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World Movement of Christian Workers

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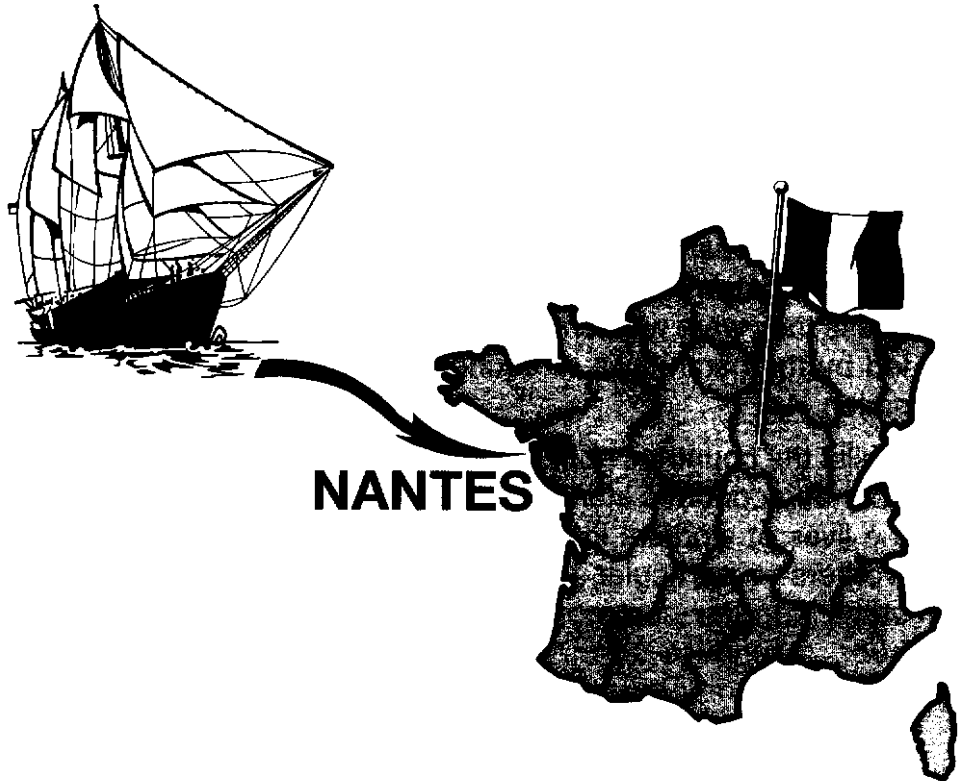
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Editorial

Land Ahoy!

Nantes France 13-22 October 2009

Our sailing ship WMCW has now weathered the storm and all hands are on deck. We are sailing towards the west coast of France arriving in Nantes the Capital of the Pays de la Loire located on the Loire River, for our International Seminar and General Assembly.



The Executive Council has Chosen the theme of **Globalisation and Migrant Workers** for the International Seminar.

Every year, millions of men and women leave their homelands in search of a decent life for themselves and their families. Most are motivated by the quest for higher wages and better opportunities; some are forced to leave because of famine, natural disasters, violent conflict or persecution. The International Labour Office estimates that there are about 90 million migrant workers. Traditional migration is from the South to North yet the trend is towards a growing immigration within the developing world.

Current migration is closely linked with features of globalization; a widening income gap between the rich and poor parts of the world also spurs people to seek economic opportunities elsewhere.

These factors, combined with aging populations in many developed countries, mean migration is likely to continue to increase.

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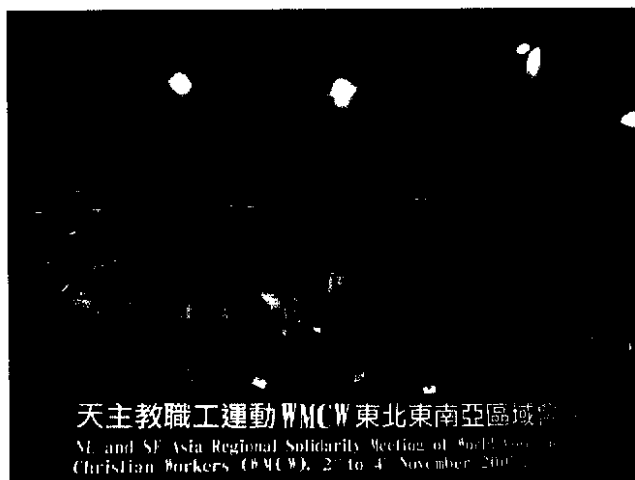
The lives of migrant workers in East and South-East Asia

This subject was the central theme of the Regional Seminar for East and South-East Asia which took place from 2 to 4 November 2007 in Taipei (Taiwan) and was attended by 15 leaders and 3 chaplains from the Christian workers' movements of Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan.

Despite the big linguistic and cultural differences between the four countries, the participants shared common problems because they were workers whose lives are ruled by the harsh laws of economic globalisation.

Whilst the countries appear to be doing well from an economic standpoint, a glimpse at the lives of workers in general and migrant workers in particular tells a very different story. Another common concern was the need to ensure continuity by recruiting younger members and safeguard the future of the WMCW.

Some of the particularities of the movements attending included the presence of indigenous people in the Taiwanese movement thanks to the work of a chaplain from the MCW and the fact that the Singaporean movement, the CFMS, is a family movement.



Situations faced by migrant workers in this region

Each of the delegations made a presentation describing living conditions in their country, the living conditions of migrants and the situation of their movement.

These are some of the aspects that emerged concerning migrants' lives in Taiwan*. There are about 109 000 migrants in Taiwan, the largest group being Indonesians.

They work in factories, the construction industry, the fishing industry and the health care sector. Over 48 000 work in the informal sector with no legal protection. These migrants are domestic workers, care for the sick or work in the fishing industry. Most of them are women, which makes them more vulnerable.

Although there are no laws protecting them these workers are entitled to one day off a week, but some migrants are forced to pay their employer to obtain it. Their wages are not paid regularly, which leads some migrants to leave their employers.

They are subjected to physical, verbal and sexual abuse and are sometimes forcibly repatriated. Some employers force them to save money by subtracting it from their wages.

Some employers hire them out illegally to other employers with whom they have no contract. It is very difficult for the migrants to meet because their days off are different and irregular.

The Catholic Church provides some services, e.g.

- Advice and intervention in situations of crisis
- Aid and arbitration when workers are repatriated
- Defending migrants' rights, information and education
- Creation of a network

A major challenge for the movement

Most of these workers are Muslims. What can the movement do to make them welcome and offer them hospitality, show concern for their living conditions and make visible gestures of solidarity?

How can it be open to inter-faith dialogue and give these migrants a place in society?

The participants found a parable in the Bible that they felt should guide them and inspire their action. « I was a stranger and you made me welcome » (Matthew 25, 35)

The future of the movement

To kick off discussions on continuity a chaplain from Singapore shared his experience of working with young people from the YCW. All the movements present were se-

riously preoccupied by the need to contact the younger generation and they plan to take steps to secure the movement's future at local, regional and international levels.

There were also proposals for new structures for the WMCW and attempts were made to identify sources of funding to improve self-financing at all levels.

Based on the delegations' presentations and the report by Executive Council member Yun Shan SHUM.

Bernadette Dubuc

**See also p-4,5 « A Window on the World of migrants in South Korea*



Workshops

A window on the world of migrants in South Korea

Michel Roncin, the chaplain of the movement in South Korea, shares his insight into the experience of the country's migrant workers

This year I have continued my engagement with migrant workers, particularly Spanish-speaking migrants from Latin America. Their lot has changed very little – apart from the fact that workers from some (mainly Asian) countries can now enter Korea with a work visa.

Unfortunately that does not solve their problems because the legislation is too restrictive: many of those who arrive legally become illegals after a few months' stay or "overstay" when their three-year contract expires.

Consequently the number of illegal foreign workers remains very high despite the legislation supposedly intended to reduce their presence.

We need to find new ways of helping

The social work we do has also changed to meet changing needs. We see fewer cases of extreme hardship and far fewer where destitution results from non-payment of wages.

However, health problems remain a major issue because most illegal foreign workers have no social security coverage. We have to negotiate with hospitals to get them admitted for treatment or an operation.

The Catholic Church runs a free clinic for foreign workers which opens every Sunday afternoon. Most of its doctors and nurses are volunteers and they help us find hospi-

tal places for our patients. For several months we were able to obtain free hospital treatment for foreign workers in a small number of public hospitals, but now it appears that the funds the government and/or local authorities allocated

for this purpose have been exhausted, and we need to find new ways of helping sick workers.

Attempts to root out illegal workers complicate our task

There have been some new developments in our pastoral work with Latin American migrants. Two Colombian priests have come to work in the diocese of Uijeombu, to the North and the East of Seoul, which I used to cover before their arrival.

This summer they moved in on a more permanent basis. This means I now have time to hold an extra mass in Spanish every month at our Pastoral Centre in Bomun. I still celebrate masses in Spanish in one of the parishes of Uijeombu because the diocese is long and narrow and transport links are difficult.

Some Peruvian nuns have also arrived Korea over the past few years. They live in Seoul and some of them have become involved in the migrant pastoral. I am delighted with this additional support because the way Latin American workers are thinly scattered throughout Seoul and Gyonggido province complicates our pastoral work – as do the attempts of immigration services to track down illegal workers.

So we have various places of worship run by different people, but we develop our pastoral together and have a number of common activities. We meet from time to time to plan these different pastoral activities and assess them. Here too we make a good team.

The problem of mixed marriages (non-Korean women married to Korean men)

Another area has come to attract more and more of our attention recently – it is the phenomenon of mixed marriages (mainly between non-Korean women and Korean men). This trend began about fifteen years ago and has increased considerably over the past few years.

It has already been noticeable for a long time in the countryside because the proportion of mixed marriages there is higher than in the towns, but in fact half of all mixed marriages are to be found in Seoul and in the surrounding province of Gyonggido.

Last Spring the local authorities asked us to open a centre to help these couples and their families, who are encountering many difficulties due to differences in language, culture and mentality.

Most of the women with Korean husbands are Filipino or Vietnamese, but there are also more and more Chinese women, most of them belonging to the Korean minority in China.

The Mixed Marriages Centre receives funding from the local authorities and is run by a nun and Korean woman who used to help us in our work with migrant workers.

The foreign spouses can find people there who will listen to them and help them address their problems. Korean language and cookery courses are organised in the same building. Special weekends are organised for the couples.

All these activities require a lot of time and energy. We have come across a few Latin American women who are married to Koreans. This is becoming more common but their numbers are insignificant compared to those of Filipino and Vietnamese women.

Our Diocesan Board is still as international as ever. It is composed of a Mongolian woman and a Thai woman, a Spanish sister, a Vietnamese priest and a French priest (myself) and several Koreans, not to mention all the Korean and foreign volunteers who help out occasionally. It is a pleasure to work in a team of people from so many different countries and cultures. There is a great deal of supportiveness and solidarity.



***Michel Roncin
former chaplain of the WMCW***

A look at Russian workers

Workers in Russia – especially those in remote regions far from Moscow - earn low wages in comparison with the wealth of their country. The health system is limited and patients have to pay money under the table to get proper treatment. Pensions are low. In most cases they are based on the wages people received during the Soviet era. These pension levels have never been adjusted to reflect the rising cost of living (particularly steep in the Moscow area). The gap between rich and poor has been growing for years. The richest 10% are 41 times richer than the poorest 10%.

Pensions also represent a big problem for the long term. The current working population receives a large part (up to half) of its pay «off the books» (or «in an envelope» as they say in here). This undeclared money creates a shortfall in revenue for the pension fund system and will considerably reduce the pensions these workers receive when they retire. Yet the economy – the gas and oil industries in particular – is buoyant.

The unions are still trying to adapt. They need to gear themselves to representing workers' interests in a less favourable environment. On the other hand there is room for wage raises in the current period of prosperity: over the past year the average increase in real wage levels has been 13%.

Norbert Klein
former General Secretary
of the WMCW,
now working
at the German Embassy in Moscow.

Letters to the Editor

Dear friends of MMTC,
Greetings from India!

I am in receipt of a copy of INFOR 211. I must thank you sending me copies of INFOR from beginning of MMTC. I am no more in the national team of CWM India and yet I am very much connected with the workers' movements. I am now a member of the staff of the major seminary.

I have noted your recent trials and I hope and pray that you will continue the good work of inspiring workers' movements all over the world and contribute to building of the Kingdom of God.

India has economically developed and yet working class have not profited from this development: instead Trade Unions become weak and collective bargaining has become very difficult. New developments pose great challenges for the workers.

Fr. Thomas Joseph, Chennai, India

Things are going better is it not... This number is more meaty. The metaphor of boat is well found to unite the teams, bravo!

Louisa Bouterfa, Paris

A WMCW delegation visits the Vatican

Last May a WMCW delegation composed of Paul Edwards (General Secretary), Claude Delporte (Treasurer) and Guy Boudaud (European Chaplain) was received by several Vatican bodies during a five-day visit to Rome.

A three-part report had been drawn up in preparation for the visit. The first part presented the WMCW and its current concerns, actions and plans. The second part explained the movement's internal and external problems, focusing particularly on its financial difficulties which are partly due to changes in the international aid agencies' policies. The latter now want their money to go straight to projects in the field rather than supporting international structures.

The third part related to spiritual assistance. The WMCW movements attach great importance to their Christian identity and the report recounted the steps taken to explore this area. The leaders of the movements are particularly concerned to train lay members and equip them for the task of spiritual assistance.

I shall not relate the interviews in detail but simply report that the officials from the different Councils listened very carefully to what we had to say. There was a climate of confidence that allowed us to communicate sincerely and the international movement received encouragement to continue its current efforts. The officials at the Pontifical Council for the Laity raised the question of the WMCW's new statutes (as the international movements had earlier been invited to revise their statutes). The meeting with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace focussed on two main subjects – our action on decent work and the financial situation of the WMCW. Monsignor Crepaldi, one of the originators of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, told us he believed four major challenges needed addressing. These were insecurity, flexibility, labour law and the « tax war ». Another important meeting was the one with Ms. Fer-

mina Alvarez who is the person responsible for relations with international organisations at the Secretariat of State. She showed great interest in the current situation of the WMCW and informed us of some current developments. She would like us to stay in touch.

We had several other meetings in the course of this five-day visit. We visited the Pontifical Council for Migration, the Council for the Evangelisation of Peoples, the Council for Inter-faith Dialogue and the French section of the Secretariat of State. Everywhere we went we were aware of an interest in and an appreciation of the WMCW, its aims and its action. All the conversations we had encouraged us to persevere. I should also mention our contacts with the French Seminary, where we lodged. Our stay there gave us an opportunity to inform the resident seminarians and priests about the WMCW's mission and action.



We were very pleased with this visit in terms of the exchanges it made possible and the first-hand experience of the WMCW delegation. The attention we received from Church representatives motivates us to continue our efforts to steer the WMCW through this 'mid-life crisis » and revitalise the movement. The relationships we have established with the different Councils must be continued. That is our desire but also that of the people we met. Although we do not underestimate the difficulty of the road that lies ahead, this experience cannot but comfort all those who believe in the WMCW and want to invest in its future.

Guy Boudaud, ECWM chaplain

The fears surrounding the impact of immigration on developing countries are unfounded.

There is no evidence that immigration reduces wages or pushes up unemployment. The economic picture is less clear-cut when it comes to the countries left by migrants. Advantages include migrants' remittances, lower unemployment, less population pressure and knowledge brought by returning migrants. On the downside, emigration often entails loss of skilled workers and dynamic young people. It also can reduce a country's output and tax revenues.

The Migrant Worker Reality

Many migrant workers frequently find themselves without the proper documents or papers and have to work clandestinely in their host country. They are often referred to pejoratively as "*illegal*". The increase in clandestine migration, including trafficking, threatens human rights and creates new challenges for national governments and the international community. A growing number of migrants find themselves in vulnerable situations, mainly because of their lack of documents and irregular status or the kind of work they do, and many face discrimination.

The social upheavals that migration produces in both sending and receiving countries can be far-reaching and destabilizing. There are many difficulties surrounding integration of people from different cultures, backgrounds and race. This integration is made worse in host countries where there is

a decline in traditional industries with the resultant mass redundancies and long-term structural unemployment of native workers. Political extremist movements espousing racism and xenophobia exploit these difficulties blaming migrant workers for causing unemployment.

Building Solidarity with Migrant Workers to create Decent Work

The WMCW recognises migrant workers as, our sisters and brothers. To welcome the migrant, it is to welcome God among us. In the Church there is no stranger. The Gospel of love of neighbour at home and abroad (MT 22,34-40) requires clear actions of solidarity with the stranger. We have to take more seriously our vocation to walk with migrant's workers, in whom the face of Christ can be seen.

As a workers movement we cannot shy away from the fact that migration is a complex issue requiring solutions to worker problems for migrant and native workers alike. The failure of the global economy to give an equal participation in the sharing of the wealth created for workers at home and abroad is a threat and a challenge to all women and men of good will struggling to build genuine international worker solidarity.

Paul Edwards
General Secretary WMCW

On minute of solidarity makes all the difference

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