



# May 1st Mobilisation update #2



Second in a series of updates in the run up to the Global Unions May 1st Mobilisation

This issue focuses on:

7 April 2003

## Respect for young workers

**For many young people, globalisation and technological change offer new opportunities for productive work. For millions of young men and women, however, particularly in the developing world, the global economy has brought increased inequality, insecurity and exclusion.**

**G**lobal unemployment is high and rising. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that around 66 million young people are unemployed throughout the world. In many countries unemployment among young people is alarmingly high. In South Africa over half of young people are without jobs, and in Italy, one third.

In many countries, young people who do find work are in jobs which are low paid and poor quality. Many work in the informal economy – as street vendors in Bombay, in sweatshops in Thailand, as casual farm labourers in El Salvador. In Africa 93 per cent of all new jobs are in such unprotected work. In Latin America, wages in the informal economy are at best half those in the formal economy.

Young women carry the burden of the insecure labour market, facing widespread discrimination in education and jobs. In Ghana and India, denied the opportunity to go to school, girls are forced to work in the informal economy or in subsistence activities. What's more, eighty per cent of workers in export processing zones are women, often in poorly paid, insecure jobs in textiles and electronics.

Decent work for young people is a challenge for governments, employers and trade unions. Countries need sound macroeconomic policies that promote employment growth. Minimum wages, job creation, workers' rights and employment protection programmes are all strategies for promoting quality work for

young people.

Low quality education, often at odds with the needs of the labour market, is one of the main causes of youth unemployment. Unions are working hard to ensure that more young people have access to a basic education that equips them for work. In Burkina Faso, a trade union centre teaches literacy to girls who cannot afford to go to school. In Indonesia, the Aspek trade union teaches information technology to young members. In Kenya, the trade union centre COTU offers families financial help so that their children can attend school instead of being forced to work.

For centuries trade unions have fought hard to improve conditions for young workers. The problem today is that a generation of young people across the world is being deprived of the benefits of trade unions at work.

In some countries, globalisation has given rise to a new elite of young workers. In stable well-paid jobs, they have done well from technological change and do not see the relevance of trade unions. In others, the shrinking of traditional industries and the public sector has given rise to a marginal workforce, difficult and costly to represent and organise.

Trade unions across the world are facing up to this challenge. "Organising schools" are teaching activists the skills to recruit young workers. In Germany and Poland trade unions have formed an alliance across national borders to represent retail workers. The LO in Norway has created a portable union membership for young people that recognises the "revolving door" of youth employment. In Ireland and Ecuador, ice-hockey games and football matches are used to help recruit new members.

Respecting the rights and interests of young workers, trade unions can help young men and women find decent work and a living wage in the global economy. ●

### May 1st plans

**What some members of the Global Unions family are planning for this May 1st.**

**Benin:** The Confédération des Syndicats Autonomes (CSA) will organize a debate on the "Respect" theme and deliver a list of demands to the Minister of Employment. This will be followed by a soccer tournament sponsored by Force Ouvrière (France) with the theme: 'health and safety in the workplace'.

**United States:** On May 1st, the AFL-CIO affiliated Communication Workers' of America will be calling for "Respect" for Chinese-language newspaper workers in California, whose workers' rights are denied by their Taiwan-based employer. A Mandarin Chinese version of the "respect" logo has been specially made for this purpose.

**Burkina Faso:** The Confédération Syndicale Burkinabe will use the 'Respect' theme and materials during their Labor Day activities.

**Japan:** RENGO will call for 'Respect' in national May 1st events, both in the speech of the president, and in leaflets distributed at its May 1st rally.

**Kenya:** On May 1st, the Kenya Railway Workers Union plans to demonstrate in the capital. Over 400 participants will man a fire extinguisher engine and trolleys and will display a mock train on their march through downtown Nairobi.

**Malaysia:** The Transport Workers Union (TWU) will incorporate the five points of the 'Respect' theme in its May 1st activities.

**Belgium:** The Belgian FGTB is calling on its regional bodies and national officers to follow the global 'respect' theme.

*Tell us what you are planning!*  
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## May 1st campaign on HIV

**Young members of an industrial trade union in Tanzania have made HIV/AIDS one of their main themes during May 1st celebrations over the last three years.**

**H**IV/AIDS is having a big impact on the workforce in Tanzania, one of the world's poorest nations. More than one in ten adults are HIV positive. On May 1st, TUICO – the Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers – educates young people about safe sex, and HIV/AIDS.

In 2000, TUICO coordinated May 1st activities on behalf of other trade unions in Tanzania. Trade unions demonstrated on campuses and in the streets, highlighting unemployment and child labour as key union concerns.

In the weeks leading up to May 1st, the trade union, which has 35,000 members

in factories, banks and supermarkets, toured local workplaces, encouraging workers to take part in May 1st celebrations. The union also organised a football tournament for young workers, handing out prizes to the teams on May 1st.

The challenge for TUICO is organising young workers in the service sector and informal economy, where many Tanzanians work.

Jonathan Peles, Assistant Secretary of TUICO, says that so far his trade union has been successful in rejuvenating its membership: "we are proving that trade unions are organisations for young people." ●

## Union scores at football matches

**Football matches and volleyball contests are the main plank of a campaign by a textiles trade union in Ecuador to recruit young workers.**

**A** group of five young workers from the Textil Indulana company have begun organising local football championships and volleyball competitions with workers from other companies. At half time, players and spectators are told about the union and invited to join. The local union has also established a monthly study circle where young people discuss democracy and national politics.

Organising workers in the textile industry is a challenge in a country which has many legal restrictions on trade union rights, and where employer opposition to unions is widespread.

Membership of the trade union, a member of CEOSL, the country's largest union confederation, has been falling for several years. Twenty per cent of the workforce is younger than 30. The union loses on average two or three members each month who emigrate to the USA.

The recruitment drive has been boosted by the presence of an active works' council, headed by Marcela Arellano, from CEOSL. The works' council has raised the profile of trade unions through investigations and exposés of company finances.

Marcela Arellano believes that unions should open up to all workers and focus on issues that are important to young people: "as workers around the world are de-humanised, the key to future union success is to centre on human dignity." ●

## Organising young workers

**Young trade unionists in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia are reversing the decline in union membership through innovative campaigns to attract young people.**

**T**rade union national centres in the UK, Canada and Australia are just three examples of "Organising Schools" – training centres which teach young people the skills to recruit workers in newly established workplaces and strengthen unions in existing workplaces.

Since opening in 1998, the Organising Academy, set up by the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), has trained around 150 new organisers. Each organiser, sponsored jointly by the TUC and a partner trade union, undertakes a year's training. Backed by their unions, the Academy trainees go on to play a crucial role in organising non-union Britain. The TUC estimates that over 30,000 new members have been signed up by the trainees.

Sam Gurney trained with the telecoms union Connect in 1998. He now works as a regional organiser for the GMB general union, organising low skill workers in hotels, casinos and security firms. "There's thousands of workers in these sectors, and a whole lot of problems because these are people at the bottom end of the economy in terms of pay and terms and conditions," he says.

Similar training schools have been set up by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the Australian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU). The CLC has developed "Solidarity Works", a three-week summer school in activist skills. "Organising Works" is ACTU's programme for developing a generation of young people with the skills to rebuild the trade union movement. ●

### What we want for young workers

- R**espect the rights at work of young women and men
- E**nsure decent work for young people
- S**olidarity and understanding between young people to overcome cultural, political, ethnic and religious barriers
- P**ut youth issues at the heart of the trade union agenda
- E**nhance the role of young people in building and strengthening trade unions
- C**all on governments to provide accessible and quality education for young people
- T**hink young... rejuvenate and revitalise the trade union movement



### Links

**Global Unions May 1st mobilisation:**

<http://www.global-union.org/may1>

**ICFTU Action Plan**

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991211547>

**UNI Organising Booklet**

<http://www.union-network.org/UNISite/Groups/Youth/youth.html>

**UN/ILO/World Bank Youth Employment Network**

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/exrel/partners/youth.htm> (only in English)