

ILC International Newsletter

A dossier of weekly information edited by the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples

INTRODUCTION:

- The National Trade Union Initiative of India and the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples have issued a joint appeal to hold a conference in New Delhi on March 5, 2006. This conference takes place *"a time when there is a shared understanding globally between trade unions and the working class that globalization is resulting in the intensification and concentration of private capital at the cost of wage and employment conditions of the working peoples of the world."*

- In less than 10 days, on February 25-26, the European Conference will take place in Berlin at the initiative of German labor activists. Delegates from 18 countries will be present to exchange their experiences and points of view.

You will find in this issue:

Germany: A contribution from a labor activist concerning the threats of privatization to the public energy sector: *"Faced with the destruction of the foundations of our infrastructure, public services and public property, should we speak out for a stop to the privatizations and the return to the public domain, through renationalization, of the privatized enterprises? This would require breaking with the Maastricht Treaty and struggling for a Europe of workers and peoples. This is the discussion that will take place at the European Conference in Berlin."*

Belgium: A letter from socialist Members of Parliament that was issued during a preparatory meeting for the Berlin Conference. The letter concerns the vote on a law on the issue of retirement. It states in part, *"We know you voted in favor of a law that the FGTB trade union federation had explicitly called upon you not to endorse. We cannot allow the elected socialist MPs to consider that henceforth they only must be accountable to the European Commission and the sacrosanct law on "heightened competition."*

Bolivia: The government of Evo Morales is faced with the following dilemma: Is it possible to conciliate the needs of the people and the nation, on the one hand, with the profits of the multinational corporations, on the other.

United States: *The Organizer* newspaper, published by supporters of the ILC, returns to the aftermath of the Katrina disaster. We have selected from its recent issue excerpts from a declaration by US Labor Against the War: *"Within a week of the hurricane, the notorious Blackwater security firm that has made a fortune in Iraq and Afghanistan was on the ground patrolling the streets of New Orleans. Sadly, corporate America now has a deep investment in war and disaster; it's good for business. _"*

Saladin Muhammad, Black working class activist and member of Black Workers For Justice in the South, writes: *"A Justice and Reconstruction program and movement in the South needs national and international support, particularly from the working class sectors. The political program for rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast needs to be championed by an independent political party."*

Switzerland: The monthly publication of the Union of Circles for a Workers Policy, includes an article on the privatization of Swisscom (public enterprise of the Swiss Confederation under the title, *"The Federal Council turns its back on a sovereign people and bends to the liberation directives of Brussels."*

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AFTER THE INAUGURATION OF THE EVO MORALES GOVERNMENT

Reports from La Paz

The government's first measures

The new government's Energy Secretary, Andrés Solís, indicated he has prepared an energy plan along with YPFB, the foreign relations office and the minister for planning. President Morales will make this plan public in an address to the nation.

At the same time, the vice president, Alvaro García Linera, has launched an appeal for austerity throughout the public sector, refusing to raise wages of teachers and doctors in particular, who on an average earn the minimum wage namely 440 bolivares or 40 Euros.

An editorial in *El Diario* of January 28 declares: "It is necessary for all of us to participate in this policy of austerity, which is one of the first economic and social measures that the executive has ordered."

The editorial is even more incisive: "Now that the new government represent the social movements, we hope they will set aside private interests for the benefit of all Bolivians, that is to say: social peace, progress and development, good governance and the solution to all the ills that affect us, while this backward society is en route to development."

The mysteries of the foreign debt

Bolivia's Central Bank announced on January 27 that the foreign debt published on December 31, 2005 was \$4.935 billion U.S. dollars. 92% of this debt was contracted through international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the Interamerican Development Bank. According to the figures reported by the Central Bank during 2005, Bolivia paid \$442.1 million dollars under the following headings: service of the debt \$367.2 million dollars, and the rest in commission and various interests. In other words, Bolivia paid \$442.1 million dollars and although it apparently benefited from "a partial debt reduction pardon," the total debt of close to \$5 billion was only reduced by 2.2%, that is, by \$109.8 million. Is it not a measure of justice, of simple morality, to decide not to pay the debt and to end with the looting to which this country is subjected?

A plot to dismantle Bolivia

The oligarchy of Santa Cruz and Tarija (center-east and south of the country) -- the gas region that profits directly from the agreements with the multinationals and is, at the same time, a financial oligarchy, exporter of agricultural products, that maintains the poor peasants in a state of semi-slavery -- does not want to hear anything about plans to save the Bolivian nation and people. In fact, it is openly plotting to dismantle Bolivia. It has imposed an election of the department prefects and seems to be seeking an agreement with Morales for the August constituent assembly to install a regionalist state, where each state would have full autonomy over its resources.

The pillage of the multinationals

The multinationals that loot the country following the laws of "capitalization" (in other words privatization) of 1996 do not want to hear talk of nationalization. They export gas and other countries refine it, in this manner multiplying the price five times, and only pay the Bolivian state the 18% of the initial price on quantities the state cannot even control. They pay the country less than the service of the debt.

The Morales government facing an alternative

La Razon, a newspaper tightly linked to the Spanish oil multinational Repsol, indicated: "What is important is that since in government, the state of law is strictly respected, without falling into the temptations of authoritarianism in power" (January 27). We are well aware of what "state of law" means to these gentlemen: do not touch a single hair of the profits of the oil companies.

Following his visit to Madrid on January 4, and on several occasions thereafter, Evo Morales has declared he would not expropriate the oil companies but would renegotiate their contracts. Immediately Repsol announced it would decrease its planned investments, would suspend the construction of a gas duct to Argentina, and the British froze their investments "in view of the uncertainty of the legislation to come regarding gas." (*La Razon*, January 4).

The Morales government faces an alternative: is it possible to reconcile the interests of the country with the profits of the multinationals? The alternative extends to the COB, the COR, the miners' federation and to all organizations: is it possible to continue the fight for "nationalization without indemnities" without affirming these organizations' independence with regard to the government?

The majority gave this government a mandate on December 18, and the organizations are the owners of this mandate. In this sense, an open letter to President Morales is circulating in different trade union organizations: the COB, the COR and the miners' federations. The only democracy possible demands "an immediate decree to nationalize the hydrocarbons (oil and gas resources) without indemnities". This measure received the enthusiastic support of the peoples of Latin America, of the North American and European working classes and all organizations.

Is there any other way to favorably and respectfully support the aspirations of the October 2003 and May-June 2005 insurrections?

The third largest hydrocarbon reserves on the continent

The latest estimates by Minister Solís Rada show that Bolivia has reserves valued at 48,000 billion cubic feet with a value equivalent to 200 billion dollars. To recoup this wealth would permit the industrialization of the country, the construction of a national highway network, the implementation of a universal and free health care system, public and obligatory education, the end of unemployment for 40% of the population, the installation of a minimum wage of \$1,500 bolivars, that is to say construct a free nation, sovereign and developed.

The demands of the teachers, the doctors and the landless

On January 23, Morales presented his government and the first meeting of the ministers was held on Thursday, January 28. The immense majority of the population, the workers, the peasants, the unemployed and the youth that elected Morales awaited the first measures of this government. The teachers' trade union of La Paz had already sent the new education minister, Félix Patzi, its list of demands, requesting an increase in wages and the creation of new jobs. The doctors' trade unions had done the same. On Thursday, January 26 a delegation of leaders of the landless movement met with Morales. Among their demands were: agrarian reform, that is to say the elimination of large landholdings (latifundios) and the creation of a land ministry to push forward this reform.

Berlin European Conference

25th & 26th February 2006

In less than ten days the European Conference will be held, called for February 25 and 26 at the initiative of the German labor activists.

We have already published in *ILC International Newsletter* issues Nos. 157 and 164 the invitation to this conference from the German activists and the common appeal by labor activists from different European countries.

Germany

A contribution by H.W. Schuster, delegate to the conference on the question of energy in Germany

"Our objective: more competition in the supply of gas and electricity"

There is no doubt: after the railroad and postal services, over the past years, the Kohl and Schroder governments have subordinated the supply of gas and electricity to the dictates of the European Union. On the basis of directives on internal markets (directive 2003/54/EG on electricity and 2003/55/EG on gas) the Schroder government reformed access to the network on July 13, 2005 thanks to the second derogatory law.

For this organization, or as the government puts it this 'regulation', the authority in charge is already in charge of telecommunications and the postal services. With this increase it became the government agency for gas, electricity, postal services and the railroad (Networks agency). It therefore controls the administration of the vital networks of the country that, in agreement with the recommendations of the European Union, have subordinated these to market economy which, in the framework of privatization will shatter.

Also, after the experience of the postal services and the railroad, there is great concern on the announcement made of the coalition contract.

The division of the network in regard to supply (we are aware of this dismantling of the structures integrated in the case of postal services and the railroad network) under political pressure of the networks agency will also exert pressure on rates.

We should have no illusions that this pressure will follow a well-known path: 200,000 workers in the energy sector and in 2001 over 80,000 jobs were suppressed. This pressure on the networks' rates that should benefit the consumers will manifest itself firstly in the form of "low investment reduces costs" that is to say the destruction of collective bargaining and new layoffs. It is the foreseeable consequence for the workers after Merkel promised the consumers to lower rates in his electoral campaign.

Ver.di goes along

U. Bottlander, head of the specialized department at Ver.di, agrees with this analysis. He emphasizes that the Schroder government has considered and taken many initiatives from Ver.di. The European Union's recommendations would not have been accepted if the Ver.di had not gone from refusing to that of developing the initiatives the government had taken up. Again, we must ask the same questions already asked at the time of the 'reforms' of the postal service and the railroads. Again we observe that Ver.di goes from 'negative changes in the economic reports and the work in the integrated energy sector' and adds, "the social and economic consequences to the workers of the transposition of European right in the energy sector can only be appreciated by the rest."

Would this transposition have been possible

without the support of the SPD? R. Hempelmann, spokesperson on energy policy of the SPD said it is no longer a question of limiting expenditures after the massive opening of the market by the European Union and the Kohl government during the 1990's. This is what he explained at a seminar of Ver.di with personnel delegates from the energy sector on May 10, 2005 in Potsdam. He emphasized that the legislation in Germany is the necessary consequence of the European Union's energy policy and its directives and that it is not a 'voluntary' initiative of the government or parliament. He regrets that the European Union does not place supplies foremost but rather the principles of the market and competition.

National parliaments follow the European directives

Despite himself, Hempelmann clarifies the situation: the decisions of national parliaments are not democratic. These are the "natural consequences of European directives." He is equally clear about the fact that will be other reductions in personnel in the energy sector. "This is unavoidable in view of the European Union's directives."

Those who associate competition with advantageous rates will find this does not hold true. According to Hempelmann there will not be a reduction in rates.

After decentralization there would be a tendency to lowering rates but the consumers will not benefit. He also emphasizes that it is not about "a reduction at all costs of expenses." Guaranteeing supply thanks to upkeep and maintenance of the installations must be ensured. The winter that followed this formulation by Hempelmann and the Ochtrup experience showed that one must be hopeful. The network collapsed and entire regions were left without electricity.

In August 2003, minister Clement had informed the parliament that after the opening of the market the structure of supply was completely transformed in Germany. There were only four large companies that controlled 80% of the production capacity of energy. (1)

After a close look it is clear that these giants are the product of an orgy of privatization by the Kohl government (the partial privatization of Veba that was entirely owned by the state took place in 1965). With privatization and in the framework of competition the companies that were formerly part of the public infrastructure now dictated their conditions.

The influence of private companies on communal companies

The remaining 1,700 companies supplying gas and electricity represent the remaining 20% of the market. The takeover of these communal companies interests the giants-no one wants to pass from relatively advantageous rates of the communal companies to the exorbitant rates of the giants-since that would ensure their access to the clients of the com-

munal companies.

In Dusseldorf lately and before that in numerous other communities the breakdown of the communal company was done against the will of the majority of the local leaders of the CDU of the FDP. The giants are getting stronger.

The erosion of the local suppliers absorbed by the giants is called "competition." The consumers have already noted the vaunted consequences of "competition" in the lowering of rates in their homes. But, according to Ver.di the prices continue to increase in 2002 and 2003 and have risen to the level before the opening of the market.

In the short term with privatization of the communal companies and the numerous bases of public infrastructure are threatened. Ver.di reports: the public services that were guaranteed by the communal companies thanks to their transversal connections, for example cheap public lighting in the towns, the unprofitable public bathrooms or the hotel service in the ports. All the population's indispensable services will no longer be part of the priorities of the companies and will be cast off on the market. The private companies specializing in waste treatment or transportation can charge whatever they can get away with.

All these consequences are known to the leaders of Ver.di and the SPD. We have enough experience with the postal service and the railroad. For example repetition of the postal services experience is on the horizon. In the Bergischen Land region RWE wants to abandon the smaller networks. RWE (as well as the other large ones) must carry the weight of a costly network that covers a rural region, contrary to those in urban areas and are not faced with competition. What could happen with the networks has been demonstrated by the closure of railroad lines in rural regions.

We have a vast experience of the consequences of the transposition of the European directives and privatization. This experience also appeared in the analysis made by the management of Ver.di and the SPD. They knew the consequences of the decisions that they took and the result.

In view of the unbearable consequences of the destruction of our basic infrastructure, of our public services and public property, we should take the offensive in order to stop this policy, for an end to privatizations and for the return to the public domain through nationalization of our privatized companies. This would presuppose a return to democracy in which the parliament decides rather than a commission of the European Union.

This implies a break with all treaties after Maastricht and a fight for a Europe of workers and peoples. This discussion will take place in the framework of the European Conference to be held in Berlin on February 25 and 26, 2006

(1). These are the companies: RWE after the fusion of RWE with WEW, EON after the fusion of Veba with VIAG, Vatterfall in which are integrated VEAG, HEW and BEWAG, EnBW the fourth giant.

March 5-6, 2006 New Delhi

**Common initiative of the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI, India)
and the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples (ILC)**

We are writing to invite you to an international workshop on Global Labour Rights And Asian Garment Labour Campaign on 5-6 March 2006. This workshop is being organised on the occasion of the founding convention of New Trade Union Initiative to be held in New Delhi from 4-7 March 2006.

The workshop, co-organised by the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) and the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples (ILC), comes at a time when there is a shared understanding globally between trade unions and the working class that globalisation is resulting in the intensification and concentration of private capital at the cost of wage and employment conditions of the working peoples of the world. These adverse changes are being perhaps experienced in their most acute form in the garment and textile industry. The end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement, the generalised deregulation of the world textile and garment market and the tightening of supply chain management by global corporations has meant a direct threat to the jobs, to the wages, to living standards and to the rights of millions and millions of workers.

These are concerns that the ILC and the NTUI share.

The ILC at its conference in Madrid in March 2005 underlined these fundamental concerns. After the Madrid conference ILC along with All Pakistan Trade Union Federation and the Bangladesh National Federation of Workers had issued an appeal for a for the organisation of an Asian conference in defence of trade union rights, workers' rights and jobs and national sovereignty.

The NTUI along with the other members of the South India Coalition for the Rights of Garment Workers has called for a dialogue on a floor level Asian wage and for taking stock of and building strategies on global experiences and innovations in organising.

The purpose of workshop will be to take these issues forward.

Both the ILC Appeal and the NTUI discussion paper on the Asian Floor Level Wage Campaign are enclosed.

We call upon all trade union organisations, especially in Asia, to participate in this workshop so that so as to build our common understanding and advance our struggles so as to resist and respond to the onslaught of capital.

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Chandan Sanyal - New Trade Union Initiative
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**A threat to millions of jobs and to the very life of the countries directly concerned
Contribution by the APTUF and the BJSF**

When the system of quotas in the textile and garment sector came to an end on January 1, 2005, all sources admitted that at least 30 million jobs were at stake world wide.

More than 2 million jobs were directly under threat in the sole case of Bangladesh, and millions could be lost in Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka.

It was then said that the first victims of this tremendous event would be -- with the exception of China, the case of which we will deal with later on in this appeal -- the countries in which this textile production was a vital component of the national industry.

For instance, in the case of Bangladesh, the IMF reckons that 25 to 40 % of the 4000 factories operating in the country are doomed. In a country where textile and garment make up 80% of exports, this means that the whole economy could fall into bankruptcy. The international media say that for the time being, the worst has been avoided. What do they mean? Because of the very low wages, the criminal conditions of labour laws, the non observance of labour laws and the common law, hundreds of workers have died in accidents, in the name of competitiveness. Is that acceptable? And now nonetheless, the closing of factories is speeding up. This is not valid only for Bangladesh.

Pakistan's cotton production represents 64% of the national wealth, and the major part of industrial production and export (70% of the exports).

In relation to India, it was said that the textile and garment industry would attempt to expand on the new conditions. But it was also emphasised that, to do so, the cost of labour had to be reduced, economic special zones had to be created.

In the case of India we have witnessed the destruction of the organised textile industry - especially the case of Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kampur, Coimbatore. That

has meant desorganizing the regular work force in that sector and doing away with the secured wages system as it prevailed before. That has gone along with the development of " export promotion zones" where labour laws are not respected.

That means that countries on which in the name of the requirements of the world market the abnormal development of a single industry, textile industry, had been imposed, should now accept to see that industry disappear with dreadful consequences for millions of workers, for the very life of the country. That in itself is a blow to the national sovereignty and independence of those countries.

The deregulation of the world textile market, engineered by the WTO, is not intended to be beneficial to the workers in that industry or to people in general. It aims at strengthening the control over that market of big multinationals, American multinationals in their majority, and it threatens not only the national economy of the countries which are directly concerned, their national independence and their unity as nations.

In the same time, the representatives of the multinationals, and the local bosses, make use of this situation to intensify the exploitation and to multiply their attacks against their rights. They pretend that the only chance left to those countries is to maintain their wage level at the lowest and to restructure the textile industry with the aim of reducing the cost of labour even more.

Of course, Asia is not the only region affected. The total deregulation of the textile market badly hits workers in countries like Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria, in Europe and in the United States. The situation in textile illustrates and concentrates the general onslaught of the capitalist system against jobs, wages and trade union rights. But the consequences of what is happening in textile hit all the workers of the Asian continent, therefore, those workers and their organisations must, at the level of the whole continent, unite to save their lives, to save their jobs, to save their rights and the very existence of their nations.

Do the Chinese workers benefit from the new situation?

And what about China? China is presented as the main beneficiary of the deregulation of the textile market. But what is taking place in reality? Those who benefit from the present situation in the case of China as elsewhere, are first and foremost the multinationals which share between themselves the world market of textile.

They are now free to pass their orders where they want, when they want, with only one criteria: the lowest buying costs.

The Chinese workers are also dragged in this rush towards the bottom. The transformation of the textile market is leading to a speeding up of privatisation in the textile industry of China, to the attack against the social rights linked to the State property. In China as elsewhere, the rush toward the lowest salary does not lead to a development of the country, but to its dislocation, threatening its independence and its unity. Each part of the country is driven in competition with the other to offer the lowest labour costs. Chinese workers fight back; There is not a day when there is not mentioned in the press an incident, a conflict, a demonstration or a strike.

One example amongst thousands of others expressing that reality: in September - October 2004, 7,000 women workers of a textile State enterprise in Xingyang, (province of Shaanxi), were on strike for seven weeks. Why? Because their plant had been used for a hidden privatisation operation. It had been sold to a holding. The contract of the workers had been cancelled. The workers were re-hired individually with lower wages and without the benefits they had before such as health insurance. The strikers nominated their delegates, formed a trade union branch that they wanted the official trade union, the ACFTU, to recognise. But at the end of the strike, the delegates were arrested. Today, we have been informed that since then they have been released without any charge being put up against them. But they have not been reinstated in their jobs. In the same time, the management seems to have given up the idea of reducing the wages. By all means, the cost of labour must be brought down.

Under the pretext of Chinese competitiveness, Thai workers have been laid off and then rehired with lower wages; in Bangladesh, where wages are even lower, special economic zones where the labour laws do not apply have been increasing to prevent any raise in wages.

And in China? The official centre of research and development stated on May 28th, 2005 that "China intends to increase its taxes of export for 74 textile items (in some cases, a 400 % increase). More than a concession to the growing protectionism of the USA and of some European states, that decision marks the will of China to speed up the painful restructuring of the textile sector."

What does that mean practically? On December 29th, the deputy chairperson of the permanent committee of the national popular assembly of China, He Luli, delivered a report on the results of the survey of more than 2,000 private enterprises located in several provinces of China. The result was that 80% of the private enterprises do not respect labour laws and that workers do not even benefit of a written contract.

She especially denounced the garment sector in which foreign investors controlled 45.34% of the total production.

The most official sources therefore confirm that the private sector in which foreign investors occupy a dominant position is developing by trampling upon the most elementary rights of the working class and is threatening the existence of what has been, since the 1949 revolution, the basis of the Chinese national economy and of the unity and independence of China: the state property of the main means of production.

The Chinese workers are our allies.

Fundamentally speaking, they have the same interests and the same enemies as all the workers on the continent.

Far from being a threat for the workers of the rest of Asia and of the world, as is sometimes said, the Chinese workers are the allies of the workers of the rest of Asia and of the world. By defending their jobs and their wages, by struggling for their rights, by fighting against privatisation, which is being accelerated by the situation in textile, by defending what they have conquered and which is linked to the achievements of the 1949 Chinese revolution, they are also defending our jobs, our wages, and our rights.

Together, with our sisters and brothers of China we can save our lives, save our jobs, save our countries.

In March 2005 in Madrid, a World Conference called by the ILC took place, with delegates from more than fifty countries: in the case of Asia, from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Korea, Sri Lanka and China.

"Do not forget the 300 million Chinese workers (.) As workers of other countries, the Chinese workers suffer from the same evils. The main features of the reforms which transform the economy in a market economy is the permanent attack against the rights of the workers and that is why the protection of workers' right is the most important problem for the social and political development of China" said the delegate who had come from China.

The aim of our meeting

Together, with our sisters and brothers of all countries, with our sisters and brothers of China, we can save our lives, save our jobs, save our countries.

For that, workers and their organisations must unite all over our continent.

How can we achieve that unity? On the basis of what demands? By using what method?

In the organisational report, the National Federation of Sales Representatives Union (one of the components of the new trade union initiative), it was said *"At a time when poverty and unemployment and job losses have grown to an astronomic proportion in all countries including in the heart of the world largest superpower, the very right to organise, unionise and associate the workers is threatened, and that is the real fight. Democracy is a hollow word without this right.(.) the resultant participatory new world government in country after country with actors as governments, parliaments, corporatisations, members of civil society, trade union organisations, international financial institutions like IMF, the World Bank, the WTO is pointing toward the real danger before the working class."*

In such a meeting, we must discuss that characterisation. Does it not find one of its most concentrated expressions in the textile and garment sector today?

To be upheld and secured, all the rights of the working class, all the gains conquered in the past struggles, can be defended only if the existence of independent working class organisations is preserved. They are indispensable tools of working class unity, their existence and action are necessary for the defence of all democratic rights and, first and foremost, the rights of nations to their sovereignty and of the rights of people to decide. Can there be any substitute to those organisations and to their struggles? Can trade union organisations act efficiently if they abdicate their independence?

Those are the problems we must discuss freely among ourselves. Day after day, it is repeated that "solutions" could be found in a common agenda between the exploited and the exploiters.

Hasn't experience taught us that we will not save our gains, our jobs and our rights by any form of "partnership" with the employers and the representatives of the multinationals and of the world financial institutions; that we will find no protection in the so-called good conduct codes and/or of any attempt to give a human face to the rush to the bottom of our labour force.

On the contrary, is it not only by defending the organisations of the working class, its trade unions, and uniting all in the struggle for the demands of the working class, that it is possible to hold in check the barbarous offensive unleashed against the working class democracy and independence?

Is it not by defending the rights and the gains of the working class, by refusing to give them away, in the name of trade deals and so-called "social clauses" that we can save our jobs, our wages and our rights?

The greed of the multinationals expressing the deep decay of the system of exploitation based on the private ownership of the means of production is responsible for the disastrous situation existing in textile and garments. The so-called overflow of products has nothing to do with the needs of the people. The labour movement is not responsible for that situation; its responsibility is to those who join it to defend their rights. The working class organisations have not to accommodate in any way the lowering of the cost of labour required by capital. They have to defend in each and every country the existing labour laws as far as they give protection to the workers. Is it not their duty to refuse any reduction of that protection in the name of competitiveness?

Is it not their duty to struggle for the full implementation in all the countries of our continent of the ILO conventions which codify the rights of the working class, beginning by conventions 87 and 98? Is not that the way to fight back in textile and garment as in other sectors, the onslaught of imperialism?

Those are the matters we want to discuss in March 2006. That is why we invite you to be present on March 2006, or/and contribute by written papers to a free discussion, to see by what means we can together put a stop to the destructive policies engineered by the multinationals.

All Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF)
Bangladesh Jatiyo Sramik Federation (BJSF)

I endorse publicly this appeal

NAME, Surname:
___ In my personal capacity or ___ On behalf of my organisation

TITLE & ORG (list if for id. only) :

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Letter to socialist deputies: "It is your duty to present in the order of the day the abrogation of the law of application of the "pact of generations"

Letter sent after a meeting in preparation for the Berlin Conference on February 9, 2006.

Ladies and Gentlemen Deputies
Dear Comrade,

The leader of your group, Thierry Giet, personally answered each of the signatories to the letter written by the Liege-Huy-Waremme trade union of the FGFB. The letter sent you by numerous workers and activists said:

"Stop! Socialist deputies don't vote for this non-solidarity pact between generations without at least amending four essential points: We demand you act in accordance with the progressive values you defend."

We note that your answer, dated December 20, was written after the vote in parliament of the "Pact of solidarity between generations" law.

In your correspondence you assure us that the PS parliamentary group "was sensitive to the common approach" taken by the signatories to the letter. You affirm that you were "impressed by the social movements" and that you are aware of the "great present problem". You evoke "a difficult context".

We know you voted in favor of the law that the letter from the FGFB asked you not to pass. You did not heed this demand in voting for the "Pact of solidarity between generations" law.

You acted in this manner by pooh-poohing the demands made in two general strikes and after the historic demonstration of October 28, 2005. It is discouraging to see the socialist group strike at the good liaison between the PS and the FGFB. You admit that the PS did not contest the objectives of the pact.

Therefore the objectives of this plan are the Belgian transcription of the Lisbon strategy recommendations that aim to lower the cost of labor and therefore to cast out labor gains in the name of a most competitive economy in the world. These objectives are not those of the workers you represent in parliament. Where are those of the multinationals and speculative funds?

You allege that without the PS the result would have been disastrous for the workers. We believe, as do many others, that the result was disastrous for the workers. We are certain that if the PS had opposed the pact and if you had paid attention to the demands of those affiliated to the FGFB, who form the majority of the leaders of the PS, the workers could have avoided this disaster.

You write that the pact includes positive measures and important gains such as the modification of the financing system for social security. Yet, Thierry Bosen, regional secretary of the FGFB in Liege-Huy-Waremme demonstrated to the contrary calling for a demonstration in Liege on December 2. *"Regarding the financing of social security there will be a new deficit in 2008. As of January 1, 2006, they will take a 15% deduction in real estate that will return 500 million to social security. This is positive. But at the same time you reduce 500 million euros from employer*

contributions. So where is the financing for social security? Or for the public services that are left out to dry as the state is using for other purposes part of its tax income?"

You also say other measures are compromises. We understand that faced with worker demonstrations, the government was not able to get to the final objectives in social regression and that other measures will come. Nevertheless we cannot accept your affirmation according to which *"the larger exception regimes were also accepted which have reduced the effect of highly criticized dispositions."*

According to you the pact as presented by the government and adopted by the parliament will actually be painless. This is not true. We know the pact is the duty paid by Belgium to the European Commission in order to conform to the Lisbon Strategy. It was required that Belgium get rid of 'rigidities' in the labor market, in other words our social gains. Who can pretend that this 'duty' failed?

If certain exception regimes are maintained for how long-it won't be longer for the pact to pass the general regime of 25 years work to 35 years, that makes pre-retirement impossible for women, part-time workers and those who have long periods of unemployment. Also, it requires 32 years of full-time work for pre-retirement for women where previously it was 19 years.

The government has maintained its decision to increase the regime to 35 years (60 years) and 38 years (58 years) if the rate of activity of senior workers is insufficient compared to European average.

Up to the present certain sectors such as metallurgy, glass or chemical industries benefited from private regimes. The pact suppresses these regimes and replaces them as "heavy labor" evidently more restricted.

The letter sent to you demanded the *"maintenance of present definitions in the event of restructuring."* One of the most important consequences of the pact is precisely to overturn the conditions in which trade union organizations are required to negotiate the loss of jobs. By referring to this demand, you evoke the last minute amendment that allows the federal government to associate regional reconversion cells to the federal plan. This arrangement serves only to complete the ensemble of new measures in the matter of restructuring.

To put it briefly: at the present in the case of restructuring, a worker can reach the age required for pre-retirement but this possibility has been suppressed and now the age can only be reached when the restructuring plan of the company is announced. Other set backs: restriction in the definition of restructured of company, obligation on the part of the candidate to pre-retirement to accept any suitable job with a reduction in the departure indemnity for the category of employees. One of the important 'novelties' in this Pact is to force the older pre-retired workers even after a long career to be available in the employment mar-

ket, which will expose them to temporary work. It is especially shocking to read that the effect of this pact has been 'slightly' reduced.

The letter sent to you asked you not to vote for the pact because it would allow the government to diminish the amount of pensions going toward welfare by disassociating it from the time of unemployment or pre-retirement that would in effect constitute a loaded premium pension which was supposedly rejected by the socialists during the negotiation for the pact. This measure constitutes an open breach in the pension regime. You do not mention it in your reply.

You have therefore voted on a law that stipulates:

CHAPTER III

Differentiated payment ceilings

Article 9. Article 7 of the Royal Decree No. 50 of October 24 1967 relative to the retirement and survival pension of salaried workers, modified by the Royal Decrees of December 23, 1997 and December 11, 2001, adds the following note "For the years after 2006, the king determines by Royal edict at what point and in what form it will deliberate on matters of remunerations paid during layoffs, or after retirement, or in between jobs. ..."

In other words in this area the parliament has given the government on the basis of strict legality, complete latitude to do as it wishes.

The FGFB Liege-Huy-Waremme through its initiative asked you not to vote for the pact in the state. This matter still concerns us since the consequences of the plan will start to be felt strongly by the workers and therefore by the immense majority of your electorate.

You should therefore listen to your base and relay its interests. We cannot admit that socialist leaders consider themselves as having to account for only to the European Commission and the sacrosanct law of "high competition."

From now on we request that you accomplish your work as elected officials representing workers and those on social security. We believe it is your duty to consider the abrogation of the application of the 'pact of generations' on your immediate calendar. You know its consequences and the sooner it is abrogated, the better. Also, the labor world will recover hope and new conditions for a change in policy will be believed.

You conclude your answer with your intention to be *"at your service"*. Would the socialist group accept to receive a delegation of these signatories in order to make known what we hear around us. To be entirely at the service of the workers is to act as demanded by the affiliates of the FGFB. It is not too late to do so, that is why we consider that the abrogation of this law is now the order of the day.

Please accept our fraternal regards: Madame, the Deputy, the leader of the group.

Presentation

At the end of August 2005, Hurricane Katrina smashed into New Orleans and the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana and Mississippi. The levees, whose repair and upkeep had been neglected in the name of budget priorities for the war, collapsed. The most impoverished sectors, the large bulk of them Black people, were devastated by the floods. The entire world could witness those tens of thousands of people - men, women, children, old and often ailing, warehoused in the most horrendous conditions in a sports complex. New Orleans is no longer front-page news. What is the situation now, five months later?

The Organizer newspaper, in its last issue, published a series of documents and interviews of this veritable war waged by Bush and the U.S. ruling class on a sector of the population of their own country: the Black working class and youth. This is a war that has all the features of what US Labor Against the War characterizes as "ethnic cleansing."

We turn over this page of the ILC newsletter to USLAW and to Saladin Muhammad, a Black worker militant in the U.S. South.

"War and disasters are good for business":

Excerpts from Statement by USLAW on Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

"While federal funding during the past several years was cut for levee protection, as well as for all the social programs needed by the people in New Orleans and Mississippi, at least US\$1.7 billion of Louisiana federal tax dollars, including \$151.6 million from New Orleans taxpayers alone, was spent on the war in Iraq, pre-Katrina.

The Louisiana and Mississippi National Guard has more than a third of their troops in Iraq and much of the badly needed vehicles and equipment were unavailable in New Orleans because they were in Iraq. _ Just as the U.S. government has privatized much of the war in Iraq, enriching the Halliburton and Bechtel profiteers of the world receiving huge no-bid contracts to build camps for rescue workers, to rebuild military installations and the oil industry, and to begin the reconstruction of the entire region.

Small local businesses have been left standing in line. Within a week after the hurricane, the notorious Blackwater Security firm that has made a fortune in Iraq and Afghanistan was on the ground patrolling the streets of New Orleans. _

One of the fundamental questions to address right now is in whose interest will New Orleans and the devastated Gulf Coast be rebuilt? How will the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars be spent and who will make the decisions? In the United States, we have all witnessed decades of "Urban Renewal" in which poor neighborhoods are levelled and rebuilt for more prosperous and generally much whiter interests.

The issue of racism permeates our government's policies in both areas. Iraqi civilian deaths are not even counted - in New Orleans, Black corpses were left to rot and citizens were sheltered under conditions the Rev. Jesse Jackson compared to the holds of slave ships. The death and destruction of the Gulf had a distinctly racial character based on years of racial oppression and resulting inequality, leaving the largely African American population of New Orleans with a 28% poverty rate.

Although the administration announced it was waiving affirmative action requirements for federal contracts for the rebuilding, military recruiters have been seen increasing their activities in all the areas where displaced Gulf Coast families are living. The message: Black people are good enough to fight in foreign wars but don't deserve a fair shot at rebuilding their own communities.

US Labor Against the War supports the efforts of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and other community-based organizations led by the people of color of the Gulf that seek to rebuild their communities on pro-people principles.

UNITED STATES

Excerpts from The Organizer Newspaper: **The Aftermath of the Katrina Disaster: Bush's Domestic War**

Hundreds of thousands of Gulf Coast residents are still without housing, and most are without jobs. In the neighborhoods that were not affected, rents have skyrocketed, even as the reconstruction has barely begun. Worse still, the reconstruction projected by the authorities is focusing on the development of "useful New Orleans," promoted by the real estate speculators, while the sections of the city where the Black majority lived are to be demolished and simply erased from the map.

As US Labor Against the War puts it: "Three months after Hurricane Katrina, the relationship between the war in Iraq and the devastating implications of what we call the war at home, against our own people, is crystal clear."

USLAW is a coalition of trade unions, representing unions with a combined membership of 2 million workers, which from the very beginning has waged a relentless campaign against the war and which, in alliance with broad forces, is organizing a national demonstration on April 29 to demand the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

At a leadership meeting in Chicago on December 3, USLAW adopted a resolution on the situation in New Orleans, excerpts of which are reprinted below.

Excerpts from Letter from Saladin Muhammad,
organizer of Black Workers For Justice:

"The political program for rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast needs to be championed by an independent political party."

[Note: The statement by USLAW on Katrina prompted a letter in its support from an organizer of Black Workers For Justice, an organization based in North Carolina that promotes the interests of the Black working class. BWFJ calls for the formation of an independent Black workers' party.]

The statement on Katrina by USLAW is a very important development. It has the potential of broadening and deepening the antiwar struggle. As important, if not more, it has the potential of merging the labor wing of the antiwar struggle with the African American-led struggle for Justice and Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast, part of the larger U.S. South where the majority of African Americans live and work and where the main struggles for Black civil and democratic rights began to formally express itself starting with the first Reconstruction period. _

A Justice and Reconstruction program and movement in the South needs national and international support, particularly from the working class sectors. The political program for rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast needs to be championed by an independent political party.

Rebuilding communities must include organizing a Constituent Assembly made up of representatives from workplaces, neighborhoods, students, women, oppressed nationalities, etc. to hammer out and vote on and struggle for a democratic program of action. Building a Justice and Reconstruction Party would be a key form of independent political action. It is very important that it be built around the Black majority, labor and the working class.

Part of the struggle is against gentrification/ethnic cleansing of the Black majority. Maintaining the Black majority must be raised as a major demand against the ethnic cleansing strategy.

A Reconstruction Program would call for an International Commission to oversee Reconstruction, including the right of return. _

It is urgent that trade unions throughout the world officially condemn the U.S. government for Crimes Against Humanity and violations of human rights of the African American and working and poor people of the Gulf Coast. If some expression like the large number of trade unions on the conference call organized for USLAW a couple of years ago could be done for the Gulf Coast Survivors Assembly (PHRF), including a call for international action, this would be an important development in expanding the struggle internationally.

