



‘Valuing Work, Dignity of the Person’.

Many of us today think of Portugal as a place in the sun, a cheap place to go on holiday. However, it is also a country with an active Movement of Christian Workers.

In June 2007, 140 delegates of the Portuguese Movement, the LOC, met for their 13th National Congress in Setubal, with the slogan, ‘**Valuing Work, Dignity of the Person**’. As well as a report of the work carried out by the national team and the debates on the future plans, the congress had an international forum at which a historian gave a presentation on the history of work in relation to the dignity of the human person. Among other things the expert said:

“In today’s neo-liberal society, work has been reduced to a single objective (profit and consumerism), it is no longer at the service and dignity of workers... but some

people are raising their voices against this trend and taking new initiatives such as Fair Trade and establishing cooperative enterprises. Work should be at the service of men and women, and not the other way around”

During the debate which followed, some members of the Portuguese Movement shared their convictions by saying, “it is necessary to defend citizens rights ... In our movement it is necessary to clarify and restate our objectives to build a new world, because these values have been lost... We have to give new positive directions for the advancement of the society we want to build”

The priorities for their action plan over the next three years include: Work and unemployment, health and social security and on going training.

Colin Cummings - Member:

“I just want to say I think [Reclaiming Time Report] is a magnificent piece of work, a staggering indictment of the present set up.

Trouble is we’re swimming against a tide. Without external pressure business will continue its ways and no political party offers hope of such pressure.”

MCW WEB SITE
www.mcworkers.org

We want to inform our readers about our new and informative web site.

Please do visit it. You can send us your comments via the contact menu.

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

Publisher: National Executive Committee

Editor: Paul Edwards



The Casino Economy

Gordon Brown's decision not to call a 'snap' election has been subject to considerable media comment, quickly followed by accusations of "stealing his opponent's ideas", particularly in relation to inheritance tax. This has provided his critics with an opportunity to use some colourful language in attacking him. The problem with this media circus is that the essential political issues facing us today have been forgotten, lost in the invective.

Whenever the next election takes place, the issues and values that underpin these issues remain the same, which should occupy the thoughts and actions of all men and women of goodwill.

By the time the next general election comes around, no doubt we shall hear the usual questions; will there or won't there be tax cuts? The NHS, Education, and Crime will as usual be the main issues of debate, and don't be surprised if Immigration is there too. However, it's the economy that will be, as usual, at the centre of the election campaign.

So let us consider some economic facts. The average house price has gone up four times faster than the average wage over the last ten years. The average household debt is currently about £24k, and in the UK personal debt increases by a £1 billion every 5 minutes.

The gap between the highest paid and the lowest paid workers continues to increase, with the top 1 per cent of the population owning 21 per cent of the nation's wealth three times as much as the bottom half (who own 7 per cent). The UK is the third most unequal country in Europe. According to the TUC, if the trend continues, by 2012 FTSE 100 chief executives will be earning more than £5 million, 150 times more than the average wage. The top 5 per cent of earners pay only 18 per cent income tax on their disposable income. Yet a

unsurprisingly found that two out of three bosses are not happy with the government's "approach to tax and competitiveness". Yet the trend in the unemployment rate continues to increase and the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance benefit has risen. Women and young workers 18-24 are the first victims of this increase.

So as Christians what are the important values for us here?

We are called to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. A Kingdom based on the values of justice, peace and love. Our world today seems to be based on a relentless pursuit of profit and wealth. But this is an essentially flawed aim, since as we see above very few people participate or share in these profits and wealth.

There can be no justice when the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. There has to be a better way than the "casino economy" to organise a world fit for human beings.

**MCW National Day
Conference
incorporating the
AGM**

24th November 2007

**St Bede's Pastoral
Centre, York
11 am – 4 pm**

Refreshments Available

A NEW WORLD THROUGH A NEW TOWN

The events which occurred in Croxteth Park in Liverpool during the summer with the savage shooting and murder of a young boy Rhys Jones touched the hearts of most decent people.

The press and TV reports of the gang warfare between the 'Crockies' (Croxteth) and the 'Nogzies' (Norris Green) gangs brought back poignant memories for me because I grew up in Norris Green, a working class council estate five miles from the centre of Liverpool, the City of Culture.

As a working class community it had all the similar characteristics one could find anywhere in Britain, blue collar workers, most families experiencing redundancy or unemployment. In addition there was a strong allegiance to either Liverpool or Everton football clubs, and the rivalry that came with this, or should I say the 'ribbing' Liverpool fans would give to Everton fans. There was also rivalry between estates, Norris Green and Croxteth existed then too. But no one was every shot down in a pub car park.

So what is different today from the sixties and seventies when I lived in Norris Green? I am not going to give a sociological analysis, nor do I think there is a case for a 'moral panic'. But I would like to share with the reader some reflections.

All over the UK young working class people are having their lives cut short by shootings or stabbings, most of these have taken place in working class communities like Norris Green. From the beginning of 1980's these communities have been virtually abandoned by most politicians. The 'right to buy' council houses were sold as working class communities becoming fully fledged members of the 'property owning democracy'. Yet the level of abstention in elections, especially local council elections,

fallacy of this assertion. Working women and men are increasing feeling a sense of alienation from the political process.

The battle for middle England by all three major parties, with a race between them on who can give the best tax cuts, indicated the values and priorities for our political leaders. Although, the present government has put in place some initiatives to improve the life chances of working class communities, such as Sure Start and Decent Homes, employment opportunities are still the lowest in these areas.

But for me what is lacking is the commitment by church leaders and their personnel to the formation and training of young worker leaders through the Young Christian Workers (YCW). It is always a very risky thing to do when you are in your fifties: to recall your younger days with fondness: As someone once said, 'nostalgia is not what it used to be'. Nevertheless, the YCW through its method of starting with real life experiences and bringing young working people together at a local, national and international level was, and continues to be, one of the most effective methods for training Christian leaders for the world of work and civic society. The current YCW campaign on Young People and the Media is testimony to the effectiveness of this method. Visit this web site to see for yourself:

<http://www.ycwimpact.com/mobile>

In the same way the Movement of Christian Workers (MCW) continues to sustain adults in their engagement in the world. The challenge for us all today is how we can promote the development and extension of these two vital movements which invite their friends and contacts to review their lives in the light of the Gospel and act to make a difference.

Guatemala. The Land of Volcanoes and Hurricanes



Paul Edwards recently attended a meeting of the Central America and Caribbean Coordination of the WMCW in Guatemala. He recalls that it is a beautiful country with beautiful people who combine their Mayan culture and religion with imported European Catholicism, which creates an affinity with the land and the elements with a struggle for justice. Here Wendy Tyndale who acted as Paul's interpreter and has a long history and experience of working in central and Latin America reflects on the current elections taking place in Guatemala

"There are currently elections going on which predicatively have gone to a second round between General Otto Pérez Molina of the Partido Patriota (Mano Dura) and Álvaro Colom of the UNE. Neither will act much in favour of the poor majority and economically the seven or so families who run the economy of Guatemala will no doubt continue to do so with the Free Trade Agreement with the US determining many factors. However, given the military past of this country, there is no doubt in our minds that Colom is the better bet of the two. His first attempt at being President was for the United Guerrilla Front

Party, soon after the peace agreements. Since then he has tried twice more and taken strides to the right each time.

Locally the Comité Cívico (supported by MTC (MCW) and the church) won in Sipakapa, i.e. a local grouping not affiliated to any party, so Sipakapa will have a mayor firmly opposed to the mine and who will be under a lot of pressure to help groups of women etc. He has promised he will, of course. In Concepción Tutuapa the Comité Cívico (also backed by MTC) came fourth. No-one was particularly surprised. The only other one to win in San Marcos was in Nuevo Progreso in the Boca Costa, backed strongly by the church with the local priest. In other places mostly the GANA (party now in power) or UNE won. In San Miguel UNE gave the women Q1000 for their soap project!



The Partido Patriota handed out hens, mobile phones and actual money as well as offering lunches on Election Day. All the parties gave handouts but clearly the richest ones were at an advantage. Rigoberta Menchú came fourth, I think. Her party didn't win in San Rafael where José Morales from the MTC was a candidate for the municipality.

