



Movement of Christian Workers

# REVIEW

Issue 54 September 2014

If it's not  
Decent  
Work then  
it is ...



## Expanding our vision through a different perspective

Our lives today and the issues that affect them appear so complicated and complex which makes the past, in retrospect, appear simple and straightforward. We rely on the news from the TV or radio or newspapers. Most of us may find ourselves in a rut of watching, listening or reading the same ones week in, week out. For others the social media is their window on the world to find out what is happening on an hourly or even minute by minute basis. How then can we unearth what other viewpoints might exist; what additional views might shed a new light on the issue in question to assist us in developing or forming a different perception from one already gleaned? Dare we say that these fresh inputs can sometimes be a revelation; deepening our understanding and challenging our previous standpoint? Jesus' meeting with the Syrophenician Woman (Mk7:24-31) reminds us how encounters can expand our vision. In this edition, albeit the written word, it is hoped that Teacher Louise or Fr Sinclair's newspaper article written for Labor Day in the USA or the International TU Confederation's comments for World Day for Decent Work may begin to help us expand our vision by thinking about what it all may mean for us, those we know and those we don't.

October 7<sup>th</sup>

### World Day for Decent Work

As part of her introduction to promote the marking of this designated day Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, ITUC writes: "The world is on an unsustainable path. Vast numbers of working people face insecurity in their jobs and the highest levels of inequality in living memory. One half of working families have experienced unemployment or reduced working hours in the past two years, while 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty." After the July edition of the MCW Review one person commented that it is hard to know what makes a decent job. However, the new insight shared was that by being able to identify what is not decent helps to form the vision of what should be.

**MCW National Conference**  
**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2014**  
**MCW Headquarters, St Joseph's**

**Theme of the Conference is**  
**Decent Work Matters**

**Arrival** from 10:30. **AGM** at 11:00 followed by a **light lunch** at 12 noon.  
**National Conference begins 13:00**  
Please do let Jo O'Brien know if you are attending so that we have the correct numbers for catering. Jo can be contacted at the HQ, address, email and phone number details at the bottom of page 4 of this Review.

## Why is action necessary?

### Louise Greenhaugh, a primary school teacher in Newcastle-upon-Tyne



In the last two years teachers who are members of the NUT have been on strike four times. I put on social media a brief message of why I was going to strike and was not surprised at some of the comments from people I would call friends: "Sympathy for teachers ... now you ARE scraping the bottom of the bargain bucket"; 'Lazy buggers, think of us people who do not get pensions and 14 weeks holiday a year!!!." Who can blame them for thinking the way they do. They read the newspapers; they see the media portraying teachers as not the respectable hard working professionals they used to be but now lazy and undedicated.

Over my 19 years of teaching the changes have been enormous. It has been so great and is having such a detrimental impact on education that teachers need to stand up and say enough is enough. Going on strike for me is not just about amendments to the pension scheme, the 3-year pay freeze followed by an under inflation rise or the introduction of performance related pay, it is the accumulative effect this is all having on education.

Teachers have always worked at home, planning lessons and making resources. Now however there is far too much paperwork, detailed planning, books marked thoroughly, targets set for individual children to improve their own learning, detailed assessments and data constantly analysed. All this is out of school time and well into the night. Teachers are working 13 hours a day as well as weekends to complete all of these demands. It is increasingly difficult to manage 'work' time and have a balanced home life. A mum with 3 children is a teacher in a nursery. She

told me "I currently teach Reception on Mondays & Tuesdays and Nursery on Wednesdays, Thursdays & Fridays. On nursery days the kids come in at 8.45 and leave at 3.15. I only have a 10 minute break away from the children. I don't have time to eat at all those days. It shouldn't be like this." How can this be right, how can she keep herself fit and healthy?

For some the answer is to go part-time. A 4-day week means the 'day off' can be used to undertake unpaid employment demands leaving at least the weekend free for time with their own children.

I have witnessed too many teachers being absolutely exhausted by the end of the year. No wonder 50% of newly qualified teachers have left after 5 years. It is ironic that the amendment to our pension scheme is to pay in more and work longer. Some people might be able to work until they are 68 but I find it difficult to see myself at that age, still trying to keep up with the levels of paperwork, teaching 30 six-year olds, having any energy and sitting on the floor with them! Teaching is a challenging and exhausting profession. Children have the right to be taught by good teachers, not burnt out people counting their days to retirement.

Along with other council workers because of the pay freeze, under inflation increase and rise in pension contributions I now take home less money than five years ago. The Coalition Government are now trying to bring in performance related pay. Will linking pay to performance really improve education? Teaching is not a private enterprise, it should not be individualistic. Teachers' pay depends on the school's budget. How will head teachers decide who might get a pay increase? What would be the impact on

the school or education generally if teachers are not working as a team sharing good practice but working for themselves in competition?

We need to be able to teach, children have the right to be taught and deserve good, enthusiastic, fresh and energetic teachers. One teacher said: "I have worked in education for 30 years, 18 as a teacher and I have never been so demoralised. I love teaching children but things have gone mad with targets, assessments ... Going on strike wasn't taken lightly but there is nothing left if we want to save the education of our children."

Any worker should be able to stand up for what is right, every person has the right to withdraw their labour. At this time teachers have had no other way than to strike.

Thankfully there are those friends who do understand why as a teacher I had to take action, a friend posted: "it is far from the 'job', finish at 3.30 and long holidays that some people who know no better, actually think. Good on you and really hope this action does some good and helps to educate people into the real situation. I am and always will be 100% in support."

### Extract from 'America's Schizophrenia' by Fr Sinclair Oubre

Americans love to look upon the Statue of Liberty, and see it as a symbol of our most basic value: individual freedom. However, ... we conveniently ignore the words that are actually engraved on its base. ... it addresses the poor of Europe, who looked to the United States as a refuge from their crushing economic poverty, and the state of continuous war.



Irish Need Apply." They faced persecution, discrimination, and hatred by Americans who were already here. On the west coast, Chinese immigrants received this same hostile welcome. Brought .. to meet the labour needs of the Gold Rush and the building of the transcontinental railroad, Chinese immigrant workers were looked upon with suspicion, and as a threat to white workers. In response, the US passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred immigration from China for 10 years under the penalty of imprisonment and deportation.

These very people, who were often disparaged, were the one's who mined our gold, dug our coal, and died in our mines. They built the railroads that stitched our nation together, and died along its tracks. This hostility to workers is not limited to immigrants. .. This year, America observes the 75th anniversary of the American classic, *Grapes of Wrath*. John Steinbeck tells the story of the Joads as they are driven from their dirt farm in Oklahoma by the great Dust Bowl to California. They are not welcomed as fellow citizens and American refugees fleeing from a great natural disaster, but as cheap labour, a

The second strophe of New Colossus reads:

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she. .... "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Sadly, before the Statue of Liberty was erected, ... Americans were already reluctant to welcome the tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free. This country's citizens fought a horrific war over the humanity of enslaved Africans. At the same time, many Americans suffered from Anti-Irish sentiments. ... by signs reading: "No

burden on society, and potential victims for rogue deputies. In our own community, both our Black and White Cajuns tell stories of discrimination because of their accent, their non-English background, and their Catholic heritage. Looking back upon our own history, we either forget it, (the French gave us the Statue of Liberty and helped us win the Revolutionary War), or reframe it so that it focuses on hard work and success (forgetting the 130+ Chinese workers who died building the western leg of the transcontinental railroad, or the 4,000+ Irish immigrants who died of yellow fever in building the New Basin Canal in New Orleans).

I believe that we have and continue to exploit domestic and immigrant workers because we do not truly see their face. Rather, we make them objects that invade our field of vision, and prevent us from seeing the world the way we want it to be. The great Jewish philosopher Emanuel Levinas was well aware of this human temptation. .. he spent the Second World War in a German prisoner of war camp. Here, he pondered the inhumanity of the Nazi's, and their ability to torture and kill without empathizing with the humanity of the other person.

Levinas came to the insight that if one allows himself or herself to see the other person, the other person then demands that he or she be recognized as a person. "In the face, the Other expresses his eminence, the dimension of height and divinity from which he descends." (Totality and Infinity, page 262). On the other hand, if one blinds herself or himself to the personhood,

"the face," of the other who stands before her or him, then there are no eminence, no height or breadth, and no image of God before him or her.

As we ponder the massacres being carried out by ISIS, as we hear stories of modern slavery and human trafficking, and as we see images of bombed civilian neighbourhoods, we want to scream, "How can a human being do this to another human being?" Yet the answer is as old as humanity, "They can do these things because they do not see the face or the person of the other."

Our country continues to struggle with the tension produced by the words on the Statue of Liberty and its reaction to immigrants. With the recent influx of immigrant children, we have choices: Will we see the face of these children, and thereby see their humanity and our divine bond as sons and daughters of God, or will we see them as other and as objects? The Spanish philosopher, George Santayana, reminds us, "Those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat their mistakes." Let's remember our past with the descendants from Africa, let us remember our past with the Irish and Chinese immigrants and let us remember our past with our own Cajun grandfathers and grandmothers. If we do so, we will treat our new immigrants differently, and we will finally bring to life the words on the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me . . . "

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

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