



Movement of Christian Workers

# REVIEW

Issue 66 December 2018



Land, Home  
and Work for  
a Decent Life



## The unpredictability of today and tomorrow

The Christmas Story is told once a year. For Christians, however, its implications and challenges remain every single day. God became man, the Word was made flesh and Jesus Christ's life showed us a new way of living. Our mission is to follow His example, His values; to discern in our everyday lives what He would do, how He would act; to love God and our neighbours, whoever they may be, to build the kingdom here on earth.

Who knows how Joseph the Carpenter felt, leading his pregnant wife Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register in the census. It is possible that he had time along the journey to think about what the future would bring, a new wife, a new child, after all, the weeks and months leading up to their current situation could not have been imagined. His reflections on what had happened and what might be to come must have also been disturbed, interrupted, by the present. Here he was responsible for their wellbeing and not even sure where they would stay or lay their head for the night. Regardless of his trust and belief in God and in his wife Mary, surely he was worried and anxious. Of course, initially his worst fears came true: There was no room at the inn. Eventually they are offered a stable which no doubt he accepted gratefully and then the Baby was born.

No-one can predict the future although it doesn't stop us thinking, dreaming or planning for it. Yet, a bit like imagining how Joseph felt 2000 years ago, there are a great number of people today who do not have the luxury to think about the tomorrows as the today is already hard and the tomorrow just too painful. The current climate in which people are surviving is one of uncertainty. Yes, Brexit and its resultant consequences are unknown and the outcome and repercussions remain unclear. But for many others it is the precariousness of their working lives, their weekly income, their ability to feed and pay their bills or to keep a roof over their heads that is now all consuming. Recent research reports paint a picture of people struggling to simply live from day to day, let alone think about what tomorrow might bring. In addition the World Movement of Christian Workers (WMCW) reminds us who are neighbours are; to welcome the stranger, yes but not to see them as a stranger, instead to recognise them as one of us. They too look for the right and dignity to live and work each day whilst their tomorrows remain unclear.

The main focus of this Review though is the 2018 Seminar of the European Christian Workers' Movement (ECWM) held in Birmingham. The theme was: 'Digital Work and its impact on workers, their families and society'. Once more what becomes apparent is the uncertainty as no-one really knows who, how and what workers will be affected by the continual onset of the digital age. COMECE's Social Affairs Committee also looked at this question. They too identified that workers needed to be involved in the decision and policy making to protect workers' rights and dignity.

Contemplating the Nativity we can reflect, be reminded, be transformed, and be renewed in our Mission to build the Kingdom. Perhaps we can ask ourselves what we can do today to act to repair the likelihood of the brokenness of many people's tomorrows.

May the Peace, Joy and Hope of Christmas be with you and yours today and always.

## European Seminar 2018, Birmingham

### “Digital Work, the impact on workers, their families and society

MCW England was proud to be able to host the 2018 European Seminar. It was held at the NASUWT Hillscourt Conference Centre, B45. Sixty participants gathered over a two day period to facilitate, discuss and debate the theme of digital work. The seminar was followed by a one day General Assembly, the decision making body of the European Christian Workers’ Movement (ECWM).



The three MCW delegates were Chris McHugh, Jo Dearlove and David McLoughlin. Mary Foy also took part as the MCW member of the European Coordination. Paul and Pat Edwards along with Jim Dearlove assisted in running the back office. Ann Smith became very well acquainted with



Birmingham Airport as she ferried delegates back and forth in her own car or became the coach driver’s assistant!

Many thanks are due to those volunteers from the MCW who because of their hard work and dedication meant that the seminar ran extremely smoothly and was said by some participants to have “set a new standard in the running of these events”.

### Greetings from Archbishop

The Archbishop of Birmingham, Bernard Longley, sent a personal message to Otto Meier, President of the ECWM and the Delegates apologising for not being

able to attend. He nevertheless expressed how important he felt our work to be within the Church and the wider world. The letter went on to say “The recent developments ..[in this digital age] .. can be seen as both a threat but also an opportunity. In the midst of these challenges it is vital that the dignity of working men and women is emphasised and promoted. Your Movements are a key element in this mission. Training, sustaining and inspiring worker leaders to enable them to make a positive difference is a vitally important apostolate. Promoting the values of the Gospel in politics, trades unions and community & voluntary organisations is more important than ever as we face difficult circumstances which, as always, disproportionately affect those with the least means.” The Archbishop concluded by saying that he prayed for our “return to our apostolates renewed in energy and hope”.

### Welcome from Mary Foy

Mary Foy gave a brief overview of the MCW explaining that we had a small number of members. The inspiration for our involvement springs from our Faith

which is a provocation to deepen our actions and commitment. The Movement follows the Review of Life Method of See, Judge & Act which enables members to reflect on their lived experiences and that of others in the light of Gospel values and provokes positive action for change. Mary went on to officially welcome the ECWM to Birmingham wishing them a very successful seminar and an enjoyable stay in England.

### Thumbnail sketch of Birmingham



It was felt important to give the participants a feel for the place in which they were meeting. To do this Jo Dearlove along with David McLoughlin had

put together a short potted history of Birmingham from 1066 to the present day! Accompanied by PowerPoint slides Jo spoke of Birmingham being a fitting location for a conference whose theme was on the so-called '4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution' because of its central role in the 1<sup>st</sup> Industrial Revolution. The history of Birmingham was described its metamorphosis from a "City of a thousand trades" to one of giant car factories through to what is now a reliance on the service sector attracting sporting events, conferences and tourists. Being the largest Local Authority and the City with the youngest population in Europe brings with it a number of difficulties because of the policies of austerity followed by a number of recent governments. Nevertheless she explained that 'Brummies' are proud of their city, their, at times, radical history and their ethnic, religious and cultural diversity.

### Keynote speaker Tom Watson MP

The key note speaker was Tom Watson MP West Bromwich East.



One of his briefs is Shadow Secretary of State for Digital issues. He had also set up an Independent Commission on the Future of Work in 2016. Therefore as a local MP it made sense that Tom was asked to address the seminar.

Tom began by stating that work is more than just something we do to earn money and put food on the table it is also something that gives meaning and shape to life: it is part of our personal identity, of how we define ourselves and value ourselves. At its best, work is something in which we take genuine pride, independently of the money we make from it. Yet, at its worst, being stuck in a bad job, even if it pays well, can make you worry about the direction your whole life is taking.

He went on to contrast this with those who are working two or three jobs in the gig economy: not just driving cabs or delivering takeaway meals, but building websites, translating, copywriting, editing. These are the long-serving workers who see technology making their jobs increasingly precarious, but who haven't been given the opportunities to train and develop the skills they need to find something new. Highly skilled graduates too may have a job, but still don't see any prospect of ever saving for a deposit on a house or paying back their student loan. This illustrated that some workers were on the wrong side of the power imbalance between labour and capital.

Such realities led him to certain conclusions. As technology changes the world of work, the job of politicians and policymakers is to ensure that they generate and protect, what he emphasised as "good work". This was work that paid whilst also providing dignity and security; that respected people's autonomy and choices, and allows them to exercise their creativity and judgment. This was the kind of work that should be available to all, not just to

those on the highest incomes. And if it isn't, we have to focus on how we make it so. Tom said it wasn't enough to pay lip service to these aspirations. We need to understand the components of good work, prioritise it, create it, measure it, and encourage fresh thinking about how to safeguard it through the age of technology. This is so it means something for the many, not the few. For him "public policy should have this central ambition: to create the social and economic conditions which generate and protect good work in the age of technology".

Some of the predictions about job losses in the UK and the USA had frightened him. This therefore demanded the need to look in more depth: to ask what is really going on, and to think about what we can do about it. Automation and artificial intelligence can, with the right policy framework around it, create as many jobs as it destroys. The transport industry for example will suffer significant disruption but rolling out new 'green' modes of transport may compensate for that. The number of workers displaced rather than retrained or redeployed is not an economic inevitability it depends on political decisions he said.

The reminder of some of the current examples of bad practice illustrated how some new technology had created new forms of exploitation. "Fulfilment centres" i.e. warehouses, in the West Midlands, where workers walked miles every day to pick orders for next-day delivery to customers, where staff worked so hard that 75% of them said they are afraid to go to the toilet on shift. It had been reported that they are so worried about missing work due to sickness that ambulances had arrived at the warehouse over 100 times, and there was even an account about one woman who miscarried while on duty. There are app-based businesses who

insist that their staff are self-employed, even though to any fair-minded observer, they are regular employees. This he said "is the dark side of new technology and new forms of workplace surveillance and control". It was for these reasons that he felt policies were needed that increased workers' rights, and their bargaining power, alongside investment in new technology.

The ways in which technology changes our lives and the lives of millions of workers are not inevitable. His message that technology itself is morally neutral was repeated many times during the seminar, but of course the caveat was clear in Tom's presentation, it can be used in ways that liberate us, or in ways that imprison us. Without democratic engagement with these questions, without politicians being forced to confront them and consider their moral dimension, the benefits of technology risk being hoarded by those who control them, and workers risk continuing to be exploited.

As members of families, churches, trade unions, political parties, and other organisations we bring our own values and our own interests to these discussions. This was in his view vital because they are questions about values and morality; not just about what technology makes possible, but about, what we want technology to make possible.

If we all think carefully about what work means, what we all want from it, and how technology can enhance our lives, about what new rights and responsibilities we need to recognise in order to make that happen, then the promise of automation and new technology can be fulfilled. For Tom seminars like ours are an important part of that: it is discussions like the ones we were having at our seminar which were absolutely vital.

### Gabriele Kienesberger, giving a Theologian's perspective



Gabriele Kienesberger, a theologian from Austria, gave a thought provoking PowerPoint presentation

entitled "God in the computer" on the ethical impact of digitalisation on social transformation. She started with a thumbnail sketch of the history of the industrial revolutions which paralleled themes from Jo Dearlove's presentation on the history of industrial Birmingham. Gabriele argued that we are now in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial revolution focused on artificial intelligence which has multiple implications. The use of fixed algorithms, which was also raised in the discussion groups during the conference, has implications that include potential injustice; sexism, ageism and racism. She went back into the Catholic Social Teaching, from *Rerum Novarum* onwards, to draw out guiding principles to bring to all developments in human work. She emphasised the need to continue to use the methodology of the Cardijn movements, formally proposed to the whole church, by John XXIII of *See, Judge, Act*: In other words an attentive and critically aware approach to all developments in the world of work and in particular to their consequences.

She looked at precarious work and its convenience to the money markets emphasising the theme of John Paul II about the need for human and humanising work. Also stressed was the importance for the need of serious social security to cover those who cannot always participate in work either permanently or for specific periods of time perhaps because of ill health for example. Justice in the world of work cannot be reduced to the just wage; it includes all those things that enable working people to be active agents not

just driven by the markets or by chance or new developments. Also justice in work involves the possibility of ongoing education for employability and a strong sense of building working practices that allow inter-generational solidarity. In essence not developing work models and outcomes that will impact negatively on future generations even though for now they suit us.

She saw Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* (2015) as taking us into another level of ethical discourse on work around his broadening of the idea of ecology. This was not just about caring for the planet over immediate industrial needs etc but a sense of an economic, social, cultural ecology. This ecology was one of daily life, a more comprehensive sense of ecology which would include and guide the world of work, a more thoughtful and self-reflective world of work.

Gabriele ended with five principles which held resonance with Tom Watson's presentation:

- Industry (robots, digitalisation etc.) is for humans and not the other way around.
- Help, respect and attention for the most disadvantaged must be at the heart of our work culture.
- Measures and arrangements need to be in place at all different levels.
- Planned resources need to be established for future generations.
- Maximum priority must be given to an emphasis on the common good of all.



## Leisure Time at the Seminar

### Friday night out in Birmingham

All the seminar participants were treated to a night out in Birmingham for a traditional Friday night meal of Fish & Chips. Their appetite was stimulated by a good brisk walk along one of the canals to a local hostelry where a good time was had by all. A slower walk and talk back to the coach around the civic area of Birmingham completed the evening.

### Table of Europe Preparing and enjoying the tables

As is the tradition at European Seminars each Movement brings some food or drink which is traditional to their Country. These goodies then become part of a shared supper on the Saturday evening. The Hillscourt Conference Centre also contributed to this custom by providing snack foods like kebabs, samosas, bhajias etc so as

to give a taste from the tables of our diverse communities that make up Birmingham.

### Working Groups

There were 3 working groups. Each group met on three occasions to respond to the two main presentations and more importantly, sharing experiences from their own Movements. Each individual session

followed the method; so they firstly carried out a 'see' process; then a 'judge' and lastly considered possibilities of what might be feasible for action. Arising from Tom and Gabriele's contributions and the report back from the discussion groups a final statement was agreed at the General Assembly.

### Final Statement

Digitalisation has both negative and positive dimensions. The challenge is to shape these developments. It is important to ask how employees are affected privately and especially at work, and how they deal with the resulting changes. The question is how to ensure comprehensively that human dignity can be preserved and protected. Men and Women are holy because they are the image of God. In a nutshell, one can formulate: technical developments have to serve people, not the other way around.

This optimistic perspective is overshadowed by serious fears and seemingly overpowering media oligarchs or data companies. At the same time digitalisation is sometimes too much for people when the boundaries between work and leisure are blurred, when every step and every statement can be monitored, when the whole digital world is always present at the family table, when the connections and technical processes cannot be grasped and understood.

One aspect that is particularly relevant for employees and which we believe remains underestimated in the discussion are the ecological side of digitisation. In addition to digital transformation processes we must also devote ourselves to ecological transformation. The question of growth must be linked to human dignity and to ecology, which ensures the basis of life for all of us.



As an ECWM, we want to take an active and confident approach to the challenges posed by digitisation. We use our different methodologies to capture and pool the experiences of the working population. Furthermore, we want to strengthen the cooperation with the trade unions, the church, politics and civil society and introduce and underline our Christian values in the disputes. Due to the complexity of the issue, education seems to us to be a central key for shaping the process. For this reason, among other things, we will discuss the reflection of the COMECE Social Commission on the topic "Shaping the future of work" and enrich it with our own experiences. To this end, the coordination group will take the first steps at its next meeting. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the "International Labour Organisation (ILO)" we will get involved and use the possibilities of networking to support the WMCW in its work in the group of Catholic-inspired organisations at the ILO. A joint action for the Day of Decent Work on 7 October 2019 is to be placed in the context of the ILO anniversary. The measures outlined here already represent the first elements of active shaping in the sense of a humane society in the digitalised world, because we accept the challenges, inform ourselves and shape society in solidarity. The path started here will be in the context of the ECWM Seminar in October 2019.



ECWM participants outside of the NASUWT Hillscourt Conference Centre, Birmingham

## Shaping the future of work

A reflection of the COMECE

Social Affairs Commission

(Abridged version of Executive Summary)

Shaping the digital as well as the ecological transformation of our economy will be a common challenge for European politics. Both trends will transform the world of work, changing our understanding as well as the labour conditions in Europe, and will require the political will and vision to shape the new world of work.

As the on-going transition will deeply transform our societies, the reflection of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences in the European Union (COMECE) encourages the EU institutions to work on a common European vision so as to ensure that everybody, as well as the society as a whole, will benefit from these changes. The document elaborated by the COMECE Social Affairs Commission in close consultation with Catholic-inspired organisations in Europe, aims to contribute both to the debate of the next EU mandate as well as to the future of work centenary initiative of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The contribution is divided into four sections: it first provides a reflection of work, defining it not only as a source of income but as an integral part of human identity. Work can help people to find their place in society, to foster their personal development and to care for creation by making the common house more fruitful for the next generations. Much beyond its financial aspect, work therefore has an important role to play in people's life, and the future world of work has the potential to promote decent employment in Europe. However, the analysis in the second chapter highlights also some of the challenges that are undermining the potential of work as contributor to the common good.

- Job polarisation is increasing

- New, more flexible forms of employment challenge EU labour law
- The line between professional and private life has gradually become blurred

Based on this analysis, the COMECE reflection proposed to shape the current trends towards a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all. Such a vision should build on an economy that serves the integral human development and combines the following characteristics:

- This world of work will be decent
- This world of work will be sustainable
- This world of work will be participative
- This world of work will be inclusive

This report was the result of a special meeting called by COMECE's Social Affairs Committee. There were approximately 30 participants representing a number of organisations. The ECWM had 5 representatives present including Jim Dearlove from the MCW.

### **Migrant solidarity message World Movement of Christian Workers**

To mark International Workers Day: We call for change, to mobilise and organise for decent work and access to justice for all migrant workers. We continue to advocate that governments and employers respect and protect the rights of all migrant workers and their families, to overcome discrimination of migrant workers and to overcome the division of the people using race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

In 2015, globally, there were 258 million migrants and it continues to increase. Income inequality, conflicts, and climate change are pushing workers to cross borders to seek decent work.

Discrimination is unfair treatment yet making a complaint against their employers may mean retaliation; they "fire them."

Welcome the stranger but recognise they are not strangers, they are one of us. We are sisters and brothers, one people of God.

Paul writes to the Ephesians: So God came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near... So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph 2: 17 - 19).

#### **Call for interviewees for new historical project**

A new historical project at the University of Birmingham seeks ex-YCW members in Birmingham to talk about their experiences of the organisation. We're interested in how religious social action has fitted into the world of voluntary organisations from 1945 to the present day. We'd welcome any material relating to the YCW, whether: leaflets; pamphlets; newspapers; meeting minutes or reports. If you would be willing to be interviewed or have any material to contribute, please get in touch with the project contact Dr Phil Child, by email at [p.child@bham.ac.uk](mailto:p.child@bham.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07775 334538.

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

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