



Movement of Christian Workers

# REVIEW

Issue 50 June 2013

## Reading the Signs of the Times

In the Cardijn Movements it is always important to be able to read the 'Signs of the Times'. For Christians who are actively engaged in trades unions, political parties or community organisations it is vital to see what is going on in the world and discern its meaning in relation to the past, present and future. This chimes with our prophetic role as baptised Christians and inspires us to share our discoveries and influence others so as to bring about positive change in both people and situations.

When thinking about how things are at the moment it is impossible not to be confronted with economic issues. High unemployment, hard times and austerity are words we see and hear every day. It gives pause for thought when we realise that more than one new food bank is being opened each week across the country. This begs the question how, as a society, should we look after the poor and vulnerable without forgetting the rest?

The Gospel imperative is that we should put the orphan, widow and stranger at the centre of our concerns. They were the poorest and most disadvantaged at the time of Jesus and we have to discover who their equivalents are today because they have to form a major part of our preoccupation. Sadly the current messages being portrayed in the media

want to divide people and tell us to look after ourselves to the exclusion of some others. Immigrants are receiving a particularly bad press. So, it is perhaps timely that migrants and migration are a current focus of the Movement's work. The enquiry within this newsletter will hopefully enable us to think more deeply about the situation and circumstances of those who have to leave their home countries and seek either work or refuge away from their homeland.

This issue also contains examples of the Movement's work at local, national and international levels. The General Meeting to celebrate St Joseph the Worker and May Day illustrates a vibrant local Movement. There is also a thought provoking piece on how an alternative economic course could be charted.

Other articles highlight how the Movement works in different parts of the world. Victoria from Korea gives an account of her working life and how her commitment to the Movement both challenges and equips her to play a leadership role.

Along with this MCW Review you will find an accompanying letter appealing for funds to enable Movements of the South to take part in the International Council Meeting in Germany during July of this year. Your generosity will be greatly appreciated.



## **The Challenge of the Stranger** **A celebration of St Joseph the Worker,** **May Day & International Workers' Day**

A member of the MCW B45 group hosted a general meeting to celebrate St Joseph the Worker and May Day on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013. Nineteen people attended from various Christian churches. All brought food and drink to share whilst meeting, greeting and exchanging conversation with one another; some heart-to-heart, some tête-à-tête, some for the first time, others trying to catch up on the passage of time.



Those organising the evening agreed that the theme should be migration. The three main reasons for this was firstly the May Day association with International Workers' Day and secondly in the knowledge of Migration being the theme for the forthcoming International Council of the WMCW (World Movement of Christian Workers). Last but not least what probably galvanised the decision was the current media spotlight and political parties' attention being given to migrants. At this time of austerity measures being taken it appeared that a number of scapegoats could be identified. The language, the creating of myths and maintaining these myths about migrants to a greater or lesser degree seemed to be creating further and deeper divisions.

At the meeting David McLoughlin gave a reflection on the Challenge of the

Stranger. What follows is a summary of his presentation leading to an open discussion amongst those present.

In dealing with migration, (The 2006 World Population Report reveals that 191 million people live outside the country of their birth and nearly 50% are women, by 2013 that figure must have increased considerably) and the reality of the inter-cultural nature of our world we deal with the strangeness and otherness of people and of our personal and collective histories. Shifting between cultures, languages and customs is the stuff of everyday existence, yet it always involves challenges to mind and heart, to our deepest feelings, beliefs, and sensibilities. It touches the very heart of who we are and who God is, who according to Genesis, we are called to image (Genesis 1:27). Our God is the strange God of migrant people and Jesus, the one who has nowhere to lay his head (Mth 8:20; Lk 9:58); because he chooses to be alongside the excluded, the marginalised and the dispossessed. Within this framework the encounter with the stranger, the migrant, and the foreigner becomes a privileged moment; capable of revealing more to us of ourselves, our world and our God.

All 3 monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, remember the journey of Abraham and Sarah. The Archetypal migrants: they leave all (Genesis 12: 1-2) and become homeless by setting out on a journey of hope for a better life. They travel across foreign lands, where they become strangers and where they negotiate with strangers. They lose both state and status and are greeted with suspicion as foreign. They are dependent on the kindness of the peoples they encounter. They must negotiate as they cross

boundaries. Even at the end of life Abraham must still negotiate to buy a grave for his wife as he and his family own no land. "A wandering Aramaean (a migrant) was my Father ..." is the oldest statement of Jewish faith.

David recalled Mahatma Gandhi whose life was transformed when he read the beatitudes. He famously said: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." True worship of the living God transforms. Having come to know the mercy of the living God we can not deny that same mercy to any of these created in the image and likeness of God. That some of them are strange and different to us is the reflection of the extraordinary strangeness of God's own self.

After his death the risen Jesus is a stranger to his disciples and companions, they do not immediately recognise him, he comes among them opening an unexpected perspective, which can only be entered when he, the stranger, has been accepted and welcomed. God calls men and women again and again to see anew through the eyes of a stranger.

Jesus' ministry displaces the centre of religion. The margins and the marginalised become the focus for the new centre of the Kingdom of God (Lk 10:30-35). There the stranger becomes a potential fellow pilgrim on the way. The place of encounter with the stranger is not an easy place to be, but it is a place of unexpected truth and even revelation. It is holy ground.



The discussion that followed this inspiring reflection included acknowledgment of our fear of the unknown. We also conceded at very particular times when facing cuts in income and services that for some, who were struggling to make ends meet, looking for someone or something to blame was likely and not easy to avoid. However it was not inevitable.

One of the participants circulated a booklet 'Facts & Fibs & Mayhem' by the Refugee Action Charity. It was a simple guide to facts and figures about asylum seekers. It presented some of the sensational stories that had been given in the media or just passed around verbally as truths alongside the real situation of the asylum seekers' circumstances. It certainly helped to allay some fears and debunk myths.

We also learnt about BIRCH (Birmingham Community Hosting Network). One of the contacts of the B45 group acts as a volunteer host and provides short term accommodation to those who have found themselves destitute in their journey through the asylum process. One example to illustrate that the process of asylum is not easy was one woman who had accommodation with a host. She was afraid to go out as she did not have the right papers. She lived in a comfortable house until she got her official leave to stay and official papers. Then, although the host was willing for her to stay longer, she was told by the authorities that she had to have her own official address. Now although legal she lives in a privately rented flat on an estate that is run down, full of criminal activity and she is scared to go out. This feels like her one big step forward has become one step back as she is again afraid to go out. At the end of our meeting it was felt to be important to be able to undermine the myths presented, separate the facts from the fictional fibs and encourage

solidarity between all those being confronted with a similar fate of living with scant resources. Strength could be gained through mutual concern for others and fighting side by side for justice and fairness: to stand together rather than at odds with each other. It was felt to be important that we addressed some of these issues so as to challenge our own views, inform ourselves and raise our awareness.

Following this meeting it was decided to write a See, Judge, Act enquiry which could be used by local groups to think about their experiences and knowledge of migrants and migration.



## MCW Enquiry Migration



### See

- When we talk about “migrants”, “foreigners” & “immigrants” who are we actually talking about?
- What are our own experiences of migration and migrants?
- From our own experience or migrants we know why was it necessary to leave home and move elsewhere?
- What are the reasons for migration? Why do people have to migrate?
- Are there any differences between local, national and

international experiences of migration?

### Judge

- Why is it currently now a key issue in the papers and amongst political parties?
- Does the ‘label’ or ‘status’ given to migrants/immigrants/foreigners e.g. asylum seeker, refugee, economic migrant, illegal



immigrant, European migrant make any difference to how we or others feel about them?

- Can you share an example of any parable or action or situation in the bible or from the life of Jesus that helps us understand basic ethical values about how we should behave towards migrants?
- What are the contradictions between the values identified in these examples and the experiences of the situation of migrants we have shared?

### Act

- How can we make ourselves more aware of the situation of migrants, locally, nationally and internationally?
- Is there anything we can do as individuals to raise the awareness of others?
- Are there other individuals or organisations that work with migrants, which we can support or help sustain in some way?
- Are there any other actions which we can identify?

If any local group uses this enquiry the MCW would really like to hear about your responses and any actions taken. Please email [mcw@aol.com](mailto:mcw@aol.com)

## The Budget and thereafter: What do we want?

One of our MCW member's is connected to a thinktank seeking debate on alternatives to the current austerity measures being taken. The following was submitted by them to the Chancellor. For more information see [www.b-divisioncollective.co.uk](http://www.b-divisioncollective.co.uk) or email [bdivisioncollective@gmail.com](mailto:bdivisioncollective@gmail.com)



### Where's the demand, where's the growth coming from?

Overwhelmingly we want secure healthcare, education, social care, aged care, disability care, social housing, public security. And we want this much more than we want anything else – viz, ordinary consumer goods and private services, of which most of us (except of course the poor) already have a fairly full complement, and which can no longer therefore form the basis of new mass demand and growth whatever you may do to encourage them! Moreover we want these 'public-need' services available according to need, free at the point of use and regardless of income.

### Where are the jobs coming from?

Resultantly there's a massive potential need for care, social and public security etc, jobs and for private jobs supplying and equipping these sectors with high tech goods, with consequent employment potentialities well above any possible alternatives. Without satisfying this clear need unemployment will remain high whatever you do. Only by satisfying it can we create hundreds of thousands of good, worthwhile, caring, professional-type jobs for our existing jobless poor, our school and college leavers and many of our older people. And only by creating public jobs in areas where public need is highest will we get money into the pockets of the poor (who alone have major unmet needs for basic consumer products and utilities) and provide the local purchasing power which can additionally create new worthwhile private jobs.

### Where's the money coming from?

We are fully prepared to pay the bill – tax – if only we are asked (given the option) and if only this is levied fairly and progressively on the basis of ability to pay – which also means cutting out tax avoidance and properly taxing dividends, capital gains, wealth and property. In this way more than enough revenue could be provided both to create significantly more 'public-need' jobs and to begin to reduce the public deficit and debt. While (thereby) getting money into the pockets of the poor and otherwise unemployed in needy areas will enable them to pay-off their debt, significantly purchase basic local goods and services (which will stimulate local growth and private jobs) and contribute tax rather than constitute an ongoing welfare burden. And the overall 'tax' effect of such policy should, compared to other 'growth' alternatives, also help dampen general inflationary pressures.

**Where's the answer to climate change coming from?** Rebalancing the economy firmly towards meeting our real 'public-need/quality of life' problems and encouraging the rest of the world to do likewise – as against simply encouraging more material consumption – will alone fundamentally (at root) reduce the need for raw materials and energy, reduce waste and pollution, cut our carbon footprint, radically reduce global warming and possibly help save the planet.

That's what people want, justified on economic as well as social and moral grounds. But is anyone going to give it to them?

**The sense of a calling, by Seo Victoria,  
Elected member of the International Council of the WMCW  
(World Movement of Christian Workers)**

In 1981 I was working in a textile factory and a colleague who was a Catholic invited me to her Church. I soon became a catholic and quickly became engaged in the YCW (Young Christian Workers). By participating in these meetings my view of the world greatly expanded. For a young girl such as myself, having little interest in the boring hard work in the factory, it suddenly took on another dimension. I became aware that I was someone and not simply a pawn; I became aware of the sacred meaning of work and the dignity of the person. I opened my eyes to the beauty of the world and was conscious of how lucky I was to have a job. I realized that ambition and greed were often leading the world and distorted our judgment about people, but that Jesus had another view of people, he considered them equal in their dignity and worthy to be loved.



I met my husband through the YCW. He works as an electrician in the construction industry. We were married in 1989 and we have two children, one girl and one boy. They have both finished their studies and are now both working. As for me, I am still working in the textile factory, which exports to Japan.

After my wedding I joined the KaNoJang (MCW). My husband supports me in my commitment to the movement; but as he works in the construction industry and he is often on the move, it is more difficult for him to participate. He spends a lot of time committed to fighting to improve the working conditions of construction workers and is a member of the electricians' trades union.

Participating with my husband in the meetings or training sessions of the KaNoJang (MCW) we have learnt a lot. We have also acquired much wisdom from

the example and experience of the older members. The sharing through the review of life in the team has given me a great deal. It is something very positive. It opens me up to the different problems in the world and society, and the sharing of the bible gives me considerable strength in this sphere of life, which is not always easy. Still today working in the fabrication of clothes in my workshop I am conscious of collaborating in the dignity of work and the creation of God, and this gives me courage and joy.

In relation to the number of hours I work and the level of my qualifications I do not receive a high salary. My hours are 9am to 7pm. On Saturdays I finish at 5pm. I have in total about 30 years working experience and only earn 1.750.000 Wons (1.170 €) per month. In our country the hourly minimum wage is 4.860 Wons (a little more than 3.5 €). I get four summer holiday days and

for two big festivals I get two times four days holiday including the Sundays.

With regard to the treatment of workers who have the toughest jobs, there is a huge gulf between what the media say and the concrete reality.

Individualism that pervades urban society makes life really precarious and difficult particularly in Seoul for workers in small enterprises.

The hours, like mine, are really very hard but for some, the conditions are far more difficult. In the majority of the enterprises that make clothing it is women who work there. It is really difficult to mobilise them because they also have work waiting for them at home in the family. Sunday they rest or have leisure activities. They share their difficulties and encourage each other; so they can find some joy in doing this work!

In 2009 I became the president of KaNoJang and I was also elected as a member of the International Council of the WMCW during the General Assembly held in Nantes. In our region of East Asia, four countries represent us, each having its own language! We don't know English, so it is our chaplains who help us to communicate with one another. I have not studied very much so I only know Korean. This may seem a little silly to be the representative of Eastern Asia in these conditions. But I still find it full of meaning to carry out this work with the help of my chaplain. I can speak and make known in the church the difficulty of the lives of workers because I feel them myself; and I try to make my lay apostolate in the Church, even if it is difficult. Leading from the front in the factory, working at home and social commitments, it is a bit of an obstacle course! But for me it is answering a call.

### **The General Secretariat of the WMCW**

The General Secretariat of the World Movement consists of one fulltime worker, Betina. She is supported in her work by members of the International Council who are all volunteers. Betina and members of the Council where possible visit the various continental co-ordinations and regional seminars. Over the last 2 years they have participated in meetings in West Africa, The Indian Ocean Islands, Caribbean, North and Central America, East Asia, East Africa, South Asia, South America and Europe.

The current International Council members are:

#### Co-Presidents

- Alda Beatriz Fortes, Brazil
- Crespín Laté Lawson, Niger

#### Treasurer

- Jean Michel Lanoizelez, France

#### Members

- Charo Castelló Alfaro, Spain
- Franz Anzenhofer, Germany
- Sabah Eskander Gayed, Egypt
- Ethelbert Penheiro, Bangladesh
- Danilda Sosa, Dominican Republic
- Victoria Sun Hee Seo, Korea

One example of a visit was Jean-Michel's participation in the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MTC Rodrigues and the

coordination meeting of the Indian Ocean Islands (Mauritius, Madagascar, Réunion and Rodrigues) which was held at the same time.



Three of the participants at the coordination meeting were left to right Désiré, MTC Maurice, Manuella, MTC Maurice & Angelette, LOAC Rodrigues.

### **Testimony from a participant at the WMCW North, Central America, Caribbean Islands regional Meeting**

(Extract from Sabino's Testimony taken from INFOR, WMCW biannual newsletter)

**The blind man of Jericho:** when they arrived near Jesus, there was a blind man sitting on the side of the lane, begging. When he heard footsteps he shouted, "Jesus, son of David have mercy on me." "What do you want me to do for you?" "My Lord make me see". When he could see again, he followed Jesus (Lk 18: 35-46).

When asked what struck him most about the regional meeting that has just ended Sabino, MTC Cuba said: "I will answer that I have come across wonderful brothers and sisters. I think that this is what happened to the blind man of Jericho, who realised that another world than the one that he could partly know, a world that he could and heartily wanted to visualise as a whole, was there. Then nothing could keep him from reaching his aim.

When I heard Lucky speak so well and so simply; when I saw Santos, a modest farmer struggling for the rights of migrants in his Guatemala that suffered so much; when I saw our sister Lydia so enthusiastic and Grâce so immersed in the defence of rights against ill-treatment of women in Nicaragua; and Jenny & Danilda (from the) Dominican Republic working with migrants in farmers' struggles; and Philippe and Orélien fighting to rebuild their destroyed Haitian nation; I saw Paul, Yvon, Louise immersed in a world drowning in the thirst of consumption and pleasure trying to set up a barrier against this current; I saw Alda from Brazil wrestling with a rising giant, involved in coordinating so many groups. Finally I saw Betina, Peter Pan's butterfly flying not with wings but with planes from continent to continent. ..

I keep in me this intense desire of these brothers and sisters I've met and from the bottom of my heart a cry comes up like Bartimé's: "Jesus, my Lord, Son of David, make me see."

## International Workers Day, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013

Extract from WMCW Message to all Movements

May 1<sup>st</sup> has been celebrated for 123 years as a sign of solidarity with all workers around the world.. Last year many labour disputes occurred.. In Asia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Indonesia workers gathered to demand wage increases. In Tunisia, Egypt and the Middle East they called for economic reforms and measures for employment. In New York and in London, in the midst of an unprecedented financial crisis,



they occupied the financial centres of Wall Street and the City to oppose the power of money. The

economic crisis has provoked strong reactions in Europe.. populations have mobilised to say no to the austerity.. Today the big problem to which we must attract attention is that of deregulation and the loss of fundamental social rights. On this issue we can reference the parable of 'the labourers in the vineyard' (Mt: 20) the money given to each of the workers corresponds to 'our daily bread' in the Lord's Prayer. The justice of the Lord, without taking into account the time that each of the workers spent in the vineyard, is manifested in the granting to everyone of the minimum necessary for them to lead a decent life. This is the Lord's justice that we are asked to achieve, going beyond the notion of a salary based on work done to take into consideration the real needs of a worker and their family.

This is the outline of an alternative society. Together to build an egalitarian society ... where basic needs such as health, education and housing are guaranteed..

The wealth of our world cannot be in the hands of the privileged [it] must serve the welfare of all of humanity.. Our Christian Workers' Movement must be the eyes and ears of our Church to let her know the suffering and discrimination of which workers are victims.

This year we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vatican II Council. At that time the Church affirmed that the Council was a tool for the world and all men and women: 'the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of these times, especially the poor and all those who suffer, are also the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the disciples of Christ. There is nothing truly human which does not raise an echo in their hearts.. The Christian community realises that it is truly and intimately linked to mankind and man's history'. (Gaudium et spes)

We are called upon to carry the message from Vatican II to all these working men and women, Catholics, believers in other religions or non-believers, all united in a common struggle to advance justice in the world and the dignity of all human beings. Let this celebration.. motivate us to continue the fight, will all the men and women and with the Church, to build, together, a more just and more fraternal world.

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

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