



Global Solidarity News

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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 ICTU Global Solidarity to ensure that it reaches affiliated unions of Congress and meet regularly during the year. They continue to act as a link between ICTU Global Solidarity, their individual union, and the membership.

These Committees encourage affiliates to engage with ICTU Global Solidarity and look to embed solidarity linking within trade union structure.

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

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

 **Irish Aid**
Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha

Welcome

A recent peer review of Irish Aid by the OECD Development Assistance Committee commends the Government for its "impressive growth" in overseas development assistance (ODA) from 2003 to 2008. The DAC praises Ireland as "a champion in making aid more effective", and the report says "The Irish Government is committed to meeting the United Nations ODA target of 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2012." "The challenge for the Government is to reach these targets despite severe economic downturn and increased budgetary pressure". The DAC urges the Government to refrain from further budgetary action that would undermine this commitment."

As the DAC report points out, we should be proud of our national aid effort. Yet, only two weeks later, the aid budget was further cut by €100 million in the April 7th emergency budget. That was the fourth cut to the aid budget since June 2008. The Irish overseas aid budget was cut by €45 million in July 2008, another €15 million in October and by €95 million in February this year.

The framework agreement adopted by the social partners on the 28th of January states: "In developing a pact, the Government and social partners are fully committed to an approach in which all sectors of society contribute in accordance with their ability to do so, and conversely the most vulnerable, low paid, unemployed and social welfare recipients are insulated against the worst effects of recession." The slashing of our aid budget and seemingly inevitable reneging (once again) on our commitment to reach 0.7% of our GNI by 2012 is not only inconsistent with this overall approach but is also damaging to our international reputation.

The cuts in the overseas aid budget will have a devastating impact on the world's poorest people who have been benefitting from the many different aid programmes. Congress has lent support to a wide coalition of groups in their strong protests against the cuts. We understand that in the current economic climate that cuts are inevitable but the current level of cuts is clearly disproportionate. The Government must now set out clearly how it is going to honour its promise of dedicating 0.7% of GNI to overseas aid by 2012.

The first twelve Global Solidarity Champions, whom all attended our five day development education training course, got their certificates on the last day of the training course, the 7th of April. By pure coincidence it was the same day as the Government announced the enormous cuts in development aid. It is timely that these people are the first (of many more we hope) of a group of informed and active champions of the world's poorest people who will facilitate a better coordinated Irish trade union approach to our international solidarity work.

In these times of global recession international trade union solidarity is more important than ever.

We have a new website!

To facilitate this further we have developed a new website The Global Solidarity Newsletter is published twice a year. But if you want up to date information we recommend that you visit:
www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity



Daniel Smith ILO and David Joyce ICTU at the Edward Phelan book launch, April 30.



Roddy Doyle at the Launch of The Big Read, April 22.



Tara Scott, Ethical Pest, talking to the ICTU women's conference, March 7.
Photo: Lukasz Paluch



ICTU's Gaza solidarity demonstration in Belfast 10th January
See page 4
for more on Palestine

Edward Phelan and the ILO

ICTU Global Solidarity was present at the launch of the book "Edward Phelan and the ILO" on the 30th of April. Edward Phelan who was born in Waterford 1888 played an important role in the history of the International Labour Organisation and he was ILO's Director General 1941 – 1948. It was under his leadership that ILO adopted Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise. At the book launch the Taoiseach Brian Cowen held a speech where he mentioned ICTU's active work. He said "I am particularly pleased that ICTU and IBEC have supported and contributed to the design of, Irish Aid's Partnership Programme with the ILO. Irish Aid support to the ILO focuses on the most vulnerable in developing countries, those often living at the margins of society with little opportunity for economic advancement. For example, the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme provides support to encourage the employment of people with disabilities. Irish Aid also supports the ILO in tackling two major global scourges: forced labour and child labour."

ICTU Women's Seminar

On the 6th and 7th of March Global Solidarity took part in ICTU women's seminar in Belfast. Global Solidarity had invited Nancy Aguiar of the Cuban Women's Federation to the seminar. She talked on the situation for women on Cuba and also expressed her gratitude for the strong support from the Irish Trade Union movement to the people of Cuba after the hurricanes last year. Tara Scott of the UK Ethical Consumer's campaign "Ethical Pest" was the second speaker. She is well known from the BBC programme "Blood, Sweat and T-shirts" which made the extreme exploitation of garment industrial workers in India known to a lot of young people in Britain. Tara held an emotional and much appreciated speech on the need of ethical consumerism.

The Big Read

On the 22nd of April the author Roddy Doyle launched the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) Big Read Campaign in the Irish Aid centre in Dublin. ICTU Global Solidarity is a member of the GCE and took part in the event. Roddy read a Michael Morpurgo story from the GCE's Big Read Book. The event included performances and readings from primary and secondary school

children, as well as mature students. All those attending were asked to sign the Irish Big Book, on behalf of the millions that cannot worldwide. This was only one event of many taking place. Hundreds of schools and youth clubs throughout the country have been preparing their own Big Books as part of Global Action Week for Education. 774 million adults in the world can not read. Each day 75 million children do not get the chance to go to school, denying them the chance to learn to read and write.

Welcome to the Global Solidarity Summer School in Waterford 28 - 29 August

This Summer School is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the most urgent equality and social justice issues in our world today.

The Summer School is also a place to meet trade union friends from Ireland, Lesotho, Norway and some other countries.

- > We will learn more about Lesotho and the trade unions' struggle against poverty and HIV/AIDS.
- > We will discuss Climate Change and the Trade Union movement's important role in the work for a sustainable development.
- > We will gain knowledge about trafficking and forced labour, and how we can stand up and support the victims of these criminal traffickers.
- > We will study how casino capitalism and greed created the worldwide recession, and the need for regulations and progressive solutions.
- > We will talk about how we can develop our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the global south, in our common work for human and trade union rights.

And we will celebrate the Centenary of Waterford's Trade Union Council with a great party on Friday night!

Among the speakers are Peter Power, the Minister for Overseas Development; Elliot Ramochela, General Secretary of the Lesotho Congress of Democratic Unions LECODU; Steve Benedict, Responsible for the Human and Trade Union Rights section in the International Trade Union Confederation; Denise Charlton, Chief Executive of the Immigrant Council of Ireland; Naimh Garvey, Climate Change expert in Trocaire and Asbjørn Wahl, a Norwegian trade union leader with a green agenda.

If you are interested in taking part – please contact your own trade union or the ICTU Global Solidarity Office by the 1st of August at the latest.



Gaza

Basic Gaza facts

- The Gaza Strip is land bordering the Mediterranean Sea between Egypt and Israel. Most of the 1.4 million people in the Gaza Strip are Palestinian refugees (people who in 1948 fled from what is now Israel)
- There is no free passage from the Strip to Egypt or Israel or to the sea. By the fall of 2008 U.N. food was all that was keeping most people of the Gaza Strip from starvation.

Trade Union Friends of Palestine

If you want to take part in the Trade Union movements solidarity work with Palestine, please contact Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP)

TUFP-Northern Ireland
eamonmcmahon@hotmail.co.uk

TUFP- Rol
mobrien@siptu.ie

Or contact the Global Solidarity Office

After the war

The Israeli aggressive war against the Palestinians in Gaza starting on the 27th of December and going on for 22 days caused tremendous devastation, horror and death. 1,300 people were killed and 5,015 were wounded. Many of injured Palestinians will require lifelong assistance and care. 13 Israelis were killed in the war whereof 3 civilians. The Israeli bombing campaign also caused extensive internal displacement of the civilian population and widespread destruction of houses, schools, hospitals and factories. 22,000 buildings - 14 % of all buildings - were partially or completely destroyed. The education system has sustained severe damage as a result of the conflict. 37 United Nations schools suffered damage from Israeli attacks. 157 schools in all were damaged. Many Palestinians in Gaza have experienced extra ordinary levels of physical and emotional stress witnessing destruction and death. This means even more hardship on an already impoverished population, compounding the effects of a 18 months blockade and tight regime of closures and restrictions on movement that date back to the early 1990s. It is also clear evidence that children suffer most of all. Over 400 Palestinian children were killed and over 1,800 were injured. It has been confirmed a significant increase in children who are experiencing emotional trauma. Many children are showing difficulties in school and there is a huge need of group and individual counseling. United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine refugees is expanding its community mental health programme to mitigate the immediate and longer term effects of the war on the population in Gaza.



Above: Gaza City, Gaza Strip, December 27, 2008. Photo: Getty Images. Right top: Anne Casey with IMAP's chairperson Mick Lannigan and the Robert Ballagh's solidarity print, which so far has sold for more than €56,000. Right below: David Begg gives the first part of the funding for the Gaza emergency campaign to Mick Lannigan, also in the photo Saeb Shaat and Yussef Dorkhom from IMAP and Anne Casey ICTU. Photos: John Chaney



ICTU solidarity with the Palestinians

When Israel started the war against the Palestinians in Gaza, ICTU's President Patricia McKeown called for immediate ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces and the lifting of the siege. She also stated that "Israel has demonstrated that it will not abide by international opinion, international law or UN conventions and resolutions. It leaves no option but the exercise of sanctions".

Congress mobilised members all over Ireland in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza. In Belfast ICTU organised an impressive demonstration on the 10th of January with more than 5000 participants. Assistant General Secretary Peter Bunting said in his speech to the participants, that "We are here today not to criticise the people of Israel, many of whom are our comrades for peace and justice. We act in solidarity with the Israeli workers, Israeli human rights groups, Israeli military refuseniks, and the Israeli physician groups – groups as Breaking the Silence and B'tselem. This protest is against the actions of the government of Israel and those western political powers complicit in their actions". He concluded his speech by saying, "Talks and not bombs are the only way forward to achieve a viable two state solution, independent of each other, peacefully co-existing and governed by those elected in a democratic process whether or not we in the west or anywhere else agree or disagree."

€98,950 to Gaza

On the 7th of January Congress started a Gaza emergency solidarity campaign and decided to support Irish Medical Aid for Palestinians (IMAP) in their work to help the people in Gaza. So far €42,950 has been collected, with the largest contributions from SIPTU €25,000, IMPACT €5,750, INO €5,000. Thanks also to UNISON, ASTI, CPSU, IFUT, PSEU, BECTU, ESBOA, UNITE, TSSA and Clonmel Trade Union Council. Most of the funding was given by David Begg to the Chairman of IMAP Mr. Mick Lannigan at a meeting on the 25th of February

In a separate campaign artist Robert Ballagh as part of his commitment to the justice of the Palestinian cause has designed a limited Edition print (300) to raise funds for medical aid to Gaza. Individual trade union members Mags O'Brien SIPTU, Noirin Green UNITE and Anne Casey ICTU ran the campaign, to sell his Gaza solidarity print. This very successful solidarity action was also in support to IMAP and their work in Gaza - so far raising more than €56,000. The price was at least €150 for each print. Most of the prints were sold to individual trade union members and unions. The Communications Workers Union paid €10,000 for the number one print!

All together, so far the Irish Trade Union movement has collected €98,950 for Medical Aid to the population in Gaza.

Reem EL Bashiti, fifth grade, originally from Rafah:

It was Saturday afternoon, I was on my way to school, when the bombardment started, I felt that it was over my head, it was so strong and scary, I was so terrified, I could not speak a word all day at the school. When I went home, I felt a severe headache, I could not concentrate, my family was watching the news, I felt so scared when I saw the bodies on the ground. The second day was more terrifying, the Israeli planes bombed the a long the border between Rafah and Egypt to destroy the tunnels, we felt that our house will fall on top of us, we stated to cry and asked my father to evacuate us. On Monday, we left the house and joined our aunt, and the war continued, we learnt that our house was completely destroyed. We could not do anything, when the war ended, my father went to see the house, but there was nothing.

Interview from UNRWA's homepage
<http://www.un.org/unrwa/english.html>

Israel refuse to cooperate with UN team investigating possible war crimes in Gaza

Richard Goldstone, who is heading the team that started its work on the 2nd of June, said it had hoped to hold hearings in Israel and the West Bank. But Israel has refused to co-operate in the inquiry, accusing it of bias. Israel charges the UN Human Rights Council with singling it out unfairly. The 15-member UN-team has visited 40 sites in Gaza and spoken to some 70 witnesses and relatives of victims. It had hoped to visit southern Israeli towns hit by Palestinian rocket fire, but was not allowed access. Mr Goldstone who is a South African judge who prosecuted war crimes in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda said he hoped Israel's refusal to co-operate would not weaken the report, due for publication in September.



Global Solidarity Champions

From left to right; Mick Dowling SIPTU, David Moran MANDATE, Tony Dunne ESBOA, John Bowen Cork Council of Trade Unions, Dominic Murray UNISON, Karan O'Loughlin SIPTU, Stellan Hermansson Global Solidarity Officer, Jaap Wienen Deputy General Secretary ITUC, Conor McKinney CPSU, Patrick Foley Wexford Council of Trade Unions, Alison Gililand INTO, Moira Leydon ASTI and chairperson of the Global Solidarity Committee, John O'Brien UNITE, Keivan Jackson MANDATE. Photo: John Chaney

On the 7th of April 2009 ICTU finished its first Global Solidarity Champions training course. 12 trade unionists received their certificate as "Global Solidarity Champions" from the final speaker at the course, the Deputy General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Jaap Wienen. The overall evaluation of the 5 day course was very positive. The "Champions" felt committed to develop the international solidarity work in their own union and to take part in the future work of the ICTU Global Solidarity.

The main speakers came from the international trade union movement and progressive NGOs. At the first course we had trade unionist speakers from Colombia, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands and introductions made by representatives of Irish Aid, Concern and Trocaire.

A variety of important issues were introduced and discussed, for example:

- > The difficult situation for trade unionists in the global south, some working under very hard conditions with extremely low pay, some of these even risking their lives for carrying a union card
- > The urgent need of a trade union engagement for and viable solution to Climate Change, a solution that must include fight against social injustice.
- > Poverty and exploitation as one of the effects of today's world trade and how the international trade union movement can fight against the power of the transnational corporations and the international financial institutions.
- > The huge gender inequalities in the world and the importance of a trade union mobilisation for women's' rights and gender equality.

The training course gave an insight to all the main social justice problems in our world, but it also offered explanations and reasons for the existence of these problems. It showed why international trade union solidarity is the key to progressive change on local, national and global level.

The participants of the training course made evaluations of each course day and several proposals were made on how the training course can improve. A new Global Solidarity Champions training course will start on the 3rd of November. If you are a member of an ICTU affiliated trade union and you want to book a place at the next course, you can contact the Global Solidarity Office.

Alison Gililand, Dublin, INTO

The training course is extremely beneficial from two points of view. One was the actual content and how it was presented: trade unionists giving their on-the-ground experiences, videos showing life for workers around the globe, interactive and facilitated group discussions. This allowed us to really get to grips with the issues and explore them. The other benefit was cross union networking - getting to know and share perspectives with other trade union members and officials.



Dominic Murray, Belfast, UNISON

The Global Champions Course is a tremendous opportunity for all us fortunate Trade Unionists in Ireland to put a piece in the jigsaw, to ensure that less fortunate International Trade Unionists can strive with us, for a fairer deal, and a greater voice, climatically and politically for a less polarised world."



Karan O'Loughlin, Limerick, SIPTU

I would recommend this course to all trade unionists who ever wondered how the world actually works and the effect of our daily mundane actions on the lives of people who are now and remain the most disadvantaged people in the world. This course clearly demonstrates that it does not have to be this way and all of our actions, collective and individual can have a marked effect."



Colombia

EU has to withdraw the Trade Benefit Agreement in the case of Colombia

Extract from David Begg's letter (20th of March) to the Minister for EU-Affairs Dick Roche

EU claims that to qualify for the preferential trading status GSP+ a country must ratify and comply with 27 Conventions on Human Rights and Labour standards, including ILO convention 87 on freedom of association and the protection of the right to organize and Convention 98 on the right to organize and collective bargaining. Colombia clearly does not comply with these conventions.

Only during the last two months four trade union leaders were killed in Colombia.

- 20 February assassination of Leoncio Gurrierrez of the SUTEV trade union.
- 15 February assassination of Guillermo Antonio Ramirez of the SER trade union
- 12 February assassination of Luis Alberto Arango Crespo, President of the Fishing and Agricultural Workers' Association.
- 28 January assassination of Leovigildo Mejia of the ASOGRAS trade union

In addition to the four murders the regional trade union leader Jose Jair Valencia Agudelo a member of EDUCAL trade union is in intensive care in hospital after having been shot six times on his way to work on 26 February.

Last year 46 trade unionists were killed in Colombia. The International Trade Union Confederation concludes in its annual survey of violations of trade union rights that Colombia "remained the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists"

I am also extremely concerned that the EU has begun negotiations with Colombia for a bilateral EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, which would provide Colombia with further economic benefits despite the country is making almost no progress in ending violence against trade unionists, and we note that President Barack Obama and the United States recently rejected such a deal citing anti-trade union attacks as the principle reason for doing so.

I therefore kindly ask you to act in favour of opening an EU investigation into Colombia's labour and human rights performance as it is permitted to do under the regulation governing GSP+, as you noted in your letter of 17 December 2008 to me.

Any serious objective analysis of Colombia's compliance with the 27 conventions on Human Rights and Labour Standards can only come to one conclusion: Colombia does not comply with these conventions.

I firmly believe that the EU has to withdraw the GSP+ benefits in the case of Colombia.

Yours Sincerely,

David Begg, General Secretary.



A protest against privatisation by public sector workers in the city of Cali. Photo: Justice For Colombia

The Irish Branch of Justice For Colombia is organising, agitating, lobbying...

On the 17th December last year ICTU Global Solidarity Committee established the Irish branch of "Justice or Colombia" (JFC). This trade union net work that started in the UK is focused on concrete solidarity work with the trade union movement in Colombia. The first meeting of JFC Ireland elected Mick Dowling, SIPTU as chairperson and Mairtin MacMaolain, ASTI as vice chair.

JFC-Ireland has since then arranged public meetings in Dublin and worked with a petition to free political prisoners (trade unionists) in Colombia. JFC has also has done a lot of lobbying work vis-à-vis both the Irish Government and the Irish MEPs against EU's preferential trade agreement with Colombia. In February the following 10 (out of Irelands then 13) MEP:s signed an appeal against the trade agreement Colm Burke, Gay Mitchell, Brian Crowley, Proinsias De Rossa, Avril Doyle, Jim Higgins, Mary Lou McDonald, Seán Ó Neachtain, Eoin Ryan, Kathy Sinnott. The MEP Gay Mitchell who is member of the Development Committee in the European Parliament also met with ICTU to discuss the situation in Colombia. At that meeting, where also the JFC Chairperson Mick Dowling took part, Gay Mitchell promised to arrange a hearing with Colombian trade union leaders and the Development Committee.

JFC also met with the Green senator Deirdre Deburca, who later on at a meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee of EU Affairs read David Begg's letter (opposite) as one way to present the extreme situation in Colombia. The Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheal Martin promised the Green senator that he will raise the issue in the EU and said "Trade agreements are important to enable countries to develop and grow. On the other hand, there has to be an approximation to the norms and values of democracies in the European Union. There is always a balance to be struck between the degree to which a country is moving towards these norms and resiling from them. The Senator's point which she strongly articulated is that these norms are nowhere near being attained in the context of the behaviour of the Colombian authorities towards trade unions. I will follow up the matter and come back to the Senator on it."

JFC-Ireland and the Colombian solidarity organisation "Raices" arranged a public meeting in Belfast at the end of March. 35 people attended the meeting where the main speaker was the Colombian trade union lawyer Miguel Puerto from the International Centre for Trade Union Rights. Several people signed a list of interest to work with JFC, so hopefully there will soon be a JFC-branch in the North as well.



The Cuban Ambassador Noel Carillo receives the funding from the Vice Chair of the Global Solidarity Committee Mick Dowling. Photo: John Chaney



Tamil concentration Camp in Sri Lanka.

€61,263 to rebuild Cuba after the hurricanes

The four hurricanes that hit Cuba in just three weeks last autumn are the worst natural disasters for this island nation since 1963. Half a million houses were destroyed, major factories, schools, telecommunications, hospitals, government buildings and farms were severely damaged. The agriculture sector was also harshly hurt, as much as 70% of last year's food production was lost.

Therefore the Executive Council of Congress decided in October last year to start an All Ireland Trade Union Campaign to support the Cuban people's efforts to rebuild their country. ICTU decided to concentrate the funding to reconstruct houses and schools in one of the worst hit regions Pinar del Rio. The largest contributions came from SIPTU €38,270, CWU €10,000, UNITE €5,143, thanks also to TUI, INTO, ASTI, NIPSA, CPSU, MANDATE, PSEU, TSSE and the Trade Union Councils in Dublin, Cork and Waterford.

The Cuban ambassador Noel Carillo met with the Global Solidarity Committee on the 4th of March. He expressed gratitude on behalf of the population in Pinar del Rio and he said that the support from the Irish Trade Union Movement has been very important and encouraging.

Lesotho - the trade union capacity building project moves forward

In a report to ICTU Global Solidarity the Lesotho Congress of Democratic Unions describes the progress of the trade union capacity building project. This project which is funded by Irish Aid and our affiliated unions IMPACT and PSEU is also a HIV/AIDS information project. In Lesotho 25% of the population is infected.

LECODU reports that they, thanks to the project, so far has established local committees in seven of the ten districts. The purpose of setting up these committees is to decentralize the services of LECODU and help in making it possible to deliver the mandate of the LECODU HIV/AIDS Project.

ICTU has invited the General Secretary of LECODU, Elliot Ramochela to the Global Solidarity Summer School in Waterford 28-29 of August, where we will have the opportunity to learn more of the project.

David Begg: The Tamil people's national rights must be respected

Congress protested against the Sri Lankan government's extremely aggressive military offensive against the Tamil population earlier this year. In a letter of the 23rd of January to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the General Secretary of ICTU David Begg wrote;

"The government in Sri Lanka bares the main responsibility for this war. Their refusal to respect the minority Tamil people's human and national rights has caused a situation where the Tamils are victims of discrimination, ill-treatment, torture and are suffering in a war where the army of Sri Lanka is responsible for many atrocities including massacres and massive destruction. A large majority of those killed in the conflict are Tamils. The Tamils have their own military organisation, the Tamil Tigers that in some military actions have caused the deaths of many civilian Singhalese people. These military actions also have to be condemned. The Sri Lankan army has a massive advantage, not at least in man power and technology, and is now on a large military offensive. Since the Government of Sri Lanka refuse international press as well as international NGOs to visit the North East of Sri Lanka, where the majority of the Tamil population is living, the atrocities can go on, without international observers and almost without international criticism."

In the letter David Begg also emphasized the need of immediate action "The Irish Congress of Trade Unions hopes that the Irish government can take new initiatives on the international level, and within the European Union, to demand an immediate ceasefire and to recreate internationally supervised and UN supported peace negotiations between the government of Sri Lanka and representatives of the Tamil people. The goal for these negotiations must be to end the war and to find a solution which respects the human and national rights of both the Singhalese and the Tamil people. Our own history in Ireland teaches us that in the final analysis, dialogue is the only way to resolve conflict."

Unfortunately the war did not stop and the worlds political leaders did not protest hard enough. It ended with a massacre of Tamil people. Now it is time for the world to investigate all the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan government and to ensure aid and support to all the Tamil people now suffering in concentration camps in Sri Lanka.

Forced labour



Child working under bonded labour, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Photo: © ILO/Crozet M.

“Forced labour is the antithesis of decent work”

In a new study on the patterns of forced labour worldwide, the International Labour Office (ILO) says the “opportunity cost” of coercion to the workers affected reaches over USD 20 billion per year.

The report, entitled *The Cost of Coercion*, also details the growing number of unethical, fraudulent and criminal practices that can lead people into situations of forced labour, and calls for increased efforts to eradicate the practices.

The report also charts the significant progress on the international and national levels in reducing and preventing forced labour, but warns of the possible impact of the global economic and jobs crisis.

“Forced labour is the antithesis of decent work”, said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia, “It causes untold human suffering and steals from its victims. Modern forced labour can be eradicated, providing there is a sustained commitment by the international community, working together with government, employers, workers and civil society.”

Moreover, the report estimates that the “opportunity cost” of coercion to the workers affected by these abusive practices, in terms of lost earnings, now reaches over USD 20 billion. This presents a powerful economic argument, as well as a moral imperative, as to why governments must now accord higher priority to these concerns.

Noting that it was being issued amid the worst economic and financial crisis for many decades, the ILO report added that “in such a crisis situation, it is the vulnerable who suffer the most. At such times it is all the more necessary to ensure that adjustments are not made at the expense of the safeguards that have been painstakingly put in place to prevent forced labour and trafficking abuse in supply chains”.

The study paints a mixed picture of global efforts to combat forced labour. While most countries have introduced legislation that deals with forced labour as a criminal offence and the issue itself is no longer hidden or taboo, others are finding it difficult to identify cases of abuse, let alone define the adequate policy responses.

The report points out that among the intensified international and national efforts to reduce and prevent forced labour, are new laws and policies at national and regional level as well as a growing provision of social protection for those most at risk of forced labour and trafficking.

“Most forced labour is still found in developing countries, often in the informal economy and in isolated regions with poor infrastructure, labour inspection and law enforcement”, the report says. “This can only be tackled through integrated policies and programmes, mixing law enforcement with proactive measures of prevention and protection, and empowering those at risk of forced labour to defend their own rights.”

“We must never forget that forced labour is a serious criminal offence that requires criminal punishment” said Roger Plant, head of the ILO’s Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour. “But we must also remember that forced labour is often poorly defined in national legislation, making it difficult to address the multiple subtle ways in which workers can be denied their freedom. The challenge is to address these problems in an integrated way, through prevention and law enforcement, using both labour and criminal justice”.

ICTU Global Solidarity against Trafficking and Forced Labour

The Global Solidarity Committee has formed a working group that just has started to gather information to find the best ways for awareness raising on these issues within the Irish Trade Union movement and how we can link our work to the International Trade Union Confederations initiative of a global alliance against trafficking and forced labour. The working group is also in contact with the Immigrants Council of Ireland that recently presented the report “Globalisation, sex trafficking and prostitution”.

Visit their website www.immigrantcouncil.ie

The Guest Contributor

Asbjørn Wahl

Climate change and Social Justice

Under this column the Global Solidarity Newsletter will publish interesting and thought provoking articles written by various international trade unionists.

Asbjørn Wahl from Norway is our first guest contributor, writing about the Climate Change and the urgent need for trade union engagement in this issue. Asbjørn Wahl is vice chair of the road transport worker's section of the International Transport Workers Federation.

Most problems in society are mainly social and political, even if at first glance they seem purely technical or scientific. This is a hard-earned lesson for the labour and trade union movement. For example, workplace technology can be developed to serve different interests: the shareholders, the customers, the workers... In the end it is the actual balance of power which decides the solution and who it will benefit.

The threat of climate change is no exception. The solution of this problem requires, among other things, a huge amount of new technology. But the problem isn't just about technology; it is a genuinely social and political issue. It is decisive, therefore, that the trade union movement develops its own climate change policies. We have to move from a reactive to a proactive position. In the end, it is a question of what kind of society we want to develop.

Facing up to the issues

So far, much of the trade union movement has hesitated when confronted with the problem of climate change, even though this situation has moved on significantly in recent years. There has been a tendency to deny the seriousness of the problem, and there has been some opposition against taking action as a result of a (fully understandable) fear of job losses.

Our first challenge is therefore to face reality. We have to realise the overwhelming scientific proof that climate change is here, that human activities are crucial factors, and that this can be catastrophic. We must realise that the main reason for the problem is the burning of fossil fuel. This means the success factor of any measure is whether or not it contributes to reducing the burning of fossil fuel. The way we live and work will change radically over the coming years either as a result of action, or of inaction. Not to act, or to delay action, is not an option, but will only make consequences worse.

Failed markets need political control

The Stern Report, which reported to the UK government, concluded that "climate change represents the biggest market failure in history". The on-going financial and economic crises represent another huge market failure in history. We cannot rely on those same failed market mechanisms to solve these crises.

Both climate change policies and the economic crisis will need increased democratic control of the economy. That is exactly what we, in the trade union movement, also need for many other reasons. This means that the climate crisis not only represents a threat, but also new possibilities for the trade union movement. The on-going crises, together with neo-liberalism's current crisis of legitimacy, have actually opened an array of opportunities waiting to be exploited.

Trade unions thus have to prioritise climate change policies, but we have to embed these policies in a broader political context. We therefore also have to overcome the contradictions between specific workers' immediate, sectoral interests and broader interests of workers as a whole. In other words, we are not only transport workers who face a change in work pattern; we are human beings confronting a potentially catastrophic event.

Redistribution of wealth

One thing is quite clear: there will be far-reaching changes. The question is therefore, how do we meet these challenges? Currently, workers and trade unions are on the defensive. We are under pressure. There is a tendency to individualise responsibility for greenhouse-gas emissions. All of us have to pay for the emissions we cause, it is said, even though those emissions in most cases are effects of the way society is organised and market forces are pushing.

Of course emissions have to be reduced, even radically. This cannot, however, be left to each individual's responsibility. Neither can it be done by implementing economic restrictions which in practise exempt the rich and wealthy from any change. Why should ordinary people support the necessary climate change policies under such conditions? People will never accept that rich people can continue to pay their way, that corporate interests are protected, while the costs are put on workers, consumers and taxpayers. What is needed, therefore, are collective political solutions in which policies against climate change are combined with a radical social redistribution of wealth. Anything short of that will prevent any solution to the climate crisis.

From defensive to offensive

Environmental organisations tell us we have to make sacrifices to save the climate and our planet. This is both incorrect, and strategically and tactically wrong. Climate change policies are not only a question of sacrifices, but of creating a better society for all. Roger Toussaint, president of Transport Workers' Union Local 100 in New York, got it right when he, at a climate change conference, stated that: "Going green is not just about job creation, it is about an improved life for working people."

Serious climate change policies will give us an opportunity for progressive social change. Change will presuppose a more democratically managed economy. It will create millions of green jobs – particularly in public transport and in the production of renewable energy. It will reduce market competition and thereby also reduce pressure at work. It will make it necessary to shorten working hours to reduce the overexploitation of resources and allow a more just distribution of jobs across the globe. It will, if we do our job properly, hopefully reduce consumerism as a way of compensating other unmet needs in our societies, characterised by alienation and powerlessness. In short, social change is a precondition and a solution at the same time to stopping climate change.

Furthermore, reduced greenhouse emissions will also reduce pollution in workplaces and communities. An enormous – and free – transfer of technology to developing countries will be necessary, both to reduce their increase in emissions and to lift two billion people out of poverty. Most importantly, climate change policies will secure the survival of human beings and the planet.

Alliances and social mobilisation

Global summits haven't achieved social equality, jobs for all, decent working conditions, eradication of poverty, gender equality. It seems unlikely they will solve the problem of climate change either. Instead, we need a social and political mobilisation for alternative solutions built on solidarity, equality and peoples' needs.

The trade union movement will need to build strategic alliances with the environmental movement, and others. To do that, we have to overcome a couple of important weaknesses. Firstly, we have to ensure the environmental movements understand the role of social power (the class conflict). Secondly, we ourselves need to increase the understanding of environmental problems and the climate crisis in our trade unions. This can only happen if the two movements start to co-operate, exchange views and experiences and develop a friendly and constructive environment for discussion.

An excellent example is the Blue-Green Alliance between the United Steel Workers and the environmental movement Sierra Club in the USA, which "is focused on restoring an additional element to the relationship between public policy and electoral politics ... that of movement building ... without strong, well-organised social movements mobilising along a society's basic fault lines, meaningful change is unlikely."

Our long-term perspective must be to build the social alliances necessary to change society, not the climate. It is ambitious, but necessary and possible – and we will sit in the driver's seat.

This article has also been published in *Transport International* No.35

In summary

- Trade unions have to face up to the reality of climate change now
- We need to be proactive, not reactive, to deal with the consequences
- Climate change is part of a broader political context. We should look at the structure of society to find solutions
- We have to work with others, especially environmental organisations
- Climate change offers many possibilities: new green jobs, a greater role for public transport, less market competition... We must act now to seize these changes and make this a positive step for workers

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