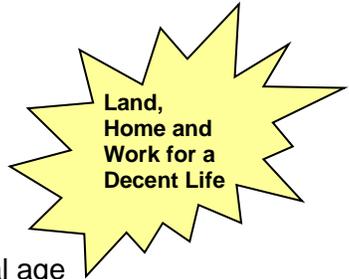




Movement of Christian Workers

Review

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ECWM Seminar 2019

A dignified life for everyone in the digital age

Final statement "Digital work: between the desire for self-determination and the need for statutory provisions and labour law regulations", October 2019 Ostend (Belgium).

The MCW England delegates were David McLoughlin and Ann Smith.

Digitalisation is in full swing, advancing at an accelerated pace and changing our lives in both the private and working environments. It is a phenomenon affecting our whole society and obviously has a great attraction which feeds its development and importance. However, this phenomenon, like many others, can be described as ambivalent and we understand that it is our task to contribute to the configuration of this process by understanding its principles, reflecting its effects on the basis of our horizon of values and considering how and what we can contribute to its configuration as actors. It is also important that we examine the use of digital media with self-criticism.

It is striking that there is a gap in society with regard to digitalisation. There are a large number of people who, until now, have had little or no access to the new media and who, because of the great importance of digitalisation in the public and work spheres, run the risk of losing contact with society. This problem is worsened by the fact that digital development is very fast and is progressing in all directions at such speed that until now political leaders have barely regulated the process, which aggravates especially the situation of those who are discarded in this process.

In this context, a social message about the future design of a digital world of work is needed and which we want to start with our calls to the church and society. The rise, among other things in the following topics: Lifelong learning; ensuring employment in the transforming process; working time and private time with blurred limits; ecological issues; substitution of economic growth as the main development criterion by values such as solidarity and common good; Fiscal justice and distribution of wealth; development of social security systems; work-free Sundays and valuation of other forms of work.

In the political sphere a dignified life for all people is our criterion for digitalisation. In *Laudato si*, no.128, Pope Francis says "The broader objective should always be to allow [human beings] a dignified life through work." To achieve this goal, we talk inside our movements and externally. We bring our specific vision in dialogue with representatives of the Church (COMECE, Caritas, Justice & Peace, local Episcopal Conferences, IYCW, ICYCW) and civil society (Trades Unions, NGOs) and politics at all levels. An exemplary action is World Day for Decent Work, which is celebrated on 7th October each year.

Ostend, 19th October 2019



The 2019 Seminar of the European Christian Workers' Movement (ECWM) was held from 17th to 19th October in Ostend, Belgium. Thirty seven representatives of member Movements from more than 11 European countries participated. The seminar was opened by Petr Koutney (left), President of ECWM, from the Czech Republic.

2019 European Seminar Report

With six presentations, working groups, project visits and sharing food and meals together only a fraction of this event can be reported upon. The seminar was structured around the Cardijn method of See, Judge and Act. The first presentation was from Luc Cortebeek of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) entitled *The Future of Work and Digitalization*. He drew on a recent ILO document the *Global Commission on the Future of Work* which was the fruit of 22 independent pieces of international research. Interestingly Luc noted the impact of global climate change as likely to be more significant than digitalization. The demography statistics presented were stark: By 2050 there will be a decline in the working age population in Europe of 14% and a rise in Africa of 12% when 50% of the African population will be under 25. Currently there are 190 million unemployed, 65 million of whom are young workers. There are 3 billion workers in extreme poverty with women globally earning 20% less than men whilst 40 million people are entrapped in modern slavery. A third of the global workforce work more than 48 hours a week and 2.78 million per year die of work related accidents or disease. There is also a clear digital divide with only 53.6% of households having internet access.

For a more consistent human centred agenda a greater investment in people's capabilities, universal entitlement to lifelong learning and re-skilling is needed to re-configure our training systems. Also required: a clearer measure of gender equality; working to eliminate violence and harassment at work; sustain and develop greater social protection and equality in health and safety; a need for a universal labour guarantee which would include an adequate living wage, limits on the hours of work, and the establishing of safe and healthy workplaces. In essence what is needed is a human "in command" approach with more explicit algorithmic accountability and an international governing system for digital labour platforms. Increasing investment in decent and sustainable work was emphasised leading to the creation of new jobs in the green and care economies.

The second presentation "*Digitization, a Chance for Humankind.*" from an entrepreneur from South Tyrol, mapped out the origins of digitalisation from the Morse code to binary code as well as the ever faster expansion of digitalisation and it's virtually universal benefits, in terms of working environment and conditions. His own firm is paperless and all the workers can tap into all necessary documentation, timetabling etc. on their smart phones or tablets so there is transparency of practice across the workforce. A caveat arose in the discussion that the founders of this technology felt they had been naïve in their assumptions about how it would be used before the growing evidence of the criminal nature of much of the dark web. Our third presentation from Pierre Marie Molinier, ACO, France, shared his experience of working for Bosch for 30 years. The founding of the firm in 1861 in Stuttgart had values similar to firms in Britain like Cadbury's and Rowntree. He spoke of the changes in his work place from technical manual work to now no place for unskilled workers being employed and trained. In response participants highlighted the growing precarious nature of much established employment and the need to develop alternative business models that promoted the common good rather than just profit. The impact of digital technology on traditionally benign work practices begged the question in the face of such rapid change what should our Unions be doing?

Markus Vennwald, the Policy Advisor to the Commission of the Bishops Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) spoke about the recent report of COMECE “*Shaping the Future of Work*”. The reason for the report was the rapidly changing face of work and so the need for a faith based response to the anxiety and uncertainty this change engendered. He addressed work as more than paid employment; more than a source of income, rather a care for creation with the need to integrate workers into society to foster personal development. His analyses identified the speed and complexity of technology and globalisation with so many, especially the low paid, being left behind in the labour market e.g. care workers. It was said that human centred models are necessary in a social market economy. A new societal consensus on the value of, for example, care work was needed with work being sustainable, providing security of work that is also ecologically aware. In summary the vision is one of decent, sustainable and participative work for all acknowledging the challenges that remain. The debate following on addressed the precarious work of the most poor and the consequence of a growing lack of engagement in the political process in some regions with up to 70% not voting. Karl Brunner from KVV South Tyrol took us through some classical biblical texts to provoke us to a sharper awareness of some of the fundamental values underpinning all work, in particular developing the theme of human beings as co-creators with God. This led into a re-reading of Pope Francis’ references to work in *Laudato Si* and *Evangelii Gaudium* (LS127, 128, EV 153)

Jelena Soms from Lithuania and representing EZA, addressed the topic of *The Future of Work and Changing Labour Relations* within the extraordinary fluid political and social context of her own country. There new technology seems to have been broadly embraced and the consequences are being worked out subsequently. In manufacturing the companies using robots are showing greater productivity and generating greater profits. As a result the workforce is expected to be agile, adaptable, and resilient. In response there has been an emergence of job sharing, bringing in special skills under short contracts; a growth in zero hours based work and individual self-employed workers with a growth in freelance collaborative workers e.g. couriers. The de-regulation of labour laws calls into question the worker identity and the nature of the employer. These changes can lead to issues of lack of pay transparency, growth in surveillance and data protection. Jelena highlighted areas in which the Trade Unions could make a difference with definitions of new digital work to be internationally agreed and types of employees; freelance, temporary, and self-employed being able to join a Trade Union.

There were three sessions of Work Groups addressing shared questions. One group identified the new reality of working remotely with the unintended consequence of lack of visibility within the organisations so that workers’ other talents lie unrecognised thus effecting progression and career development. One project visit, bicycle recycling, enabled particularly migrant children to get cheap bikes; another was a centre for migrants offering language teaching and opportunities for social gatherings.



The multi-lingual Eucharist was led by the European Chaplain Fr Josep from Barcelona, after which we enjoyed delicacies from the table of Europe. It was a productive seminar and the quality of solidarity and sympathetic listening and robust discussion was impressive.

David McLoughlin (left), Birmingham MCW Group

Delegate's Reflection

What stood out for me at this year's seminar was the application of the See, Judge and Act method of working as we tackled the serious and complicated themes of the seminar; that of the dilemma between the rapid pace of change in this new era of working in the fourth industrial revolution (the new 4.0 digitalisation) and the demise of many jobs for the vast majority of working people.

In the working group in which I was present everyone gave concrete examples of working life situations and we examined the positive and negative outcomes of expanding digitalisation. We then examined what the nature of work should be: how it should enhance the human condition not degrade the person. Then we moved onto action that needed to be taken. We suggested intergenerational learning, with the young assisting older and or less able people to use the new technology. Markus, (COMECE) gave examples of "burn out" by young highly qualified professionals that he has met in Brussels and the need for balanced lives. What also stood out at this seminar was the presence of several young people who made such a positive contribution to the seminar; amongst them being Markus, Sarah, International Young Christian Workers, Jelena from EZA (with social policy and funding responsibility) and young delegates from Austria, Czech Republic and South Tyrol.

As ever, it was wonderful to meet fellow workers from so many different European countries and learn of their situations many of which chimed with what is happening in the UK. The friendships and camaraderie that develops at these seminars is very special and is especially appreciated by our wonderful team of interpreters, Koen our technical man and the administration team, so ably led by Lieve and Mark. Our Belgian hosts were very genial and Ostend is a beautiful city with a very interesting history.



I always find serendipitous things happen when travelling and this was no exception. David McLoughlin and I were approached for train information on a platform at Brussels Midi station and unable to reply in Flemish, spoke in English to the young lady who replied in perfect English with a beautiful Northern Irish accent. We shared the train journey with her to Ostend, learnt her life story and she ours. She really wanted to come to the seminar! We came to a compromise and Mieke came to the "Table of Europe" social on Saturday evening and thoroughly enjoyed herself becoming known as "the girl on the train". We are still in communication.

Anne Smith (left), B45 Group

We apologise for the postponement of our National Conference including AGM and for any inconvenience this may have caused. All those who booked were informed directly. A new date will be announced in the New Year.

The views expressed by contributors of the MCW Review do not necessarily represent the views of the MCW

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