trade, are the thousands of unscrupulous agents, labour brokers and employment agencies deceiving workers in their countries of origin with false promises of wages, working conditions and even the nature of work. Consequently, they exploit workers’ vulnerability in their country of destination where they do not speak the language or know the culture, or the administration. This is again combined with the fear of repatriation. Migrant workers often have to pay huge amounts to brokers to be employed in a foreign country and accept a loan. In many cases it would take the worker two to three years to pay off the loan in debt bondage.

In December 2008 the MRCI published a report of a survey among 115 mainly Asian migrants working in the restaurant industry in Ireland. Half of those interviewed did not earn the minimum wage, worked more than 9 hours a day, did not get rest breaks, bank holiday pay or even pay slips. 85 per cent did not receive overtime pay or extra pay for Sunday work. They did not have an employment contract nor were their employment rights displayed. Last but certainly not least, 88 per cent of them had never been in contact with a trade union. In 2008 The Star published the following story: “[a] Pakistani man, who was forced to work in appalling conditions for five years, earned just €150 a week – and had €100 of that deducted by his Dublin-based employer for his accommodation. He had virtually no days off. His employer kept his passport and threatened him with the loss of this work permit and deportation if he complained. He was sacked when he sought help . . .”

This short article does not allow me to go into details of all different forms of contemporary forced labour which are still prevalent nor does it allow me to expand on appropriate counter measures and policies. I hope it did, however, illustrate that a growing numbers of forced labourers are working in Ireland and in the EU as a whole.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is leading a global trade union alliance to combat forced labour and trafficking, promoting trade union activism and cooperation. Significant and timely steps in the right direction are being taken by trade unions around the world including in Ireland. SIPTU is recruiting migrant organisers to reach out these modern slaves. Global solidarity starts in the EU, in Ireland. Maybe next time you walk into the Chinese take away around the corner, or into a house of some acquaintance, you could talk to the workers about labour rights and how a trade union can help to claim them.

In summary

- > 12.3 million people worldwide are still in forced labour
- > Every single country is affected by forced labour
- > Most vulnerable, often abused and exploited, are domestic workers
- > ILO will develop regulatory instrument to better protect the rights of domestic workers
- > ITUC is leading a global trade union alliance to combat forced labour and trafficking
- > Global Solidarity starts in the EU, in Ireland

Global Solidarity

Republic of Ireland

Stellan Hermansson
Global Solidarity Officer
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

t: +353 (01) 889 77 04
e: stellan.hermansson@ictu.ie
w: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity
w: www.ictu.ie

Northern Ireland

John O'Farrell
Northern Ireland Committee
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Carlin House, 4-6 Donegall Street
Belfast BT1 2 FM

t: +44 (0)28 9024 7940
e: info@ictuni.org
w: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity
w: www.ictuni.org

www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity

Printed on 100% recycled paper