

Committee for Free Trade Unionism Oct 18 2011

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[Labor Leaders Murdered in El Salvador Honored at AFL-CIO Ceremony](#)

 May 14th, 2011 , By admin

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The three victims were Michael Peter Hammer, Director of Land Reform Programs; Mark David Pearlman, lawyer, and José Rodolfo Viera, head of the Salvadoran Farm Workers' Union and also President of the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Transformation. Hammer and Pearlman were on assignment for the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the AFL-CIO's Latin American arm. Viera's institute was empowered under 1980 laws in El Salvador to take land from the country's propertied oligarchy and redistribute it among Salvadoran peasants, a program that country's ruling families sought to destroy.

The AFL-CIO's annual Workers' Memorial Day observance is held to honor and call attention to the death of workers killed in industrial or workplace accidents. The names of those killed are fired onto brick pavers set at the memorial site, which is on the campus of the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland.

On January 3, 1981, Hammer, Pearlman and Viera were having dinner in San Salvador's Sheraton Hotel when two men armed with automatic pistols walked into the dining room and opened fire, killing the three.

Two ex-corporals in El Salvador's National Guard were arrested and convicted in connection with the killings. They confessed, and testified that one of their officers, a Lieutenant Rodolfo Isidro López Sibrián, told the pair to kill the three labor unionists. They were released a year later in a general amnesty.

Michael Hammer, Jr., son of one of the victims, attended the AFL-

CFTU Updates

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Bill Doherty, 84, Executive Director of the American Institute for Free Labor Development, AFL-CIO

William Charles "Bill" Doherty Jr., who led the AFL-CIO's outreach to trade unions in Latin America for 35 years, died August 28 after a long battle with bone marrow cancer. He was 84.

Born in Belleview, Ky., the oldest of nine children, Doherty was raised in the Washington, D.C. area where his father, William Charles Doherty Sr. was president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and later the first U.S. ambassador to Jamaica. He graduated from St. Paul's Catholic Academy High School, where he met his future wife, Jane Catherine Donovan, a Boston native. He worked as a Capitol Hill police officer while

International News

• [18 Killed in Malawi Protests](#)

In late July, authorities in Malawi perpetrated a round of violence that resulted in the deaths of 18 people involved in peaceful protests.

The International Trade Union Confederation has written to the president of Malawi to strongly protest the bloody repression of peaceful protests.

Malawi's trade unions have been critical of a number of recent laws which limit the freedom of the press, restrict lawsuits against government agencies and officers, and limit civil liberties. Under the current situation, the Malawian police can search any house without a search warrant, and the press cannot publish anything which is "deemed to be contrary to the public interest."

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completing his degree in philosophy at Catholic University of America, where he played defensive lineman for the football team. He also attended Georgetown University School of Linguistics and Georgetown Law School.



Doherty's life was defined by his Catholic faith (he spent a brief period of his life in the St. Charles Seminary, studying to be a priest) and his conviction that democratic trade unions held the key to freedom and prosperity around the world. His work with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Postal Telephone and Telegraph International (PTTI) and the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), took him to 129 countries over his career.

After serving as an aerial photographer with the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, Doherty assisted in rebuilding the trade union movement in Germany, supporting the anti-Nazi, dissident labor leaders and nascent democratic trade union movement that is today known as the Confederation of German Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund,

deteriorating economic conditions in their country, characterized by crippling fuel and foreign exchange shortages. The workers of Malawi have been hit hard by the economic crisis. Shortage of foreign exchange means that companies cannot bring in raw materials and parts, which has resulted in massive job losses. Shortages cause basic goods to become unaffordable.

"This is not worthy of a country which adheres to the principles of democracy," said ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow. "Confronted with such particularly harsh conditions as the ones currently hitting Malawi, citizens and civil society organizations should not face even tougher repression when standing up for their basic rights."

- **More Women Workers Killed in Guatemala**

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When President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress was initiated in 1961 to support labor's international role in nurturing democratic trade union movements abroad, Doherty was the logical choice to serve as AIFLD's Director of Social Projects, and later as Executive Director. He led the AIFLD under the direction of four AFL-CIO presidents, retiring in 1996.

Survivors include his wife of 52 years, Jane Catherine Donovan, eight children and 25 grandchildren.

- **The CFTU Website**

Welcome to the CFTU website!

We've designed it to keep you better informed about developments in the continuing struggle of workers everywhere to establish and maintain the right of Freedom of Association – the right to form and join unions of their own choosing, run by people they elect.

The CFTU has been active in recent years in attempts to assist workers in Cuba struggling to assert that right – in the face of their government's

death by machetes at her home in Comunidad de La Selva, Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez, on 21 July. The assassins, not content with killing her, chopped off one of her hands.

María Santos Mejía, secretary of the independent maquilas union Sindicato de Maquilas Independientes, was shot in the head several times by assailants on a motorbike. She leaves her four children and four-month-old baby.

In a letter, the ITUC urged Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom to take every step necessary to bring an end to the "constant murders and violations of the rights of working people. It is essential that the Guatemalan government take urgent measures to guarantee the full exercise of human, labour and trade union rights in the country and to end the murders of trade unionists and women trade unionists."

- **Guatemalan Trade Unionist Murdered**

Lorenzo Godoy Asencio, general secretary of the tricycle taxi drivers union and the local transport workers union in Guatemala, was murdered in early May.

The trade unionist disappeared on May 2nd with his moto-taxi; he had left the house to buy bread for dinner. When he failed to return, a search

insistence that only one union, guided by the Communist Party, can represent them, and against the background of continuing imprisonment and harassment of those who think otherwise.

Cuba is not the only country in the world denying workers their rights. Sadly the list is long – Burma, Vietnam, North Korea, China - to cite a few. But too many trade unionists in the free world are unwilling to speak out, apparently believing that somehow these regimes will transform themselves into democratic societies and that through contact with free world unions, the non-representative unions in those police states will remake themselves into legitimate unions. Such a belief flies in the face of 90 years of experience to the contrary.

The recent hunger-strike death in a Cuban prison of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a 42-year old brick mason serving a 26-year sentence for his political activities, and the long hunger strike of dissident journalist Guillermo Farinas, provide eloquent testimony to the determination of those heroes to see their country free and democratic and observant of all the

was launched the following day in the area bordering El Salvador. His body was found on May 5th in Aldea Los Angeles, showing stab wounds thought to have been inflicted with a screwdriver. This murder has once again plunged into mourning the workers of Guatemala.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), in a **letter to the president of Guatemala**, called for a full and immediate investigation to ensure that those responsible for this crime are brought to justice without delay and punished with the full force of the law.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow, appalled by the repeated murders of trade unionists in Guatemala, underlined: "This new murder must not go unpunished, as, unfortunately, have all the other murders carried out against trade unionists in Guatemala thus far. It is essential that the government react by strengthening the rule of law and ensuring respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in the ILO Conventions ratified by Guatemala."

The serious and constant violations of ILO Convention 87 in Guatemala will be examined by the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards during the International Labor Conference in June.

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Our committee believes that neither dictatorships nor their hand-aided unions ever yield power willingly and that free trade unions must not be complicit in the denial of freedom of association to workers. Rather, we believe that those who are joined in the struggle to assert workers' rights in the face of dictators, those who risk imprisonment and harassment, need and deserve our moral and material support. We hope you will join us in those struggles.

**Tom Donahue, CFTU
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- **Hope for Democracy Builds as Dictators Fall**



The recent events in Tunisia and Egypt that resulted in the departures of long-time dictators Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak have raised hopes that reasonable democracies will flourish and spread throughout the Arab and Muslim Middle East.

Governments that work for all the people instead of just the very wealthy or "the connected" are long overdue. All who appreciate freedom can only applaud what has taken place so far. Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of Yemen, will no longer push for his son, Ahmed, to take his place. King Abdullah of Jordan replaced his government in order to shore up his regime. Hopefully, the dictator Muammar Qaddafi of Libya will not be able to pass the government there onto his sons.

Workers and labor unions in the Middle East, as elsewhere, have played a role in the fight for democracy in Tunisia and Egypt. Who can forget Solidarność, the independent trade union federation that helped

topple the Communist regime in Poland?

Newly democratic nations in the Middle East, if they are truly democratic, will encourage the development and expansion of free, democratic, independent trade unions that represent the workers in those countries. Trade unions exist to help workers better their lives and the lives of their families with improved wages, benefits, safer working conditions, and representation, precisely what is needed most to build and sustain a true democracy.

- **Calls for Halt to Trade Union Rights Violations**

MOSCOW – At a recent ITUC conference here, the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) affiliates joined the Newly Independent States (NIS) in their demands that the governments and employers in Russia and in the newly independent former Soviet states respect fundamental rights guaranteed by ILO Conventions.

The demands were voiced at the conclusion of the International Confederation of Trade Unions Conference, "Building Democracy and Trade Union Rights in the NIS," held here last December.

"We have the situation when in the countries with

about 200 million able-bodied population, the real security of workers approaches to zero," reads the final document adopted by the delegates.

The large conference was attended by union leaders and activists from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, as well as representatives of the ITUC and its Pan-European Regional Council (PERC), European trade unions and global union federations, including the IMF, NGOs, academics, trade unionists and journalists.

The nature of violations differ: in Russia, trade union leaflets were added to the list of "extremist materials"; in Belarus, the system of annual contracts is used as a tool of anti-union discrimination; in Georgia, a truncated Labor Code is introduced, which contains only 55 articles and virtually no guarantees of legal protection of trade unions.

Employers and the governments violate the fundamental right of workers to freedom of association as guaranteed by ILO Conventions.

Officials from different Russian government agencies attended the conference, including the Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Justice, and General Procurator's Office. This created the possibility of a direct and sharp dialogue between trade unionists and

government representatives. Andrei Isaev, Chairman of the Duma Committee on Labor and Social Policy, spoke about the legislative work regarding labor relations.

About 15 activists of the primary union organizations from across the region spoke of pressure exerted on them by employers and authorities. Behind each of the short reports was a history of several months and sometimes years of struggle, persecution, unlawful dismissals, discrimination, and fierce resistance.

The final document adopted by the representatives of trade unions calls for strengthening trade union solidarity, to conduct educational work, to build strong trade unions, and to hold national and international campaigns for the protection and development of trade union rights.

- **Free Trade Unionism Nixed in Much of Middle East**

In the West, we take for granted what we have, and what others fought for, including eight hour working days, paid holidays, and much more, so it is reasonable to ask about working conditions in other parts of the world. The Middle East, with its untold wealth and resources, is a good place

to start.

Despite a massive population, maybe as many as 300 million, we hear little of the situation of ordinary people and workers in the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, trade unions and trade unionists have many difficulties in most of the Middle East, their legal rights are often nonexistent, and they are persecuted, attacked and even assassinated.

More often than not, ordinary people in the Middle East don't even have the basic right to join a free trade union, or defend their working conditions, let alone strike.

The picture of workers' rights in the **Middle East** is frequently bleak, as a report in the International Trade Union Confederation 2009 survey relates:

In Palestine and Lebanon, political tensions and violence have a negative impact on trade union activities. The offices of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, and some of the houses of its members, were destroyed by bombs. In Lebanon, the government called out the army after a general strike was called in May. Changes in legislation have continued, but rather slowly.

The effective exercise of union rights has accordingly been restricted or non-existent. In **Iran**, a new law enabling the establishment of free trade

unions is being discussed. Promises of new laws guaranteeing increased trade union freedom have still not been kept in **Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar**. In **Iraq**, the new labor code has not been presented to the Parliament; as a result, laws dating back to the former regime that severely restrict trade union activities remain in force. As a general rule throughout the region, migrant workers have no trade union rights. In **Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen** and the **United Arab Emirates**, the governments have brought in measures or proposed reforms aimed at improving the lot of migrant workers, however.

Trade unions are still banned in Saudi Arabia (where only the national workers' committees are allowed to be set up in companies with more than 100 workers), **Qatar and the United Arab Emirates**. Despite the fact that trade union rights are enshrined in constitutions, restrictions remain and trade union pluralism and collective bargaining are virtually non-existent in the region. In **Bahrain**, for instance, although the government committed itself in 2007 to adopting a law allowing collective bargaining, the law has still not been adopted.

The right to strike remains limited in **Oman, Qatar, Syria and Yemen, while it is totally banned in**

Saudi Arabia and banned in the public sector in the **United Arab Emirates, Iran, Kuwait and Qatar.** In addition, in many cases the list of essential services in which strikes are banned goes beyond the ILO definition.

- **Worker Activist in China Sentenced to 3 Years in Jail**

A well-know labor activist was sentenced on 20 October to three years in jail for “gathering a crowd to disrupt social order”, according to media reports.

Zhao Dongmin was arrested on 19 August last year after organizing more than 380 workers from about 20 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to form a labour rights group tasked with overseeing and monitoring SOE restructuring, and reporting corruption and abuses of power.

The Shaanxi Union Rights Defence Representative Congress was formally banned by the municipal government of Xi’an on 27 July, after which Zhao wrote an open letter protesting the action to the State Council, the municipal, provincial and central committees of the Chinese Communist Party. He was arrested 18 days later.

Since his arrest, Zhao’s case has been taken up by an increasingly vocal group of supporters, many of

whom share his leftist political views. Zhao was the head of the Shaanxi Mao Zedong Thought Study Group, one of several Maoist groups in China that seek the restoration of a more egalitarian, fair and just society.

More than 50 scholars signed a petition in October stating that Zhao was not only innocent but had performed meritorious service and that his arrest mocked the rule of law and insulted trade union organizers.

Zhao's three year sentence is on the upper-end of the scale for labour activists. Unlike a decade ago when five or ten year sentences were not uncommon, the authorities nowadays tend to use threats, harassment and short-term detention rather than criminal trials and prison terms to suppress labour groups and activists. It is perhaps Zhao's Maoist allegiances therefore that led to his relatively heavy sentence on this occasion.

- **Dissidents in Vietnam – Out of Sight, Out of Mind?**

In its summer issue, *Dissent* magazine, published in New York, breaks the silence on efforts to quell pro-democracy movements in Vietnam with an article titled "Vietnamese Dissidents: Absent from the Western Mind."

Dustin Roasa, a free lance writer based in Cambodia, describes the most recent chapter in the history of Vietnamese dissidents, which began on April 8, 2006, when a group of activists posted on-line a "Manifesto 2006 on Freedom and Democracy." The Dissent article was featured in a blog called Human Rights for Workers.

The "manifesto" was signed by more than 2,000 Vietnamese, including lawyers, Buddhist monks, Catholic priests, ex-Communist Party members, writers, and intellectuals from all parts of the country. They became known as Bloc 8406, after the date it was posted.

In a visit to Vietnam in the winter of 2007, Roasa talked with several Bloc 8406 members and found their mood pessimistic. The movement was under siege and losing members to prison. It did not gain the attention of the foreign media.

"The dissidents I know hope for foreign involvement in their cause," Doasa writes . The hope was that media interest would pressure the Party to listen to dissidents like Nguyen Dan Que, who after 20 years in prison is under house arrest in Saigon and has refused offers of exile to the United States.

In the summer of 2008, the government quietly gave a multibillion-dollar land concession in the Central Highlands to a

bauxite mining company in China, which brought in thousands of "guest workers" from China. General Vo Nguyen Gap, 98, criticized the concession. So did some bloggers. "Few issues unite Vietnamese than suspicion of their large neighbor to the North," Doasa points out.

A new wave of repression followed. At least 60 pro-democracy activists have been arrested since last October. One was a 41-year-old lawyer and graduate of Tulane, Le Cong Dinh, who gained fame for representing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in a trade dispute with the United State (over catfish dumping) and winning it. He also took on the job of defending dissidents in court, and began blogging about the bauxite mine and other government concessions to the People's Republic of China.

On January 30, 2010, Le Cong Dinh was sentenced to five years in prison on a charge of conducting propaganda against the state.

- **Pressure Builds for Free Trade Unions in China**

A wave of strikes in Chinese factories recently has highlighted the lack of authentic rights for Chinese workers and other inequities in Chinese society. In response, the Communist regime is launching a "Strike-Hard"

campaign.

According to China analysts, the recent wave of strikes is a reflection of simmering social discontent and unrest as a result of social inequality, injustice, and rising inflation, *The Epoch Times* reports. Many of the striking workers are not only demanding pay raises, but are also asking for independent unions.

If the strikes escalate, they may threaten China's position as the factory of the world, and thus threaten the communist regime's popular legitimacy and survival. However, experts say that responding to the workers demands with brute force will not work.

On June 13, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security announced it would launch a seven-month-long "Strike-Hard" campaign to "crack down on violent crimes that seriously affect the public's sense of security" as China goes through an economic transition and social transformation.

Xu Yimin, a migrant workers' rights activist in Jilin Province, in his blog called for an independent labor union, stating that the string of suicides at Foxconn and the subsequent strikes across the country were mainly due to "workers having no voice, rights, or means of expression."

New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) said in a June 24 report that last

year, migrant rural workers from northeastern Jilin Province applied to authorities to form their own union but were rejected. Around the same time, the state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions released a report warning that young migrant workers are increasingly willing to make demands from the state, a development construed as "a test for stability in the country."

Labor unions in China are state-controlled and generally side with the management and local communist officials, instead of representing workers.

- **Mexican Workers Face State Brutality**

The Mexican miners' union, Los Mineros, has put out a call for support for its 1200 members facing state brutality and violence aimed at breaking their two year strike. The 1200 miners have been on strike since July 2007 at the Cananea mine over health and safety and other contract violations. Grupo Mexico, the mining giant which operates Cananea, and the Mexican government have continuously tried to end the strike and crush the union. They have threatened and jailed union leaders, illegally frozen union bank accounts and failed to investigate or prosecute assassinations of union

members.

On February 11, a federal court gave Grupo Mexico permission to fire the striking workers and terminate the labour agreement. The government has threatened to use armed force to gain control of Cananea. The Los Mineros members at Cananea are resolved to continue occupying the mine until a fair labour agreement is reached. The International Metalworkers' Federation, which the EPMU is a member of, has called on the Mexican government to: * Release all union funds illegally seized by the government; * Lift all charges still pending against Napoleon Gomez Urrutia and other members of the union. * Prosecute in a court of law, immediately and transparently, all those responsible in the corruption of documents and facts; and * Investigate Grupo Mexico's involvement in the murder of Reynaldo Hernandez Gonzolez and the detention and torture of 20 union members in Nacozari, Sonora.

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Newly democratic nations in the Middle East, if they are truly democratic, will encourage the development and expansion of free, democratic, independent trade unions that represent the workers in those countries. Trade unions exist to help

workers better their lives and the lives of their families with improved wages, benefits, safer working conditions, and representation, precisely what is needed most to build and sustain a true democracy.

- **Calls for Halt to Trade Union Rights Violations**

MOSCOW – At a recent ITUC conference here, the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) affiliates joined the Newly Independent States (NIS) in their demands that the governments and employers in Russia and in the newly independent former Soviet states respect fundamental rights guaranteed by ILO Conventions.

The demands were voiced at the conclusion of the International Confederation of Trade Unions Conference, "Building Democracy and Trade Union Rights in the NIS," held here last December.

"We have the situation when in the countries with about 200 million able-bodied population, the real security of workers approaches to zero," reads the final document adopted by the delegates.

The large conference was attended by union leaders and activists from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia and

Ukraine, as well as representatives of the ITUC and its Pan-European Regional Council (PERC), European trade unions and global union federations, including the IMF, NGOs, academics, trade unionists and journalists.

The nature of violations differ: in Russia, trade union leaflets were added to the list of "extremist materials"; in Belarus, the system of annual contracts is used as a tool of anti-union discrimination; in Georgia, a truncated Labor Code is introduced, which contains only 55 articles and virtually no guarantees of legal protection of trade unions.

Employers and the governments violate the fundamental right of workers to freedom of association as guaranteed by ILO Conventions.

Officials from different Russian government agencies attended the conference, including the Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Justice, and General Procurator's Office. This created the possibility of a direct and sharp dialogue between trade unionists and government representatives. Andrei Isaev, Chairman of the Duma Committee on Labor and Social Policy, spoke about the legislative work regarding labor relations.

About 15 activists of the primary union organizations from across the region spoke of pressure exerted on them by employers and

authorities. Behind each of the short reports was a history of several months and sometimes years of struggle, persecution, unlawful dismissals, discrimination, and fierce resistance.

The final document adopted by the representatives of trade unions calls for strengthening trade union solidarity, to conduct educational work, to build strong trade unions, and to hold national and international campaigns for the protection and development of trade union rights.

- **Free Trade Unionism Nixed in Much of Middle East**

In the West, we take for granted what we have, and what others fought for, including eight hour working days, paid holidays, and much more, so it is reasonable to ask about working conditions in other parts of the world. The Middle East, with its untold wealth and resources, is a good place to start.

Despite a massive population, maybe as many as 300 million, we hear little of the situation of ordinary people and workers in the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, trade unions and trade unionists have many difficulties in most of the Middle East, their legal rights are often nonexistent and they are

persecuted, attacked and even assassinated.

More often than not, ordinary people in the Middle East don't even have the basic right to join a free trade union, or defend their working conditions, let alone strike.

The picture of workers' rights in the **Middle East** is frequently bleak, as a report in the International Trade Union Confederation 2009 survey relates:

In Palestine and Lebanon, political tensions and violence have a negative impact on trade union activities. The offices of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, and some of the houses of its members, were destroyed by bombs. In Lebanon, the government called out the army after a general strike was called in May. Changes in legislation have continued, but rather slowly.

The effective exercise of union rights has accordingly been restricted or non-existent. In **Iran**, a new law enabling the establishment of free trade unions is being discussed. Promises of new laws guaranteeing increased trade union freedom have still not been kept in **Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar**. In **Iraq**, the new labor code has not been presented to the Parliament; as a result, laws dating back to the former regime that severely restrict trade

union activities remain in force. As a general rule throughout the region, migrant workers have no trade union rights. In **Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen** and the **United Arab Emirates**, the governments have brought in measures or proposed reforms aimed at improving the lot of migrant workers, however.

Trade unions are still banned in Saudi Arabia (where only the national workers' committees are allowed to be set up in companies with more than 100 workers), **Qatar and the United Arab Emirates**.

Despite the fact that trade union rights are enshrined in constitutions, restrictions remain and trade union pluralism and collective bargaining are virtually non-existent in the region. In **Bahrain**, for instance, although the government committed itself in 2007 to adopting a law allowing collective bargaining, the law has still not been adopted.

The right to strike remains limited in **Oman, Qatar, Syria and Yemen**, while it is totally banned in **Saudi Arabia** and banned in the public sector in the **United Arab Emirates, Iran, Kuwait and Qatar**. In addition, in many cases the list of essential services in which strikes are banned goes beyond the ILO definition.

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- **Worker Activist in China Sentenced to 3**

Years in Jail

A well-known labor activist was sentenced on 20 October to three years in jail for "gathering a crowd to disrupt social order", according to media reports.

Zhao Dongmin was arrested on 19 August last year after organizing more than 380 workers from about 20 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to form a labour rights group tasked with overseeing and monitoring SOE restructuring, and reporting corruption and abuses of power.

The Shaanxi Union Rights Defence Representative Congress was formally banned by the municipal government of Xi'an on 27 July, after which Zhao wrote an open letter protesting the action to the State Council, the municipal, provincial and central committees of the Chinese Communist Party. He was arrested 18 days later.

Since his arrest, Zhao's case has been taken up by an increasingly vocal group of supporters, many of whom share his leftist political views. Zhao was the head of the Shaanxi Mao Zedong Thought Study Group, one of several Maoist groups in China that seek the restoration of a more egalitarian, fair and just society.

More than 50 scholars signed a petition in October stating that Zhao was not only innocent but

had performed meritorious service and that his arrest mocked the rule of law and insulted trade union organizers.

Zhao's three year sentence is on the upper-end of the scale for labour activists. Unlike a decade ago when five or ten year sentences were not uncommon, the authorities nowadays tend to use threats, harassment and short-term detention rather than criminal trials and prison terms to suppress labour groups and activists. It is perhaps Zhao's Maoist allegiances therefore that led to his relatively heavy sentence on this occasion.

- **Dissidents in Vietnam – Out of Sight, Out of Mind?**

In its summer issue, *Dissent* magazine, published in New York, breaks the silence on efforts to quell pro-democracy movements in Vietnam with an article titled "Vietnamese Dissidents: Absent from the Western Mind."

Dustin Roasa, a free lance writer based in Cambodia, describes the most recent chapter in the history of Vietnamese dissidents, which began on April 8, 2006, when a group of activists posted on-line a "Manifesto 2006 on Freedom and Democracy."

The *Dissent* article was featured in a blog called Human Rights for Workers.

The "manifesto" was

signed by more than 2,000 Vietnamese, including lawyers, Buddhist monks, Catholic priests, ex-Communist Party members, writers, and intellectuals from all parts of the country. They became known as Bloc 8406, after the date it was posted.

In a visit to Vietnam in the winter of 2007, Roasa talked with several Bloc 8406 members and found their mood pessimistic. The movement was under siege and losing members to prison. It did not gain the attention of the foreign media.

"The dissidents I know hope for foreign involvement in their cause," Doasa writes. The hope was that media interest would pressure the Party to listen to dissidents like Nguyen Dan Que, who after 20 years in prison is under house arrest in Saigon and has refused offers of exile to the United States.

In the summer of 2008, the government quietly gave a multibillion-dollar land concession in the Central Highlands to a bauxite mining company in China, which brought in thousands of "guest workers" from China. General Vo Nguyen Gap, 98, criticized the concession. So did some bloggers. "Few issues unite Vietnamese than suspicion of their large neighbor to the North," Doasa points out.

A new wave of repression followed. At least 60 pro-

democracy activists have been arrested since last October. One was a 41-year-old lawyer and graduate of Tulane, Le Cong Dinh, who gained fame for representing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in a trade dispute with the United State (over catfish dumping) and winning it. He also took on the job of defending dissidents in court, and began blogging about the bauxite mine and other government concessions to the People's Republic of China.

On January 30, 2010, Le Cong Dinh was sentenced to five years in prison on a charge of conducting propaganda against the state.

- **Pressure Builds for Free Trade Unions in China**

A wave of strikes in Chinese factories recently has highlighted the lack of authentic rights for Chinese workers and other inequities in Chinese society. In response, the Communist regime is launching a "Strike-Hard" campaign.

According to China analysts, the recent wave of strikes is a reflection of simmering social discontent and unrest as a result of social inequality, injustice, and rising inflation, *The Epoch Times* reports. Many of the striking workers are not only demanding pay raises but are also asking

for independent unions.

If the strikes escalate, they may threaten China's position as the factory of the world, and thus threaten the communist regime's popular legitimacy and survival. However, experts say that responding to the workers demands with brute force will not work.

On June 13, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security announced it would launch a seven-month-long "Strike-Hard" campaign to "crack down on violent crimes that seriously affect the public's sense of security" as China goes through an economic transition and social transformation.

Xu Yimin, a migrant workers' rights activist in Jilin Province, in his blog called for an independent labor union, stating that the string of suicides at Foxconn and the subsequent strikes across the country were mainly due to "workers having no voice, rights, or means of expression."

New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) said in a June 24 report that last year, migrant rural workers from northeastern Jilin Province applied to authorities to form their own union but were rejected. Around the same time, the state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions released a report warning that young migrant workers are increasingly willing to make demands from the state, a development

construed as “a test for stability in the country.”

Labor unions in China are state-controlled and generally side with the management and local communist officials, instead of representing workers.

- **Mexican Workers Face State Brutality**

The Mexican miners' union, Los Mineros, has put out a call for support for its 1200 members facing state brutality and violence aimed at breaking their two year strike. The 1200 miners have been on strike since July 2007 at the Cananea mine over health and safety and other contract violations. Grupo Mexico, the mining giant which operates Cananea, and the Mexican government have continuously tried to end the strike and crush the union. They have threatened and jailed union leaders, illegally frozen union bank accounts and failed to investigate or prosecute assassinations of union members.

On February 11, a federal court gave Grupo Mexico permission to fire the striking workers and terminate the labour agreement. The government has threatened to use armed force to gain control of Cananea. The Los Mineros members at Cananea are resolved to continue occupying the mine until a

fair labour agreement is reached. The International Metalworkers' Federation, which the EPMU is a member of, has called on the Mexican government to: * Release all union funds illegally seized by the government; * Lift all charges still pending against Napoleon Gomez Urrutia and other members of the union. * Prosecute in a court of law, immediately and transparently, all those responsible in the corruption of documents and facts; and * Investigate Grupo Mexico's involvement in the murder of Reynaldo Hernandez Gonzalez and the detention and torture of 20 union members in Nacozari, Sonora.

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Refusing Deportation »

Labor Leaders Murdered in El Salvador Honored at AFL-CIO Ceremony



May 14th, 2011 , By admin

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Silver Spring, MD – Two American trade unionists and a Salvadoran labor leader who were murdered 30 years ago while working for agricultural reform in El Salvador were honored recently during the AFL-CIO's Workers' Memorial Day observance.

The three victims were Michael Peter Hammer, Director of Land Reform Programs; Mark David Pearlman, lawyer, and José Rodolfo Viera, head of the Salvadoran Farm Workers' Union and also President of the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Transformation. Hammer and Pearlman were on assignment for the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the AFL-CIO's Latin American arm. Viera's institute was empowered under 1980 laws in El Salvador to take land from the country's propertied oligarchy and redistribute it among Salvadoran peasants, a program that country's ruling families sought to destroy.

The AFL-CIO's annual Workers' Memorial Day observance is held to honor and call attention to the death of workers killed in industrial or workplace accidents. The names of those killed are fired onto brick pavers set at the memorial site, which is on the campus of the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland.

On January 3, 1981, Hammer, Pearlman and Viera were having dinner in San Salvador's Sheraton Hotel when two men armed with automatic pistols walked into the dining room and opened fire, killing the three.

Two ex-corporals in El Salvador's National Guard were arrested and convicted in connection with the killings. They confessed, and testified that one of their officers, a Lieutenant Rodolfo Isidro López Sibrián, told the pair to kill the three labor unionists. They were released a year later in a general amnesty.

Michael Hammer, Jr., son of one of the victims, attended the AFL-CIO observance. He is an Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

Development, AFL-CIO

William Charles "Bill" Doherty Jr., who led the AFL-CIO's outreach to trade unions in Latin America for 35 years, died August 28 after a long battle with bone marrow cancer. He was 84.

Born in Belleview, Ky., the oldest of nine children, Doherty was raised in the Washington, D.C. area where his father, William Charles Doherty Sr. was president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and later the first U.S. ambassador to Jamaica. He graduated from St. Paul's Catholic Academy High School, where he met his future wife, Jane Catherine Donovan, a Boston native. He worked as a Capitol Hill police officer while completing his degree in philosophy at Catholic University of America, where he played defensive lineman for the football team. He also attended Georgetown University School of Linguistics and Georgetown Law School.



Doherty's life was defined by his Catholic faith (he spent a brief period of his life in the St. Charles Seminary, studying to be a priest) and his conviction that democratic trade unions held the key to freedom and prosperity around the world. His work with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Postal Telephone and Telegraph International (PTTI) and the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), took him

resulted in the deaths of 18 people involved in peaceful protests.

The International Trade Union Confederation has written to the president of Malawi to strongly protest the bloody repression of peaceful protests.

Malawi's trade unions have been critical of a number of recent laws which limit the freedom of the press, restrict lawsuits against government agencies and officers, and limit civil liberties. Under the current situation, the Malawian police can search any house without a search warrant, and the press cannot publish anything which is "deemed to be contrary to the public interest."

Protestors also wanted to point out the quickly deteriorating economic conditions in their country, characterized by crippling fuel and foreign exchange shortages. The workers of Malawi have been hit hard by the economic crisis. Shortage of foreign exchange means that companies cannot bring in raw materials and parts, which has resulted in massive job losses. Shortages cause basic goods to become unaffordable.

"This is not worthy of a country which adheres to the principles of democracy," said ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow. "Confronted with such particularly harsh conditions as the ones currently hitting Malawi, citizens and civil society

to 129 countries over his career.

After serving as an aerial photographer with the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, Doherty assisted in rebuilding the trade union movement in Germany, supporting the anti-Nazi, dissident labor leaders and nascent democratic trade union movement that is today known as the Confederation of German Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, DGB). He served in Belgium, Europe and Latin America as an AFL-CIO representative to the PTTI, an international trade secretariat.

When President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress was initiated in 1961 to support labor's international role in nurturing democratic trade union movements abroad, Doherty was the logical choice to serve as AIFLD's Director of Social Projects, and later as Executive Director. He led the AIFLD under the direction of four AFL-CIO presidents, retiring in 1996.

Survivors include his wife of 52 years, Jane Catherine Donovan, eight children and 25 grandchildren.

- **The CFTU Website**

Welcome to the CFTU website!

We've designed it to keep you better informed about developments in the continuing struggle of workers everywhere to establish and maintain the right of Freedom of Association – the right to form and join unions of their own choosing, run by people they elect.

The CFTU has been active in

organizations should not face even tougher repression when standing up for their basic rights."

- **More Women Workers Killed in Guatemala**

Guatemala City – Delegates to the II Conference against Impunity in Guatemala, convened by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and its Guatemalan affiliates, have condemned the killings of two women who were fighting for the rights of the Guatemalan people.

Lesbia Elías Xurup, a member of Comunidades en Resistencia contra Unión FENOSA, fighting against energy group abuses, was hacked to death by machetes at her home in Comunidad de La Selva, Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez, on 21 July. The assassins, not content with killing her, chopped off one of her hands.

María Santos Mejía, secretary of the independent maquilas union Sindicato de Maquilas Independientes, was shot in the head several times by assailants on a motorbike. She leaves her four children and four-month-old baby.

In a letter, the ITUC urged Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom to take every step necessary to bring an end to the "constant murders and violations of the rights of working people. It is essential that

recent years in attempts to assist workers in Cuba struggling to assert that right – in the face of their government’s insistence that only one union, guided by the Communist Party, can represent them, and against the background of continuing imprisonment and harassment of those who think otherwise.

Cuba is not the only country in the world denying workers their rights. Sadly the list is long – Burma, Vietnam, North Korea, China - to cite a few. But too many trade unionists in the free world are unwilling to speak out, apparently believing that somehow these regimes will transform themselves into democratic societies and that through contact with free world unions, the non-representative unions in those police states will remake themselves into legitimate unions. Such a belief flies in the face of 90 years of experience to the contrary.

The recent hunger-strike death in a Cuban prison of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a 42-year old brick mason serving a 26-year sentence for his political activities, and the long hunger strike of dissident journalist Guillermo Farinas, provide eloquent testimony to the determination of those heroes to see their country free and democratic and observant of all the rights of free people.

Our committee believes that neither dictatorships nor their hand-maiden unions ever yield power willingly and that free trade unions

the Guatemalan government take urgent measures to guarantee the full exercise of human, labour and trade union rights in the country and to end the murders of trade unionists and women trade unionists.”

- **Guatemalan Trade Unionist Murdered**

Lorenzo Godoy Asencio, general secretary of the tricycle taxi drivers union and the local transport workers union in Guatemala, was murdered in early May.

The trade unionist disappeared on May 2nd with his moto-taxi; he had left the house to buy bread for dinner. When he failed to return, a search was launched the following day in the area bordering El Salvador. His body was found on May 5th in Aldea Los Angeles, showing stab wounds thought to have been inflicted with a screwdriver. This murder has once again plunged into mourning the workers of Guatemala.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), in a **letter to the president of Guatemala**, called for a full and immediate investigation to ensure that those responsible for this crime are brought to justice without delay and punished with the full force of the law.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow, appalled

must not be complicit in the denial of freedom of association to workers. Rather, we believe that those who are joined in the struggle to assert workers' rights in the face of dictators, those who risk imprisonment and harassment, need and deserve our moral and material support. We hope you will join us in those struggles.

Tom Donahue, CFTU Chair

by the repeated murders of trade unionists in Guatemala, underlined: "This new murder must not go unpunished, as, unfortunately, have all the other murders carried out against trade unionists in Guatemala thus far. It is essential that the government react by strengthening the rule of law and ensuring respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in the ILO Conventions ratified by Guatemala."

The serious and constant violations of ILO Convention 87 in Guatemala will be examined by the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards during the International Labor Conference in June.

- **Hope for Democracy Builds as Dictators Fall**



The recent events in Tunisia and Egypt that resulted in the departures of long-time dictators Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak have raised hopes that reasonable democracies will flourish and spread throughout the Arab and Muslim Middle East.

Governments that work for

all the people instead of just the very wealthy or “the connected” are long overdue. All who appreciate freedom can only applaud what has taken place so far. Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of Yemen, will no longer push for his son, Ahmed, to take his place. King Abdullah of Jordan replaced his government in order to shore up his regime. Hopefully, the dictator Muammar Qaddafi of Libya will not be able to pass the government there onto his sons.

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- **Calls for Halt to Trade**

Union Rights Violations

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- **Mexican Workers Face**

State Brutality

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in a court of law, immediately and transparently, all those responsible in the corruption of documents and facts; and * Investigate Grupo Mexico's involvement in the murder of Reynaldo Hernandez Gonzolez and the detention and torture of 20 union members in Nacozari, Sonora.

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[Labor Leaders Murdered in El Salvador Honored at AFL-CIO Ceremony](#)

 May 14th, 2011 , By admin

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Silver Spring, MD – Two American trade unionists and a Salvadoran labor leader who were murdered 30 years ago while working for

CFTU Updates

- [The Passing of Bill Doherty](#)

Bill Doherty, 84, Executive Director of the American Institute for Free Labor Development, AFL-CIO

William Charles "Bill" Doherty Jr., who led the AFL-CIO's outreach to trade unions in Latin America for 35 years, died August 28 after a long battle with bone marrow cancer. He was 84.

Born in Belleview, Ky., the

International News

- [18 Killed in Malawi Protests](#)

In late July, authorities in Malawi perpetrated a round of violence that resulted in the deaths of 18 people involved in peaceful protests.

The International Trade Union Confederation has written to the president of Malawi to strongly protest the bloody repression of peaceful protests.

Malawi's trade unions have been critical of a number

agricultural reform in El Salvador were honored recently during the AFL-CIO's Workers' Memorial Day observance.

The three victims were Michael Peter Hammer, Director of Land Reform Programs; Mark David Pearlman, lawyer, and José Rodolfo Viera, head of the Salvadoran Farm Workers' Union and also President of the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Transformation. Hammer and Pearlman were on assignment for the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the AFL-CIO's Latin American arm. Viera's institute was empowered under 1980 laws in El Salvador to take land from the country's propertied oligarchy and redistribute it among Salvadoran peasants, a program that country's ruling families sought to destroy.

The AFL-CIO's annual Workers' Memorial Day observance is held to honor and call attention to the death of workers killed in industrial or workplace accidents. The names of those killed are fired onto brick pavers set at the memorial site, which is on the campus of the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland.

On January 3, 1981,

oldest of nine children, Doherty was raised in the Washington, D.C. area where his father, William Charles Doherty Sr. was president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and later the first U.S. ambassador to Jamaica. He graduated from St. Paul's Catholic Academy High School, where he met his future wife, Jane Catherine Donovan, a Boston native. He worked as a Capitol Hill police officer while completing his degree in philosophy at Catholic University of America, where he played defensive lineman for the football team. He also attended Georgetown University School of Linguistics and Georgetown Law School.



Doherty's life was defined by his Catholic faith (he spent a brief period of his life in the St. Charles Seminary, studying to be a priest) and his conviction that democratic trade unions held the key to freedom and prosperity around the world. His work with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Postal Telephone and Telegraph International (PTTI) and the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development

of recent laws which limit the freedom of the press, restrict lawsuits against government agencies and officers, and limit civil liberties. Under the current situation, the Malawian police can search any house without a search warrant, and the press cannot publish anything which is "deemed to be contrary to the public interest."

Protestors also wanted to point out the quickly deteriorating economic conditions in their country, characterized by crippling fuel and foreign exchange shortages. The workers of Malawi have been hit hard by the economic crisis. Shortage of foreign exchange means that companies cannot bring in raw materials and parts, which has resulted in massive job losses. Shortages cause basic goods to become unaffordable.

"This is not worthy of a country which adheres to the principles of democracy," said ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow. "Confronted with such particularly harsh conditions as the ones currently hitting Malawi, citizens and civil society organizations should not face even tougher repression when standing up for their basic rights."

- **More Women Workers Killed in Guatemala**

Guatemala City –

Hammer, Pearlman and Viera were having dinner in San Salvador's Sheraton Hotel when two men armed with automatic pistols walked into the dining room and opened fire, killing the three.

Two ex-corporals in El Salvador's National Guard were arrested and convicted in connection with the killings. They confessed, and testified that one of their officers, a Lieutenant Rodolfo Isidro López Sibrián, told the pair to kill the three labor unionists. They were released a year later in a general amnesty.

Michael Hammer, Jr., son of one of the victims, attended the AFL-CIO observance. He is an Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

(AIFLD), took him to 129 countries over his career.

After serving as an aerial photographer with the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, Doherty assisted in rebuilding the trade union movement in Germany, supporting the anti-Nazi, dissident labor leaders and nascent democratic trade union movement that is today known as the Confederation of German Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, DGB). He served in Belgium, Europe and Latin America as an AFL-CIO representative to the PTTI, an international trade secretariat.

When President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress was initiated in 1961 to support labor's international role in nurturing democratic trade union movements abroad, Doherty was the logical choice to serve as AIFLD's Director of Social Projects, and later as Executive Director. He led the AIFLD under the direction of four AFL-CIO presidents, retiring in 1996.

Survivors include his wife of 52 years, Jane Catherine Donovan, eight children and 25 grandchildren.

- **The CFTU Website**

Welcome to the CFTU website!

We've designed it to keep you better

Delegates to the II Conference against Impunity in Guatemala, convened by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and its Guatemalan affiliates, have condemned the killings of two women who were fighting for the rights of the Guatemalan people.

Lesbia Elías Xurup, a member of Comunidades en Resistencia contra Unión FENOSA, fighting against energy group abuses, was hacked to death by machetes at her home in Comunidad de La Selva, Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez, on 21 July. The assassins, not content with killing her, chopped off one of her hands.

María Santos Mejía, secretary of the independent maquilas union Sindicato de Maquilas Independientes, was shot in the head several times by assailants on a motorbike. She leaves her four children and four-month-old baby.

In a letter, the ITUC urged Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom to take every step necessary to bring an end to the "constant murders and violations of the rights of working people. It is essential that the Guatemalan government take urgent measures to guarantee the full exercise of human, labour and trade union rights in the country and to end the murders of trade unionists and women trade unionists."

informed about developments in the continuing struggle of workers everywhere to establish and maintain the right of Freedom of Association – the right to form and join unions of their own choosing, run by people they elect.

The CFTU has been active in recent years in attempts to assist workers in Cuba struggling to assert that right – in the face of their government's insistence that only one union, guided by the Communist Party, can represent them, and against the background of continuing imprisonment and harassment of those who think otherwise.

Cuba is not the only country in the world denying workers their rights. Sadly the list is long – Burma, Vietnam, North Korea, China - to cite a few. But too many trade unionists in the free world are unwilling to speak out, apparently believing that somehow these regimes will transform themselves into democratic societies and that through contact with free world unions, the non-representative unions in those police states will remake themselves into legitimate unions. Such a belief flies in the face of 90 years of experience to the contrary.

- **Guatemalan Trade Unionist Murdered**

Lorenzo Godoy Asencio, general secretary of the tricycle taxi drivers union and the local transport workers union in Guatemala, was murdered in early May.

The trade unionist disappeared on May 2nd with his moto-taxi; he had left the house to buy bread for dinner. When he failed to return, a search was launched the following day in the area bordering El Salvador. His body was found on May 5th in Aldea Los Angeles, showing stab wounds thought to have been inflicted with a screwdriver. This murder has once again plunged into mourning the workers of Guatemala.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), in a **letter to the president of Guatemala**, called for a full and immediate investigation to ensure that those responsible for this crime are brought to justice without delay and punished with the full force of the law.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow, appalled by the repeated murders of trade unionists in Guatemala, underlined: "This new murder must not go unpunished, as, unfortunately, have all the other murders carried out against trade unionists in Guatemala thus far. It is essential that the government react by

The recent hunger-strike death in a Cuban prison of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a 42-year old brick mason serving a 26-year sentence for his political activities, and the long hunger strike of dissident journalist Guillermo Farinas, provide eloquent testimony to the determination of those heroes to see their country free and democratic and observant of all the rights of free people.

Our committee believes that neither dictatorships nor their hand-aided unions ever yield power willingly and that free trade unions must not be complicit in the denial of freedom of association to workers. Rather, we believe that those who are joined in the struggle to assert workers' rights in the face of dictators, those who risk imprisonment and harassment, need and deserve our moral and material support. We hope you will join us in those struggles.

**Tom Donahue, CFTU
Chair**

strengthening the rule of law and ensuring respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in the ILO Conventions ratified by Guatemala.”

The serious and constant violations of ILO Convention 87 in Guatemala will be examined by the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards during the International Labor Conference in June.

- **Hope for Democracy Builds as Dictators Fall**



The recent events in Tunisia and Egypt that resulted in the departures of long-time dictators Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak have raised hopes that reasonable democracies will flourish and spread throughout the Arab and Muslim Middle East.

Governments that work for all the people instead of just the very wealthy or “the connected” are long overdue. All who appreciate freedom can only applaud what has taken place so far. Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of Yemen, will no longer push for his son, Ahmed, to take his place. King

Abdullah of Jordan replaced his government in order to shore up his regime. Hopefully, the dictator Muammar Qaddafi of Libya will not be able to pass the government there onto his sons.

Workers and labor unions in the Middle East, as elsewhere, have played a role in the fight for democracy in Tunisia and Egypt. Who can forget Solidarność, the independent trade union federation, that helped topple the Communist regime in Poland?

Newly democratic nations in the Middle East, if they are truly democratic, will encourage the development and expansion of free, democratic, independent trade unions that represent the workers in those countries. Trade unions exist to help workers better their lives and the lives of their families with improved wages, benefits, safer working conditions, and representation, precisely what is needed most to build and sustain a true democracy.

- **Calls for Halt to Trade Union Rights Violations**

MOSCOW – At a recent ITUC conference here, the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) affiliates joined the Newly Independent States (NIS) in their demands that the governments and employers in Russia and in

the newly independent former Soviet states respect fundamental rights guaranteed by ILO Conventions.

The demands were voiced at the conclusion of the International Confederation of Trade Unions Conference, "Building Democracy and Trade Union Rights in the CIS," held here last December.

"We have the situation when in the countries with about 200 million able-bodied population, the real security of workers approaches to zero," reads the final document adopted by the delegates.

The large conference was attended by union leaders and activists from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, as well as representatives of the ITUC and its Pan-European Regional Council (PERC), European trade unions and global union federations, including the IMF, NGOs, academics, trade unionists and journalists.

The nature of violations differ: in Russia, trade union leaflets were added to the list of "extremist materials"; in Belarus, the system of annual contracts is used as a tool of anti-union discrimination; in Georgia, a truncated Labor Code is introduced, which contains only 55 articles and virtually no guarantees of legal protection of trade unions. Employers and the governments violate the

fundamental right of workers to freedom of association as guaranteed by ILO Conventions.

Officials from different Russian government agencies attended the conference, including the Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Justice, and General Procurator's Office. This created the possibility of a direct and sharp dialogue between trade unionists and government representatives. Andrei Isaev, Chairman of the Duma Committee on Labor and Social Policy, spoke about the legislative work regarding labor relations.

About 15 activists of the primary union organizations from across the region spoke of pressure exerted on them by employers and authorities. Behind each of the short reports was a history of several months and sometimes years of struggle, persecution, unlawful dismissals, discrimination, and fierce resistance.

The final document adopted by the representatives of trade unions calls for strengthening trade union solidarity, to conduct educational work, to build strong trade unions, and to hold national and international campaigns for the protection and development of trade union rights.

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- **Free Trade Unionism Nixed in Much of Middle**

East

In the West, we take for granted what we have, and what others fought for, including eight hour working days, paid holidays, and much more, so it is reasonable to ask about working conditions in other parts of the world. The Middle East, with its untold wealth and resources, is a good place to start.

Despite a massive population, maybe as many as 300 million, we hear little of the situation of ordinary people and workers in the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, trade unions and trade unionists have many difficulties in most of the Middle East, their legal rights are often nonexistent, and they are persecuted, attacked and even assassinated.

More often than not, ordinary people in the Middle East don't even have the basic right to join a free trade union, or defend their working conditions, let alone strike.

The picture of workers' rights in the **Middle East** is frequently bleak, as a report in the International Trade Union Confederation 2009 survey relates:

In **Palestine and Lebanon**, political tensions and violence have a negative impact on trade union activities. The offices of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, and some of the houses of its members,

were destroyed by bombs. In Lebanon, the government called out the army after a general strike was called in May. Changes in legislation have continued, but rather slowly.

The effective exercise of union rights has accordingly been restricted or non-existent. In **Iran**, a new law enabling the establishment of free trade unions is being discussed. Promises of new laws guaranteeing increased trade union freedom have still not been kept in **Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar**. In **Iraq**, the new labor code has not been presented to the Parliament; as a result, laws dating back to the former regime that severely restrict trade union activities remain in force. As a general rule throughout the region, migrant workers have no trade union rights. In **Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen** and the **United Arab Emirates**, the governments have brought in measures or proposed reforms aimed at improving the lot of migrant workers, however.

Trade unions are still banned in Saudi Arabia (where only the national workers' committees are allowed to be set up in companies with more than 100 workers), **Qatar and the United Arab Emirates**. Despite the fact that trade union rights are enshrined in constitutions,

restrictions remain and trade union pluralism and collective bargaining are virtually non-existent in the region. In **Bahrain**, for instance, although the government committed itself in 2007 to adopting a law allowing collective bargaining, the law has still not been adopted.

The right to strike remains limited in **Oman, Qatar, Syria and Yemen, while it is totally banned in Saudi Arabia** and banned in the public sector in the **United Arab Emirates, Iran, Kuwait and Qatar**. In addition, in many cases the list of essential services in which strikes are banned goes beyond the ILO definition.

- **Worker Activist in China Sentenced to 3 Years in Jail**

A well-know labor activist was sentenced on 20 October to three years in jail for “gathering a crowd to disrupt social order”, according to media reports.

Zhao Dongmin was arrested on 19 August last year after organizing more than 380 workers from about 20 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to form a labour rights group tasked with overseeing and monitoring SOE restructuring, and reporting corruption and abuses of power.

The Shaanxi Union Rights Defence Representative Congress was formally banned by the municipal government of Xi’an on 27

July, after which Zhao wrote an open letter protesting the action to the State Council, the municipal, provincial and central committees of the Chinese Communist Party. He was arrested 18 days later.

Since his arrest, Zhao's case has been taken up by an increasingly vocal group of supporters, many of whom share his leftist political views. Zhao was the head of the Shaanxi Mao Zedong Thought Study Group, one of several Maoist groups in China that seek the restoration of a more egalitarian, fair and just society.

More than 50 scholars signed a petition in October stating that Zhao was not only innocent but had performed meritorious service and that his arrest mocked the rule of law and insulted trade union organizers.

Zhao's three year sentence is on the upper-end of the scale for labour activists. Unlike a decade ago when five or ten year sentences were not uncommon, the authorities nowadays tend to use threats, harassment and short-term detention rather than criminal trials and prison terms to suppress labour groups and activists. It is perhaps Zhao's Maoist allegiances therefore that led to his relatively heavy sentence on this occasion.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

In its summer issue, *Dissent* magazine, published in New York, breaks the silence on efforts to quell pro-democracy movements in Vietnam with an article titled "Vietnamese Dissidents: Absent from the Western Mind."

Dustin Roasa, a free lance writer based in Cambodia, describes the most recent chapter in the history of Vietnamese dissidents, which began on April 8, 2006, when a group of activists posted on-line a "Manifesto 2006 on Freedom and Democracy." The *Dissent* article was featured in a blog called Human Rights for Workers.

The "manifesto" was signed by more than 2,000 Vietnamese, including lawyers, Buddhist monks, Catholic priests, ex-Communist Party members, writers, and intellectuals from all parts of the country. They became known as Bloc 8406, after the date it was posted.

In a visit to Vietnam in the winter of 2007, Roasa talked with several Bloc 8406 members and found their mood pessimistic. The movement was under siege and losing members to prison. It did not gain the attention of the foreign media.

"The dissidents I know hope for foreign involvement in their cause," Doasa writes . The

hope was that media interest would pressure the Party to listen to dissidents like Nguyen Dan Que, who after 20 years in prison is under house arrest in Saigon and has refused offers of exile to the United States.

In the summer of 2008, the government quietly gave a multibillion-dollar land concession in the Central Highlands to a bauxite mining company in China, which brought in thousands of "guest workers" from China. General Vo Nguyen Gap, 98, criticized the concession. So did some bloggers. "Few issues unite Vietnamese than suspicion of their large neighbor to the North," Doasa points out.

A new wave of repression followed. At least 60 pro-democracy activists have been arrested since last October. One was a 41-year-old lawyer and graduate of Tulane, Le Cong Dinh, who gained fame for representing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in a trade dispute with the United State (over catfish dumping) and winning it. He also took on the job of defending dissidents in court, and began blogging about the bauxite mine and other government concessions to the People's Republic of China.

On January 30, 2010, Le Cong Dinh was sentenced to five years in prison on a charge of conducting propaganda against the

state.

- **Pressure Builds for Free Trade Unions in China**

A wave of strikes in Chinese factories recently has highlighted the lack of authentic rights for Chinese workers and other inequities in Chinese society. In response, the Communist regime is launching a “Strike-Hard” campaign.

According to China analysts, the recent wave of strikes is a reflection of simmering social discontent and unrest as a result of social inequality, injustice, and rising inflation, *The Epoch Times* reports. Many of the striking workers are not only demanding pay raises, but are also asking for independent unions.

If the strikes escalate, they may threaten China’s position as the factory of the world, and thus threaten the communist regime’s popular legitimacy and survival. However, experts say that responding to the workers demands with brute force will not work.

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