

The contact I have had with workers in the USA, has reminded me that there are millions of people in the US who also share our views: They are struggling for a universal health care system; they are demonstrating against the

war in Iraq and US foreign policy, and they The Catholic Labor Network of the US expressed its desire to become part of the WMCW. This is a great sign of hope.

Welcoming the stranger

Some 45 representatives from about 20 national movements in Europe met in Seville in Andalucía in southern Spain from 10-13 May 2007 to examine this important question of our time.

Throughout human history, there has always been migration out of necessity. However, migration in the 21 century is a fundamental challenge to our society today in Europe. The poor of the world flee famine, oppression, the threat of death, expulsion, the destruction of the environment. Thousands of people take the route to Europe in order to live. A growing number of people are seeking in work, and housing for themselves and the needs for their family. One also observes a feminization of the migration.

Yet, the European Union does offer a concept of human dignity for the migrant. The current European policy of asylum and migration enables the European economy to be supported by a significant number of people who are sometimes described as 'illegal's' and who form a network of 'clandestine workers.' They work in undignified working conditions, denied basic rights at work. They are victims of human trafficking and often forced into prostitution and returned home without any legal protection. This insupportable situation is part only a European problem, but also an international problem. Our "option for the poor" requires that we take them into account.

Economic globalisation, based on neo-liberal policies has negative consequences which lead to impoverishment and in turn migration. The unjust trade policy of the World Bank, WTO and the IMF destroys in many places economic structures and prevents sustainable development. The governments of the G8 countries only produce symbolic policies, but do not create real solutions.

Migrants are, according to our Christian faith, our sisters and our brothers. **To welcome the migrant, it is to welcome God among us.** In the Church there is no stranger. The Gospel of love of neighbour at home and abroad (MT 22,34-40) requires clear actions of solidarity with



the stranger. The dignity of human being is required by God.

The European movements are opposed to the concept of a fortress Europe. The EU and its Member States must fight in the world context the causes of the migration. A major element is the fight against poverty in the world.

The ECWM wants to fight against xenophobia and to challenge the populist and fallacious arguments of the extreme right. For that we will use our reviews and our means of communication, for example Internet.

We must expose the catastrophic consequences of neo-liberal policies of the World Bank, WTO and the IMF which causes the migration. - We want to create alliances and networks with the Christian groups, the pastoral care of migrants, NGO's and the trade unions - We want to reinforce the communication and the dialogue with the organizations of migrants, to create intercultural base groups, to seek dialogue with the Moslem communities in our churches and their mosques.

We want to march towards a global society which is based on human dignity as it is laid down in the Declaration of the human Rights of the United Nations. It is a requirement for us, here and today, to work for a future.



Infor 211 December 07 to January 08

Mid-Life Crisis

In 2006 the WMCW celebrated its forty years of existence, and at the time we talked about life beginning at forty. Some people also suggest that from about forty years of age we begin to go through a mid life crisis.

It could be said that these two definitions apply to the WMCW. The year 2007 has been a difficult year for our movement, and indeed it could even be said that we have lived through a crisis. Our friends in the Flemish movements in Belgium will leave our organisation at the end of the year, which is sad. Our hope is that we can explore together how we can continue to collaborate with each other as we share common inspirations and motivations.

For the first time in our history the executive council was forced into dismissing one of the movements General Secretaries for serious misconduct. This decision was not taken lightly and it was a difficult time for all the council members, but following a serious reflection and based on the weight of the evidence, the council took a unanimous decision that it was in the immediate, short and long term interest of the WMCW to dismiss a General Secretary.

One of the consequences of this serious misconduct is that the executive council also had to take the difficult decision to postpone

the General Assembly due to have taken place in May 2008. We are now working towards holding the General Assembly in the autumn of 2009.

The executive council also took the decision to create a support group and a finance committee to assist the remaining general secretary and the treasurer who have a large amount of work to do up to the General Assembly in 2009. For practical reasons these groups will be made up with members of the European movements, who have agreed to take responsibility for the cost of the participation. These groups will keep the executive council fully informed of their work.

This work has already begun. The support group members are from ACO France, KAV Belgium, KAB Germany, MTC Quebec, Claude Delporte, the current treasurer of WMCW, and Paul Edwards the General Secretary. The Finance committee in addition to the treasurer and general secretary will draw support from former international treasurers from the ACO France and the KAV Belgium as well as the KAB Germany.

There is much work to be done, but it is remarkable to see the good will and collective commitment to get out of this crisis and continue to build the WMCW.

Meeting of the Caribbean and Central American Coordination of the WMCW

From the 29 July to 6 August 2007, the movements of the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Cuba met with the MTC of Guatemala in San Marcos in Guatemala.

The delegates made a frank evaluation of the work of the coordination starting from a review of life of the worker reality in the region. All the

delegates underlined the importance migration plays in the life of their countries. Most of this migration is towards the USA. It was noted that whilst this migration brings some benefits in terms of the money that is sent back, the delegates also noted the impact that migration is having on the countries that send mostly male workers to the United States.

Movement of Christian Workers

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During the meeting we had an opportunity to hear about two important ongoing worker struggles: The conflict in the coffee fincas and conflict in the mountains.

In the year 2001, the owner of the finca 'Las Delicias' decided to sack his 65 resident workers. The reason given for the landowner's move was the coffee crisis. Thousands of workers and their families were expelled, not only from their jobs but from the houses they had lived in since childhood.

The Movimiento de Trabajadores Campesinos (MTC) has been giving moral support and legal advice to the workers who resisted the deal but, according to the young lawyer working for the MTC "Las Delicias is a very difficult case to win through the courts because of all the ups and downs of the process". But the struggle continues

But the workers of the finca Las Delicias are not the only ones who have been reduce to taking direct action to defend their rights. In the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacán on the altiplano (about 8,000 feet above sea level) families there have been engaged in another sort of conflict.

Five years ago the firm Montana, now a subsidiary of the transnational company Goldcorp, first arrived to explore for gold in the area of San Miguel. Representatives of the mine started to buy land from the indigenous Maya-Mam inhabitants. They promised that, if they found gold, they would give the peasant farmers much more money. However, nothing was written down and now, even though the gold mine has been working for nearly four years, earning over US\$90 million per year, the firm is refusing to honour the commitment.

The company made many promises, including jobs, a hospital, and a paved road. The jobs have been given largely to foreigners and people from other parts of Guatemala – only about 200 people from the locality are employed. The hospital and the paved road have not materialised. Instead the open cast mine which uses 200,000 litres of water per hour and where cyanide is used to extract the gold constitutes a grave threat of contamination to the air people breathe and the water they drink.

A delegation of Mayan Mam peasant farmers

from the area went into the mine in January 2007 asking to see the management to negotiate a better deal for the local people. But instead of treating them with respect, the mine's representatives made fun of them and assured them that on no account would Montana enter into any discussions with them. The delegation organized a group of 600 people to block all the entrances to the mine with rocks and tree trunks for ten days (11-21 January).

This action ended in the arrest of four of seven men accused of causing "light" injuries, issuing threats, coercive behaviour and inciting others to crime. After three months, the Public Ministry, in charge of the investigation, declared that it had found insufficient evidence against the men but, clearly under pressure from Montana, asked for a further month to investigate medical reports after the incident and on the grounds of these; criminal proceedings have now been initiated against the seven men.

Monseñor Álvaro Ramazzini has given strong backing to the support of the MTC for the indigenous peoples of the mountains of San Marcos who are resisting new mining exploration in their areas. So far four "popular consultations" have been held with a resounding vote of NO! "Development in our mountain regions must be based on knowledge of and respect for the cultural values of the people who live there", says the bishop. Then he adds with a wry smile that the diocesan option for the poor and the excluded and to defend the right of the indigenous people to use their natural resources appropriately is what has led to direct threats against his life and to his being accompanied by three hefty bodyguards.



'Valuing Work, Dignity of the Person'.

In June, 140 delegates of the LOC met for their 13th National Congress in Setúbal, with the slogan, '**Valuing Work, Dignity of the Person**'. As well as report of the work carried out by the national team and the debates on the future orientation, the congress had an international forum at which a historian gave a presentation on the history of work in relation to the dignity of the human person.

"In this neo-liberal society today, work has been reduced to a single objective (profit and consumerism), it is no longer at the service and dignity of workers... but some people are raising their voices against this current, and taking new initiatives such as with Fair Trade,

solidarity economy (cooperatives). Work should be at the service of men and women, and not at the service of work"

During the debate which followed, some members of the Portuguese movement shared their convictions by saying, "it is necessary to defend citizens rights" " In our movement it is necessary to clarifier and restate our objectives to build a new world, because these values have been lost... We have to give new positive directions for the advancement of the society we want to construct"

The priorities for their action plan over the next three years includes: Work and unemployment, health and social security and on going training.

The Movement emerges in USA

There are some 12 million undocumented workers in the USA I met some of them standing on the street corner at 7am. They were waiting in the hope that someone would employ them for the day. A guy from Guatemala told me he had not worked in more than a month. I was also told that even when 'chosen' for hire employers frequently refuse to pay them at the end of the day. You can imagine how difficult it is for undocumented workers to pursue these employers. It reminded me of the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Immigration is a major political issue in the USA, and the Network and the Catholic Church are supporting legislative change to bring about the recognition and integration of undocumented workers.

I had to go to Washington DC to attend the meeting of the Catholic Labor Network of the USA. I met trades union activists from all over the USA. They told it like it really is.

In the *land of the free, and the home of the brave*, workers are suffering the same consequences of globalisation as workers everywhere. Every year since 2000 the income of workers has slipped back to below inflation which has increased by 2% whilst wages of the lowest paid workers have dropped to almost 6% below inflation.

More than 38 million people are living in poverty . The minimum wage was fixed ten years ago at a rate of 5\$ per hour. However, to afford an apartment in Washington DC today a worker needs a minimum hourly rate of almost 24\$.



Some 44 million documented workers do not have health insurance and an estimated 10 million undocumented workers and 9 million children are not covered.

I met two workers who are trade union activists, who cannot see themselves retiring until well into their seventies because they are having to fund the education of their children, the health and social care costs of their parents and other family members. This is happening to millions of American workers. '*in the land of the free*' and richest country in the world.