

314
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Boletín del Sindicato Staff Union Bulletin Bulletin du Syndicat

Give peace a chance...

union

• **C'est le moment d'y croire**

• **Defining decent work**

• **Vigilangue**

• **Rincón del Comité**

• **Happy birthday ILR, KOR**

• **Sagesse, K* * ***

ILO Communications

EDITORIAL

We'd better believe it

Difficult this month to concentrate on our backyard and its human resource and other problems. They suddenly seem petty set against the momentous events of 11 September. Like the death of Kennedy, what happened that day in New York and Washington will remain etched in our memories forever. The consequences, too, may mark the rest of our lives.

As colleagues spontaneously gathered round the UBS TV screens on R3, you only had to see the look on their faces – at first incredulous, then stunned – to feel the immense distress of our American colleagues and the palpable solidarity of all the rest.

It should be at moments like these that working for an international organization assumes genuine significance. Amid the clamour of calls for revenge, and global mobilization against a nebulous enemy, you tell yourself that 30,000 men and women, of all nationalities and faiths, united under the same blue banner, must have a role to play.

The UN organizations were created to restore peace among the peoples of the world in the aftermath of global conflict. Now it's up to the people who work for them to strive to prevent such conflict – right?

To judge by the approach of the world's leaders, shuttling back and forth to build coalitions, you wouldn't think so.

The US President apparently sees a role for the UN in governing a post-Taliban Afghanistan. The UN Secretary General was granted a three-minute huddle with the UK Prime Minister in the back of a New York church. As far as we know, that's all there is.

Our profile and that of our sister agencies seem to be lower than ever. Yet the time to believe in what we do and why we do it is surely now or never. Is our own Organization, claimed by the DG to be the social conscience of the world, to sit on the sidelines with its mouth firmly shut?

What we can do to ensure there is a just outcome may be minor. But if we merely go about our business as if all was normal, the world will conclude we are not even trying.

The editors
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EDITORIAL

C'est le moment d'y croire

Bien difficile ce mois-ci de se concentrer uniquement sur notre microcosme et nos problèmes de gestion de ressources humaines. Ceux-ci paraissent bien mineurs comparé à l'ampleur des événements tragiques survenus aux Etats-Unis le 11 septembre 2001. Ils feront partie de ceux dont chacun de nous se rappellera exactement où il était et ce qu'il faisait à l'heure exacte ou cela s'est produit, comme pour l'attentat contre JFK.

Il suffisait ce jour-là de déambuler dans les couloirs et de rencontrer des collègues d'abord incrédules puis abasourdis et choqués, rassemblés spontanément devant les images diffusées en boucle par les téléviseurs du bureau de banque au R3 pour ressentir l'immense détresse de nos collègues américains et la solidarité palpable de tous les autres.

C'est aussi dans ces moments-là que travailler pour une organisation internationale revêt tout son sens. En effet, lorsque l'on commence à entendre ici et là, propos vengeurs, bruits de bottes et mobilisation générale contre des coupables bien difficiles à cerner, on se dit que plus de 30.000 hommes et femmes, toutes nationalités et religions confondues, réunies sous la même bannière bleue de la paix ont leur rôle à jouer.

Les organisations des Nations Unies ont chaque fois été créées après des conflits mondiaux en vue de rétablir la paix entre les peuples. Ne serait-il pas temps, pour une fois pour elles de les prévenir?

Mais à considérer l'approche actuelle de nos chefs d'Etat, peinant à construire des alliances, cela ne semblent pas être le cas.

Le Président des Etats-Unis ne voit apparemment un rôle à jouer pour l'ONU que dans un futur Afghanistan post-Taliban. Alors que le Secrétaire général de Nations Unies ne fut gratifié que d'une entrevue de trois minutes avec le Premier ministre anglais dans le fond d'une église Newyorkaise. Pour autant que nous le sachions, ce fut tout en ce qui concerne les Nations Unies. Et toutes ses agences spécialisées semblent faire également profil plus que bas.

C'est donc le moment ou jamais de croire en ce que nous faisons. Si nous considérons effectivement que notre Organisation est, comme aime à le répéter notre DG, la « conscience sociale du monde », allons-nous rester les bras croisés?

Bien sûr, tout ce que nous tenterons à notre niveau pourra peut-être paraître mineur. Mais si nous nous cantonnons à nos tâches habituelles comme si de rien n'était, alors le monde entier conclura que nous n'avons même pas essayé.

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Union es el boletín oficial del Sindicato del Personal de la OIT publicado por el Comité del Sindicato con la colaboración de un Comité de Redacción. Los artículos firmados comprometen únicamente a sus autores y no reflejan necesariamente las opiniones del Comité del Sindicato. En caso de reproducción de los textos, se debe mencionar la fuente.

Union magazine is published ten times a year (with double issues in July-August and November-December). The Editorial Board will consider every submission. Pseudonyms are acceptable provided the author's name (which will remain confidential) is supplied to the editors. The copy deadline for contributions is the first working day of each month (except June and October). If accepted for publication, the earliest they may appear is in the following month's issue. Articles may be submitted in English, French or Spanish. The preferred length of manuscripts is under 1000 words. If possi-

ble, they should be submitted in a common word-processing format (as simple as possible: unjustified, with no tabs, no indents, no underlining) as an email attachment or on diskette, together with a hard (paper) copy. Photographs should preferably be black-and-white bromide prints, or colour slides. Originals should be supplied of all drawings.

The magazine *Union* parait 10 fois par an (avec 2 numéros doubles, juillet-août, novembre-décembre). Le Comité de rédaction examinera toutes les propositions. Les pseudonymes sont acceptés à condition que le nom de l'auteur soit communiqué à la rédaction (information qui restera confidentielle). Le délai de soumission des contributions est le premier jour ouvrable de chaque mois (à l'exception de juin et d'octobre). Lorsqu'elles sont retenues, les contributions seront publiées au plus tôt dans le numéro du mois qui suit. Les articles peuvent être soumis en anglais, français ou espagnol. La longueur des articles ne devrait pas excéder 1000 mots. L'original devrait, si possible, être soumis sous format traitement de texte (texte au kilomètre: sans tabulation, sans alinéa, sans soulignement) en pièce jointe de courrier électronique ou disquette, accompagnée d'une copie papier. Les photographies sont les bienvenues, de préférence en noir et blanc sous forme de bromure, ou diapositives couleur. Tous les dessins devront être soumis sous leur forme originale.

La revista *Union* se publica 10 veces por año (con dos números dobles en julio-agosto y noviembre-diciembre). El Comité de Redacción examina todos los textos propuestos. Se aceptan los pseudónimos a condición de que se comunique a la redacción el nombre del autor (información que tendrá carácter confidencial). El plazo de presentación de las contribuciones acaba el primer día laborable de cada mes (excepto junio y octubre). Las contribuciones que hayan sido aceptadas se publicarán en el número del mes siguiente o en números posteriores. Los artículos pueden presentarse en inglés, francés o español y no deberían exceder de 1000 palabras. El original debería presentarse, de ser posible, en formato de tratamiento de texto (texto sin formato especial: sin justificación a la derecha, sin tabulación, sin sangrado y sin subrayados) como texto anexo al correo electrónico o en disquete, acompañado de una copia impresa. Las fotografías deberían ser preferentemente copias de bromuro en blanco y negro o diapositivas en color. Los dibujos que se presenten deben ser los originales.

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Committee Corner

Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC)

A JNC meeting was held on 2 and 3 August. The Staff Union Committee reports that the Collective Agreement on the Personal Development Plan (PDP) has been signed, and that the Collective Agreement on Job Grading (applying as of finalization of the baseline grading/matching) has been finalized and will be signed soon.

Precarious employment

The Staff Union Committee (SUC) continues to follow-up on cases of precarious employment, and it is expected that HRD will soon publish a document on the Office's approach to the resolution of this issue.

The ILO Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT)

The SUC has submitted to the Administration a draft on amendments to the Statute of the ILOAT with a view to ensuring, among other things, compatibility with the relevant Collective Agreements.

Ombudsperson

The Ombudsperson has been appointed and should take up her duties by mid-October 2001.

Missions to the field

The SUC Chair has received an invitation to attend the Africa Region Directors' meeting, scheduled in Pretoria from 1 to 6 October 2001.

At the request of the staff representatives of the Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS), an SUC member undertook a mission in mid-September 2001 to Beirut to review the situation prevailing in that Office and to assist its staff in dealing with an HRD mission.

Comité de Negociation Paritaire (CNP)

Une réunion du CNP s'est tenue les 2 et 3 octobre 2001. Le Comité du Syndicat du Personnel informe que l'Accord collectif sur le Plan de Développement Personnel (PDP) a été signé. L'Accord collectif sur la Classification des postes a été finalisé et sera signé très prochainement.

Emplois précaires

Le Comité du Syndicat du Personnel assure le suivi des cas en souffrance. L'Administration devrait publier prochainement un document décrivant l'approche du Bureau pour résoudre cette question.

Le Tribunal administratif de l'OIT (TA)

Ainsi qu'il en a été convenu avec l'Administration, le Comité du Syndicat du Personnel a soumis un projet d'amendement au Statut du TA, visant à assurer, entre autres choses, la compatibilité de ce dernier avec les accords collectifs y-relatifs.

Médiateur

Le Médiateur a été nommé et prendra officiellement ses fonctions à la mi-octobre 2001.

Divers

Le Président du Comité du Syndicat a reçu une invitation pour assister à la réunion des Directeurs des Bureaux d'Afrique, qui se déroule à Prétoria du 1 au 6 octobre 2001.

A la demande des représentants du personnel du Bureau régional pour les Etats arabes, un membre du Comité du Syndicat du Personnel s'est rendu à la mi-septembre à Beyrouth afin d'évaluer la situation du personnel dudit bureau et de lui porter assistance dans le cadre d'une mission du Département des Ressources Humaines (DRH).

Comisión Paritaria de Negociación (CPN)

Una reunión de la CPN tuvo lugar los días 2 y 3 de agosto. El Comité del Sindicato informa que se ha firmado el Convenio Colectivo sobre Planes de Desarrollo Personal (PDP), y que se ha terminado de negociar el Convenio Colectivo sobre Clasificación de Puestos (que se aplicará una vez haya terminado el

ejercicio de establecimiento de una base para la clasificación), y se espera que la firma se produzca en breve.

Empleo precario

El Comité del Sindicato continúa con el seguimiento de los casos de empleo precario, y se espera que el Departamento de Desarrollo de los Recursos Humanos (HRD) publique en breve un documento en el que se expongan los criterios de la Oficina para resolver esta cuestión.

Tribunal Administrativo de la OIT

El Comité del Sindicato ha presentado a la Administración un borrador relativo a las enmiendas al Estatuto del Tribunal Administrativo encaminadas a asegurar, entre otras cosas, la compatibilidad con los convenios colectivos correspondientes.

Ombudsman

La *Ombudsman* ha sido nombrada, y se espera que se incorpore a la Oficina a mediados de octubre de este año.

Misiones fuera de la sede

El Presidente del Comité del Sindicato ha sido invitado a asistir a la reunión de directores de la región de Africa, que tiene lugar en Pretoria del 1 al 6 de octubre de 2001.

A petición de los representantes del personal de la Oficina Regional para los Estados Arabes, un miembro del Comité del Sindicato realizó a mediados de septiembre una misión a Beirut para valorar la situación en dicha Oficina y prestar asistencia al personal de la misma en relación con una misión enviada por el Departamento de Desarrollo de los Recursos Humanos (HRD).

Formation: discrimination, encore et encore...

De notre correspondant vigilangue

Ne le répétons-nous jamais assez, l'Organisation dans laquelle nous travaillons est-elle oui ou non trilingue?

Vous avez sans doute reçu dans vos boîtes d'entrée le magnifique Catalogue présentant la nouvelle politique de formation et les cours à votre disposition pour votre développement de carrière. Apparemment fort bien réalisé, le contenu mériterait et fera certainement l'objet d'une étude plus approfondie dans nos colonnes. Mais là n'est pas l'objet de notre indignation.

Une fois de plus, malgré l'apparence trompeuse de sa page de couverture *Catalogo*, *Catalogue*, qui suggérerait que celui-ci se décline dans les trois langues officielles, cette luxueuse brochure n'a été publiée qu'en anglais. En page 7, on apprend que HRD « a l'intention » de la publier dans les deux autres langues « l'année prochaine »...

De qui se moque-t-on? Au nom de l'égalité et de l'équité entre les collègues, il est inadmissible qu'un tel document ne soit accessible qu'à ceux qui parlent la langue la plus couramment utilisée. Un chef de département ne devrait pas avoir l'audace ni le droit de laisser sortir ce type de document tant que les trois langues soient prêtes.

De même, nos représentants syndicaux devraient exiger à chaque présentation de document que celui-ci soit accessible immédiatement dans les trois langues (les comités précédents successifs l'ont bien fait, serait-ce une requête insurmontable ou pas assez gratifiante à formuler de la part de nos collègues actuels?). Faudra-t-il en arriver finalement à se plaindre officiellement aux états membres de cet état de fait? Le dénoncer aux instances de la 5e commission à New York, et à exiger, comme à l'OMS, qu'un médiateur soit uniquement nommé pour les questions d'équité linguistique? Ce serait quand même dommage... Pendant des années, l'administration du BIT a su garder un équilibre, aussi précaire était-il, dans ce domaine. Alors un effort SVP, dans les vacances de postes, les circulaires, le site web, les réunions internes et autres pentagrammes... Si l'on veut que son personnel adhère à sa politique, la moindre des choses est de lui témoigner du respect et celui-ci s'exprime aussi par la communication dans sa langue.

Defining decent work: Meeting the global challenge

Thanks to the rich input from the 410 speakers in the Plenary Sessions of the ILC, difficulties in finding the right definition of decent work appear to have been overcome.

The following 80 or so definitions, drawn from the Provisional Record, fall into four broad categories: conceptual (a vision thing); target-oriented (an intention thing); policy-oriented (a strategy thing); and directional (an indicator thing). Use the one that is right for you. Decent work is:

Conceptual	Target-oriented	Policy-oriented	Directional
a philosophy all very well a means for existence very elusive a subjective idea a subjective topic a pipedream for millions	a goal more than a goal a development goal a goal that connects with people's aspirations a universal goal the ultimate universal goal	a relevant policy agenda a strategy a package a global policy of social development	a message a paradigm a framework an agenda a flag a method of organizing the best possible path for development
affordable a right a human right a legitimate right of every citizen a qualitative notion a dynamic notion in danger of becoming just another philosophical mantra far from clear	a challenge a global challenge a priority an ambitious aim worthwhile about improvements in the quality of people's lives a way of expressing the goals of development in human terms	a platform for external dialogue and partnership an overarching theme of the ILO's policy our life the centre of our legislative agenda an essential component of the mandate of the ILO	an important yardstick a model for the creation and implementation of national, social and development policies a defining feature of human existence the means of sustaining life and of meeting basic needs the antithesis of a static form unionism and apathetic workers
about the quality of people's lives a concept a highly operational concept probably the most important concept to have emerged in recent times a concept of ideal work conditions a dynamic concept	a Utopia for the large majority of workers a universal aspiration	crucial to individual choice a key management tool a reality for the precious few an integrated policy framework a weapon in the fight against poverty	the antithesis of a static form unionism and apathetic workers
an idealistic and seductive concept a multi-faceted concept an inspired concept and vision a subjective concept		dignified work central to well-being and respect for human dignity in the interests of states sustainable employment	a means to retirement at an appropriate age the natural expression of human solidarity the most efficient means for individual, family and social development and progress an excellent bridge for the ILO to cross over in the twenty-first century an attractive slogan
a development concept an umbrella term a dream to many lacking		an asset productive work	a yardstick a crucial factor in securing harmonious and sustainable development

Enness Jaye 06/01

80 years of the International Labour Review: 1921-2001



The present incumbent, Iftikhar Ahmed

This is a milestone year in the history of the ILO's flagship publication, the International Labour Review, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary.

Origins

The International Labour Review (ILR) and the Revue internationale du Travail commenced publication in 1921 in response to Part XIII, Article 396 of the Treaty of Peace (Versailles, 28 June 1919) which stipulated that the ILO "edit and publish in French and English, and in such other languages as the Governing

Body may think desirable, a periodical paper dealing with problems of industry and employment of international interest".

The publication of the Revista Internacional del Trabajo was launched nine years later in 1930. It is now Review policy to publish the same text of the ILR in all three editions (English, French and Spanish: see the special issue entitled "75 years of the International Labour Review: A retrospective", Vol. 135 (1996), No. 3-4).

Editors

During the period 1921 to 1964, the leadership role of the ILR was diffused within overall editorial responsibilities in the ILO. The persons responsible for the ILR over its 80-year history were identified as follows through a search of the ILO archives by Ivan M.C.S. Elsmark.

- 1920-21: Royal Meeker (US), Chief of Scientific Division
- 1921-36: Pierre Waelbroeck (Belgium), Chief of Publications Section, later Editorial Section
- 1937-38: Joseph Herbert (UK), Chief of Editorial Section
- 1938-40: Rexford B. Hersey (US), Chief of Editorial Section
- 1940-61: James Johnstone (Canada), Chief of Editorial Section, later Editorial Division
- 1961-64: Maurice Chapman (UK), Assistant Chief with responsibility for the ILR (1961); Chief of the Editorial Division (1962-64)
- 1964-81: David Hobden (UK), Head of the editorial team of the ILR (1964-71); officially "Chief Editor" and Chief of the ILR Section (1971-81)
- 1981-93: Timothy Lines (UK), Chief Editor and Chief of the ILR Section
- 1993-2000: Martha F. Loutfi (US), Editor-in-Chief and Chief of the ILR Section
- 2000—: Iftikhar Ahmed (Bangladesh), Editor-in-Chief and Chief of the ILR Section

Of the ten individuals having editorial responsibility, there was only one woman (Martha Loutfi) and the present Editor-in-Chief (Iftikhar Ahmed) is the first from a developing country in the 80-year history of the ILR.

Confronting the global decent work deficit over 80 years

The 1996 special issue commemorating the 75th anniversary, which selectively reprinted 18 articles from each of the eight decades of publication, demonstrates that the ILR had been consistently disseminating the results of innovative thinking, research and policies on economic and social issues and promoting informed debate and policy formulation.

The topics covered by that sample of articles also clearly indi-

cate that over its 80-year history, the ILR has been systematically dealing with the theme of decent work deficit, which serves as a measure of the absence of sufficient employment opportunities, inadequate social protection, the denial of rights at work and shortcomings in social dialogue (see the Reports of the Director-General to the 1999 and 2001 ILCs). Indeed, issues tackled in the pages of the ILR many years ago continue to demand urgent attention today.

Iftikhar Ahmed ■



The first editor, Royal Meeker



From ILO communications:

News you may have missed...

Administrative Tribunal, 91st session Selected Considerations

The complainant contends that, as a result of the restructuring exercise, he was deprived of his functions without due warning and was made “a scapegoat” by the ILO for its personnel policy which had resulted in a gender imbalance. The Organization asserts that he misinterpreted the document: The omission of the complainant’s name merely meant that he was not one of the staff appointments at the time the minute was circulated. The Administration also stopped responding to the letters he sent to the Human Resources Development Department, thus “sealing an atmosphere of vacuum around [him]”.

mirror/public/english/tribunal/fulltext/2050.htm

Le requérant ne saurait prendre pour excuse une maladie psychique pour rejeter la responsabilité de ses erreurs sur l’administration. L’OIT ajoute qu’il ne suffit pas, pour établir qu’une maladie est imputable au service, que celle-ci ait un quelconque rapport avec le travail, encore faut-il que ladite maladie soit la conséquence directe d’un risque particulier auquel le fonctionnaire a été exposé pour s’acquitter des tâches qui lui ont été confiées. Ainsi, ne sont pas imputables au service les réactions psychologiques pouvant résulter de décisions administratives défavorables.

mirror/public/french/tribunal/fulltext/2058.htm

The complainant joined the staff in 1980. In 1999, he was informed that his contract would not be renewed upon expiration. The complainant seeks to draw some argument from the fact that by the time the Director-General exercised his discretion to refer the matter to the Joint Committee, the complainant’s contract had expired. The argument is not only without merit, but it cannot possibly benefit the complainant. If the right of appeal created by Article 13.2 is to have any meaning it clearly implies that the Organization’s decision may be altered as a result of such appeal and it is simply incoherent for the complainant to argue otherwise.

mirror/public/english/tribunal/fulltext/2071.htm

«Le Comité [des rapports] ne peut que recommander que [le requérant]... soit maintenu à un poste où il peut tirer parti de ses points forts sans que ses points faibles ne constituent un handicap. Le Centre pourrait sans doute mettre à profit son niveau d’éducation ainsi que ses capacités intellectuelles et conceptuelles en l’employant pour exécuter l’une des tâches effectuées en amont...»

mirror/public/french/tribunal/fulltext/2077.htm

Overall results of the 35 Judgements: “The complaint is dismissed” = 68%; “Other claims dismissed” = 26%; finding in complainant’s favour = 6% (only).

mirror/public/english/tribunal/lastsesn.htm

ILO-COMment: Don’t complain – just suffer!

25 years ago: Workers’ Defence Committee KOR

On 23 September 1976, a group of 15 Polish intellectuals founded the Workers’ Defence Committee, known by its Polish initials “KOR” (Komitet Obrony Robotników). The committee originated from the spontaneous action of the group of intellectuals and students intended to help repressed and prosecuted workers and their families following a wave of strikes and demonstrations against Communist Party policy in June 1976. The initial aims were to provide material, medical and legal assistance for workers imprisoned after the June events. Trials were attended, families supported and protests made against

physical abuse by the police. The committee started to collect the information on all those repressed and it appealed for an independent investigation into the brutalities by a special parliamentary commission. Although this appeal remained unanswered, KOR’s call for the release of those imprisoned – including some of the KOR members arrested in May 1977 – eventually proved surprisingly successful in July 1997. All workers were amnestied and reinstated, though often to inferior positions.

This was the first great success for the independent movement. In the course of its interventions between September 1976 and summer 1977, numerous other people unlawfully prosecuted approached KOR, not only asking for assistance but also declaring their willingness to cooperate. Also, many independent initiatives flourished around KOR – periodicals, educational initiatives, independent students’ associations, etc. Rather than disband, therefore, KOR decided to expand its activities to the defence of society as a whole. In September 1977, it transformed itself into the Committee for Social Self-Defence (KSS KOR), retaining the label “KOR” to show continuity. A new programme called for “social initiatives” from all sections of society and promised support against lawlessness.

In the meantime, the number of formal committee members increased to over 30 and the group of its activists and collaborators to a few hundred. Over 100 of them signed a Declaration of the Democratic Movement, outlining a programme of independent social initiatives in many areas: publishing, educational, protecting rights of workers, farmers and other groups in society.

The notion of “self-defence” was defined as a form of joint action through which continuous pressure “from below” would wrest concessions from the authorities. KOR itself and the movement around it brought together people of different political backgrounds and views but united by a willingness to defend human rights through independent, non-violent action. Non-violence was an important element, taking into account the Polish romantic tradition of conspiracy and insurrection. One of the major strengths of the movement was its openness: names, addresses and telephone numbers of all members were published in each issue of KOR’s regular bulletin, and the same applied to the editors of the other mushrooming independent periodicals (but of course not to those who were actually printing them on very simple printing devices and had to hide while the political police were hunting them). Another strength lay in the successful breakup of the party’s information monopoly: information was disseminated through illegal publications, Western journalists, widely listened-to Polish-language broadcasts of the BBC, Voice of America, Radio France Internationale and Radio Free-Europe and, later, even independent, short FM radio broadcasts in Poland (this was all well before the Internet was invented).

Foremost among the independent social initiatives undertaken by KOR was the defence of workers’ interest through the uncensored journal *Robotnik* (“The Worker”), compiled in Warsaw from material sent in by worker-correspondents. Its first aim was information: to end isolation of workplaces in different parts of the country through a nationwide distribution network, which reached 100,000 to 200,000 workers. A community of interest and experience soon became apparent. Strikes, undertaken more and more often by workers in different factories, had been successful but only in the short run. Concessions granted proved temporary. *Robotnik’s* conclusion echoed KOR’s: lasting improvements would result only from constant pressure on the authorities. They urged workers to “organize themselves into more permanent bodies such as Strike Committees or Free Trade Unions”. The first Free Trade Union had been founded in Silesia in February 1978; the second, in May 1978 in Gdansk, was the Founding Committee of the Free Trade Unions of the Coast. Among its founding members was Lech Walesa.

In September 1979 *Robotnik* (and its Gdansk version – *Robotnik Wybrzeża* – “Worker of the Coast”) published a “Charter of Workers’ Rights”, prefiguring many of the demands which were to be made later, in summer 1980: for better wages, shorter working hours, improved safety precautions, promotion by merit, and, above all, for new, independent trade unions. Sixty-five activists – workers, technicians, engineers and intellectuals – signed the Charter. All, on the principle of openness adopted by KOR, gave their full addresses and telephone numbers (those who were fortunate enough to have telephones). An Appendix quoted the relevant clauses of the ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98. Both conventions had been ratified by Poland already in 1956, but actual law and practice were far from the stipulations of these conventions.

Then came a wave of strikes in summer 1980. This time, however, the workers did not follow the examples of their predecessors from the events in December 1970 or June 1976: they did not go onto the streets to clash with the police or the army. They stayed in factories but organized themselves into interfactory strike committees covering large regions of the country. They followed the path of self-organization advocated by KOR, and the famous appeal to the workers made by Jacek Kuron, one of the KOR leaders and subsequently first Minister of Labour in the first non-communist government in 1989: “Do not burn down the committees – establish your own!” (referring to the fact that in 1970 and 1976, local party headquarters in several cities were burned down by the demonstrators).

KOR was there. It was disseminating information about the strikers and workers’ demands. It helped to establish contacts between different committees. Finally, many KOR members and collaborators were with the workers in the striking shipyards and factories, serving as advisers.

The main workers’ demand was the right to establish independent trade unions. Again, ILO Convention No. 87 was quoted. The strikes were successful. The government started to negotiate and negotiations ended with agreements that, among other things, granted the right to establish independent trade unions. The independent trade union “Solidarnosc” (Solidarity) was born.

KOR decided to finish its activity a year later, in September 1981, during the first National Convention of Solidarity in Gdansk. Three months later, martial law was introduced in Poland and Solidarity became illegal. It took another eight years to achieve real freedom – for trade unions and society as a whole. But now the movement was much, much bigger and supported not by hundreds but by thousands and millions. An example of how to organize independent activity in a successful way was there, together with the taste of freedom from the 15 months of the 1980-81 period – a “carnival of freedom” as some named it.

This all led eventually to the round table negotiations between Solidarity and the communist government in spring 1989, resulting in so-called partly free elections in June 1989. These were won by the democratic opposition led by Solidarity, bringing to power a first non-communist government in September 1989. Then came “velvet revolutions” in Prague and Budapest, and the fall of the Berlin wall...

It’s already 12 years since the events in 1989, and on 23 September 2001 there were the fourth, fully democratic, parliamentary elections since 1989 in Poland. One can now find KOR members and activists in different political parties, often arguing about many key issues. But on the eve of the elections, they all gathered in Warsaw, despite their political differences, to commemorate the anniversary. And they all recognize the importance of what happened 25 years ago and they still share the basic values that united them in the past, even if now they do not necessarily share views on what policies are best for their country.

Many different actions and circumstances made democracy a reality in central and eastern Europe. But it is worth remembering that it all started 25 years ago, in September 1976, when a small group of people founded the Workers’ Defence Committee KOR. Doing this, they never believed that what actually happened, might do so within the span of their lifetimes. But they felt that it is important to act to defend workers’ rights and broader human rights. And this story should particularly be remembered in the ILO, as the ILO and its Conventions played an important role.

Krzysztof Hagemeyer ■

Correspondence

I am an English-speaking visitor for a short time at WMO. I was reading the article “Pourquoi les fonctionnaires...” in the June 2001 Union. I can’t find out the meaning of the “C.v.t.i.” that it ends with and the several French speakers I’ve asked don’t know, either.

Can you help me, please?

Peter Price ■

C’est vraiment trop injuste, n’est-ce pas? – Ed.