

ILC International Newsletter

A dossier
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information
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International
Liaison
Committee
of Workers
and Peoples

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UNITED STATES

In November, a massive defeat of the anti-worker and anti-democratic measures of Governor Schwarzenegger took place.

The Republican governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, submitted to referendum totally reactionary law proposals aimed against the workers, their organizations, and their rights.

The measures were the following:

- * The granting of the authority to the governor to reduce public spending;
- * The prohibition for unions to use their funds for political purposes and, thus, to support the candidates of their choice;
- * The right to redesign the electoral districts;
- * The creation of a period of five years during which public school teachers would be considered as provisional.

The November 8 Elections in California

By Alan Benjamin

On November 8th, a major victory occurred in California with the massive defeat of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's anti-labor and anti-choice measures on the statewide ballot.

When Schwarzenegger placed his propositions on the ballot for an off-year special election, he was counting on a low voter turnout (which typically favors conservatives) and a divided labor movement to pass his assault on the unions and working people as a whole. But the labor movement in California rejected the division that the labor apparatuses sought to impose on them. They defied the Sweeney AFL-CIO leadership directive, issued at the end of the Chicago convention in July, to oust all Change to Win unions from the local labor councils and state federations.

The unity that was forged by the trade union movement across California was key to this victory. Tens of thousands of union and community volunteers mobilized to Get Out The Vote -- an effort that resulted in a better-than-expected

voter turnout for an off-year election: 49%.

Also, this refusal to divide the labor movement by the California unions forced the AFL-CIO leadership to amend its unacceptable conditions for creating Solidarity Charters. A November 16 memo from the AFL-CIO leadership indicates that all the sensitive questions appear to have been resolved between the AFL-CIO and Change to Win leaderships and that henceforth all unionists at the state and local levels across the country will be able to continue working together -- as before. This is an important victory of -- and by -- the ranks of the labor movement.

This outcome was not a given -- far from it. It took a concerted struggle by state and local labor bodies at the Chicago convention -- and following that gathering -- to force the AFL-CIO to retreat. Though it took the form of defiance of the AFL-CIO leadership, this rejection of division within labor's ranks also was a blow against the Change to Win unions, which

were the ones that split from the AFL-CIO to begin with.

Now, following the election, the unions are feeling they have some muscle. A discussion has begun among unionists across the state about what to do next. Many of us argue that the unions have to take the political offensive statewide and put a statewide initiative on the ballot for single-payer healthcare, but this time working as a real coalition, as we did with this election's union-led Alliance for a Better California (as opposed to 10 years ago, when the unions didn't really get behind the ballot Proposition for single-payer).

We also believe that the unions in California must take the lead in the fight against the war -- something that has not happened, despite all the antiwar resolutions passed by the unions across the state. This message is resonating among unionists statewide.

Excerpts from the statement by national leadership of AFL-CIO

Union Members Key to Election Victory

Union members resoundingly defeated the Schwarzenegger-backed initiatives that unfairly targeted public employees. Proposition 75 was defeated 53 to 47. Before unions started their fightback campaign, the "yes's" on Proposition 75 outstripped the "no's" by 32 points, and even union members were evenly divided. A recent Field Poll showed 70 percent of union members prepared to vote against Proposition 75, and just 23 percent for it. Although there was no exit polling this year, union voters were 35 percent of the electorate when Prop. 226, the predecessor to Prop. 75, was defeated in 1999. Union members similarly drove Prop. 75's defeat yesterday. Prop. 75 would have forced unions to get members' express permission to spend dues on politics, despite the fact that companies wouldn't have to do the same.

"Some people doubted the ability of a divided labor movement to beat back Proposition 75, but the unions came together and an intensive education and mobilization campaign really worked," said AFL-CIO Political Director Karen Ackerman.

The AFL-CIO helped lead the fight against Prop 75 -- about 20 staffers have been working on the campaign full time in lead roles. Union members passed out nearly two million leaflets against Prop 75 in their workplaces and made over 4 million calls. More than 180 union staff worked full time to defeat the Schwarzenegger initiatives, and 13,000 union members volunteered on election day.

Statement on the Special Election Art Pulaski, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, California Federation of Labor

Congratulations on a great victory! We swept Arnold Schwarzenegger's entire Special Election agenda. This election was a showdown with a bully. Labor's voice was not silenced -- we spoke loud and clear. Today we kicked Arnold's butt!

This victory was the result of a massive effort by all of California's unions. We acknowledge all of the tremendous work you have done for this campaign.

Voters were not fooled by this Special Election. They rejected Arnold Schwarzenegger's power grab, and they rejected his bullying antics and his politics of blame.

This was a devastating loss for Arnold Schwarzenegger. He has wasted a full year of his governorship. He made this Special Election his priority, and it was soundly rejected by voters.

When Arnold ran for office, he promised to have everyone at the table. Instead, he built a private tent in a protected courtyard to share cigars with his corporate allies.

Now Arnold should listen to voters and stop trying to bully union members.

Beginning today, we call on the Governor to put derision and divisiveness aside. We challenge him to work with us to improve California for all of us, not just for his corporate donors.

Labor will continue to work to build better transportation, improve our schools, create good jobs, and provide good health care for all Californians.

A heartfelt congratulations for all of your tremendous work that led to this victory.

**Call for the Second Caribbean Conference for the Sovereignty of the Peoples
and the Independence of the Trade Unions
(December 16-17, 2005 in Guadeloupe)**

**In this issue of the ILC International Newsletter, we are publishing the new appeal for the conference
that will take place in December 2005.**

**In the framework of the preparation for this conference, a meeting will take place in Paris with Michel
Madassamy, member of the national leadership of the UGTG trade union federation of Guadeloupe
and Daniel Gluckstein, national secretary of the PT.**

On December 12-13, 2002, thirteen organizations representing nine countries met at the First Caribbean Conference "*Against Deregulation, For the Defense and Reconquest of Labor Rights, For the Independence of Trade Unions, Against the FTAA & Other 'Free Trade' Agreements, and For the Right of the Caribbean Peoples to Self-Determination.*"

Three years later -- as is occurring throughout the world under the aegis of the transnational corporations and the governments in their pay -- the situation facing the workers and peoples of the Caribbean has greatly degenerated with an escalation of unemployment; layoffs; destruction of public services; privatizations, the liquidation of agriculture; and an increase in delinquency, drugs and prostitution.

At the heart of it all is an escalation in the attacks against national sovereignty and the independence of trade unions.

In February 2004, the elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was kidnapped. This kidnapping was condemned by the CARICOM countries, which characterized this action "*as a dangerous precedent for the entire region.*" Then the first Black Republic in the world was occupied by UN troops under Brazilian command, spreading death and untold misery across the country.

We have witnessed a succession of attempts at coup d'états, orchestrated by the U.S. government, aimed at overthrowing the elected president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez. The people of Venezuela, strongly organized around their new independent trade union organization, the National Union of Workers (UNT), have been able to prevent this up till now.

We have witnessed an increase in repression against the main Guadeloupan trade union, the UGTG, co-organizer of the first Caribbean Conference. One of its leaders, Michel Madassamy, was kidnapped by hooded men sent by the French government, and later jailed. The strong mobilization of the Guadeloupan people, supported by an international campaign organized by the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples (ILC), obtained his release. But repression against the UGTG trade union federation continues.

Increasingly, the most pernicious and subtle weapon is being used -- and by that we mean the increased attempts at associating the trade unions into the implementation of the very plans of global capitalism.

In November 2001 a "*Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization*" was created by the International Labor Organization (ILO) with the aim of implementing "*a New World Governance*" that would bring together as equal partners all the "*governments, parliaments, corporations, members of civil society, trade unions, and international institutions.*"

In the report presented in June 2004 to the 92nd Assembly of the ILO, this Commission indicated it had met with the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the European Commission and the Bretton Woods coordinating group. This same report -- and the same goal of establishing a "New World Governance" -- were discussed during the congress of the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) in December 2004, where the merger between the ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labor (WCL) was decided. This report was also the subject of discussion at the World Trade Union Forum that preceded the World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2005.

A proposal was made that the next meeting of the World Social Forum (WSF) in 2006 would be the founding congress of the new world federation. The WSF is planned for January 2006 in Caracas.

Another date emanating from the World Social Forum will be the

Caribbean Social Forum, the first of its kind, planned for Martinique in July 2006. Its initial budget (later revised) was of five million euros, 1/3 financed by the French government, 1/3 by the European Union and 1/3 by local Martinique groups. The organizers are in constant communication with the French government, which has declared the Forum objectives in keeping with its policies, especially those of "*regional cooperation.*" This government, rejected by the French people on May 29, 2005 during the referendum on the draft of the European Constitution, still continues to apply the policies of global capitalism and the European Union. It is this very same government that is overseeing all the stages of the Caribbean Forum project.

Is it possible to defend the workers' and peoples' interests hand in hand with those who daily reveal themselves as the worst enemies of the workers and the sovereignty of the peoples?

Are the workers to draw a positive balance sheet of their various experiences with "*labor-management partnership*" schemes, which seek to replace class-struggle and protest trade unionism for the sake of the interests of governments and transnational companies?

Should they ignore the very real positive balance sheet of their experiences of struggle through independent trade unions?

Are the peoples to draw a positive balance sheet from the multiple interventions by foreign powers and military occupations under cover of the UN?

Should they ignore the very real positive balance sheet of their experiences resisting foreign intervention?

These are the questions on the agenda of the Second Caribbean Conference For the Sovereignty of the Peoples and For the Independence of Trade Unions that will be held December 16-17 in Guadeloupe on the basis of self-financing by each delegation.

The undersigned organizations invite you to participate in this conference and submit questions to the debate on the democratic labor movement of the Caribbean.

Our aim is to reinforce the cooperation between the peoples -- especially the workers of the Caribbean, starting from our common cultural bases and our shared origins. It is through free discussion, on the basis of indisputable facts, that together we can find positive solutions to the problems that plague us.

First signatories:

Dominica: National Worker's Union (NWU);
Dominica Trade Union (DTU).

Guadeloupe: Union Générale des Travailleurs de Guadeloupe (UGTG);
Travayè é Péyizan.

Haïti: Organisation Générale Indépendante des Travailleurs Haïtiens (OGITH);
Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Haïtiens (CGTH)

Martinique: Alliance Ouvrière et Paysanne (AOP)

This appeal has the support of the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples.

(Adopted in Roseau, Dominica on July 30, 2005)



"A Front in Defense of National Sovereignty":

An editorial from *Fraternité*, the newspaper of the Workers Party (PT) of Algeria

It is now a rule that the commemoration of all dates that mark a turning point in the Algerian revolution is accompanied by the announcement of decisions imposed by the international financial institutions, decisions which put into question our national sovereignty. This November marks the 51st anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle for national independence; this date had profound consequences for the Algerian nation.

In October, in Algiers itself, the IMF announced its injunctions relating to everything concerning the Algerian economy. The reference price of a barrel of oil at 19 US dollars was the fundamental point. Other points concerned the decision to privatize the public banks and to accelerate the destruction of the 1217 public companies that remain. Following this announcement, the general director of the IMF began a tour on November 21 to order three countries of the Maghreb (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) to totally get rid of tariffs in order to "open the market of 75 million consumers to international commerce."

In reality, this is the implementation of the plan of the US, which aims to create a "free trade" zone with the three countries, according to the declarations of the American minister Eizeinstat in his regional tour in the year 2000.

Thus, it is confirmed that the agreement to associate with the European Union signed by the governments of the three countries and implemented (since September 1st for Algeria) opens the path for the American corporations. Already, the parliament of Morocco ratified in January 2005 a "free trade" agreement along these lines; the Tunisian government is "negotiating" and the Algerian government has just been called on by the general director of the IMF to integrate into it.

During the debate in the National Popular Assembly concerning the Financial Law of 2006, the minister of finances affirmed, in response to the questions and doubts of the MPs (particularly of the PT) concerning the consequences of a reference price of 19 US dollars for a barrel of oil the minister of finances affirmed that this "prudent" measure was not imposed by the IMF, but was rather a "sovereign political decision" that would not harm the budget!

However, the rejection of all the amendments presented by the PT and even of the coalition MPs -- at a moment where the exchange reserves reached 55 billion dollars and thus the regulatory fund exceed 1,700 billion Algerian dinars -- confirms that this decision was not Algerian.

The general director of the IMF just confirmed, in relation to these funds, that, "the priority is the payment of the debt and not a raise in wages."

For his part, the minister of energy who claimed that the denationalization of the hydrocarbons would only be implemented in five years, has just finished announced the subdivision of the two state agencies into private administrations in charge of signing contracts and receiving funds from oil revenue.

There is a clear link between the law on hydrocarbons, the decision to privatize 1217 public companies, the decision to fix the reference price for a barrel of oil at 19 US dollars, and the decision to associate with the European Union, on the one hand; and the creation of new taxes on consumption, the public sector budget freeze, and the rejection of wage increases, on the other.

They are trying to make the Algerian people pay for the financial hemorrhage caused by the pillage of the national resources. The IMF is aiming to integrate Algeria, in particular, and North Africa in general into generalized chaos, into the bloody descent of the African continent.

Do we need to accept this descent into the abyss?

These unprecedented events take place against the backdrop of uprisings across the country, with road blockades by students and the general population. Everywhere there is fierce resistance to privatization. Everywhere the public sector workers and retirees are outraged.

The profound political response to this total war was expressed in Kabylie during the election campaign of November 24. In the debates organized by the leaders and candidates of the PT and in the events which I personally led in Tizi, Bejaia, Boumerdès and Bouira, the participation was more massive than ever; the loyalty to the unity of the nation was expressed with profound clarity

and force.

As if they were driven by a common urge to confront the mounting dangers, the Algerians in Kabylie, in the thousands, came to listen attentively to the positions of the PT concerning national solutions, the defense of the Algerian nation, plunging their common bonds in their tributes to the martyrs of the Algerian revolution, whose sacrifices are now on the chopping block.

In the thousands, the workers, youth, small merchants, and housewives of Algeria, conscious of the stakes, shouted in unison while waving the national flag: Long live Algeria!

It is evident that beyond the electoral results and the conditions in which they took place, the force and grandeur of the Algerian revolution and the role of Kabylie were expressed in a striking manner, in resistance to all the policies of war dictated by the imperialist centers, in resistance to submission and capitulation.

This is an indisputable guarantee for the future of the nation. For its part, the PT came out of these election stronger than ever. A heavy responsibility has been given to the PT because we are living in a very serious period.

That is exactly why, with the PT's mandate, before ending my tour of Tizi-Ouzou and Bejaia, I met with the candidates and members of the party in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou, in the Ihil Imoula village, where the declaration of November 1, 1954 was written, and Ifri Ouzellaguen, where the Soummam congress took place for those from Bejaia. Numerous citizens came together to defend the sovereignty of the nation of Algeria, the unity of the nation, the existence of an Algerian state, i.e. national independence.

Thus, in the name of PT, I reiterate our appeal to the parties and individual which I launched in Ighil Imoula and Ifri to constitute a Front In Defense of the Algerian Nation, a front purged of the errors of the past, that is, a front which respects its multiple parties and the two linguistic components of the Algerian nation, so that the Algerian republic can remain one and indivisible.

- Louisa Hanoune
November 23, 2005

The "grand coalition" faces its first difficulties

On November 22, the Bundestag swore in the grand coalition government headed by Angela Merkel.

Thus six months was necessary, after the defeat dealt to Schroder in the elections of North Rhenany-Westphalia, to construct a new government. These six months were marked by the attacks on all the partisans of the acceleration of the counter-reforms, in a European already shook by the French "No" on the European "Constitution."

After her inauguration, Angela Merkel toured the European capitals: Paris, Brussels, London, and Warsaw. During this trip she unceasingly vaunted the German "compromise" and the "grand coalition" government's program, which unites the CDU-CSU and the SPD. She invited all Europe to be inspired.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that, despite the optimistic declarations on the part of some, this confidence did not seem to be reciprocated.

"Merkel in power won't be the big night of liberalism," a leader of a European commissary recently complained to the La Croix newspaper, which observed that "a Germany paralyzed by the Grand Coalition has nothing good in store for Europe."

More precisely, Antony Giddens, political advisor to Tony Blair, declared, *"It is difficult to predict the fate of the grand coalition government. Will it lead to a freeze or acceleration of the radical reforms? Maybe another crisis and new elections will be necessary to oblige Germany to revise its economic and social system."*

One thing is sure: The representatives of finance capital recognize the extreme weakness of the government. They know that, last September 18, the German masses dealt a defeat to Merkel and Schroder.

They know that the policies of counter-reform dictated by the European Union was rejected in Germany, just like in France. They know that the governmental program signed by Merkel and Müntefering doesn't satisfy the bosses or the workers, the base of the SPD, and the trade unions.

For the bosses, the CEO of Porsche ably summed up the situation as follows: *"Too little reforms and too many taxes."* As for the president of the Bundesbank, hardly any more enthusiastic, he deemed that the agreement *"in general is not very convincing."*

For the traditional base of the SPD (whose leadership signed this program of an acceleration of the anti-worker policies implemented by Schroder, which Merkel proposes to deepen) the reaction is a mix of fright and revolt.

A revealing incident occurred when, just after the government took power, a debate emerged, obliging the leadership of the SPD to aim to disavow responsibility for the government's decisions.

The *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper revealed some of the measures taken by the "grand coalition" *to reduce the public deficit.* It announced the reduction by 50% of the 13th month for public sector workers and for retired workers beginning in 2006, a one-hour rise in the workday without a wage increase, the lay-offs of 2.5% of the public sector workers_ Imagine the explosion of anger.

Immediately, the General Secretary of the SPD, H. Heil, declared on the ZDF television channel that the SPD had not agreed to this, that this was not contained in the agreement, that they were only proposals, etc.

At the same moment, on ARD, Michael Sommer, president of DGB, protested. Eight hours earlier he declared that he wanted to accompany *"in a constructive*

and critical manner the work of the coalition." Here he was forced to critique these measures in the name of his conception of an "equilibrium" that, in his opinion, the government would make an error to break.

The government which has just taken power has been immediately plunged into a situation of extreme instability. The leadership of the SPD knows this.

On the eve of the election of Angela Merkel by the Bundestag, Müntefering presented his successor as the head of the parliamentary group of the SPD, Peter Struck (3). Aiming to dissipate the worries concerning the discipline of the deputies while voting, he declared: *"Until the present, Peter Struck has had 217 generals under his command. From now on, he will have 222 deputies."*

Nevertheless, 51 MPs of the governmental majority, most from SPD MPs, voted against the appointment of Angela Merkel as chancellor.

Rarely has the tension been so lively in the SPD, to the point that it has reached its parliamentary group.

Correspondent

(1) After a month of deliberations, the leaderships of the parties of the right (CDU-CSU) and of the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) signed a governmental program. The grand coalition government led by Merkel, with Müntefering as vice-president, includes 8 CDU-CSU ministers and 8 SPD ministers.

(2) On the very night of the electoral defeat suffered on May 22 in North Rhenany-Westphalia, the most populated Lander in Germany, and a historic bastion of SPD, Schroder announced his decision to call for new general elections.

(3) Peter Struck, SPD, was the minister of defense in the Schroder government.

We publish below a contribution from a German metal-worker, member of the SPD and IG-Metall, published in SoPoDe (November 30, 2005), a bulletin edited by social-democratic and union activists leading a struggle against the grand coalition.

"What does the grand coalition agreement mean for an unemployed metal-worker like yourself?"

The title of this agreement, *"Together for Germany -- with courage and humanity,"* sounded promising. I personally held a few illusions, because after seven years of a red-green government, I thought things could only improve. Again, the poor and the workers will be affected by the deepening of the austerity measures. Concerning the Hartz-IV law, that is, all the measures reforming the benefits paid to the unemployed, I think that these economic measures are quite radical: 3.8 billion, from which 2 billion should be cut from the pensions.

The contribution which pays for my insurance benefits (Arbeitsamt) as an unemployed worker is currently 78 Euros a month, but will be reduced to 40 Euros. This means that I will no longer have the right, when I retire, to the 4.25 Euros which should be added to the pensions which I won while working; it will now be 2.10!

With the .4% tax hike on pensions, the pension which I would receive for the period of unemployment will drop to 1.95 Euros! And they dare to advise me to take measures of precaution_ Can they tell me how? On page 68 of the agreement, it is written that, beginning in 2006, it will be necessary to cut 3 billion Euros from ALG II unemployment insurance and to increase :savings by 4 billion Euros in the year to come. This is unthinkable.

Peter Turk, November 25, 2005

Annul the Bolkenstein directive? Okay! And why not all the other European directives?

A campaign is currently being led to demand the annulment of the Bolkenstein directive, a directive that aims to open all services to the market. But a question is posed: Why not question all the other European privatization directives?

Let us take a look at some of the recent destructive actions of the European Commission.

November 10: The Postal Services

On November 10, the European Commission launched a public declaration concerning the future of the postal sector in the European Union. In it one finds the following: "The reform on a regional level began in 1997 with the postal directive (1997/67/CE). _ In 2002, this directive was amended by directive 2002/39/CE, which _ progressively limited the range of services that can remain as a monopoly. _ 2006 will be an important year. In the name of the postal directive, the member-states should continue to reduce the monopolized sector." In short: It is necessary to privatize all the European postal services.

November 15: Energy

On November 15, the European Commission published a communiqué titled: "Energy: The member-states should from this point on open the markets." The European commissar in charge of energy, Andris Piebalgs, declared: "The member-states should immediately and fully implement the directives concerning electricity, not only in form, but in content." For Brussels, the electricity and the gas can not be sold off quick enough.

November 18: Air transport

On November 18, the European Commission and the United States came to an important agreement, titled "Open Sky."

According to AFP, "the agreement _ will permit flying without a limit in the liaisons or choice of carriers between Europe and all destinations."

They want more deregulation in the air-transport sector, the end of any limitations on dirty airplanes and on air companies denounced as being dangerous. We can understand the joy of the American vice-secretary of transportation in the State

Department: "We want to open the doors to more vigorous competition."

November 20: The Arms Market

The European ministers of defense adopted a "code of control" meant, according to AFP, to "open to competition the domestic market for instruments of defense _ a market which represents close to 30 billion Euros every year and which, very often, in the name of the protection of national security, escapes the rules of competition in place in the European Union." In short: Privatization should reach one of the last sectors which remains nationalized, in order to assure more profits for the arms corporations.

November 21: The Ports and the Docks

Hundreds of dockers protested in Brussels against a proposed directive authorizing shipping companies to load and unload their vessels on their own, that is, a privatization of the port services.

Isn't the conclusion self-evident? Annul all the European directives and break with the European Union!

Correspondent

The decisions of the European Summit of October 27, 2005

On Thursday, October 27, Tony Blair, who for six months is presiding over the European Union, met at a supposedly "informal" summit of the 25 European heads-of-state and governments.

No agreements came out of this summit, no agreements on the future budget orientations, nor on the revision of agricultural budgets. The crisis rooted in the "No" votes in France and Holland, have left their mark on the functioning of the European Union.

But was the summit held in vain, as the media has claimed? Not at all.

Let's take a look at what the document adopted on October 27 states:

"Public expenditures linked to old age, retirement, healthcare and long-term care at the current pace will represent in the coming decades anywhere between 4% and 8% of the Gross Domestic Product. This amount is unbearable and would only lead to the increase in the public debt."

The conclusion? *"A deeper debate is currently taking place in order to define what will be, for the government and social partners, the most appropriate policies assuring that_ from now on*

people will work longer."

"It is necessary_ to complete the domestic market, including on the level of services, telecommunications, energy, and financial services". Thus amongst others, the Bolskenstein directive.

"It is necessary to implement the reforms and the structural policies _ while promoting flexibility and adaptability aiming to protect people more than the jobs _ This can be facilitated through more flexible labor market."
The collective rights

linked to the labor contract must be replaced by the so-called rights linked to the individual, that is, individualization.

For the general secretary of the ETUC, John Monks: *"The European Summit of Hampton Court approved the document prepared by the European Commission. _ This proposal is welcomed."*

This is yet another confirmation that the ETUC is nothing but an institution of the EU.

Correspondent

"After the catastrophes which took place in China"

Editorial of the *Newsletter* of the Chinese Commission of Inquiry and three articles

The international media outlets multiplied their reports on the benzene pollution of the Songhua river in the wake of the explosion of a big petro-chemistry state-factory in Jilin on November 13. They spoke of the ecological disaster but spoke little about the fact that for ten days the peoples of the towns and cities which bordered the river consumed this water polluted with around 100 tons of benzene.

For ten days, the authorities of the provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang hid the truth from the population, while the leaders of the National Chinese Oil Company declared in the wake of the explosion that there was no pollution risk.

Of course, this concerned the 3.5 million citizens of Harbin (a province of Heilongjiang) but also the 50 to 60 million citizens who live along the river up to the Russian border.

In Harbin, the authorities finished by cutting the water under the pretext of repairing the canals; they did not want to contradict the version of the authorities of the Jilin province and waited for instructions from the central government of Peking before revealing the truth about the catastrophe.

Once the whole affair was impossible to continue to cover up, the media, who, in the wake, received the order from the department of propaganda to not investigate the event, vigorously condemned the lies of the authorities. But following this, the order was given to cease to speak in this tone, because the local leaders dealt with the situation in a responsible manner! And nevertheless, the rumor is that heads are going to fall.

In the wake of dozens of other accidents, the Xingming (a province of Guangdong) tragedy, which led to the death of 123 people at the beginning of August, pushed the Peking government to demand that the local functionaries take out their investments in the private mines. By the end of September, only 500 functionaries officially have done so; 325 belonged to the state administrators, 172 to the state enterprises. Five-hundred state functionaries for 25,000 private mines is very little!

The official agency Xinhua announced new stats on October 24: 3,200 functionaries will be withdrawn from the mines where they held investments in 20 provinces.

How much money had they invested? In the Henan province, 326 functionaries swore that they were worth the equivalent of a million Euros, a rather big sum. Who are these "functionaries"?

In the framework of the Xingming tragedy, 18 people were arrested, including the owner of P-DG, Mr. Zeng Yungao. Who is this Mr. Zeng? According to a Hong Kong newspaper which investigated, he is a Communist Party member in the city, a member of the local parliament, and a police officer.

The "*Henan Business News*", a newspaper of the Henan province, reported that on July 31, a mine collapsed in Ruzhou, but nobody knows about the circumstances or the number of victims. Fan Yonfang, a journalist for this newspaper provided one explanation for this: all the journalists were offered money by the local authorities, 500 Yuans (50 Euros), to keep silent and to not write anything. Fan twice received 500 Yuans.

The new bribe attracted around 500 people to Ruzhou, all of whom pretended they were journalists. Fan and his editor had to quit their jobs and the authorities prohibited the publishing of the newspaper from September 17 to October 16.

Nobody has spoken of the reason why the Jilin factory exploded. Nevertheless, if there is enough money to continue production, why is there none for the security of the workers? Is a state enterprise condemned to function like a private company that violates the labor laws every day of the week?

Around 148 mineworkers were the victims of a fire in a mine on November 27 in the province of Heilongjiang; the international media spoke even less of this. This occurred in the wake of the visit of the prime minister, Wen Kiabao, who had come the area to reassure the population concerning the benzene pollution.

The official agency, China News, reports that Li Yizhong, the national director of labor security, who from now on has the rank of minister, demanded of the authorities of the Dongfeng mine to determine the location of the 33 mineworkers who signed up for work but who weren't included amongst the list of victims, nor the list of survivors.

A raise to 200,000 Yuans (21.000 Euros) in the compensation paid to the affected families has already been announced.

This tragedy struck the mineworkers one year to the date after the tragedy in Tungshuan (a province of Shaanxi), which took the life of 166 mineworkers and pushed the authorities in Peking to adopt severe measures concerning security in the mines. Since then, the number of accidents has not dropped. Between November 11 and 19, three accidents took place, taking the lives of 40 mineworkers. On November 20, a commission organized by the government ordered the suspension of production in 12,000 mines in order to make them conform to the security systems.

What was the result? Nothing at all! The tragedy of November 27 did not take place in a private mine out of the control of the state, but rather in a state mine where the security of the mineworkers is, in principle, more assured.

How can one speak of security when it is necessary to always produce more and more and to create gigantic profits? How can one speak of security in Dongfeng, this mine in Qitahé when one of the directors of security is also the owner of a private mine where an accident took the lives of 11 mineworkers last spring? (See our documents.) And here, the all-powerful state, the central government couldn't do anything? Its directives must remain a dead letter?

Who can believe that these authorities who persecute the representatives of the workers, the activists fighting for worker and democratic rights, and condemn them to heavy prison sentences, are impotent to deter those who are burying the miners at the bottom of the pits?

All these facts nourish our conviction that it is necessary to lean on the codified rights which are favorable to the workers.

In "*Workers Rights in China*" we wrote: "*This is a violation of the ILO conventions, particularly Convention 176 of 1995 concerning health security in the mines which affirmed that it is desirable to prevent all mortal accidents, injuries, and attacks on the health of the workers and the population. In Article 6, the responsibility of the employers is defined. Don't the mineworkers have the right to work in satisfactory working conditions? Why don't they have the right to control the security conditions?*"

What are foreign investors looking for?

Let's take a look at the example of Shanxii. This province is China's main producer of coal; 493 million tons were produced in 2004, and production has risen by 30 million tons in every year since the year 2000.

As the price for oil and gas is skyrocketing the world market, the vice-president of the Academy of Social Sciences of the province stated: "The coal sector seduces Chinese investors, but also foreign investors because enormous profits can be made."

On last October 29, the head of foreign investment in the province announced that he would facilitate the access to coal mines of Shanxii to foreign investors, after the recommendation of the central governmental. Of course, no-one spoke of "*enormous profits*", but rather of very advanced foreign technology; if this wasn't enough to convince you, they insisted on providing better security for the mineworkers.

Nevertheless, it shouldn't be forgotten that if the prices of carbon rose by 20% in the first trimester, in comparison with 2004, the number of mineworkers who lost their lives also rose by 20%, and profits of the 31 biggest state-mines more than doubled (+ 120%).

Two statistics give us an idea of the situation. In March, the central government envisaged allocate 3 billion Yuans (300 million Euros) to improve the security in the mines. In March, the profits of January and February of the 31 biggest state-mines were announced: The sum was 4.46 billion Yuans.

In September, the biggest coal companies in the world, the American Peabody, opened up shop in Peking: "Enormous opportunities," explained the director Boyce. *The People's Daily* the organ of the Chinese Communist Party, echoed a worry: Will the Chinese coal-mines be dominated by foreign capital?

The response came from the vice-president of Chinese Coal-Mines: Don't worry, the state carbon companies have full control over the coal resources, but "*China needs to perfect its laws and regulations to improve the environment for investments in coal.*"

The Iraqi people demand:

"Not a fake independence, but rather a real national independence."

("The Hindu", an Indian newspaper)

For the British financial newspaper, *The Economist* (December 3, 2005), "Mr. Bush has convinced millions of people that he has no idea where he is going."

The weekly *Newsweek* (December 1st, 2005) also was skeptical: "The president's speech was exceptionally empty in many respects. He declared that our mission in Iraq was to win the war. Really? If in a strategic document it is necessary to write this, it means that they have no idea how to do so."

The *New York Times* (December 3, 2005) underlines that, "the American forces are being used to the maximum: numerous officers are returning to Iraq for a second period, even if they just finished their last one."

The same day, it was announced that 10 marines were killed and 11 wounded in the suburb of Fallujah, the heaviest loss since the deaths of 14 soldiers were killed close to Haditha, in the north-west of Baghdad on August 3.

On the day of Bush's speech, insurgents occupied the city of Ramadi, a provincial capital in the western part of Iraq.

The only real support given to Bush has come from the Democrats. Numerous leaders, beginning with Hillary Clinton, affirmed "that a removal of the troops would be disastrous." In the already cited article from *The New York Times* it is reported that John Murtha, a Democratic Party member of Congress, stated that it may be necessary to "immediately redeploy our troops in Iraq."

But the facts are there. A recent poll taken shows that more than 68% of Americans don't think that the invasion of Iraq can result in a victory.

The heart of the matter is, in the words of the Indian newspaper *The Hindu* (November 22, 2005), that "while the American and British governments have used thirty months of occupation to 'justify' the torture of prisoners to obtain information, the Iraqis continue their struggle because they are convinced that they have the right to not a fake independence, but rather a real national independence."

- Correspondent

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