



REVIEW

Issue 46 October 2011

Movement of Christian Workers

What Price the MCW?



In our world leadership is needed more than ever. Not just in Parliament or on the TV but in everyday circumstances, in our homes, at work and in the community.

The lack of leadership in everyday situations is quite marked. Often people's opinions are swayed by the media or by those with the loudest voices. And when leadership is evident, it often comes from those who have had opportunities by virtue of their background, schooling and wealth. Those with more ordinary backgrounds who often lack confidence need to be encouraged, assisted, trained and sustained in being leaders in their lives. This is exactly what the MCW does best.

As someone once said "leaders don't grow on trees", they have to be called and formed. This takes resources which means money, equipment, people, experience, skill and expertise.

This issue of our newsletter illustrates the fruits of the work of the Movement in the form of two

articles about women activists trained by the Movement and active members of it.

Mary is the current Chair of the Movement and is a Cabinet Member of Gateshead Council. Sabah is a member of the Movement in Egypt and has taken an active part in the momentous events which are changing the course of history in her country. Their actions speak volumes and justify the MCW both as a Movement of the Church and in the World.

Without leaders and in particular Christian Worker Leaders who understand the apostolic nature of their role in society, not only is society the poorer but also the Church is deprived of a profound part of its mission to the world.

We have received some interesting comments in response to a recent newsletter about the unique spirituality of our Movement. A number of readers said that the edition reinforced their belief in the on-going value of the Movement whilst another thanked us for reminding him about the value of the Movement's Review of Life method. We hope to have a similar response to this newsletter.

Enclosed with this edition you will find an appeal letter asking you to support the development of our Movement in different ways, not least to make a further financial commitment. Times are hard and money is tight but it is hoped that this newsletter will inspire you to dig deep to support the work of the Movement.

Mary Foy is the Chair of the Movement of Christian Workers' (MCW) National Executive Committee. She is also an elected Councillor on Gateshead Council.

Mary was interviewed by our editor whilst attending this year's Labour Party Conference in Liverpool.

Q. What is your current responsibility as a member of Gateshead Council?

I was elected on to the Council's cabinet in May 2009 and I am the lead member for Health and the support member for Adult Social Care.

Q. How long have you been a Local Councillor?

I was first elected to Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council in 2006, having previously served on Birtley Town Council.

Q. What was it that got you interested in politics?

I suppose I became interested in politics with a `small p` when I joined the Young Christian Workers (YCW) at the age of 19. I then progressed into the MCW and with the support of my local MCW group I became more and more active in my local community and increasingly aware of the issues affecting local people and our community. This led me to become a founding member of our local credit union and then to stand for the town council.



I had also gained experience of developing the MCW regionally and nationally and took part in World Movement of Christian Workers' General Assembly, as well as various European Meetings of the Movement.

Listening to the experiences of working men and women from across the globe clearly strengthened my commitment to social justice and made me more political.

Putting it simply, I think my involvement in politics developed incrementally over many years with lots of contributory factors but without doubt the most significant has been through my involvement in the Cardijn Movements.

Q. What is it that supports and sustains you in your commitment?

My faith is central to this but in particular connecting the values of the Gospel to the world in which we live through the Review of Life method. This is how the MCW supports me and is probably the greatest factor in keeping my awareness fresh and challenging. Because of the method and constant reflection there is the awareness and heightened sense of injustice that I see around me. The support that I get from my family, parish, wider community and people in my political party with whom I share common values and aspirations is also crucial.

Q. How easy is it to keep your ideals and ideas fresh?

I am naturally an idealist and some might say a dreamer. To quote Jon Sobrino "My God still believes in Utopia". Having said that, it can be a constant battle not to compromise your principles. Bureaucracy can be stifling and even oppressive and that is even before you come up against those who are diametrically opposed to you and what you believe.

Q. How do you continue to develop a critique on how society is at the moment?

By reflecting on our experiences and that of those around us and by posing the difficult questions. The questions that people don't want you to ask. I also try to think radically and be challenging.

Q. What ambitions do you have for the movement?

The ambition of the movement is always to build the Kingdom of God.

Social problems such as poverty and unemployment are injustices which spring from the flaws of capitalism. The persistence of individualism has falsely made them look like the consequences of personal behaviour or even choice. The movement has a responsibility to highlight and challenge all that is contradictory to the values and truth of our faith.

Q. What support does the MCW need?

Financial support is the obvious answer to this question, particularly since we no longer receive any funding from the Church, but probably more important than this is the commitment of membership either as an individual or by becoming part of a group. We also need the support and solidarity of the wider worker movement and others who support our values.

Q. If people want to help the MCW to develop its crucial apostolic role, how do you think they could best do it?

Firstly, by registering as a supporter and joining our mailing list but also by engaging in dialogue with us about what they may be able to offer and what the MCW may be able to offer them.



Mary on the TUC march for jobs, growth and justice in London 26 March 2011

Sabah is a member of the Movement of Christian Workers of Egypt. She was elected as one of the African members to the International Council of the WMCW during the General Assembly held in Nantes in October 2009.

Initially the Belgium consulate refused to give Sabah a visa for her to attend the meeting of the International Council that took place in Belgium from the 20th to the 27th February 2011. Despite the presentation by the WMCW of numerous documents to the Belgium authorities and guarantees made by the WMCW, the Belgium authorities suspected that she really wanted to emigrate. It was only at the last minute and after several attempts and interventions did she actually obtain the right to exercise her mandate for which she had been elected.

During the course of the council meeting she was given the opportunity to share her experiences of participating in the unfolding events during the previous weeks in Egypt.

The revolution did not have a spontaneous birth. For many years the people saw clearly that the country was not going in a good direction. Corruption was everywhere; the gap between the rich and the poor grew larger. A sentiment of despair gripped a large part of the population. However, for the last five or six years we have seen the start of the uprising amongst workers above all in the textile industry. Certain movements were born “That’s Enough” or the “Movement of the 6th April” of which I am a member and is made up of many young people who want democracy.

On the 6th April 2008 there was the first general strike in Egypt against the rising cost of living. Bread had become very rare to find and was of poor quality.

The strike was a great success in spite of the arrests.

The Government was frightened and introduced some social measures. These issues have been boiling up over five years resulting in the birth of the revolution of the 25th January 2011 that sprung from three major elements:

- **The elections to the People's Chamber** where fraud took place on an even larger scale than in the previous elections when the President's party obtained 95% of the vote. All this was calculated to give the President a sixth term in office or pass the power to his son. In fact a Presidential candidate has to obtain the agreement of 2/3 of the chamber.
- **The explosion on the 1st January 2011** in the church killing 25 people with more than 100 injured. We learned afterwards that it was the Minister of the Interior (currently in prison) who organised this bomb attack in order to divide the community. The Government despite its flowery declarations favoured the Muslim/Christian conflict in order to detract attention away from the social problems.
- **The revolution in Tunisia encouraged us**

All of this started on the 25th January, the feast day of the Police! Thanks to Face Book the youth called one another to assemble in small groups in their neighbourhoods and then to converge on the Tahir Square, Liberation Square. We were a lot of people. In the evening the Police intervened with teargas (made in America!) So, we started to organise ourselves.

It was decided to meet the following Friday after Muslim prayers and then every Friday. The first Friday has been called angry Friday. The second, that of the depart (of the President). The third the perseverance "We will remain until the end"

On the 28th January there was a large demonstration and surprise, all the Police had disappeared. In fact they released some non political prisoners and demanded that they attack the demonstrators. Also money was distributed to mercenaries. There were attacks and plundering in all neighbourhoods and in Tahir Square the demonstrators were attacked by men on horseback and camels. Some people were killed.

The Internet and mobile phones were blocked. The government set up a curfew. In a radio and television broadcast the President attempted to rally the people in announcing that he would not be a candidate for the Presidency at the next elections. But he said nothing about his son. He nominated a Vice President, which had not been done for ten years. The government had changed and those who were the most corrupt had been arrested.

Many people had been impressed by his speech. One felt at this moment a division in the country even though many people wanted to see the back of the President. I felt that the propaganda from the television was very powerful. The journalists or commentators were against us. They said that our movement was being organised by foreigners and that we were being paid £50 Egyptian (€6) a day. All this was done to dirty our reputation.

Foreign journalists would often ask us: Who is your leader? Who is behind this revolution? They did not understand that the revolution was born from the accumulation of a series of events, the thirst for freedom and not to a providential man.

In the face of provocation, the population organised itself. Neighbourhood committees were spontaneously born to protect their inhabitants.

Everyone participated, Muslims, Christians mixing together. A Christian was saying: It's the first time that I have spoken in such a profound way with my Muslim neighbour and I have discovered that we had many points in common".

The members' of the MTC of Egypt, which is small movement, have also participated in these events. Two priests who came with us gave us a lot of support. Everyday there were members of the movement present in the square, they brought food and medicine. I was there throughout the 16 days. And when we returned home, we did so full of what we had lived and shared.

In the square there were young people and not so young and people from all spheres of life: Muslims, Christians, people from the right and the left, poor people, business people, the unemployed, students etc.

A whole people united together. Before this it was only football that could unite the people. At the end of the occupation, the youth cleaned up the square and left in good order. We now only occupy it on Fridays. We had only one aim: free our country and put in place a new democratic regime. We have produced four demands:

- The departure of the President and corrupt clique.
- The dissolution of the People's House and the organisation of new non-faked elections.
- A change of Government that was put in place by the President and in which are found corrupt former ministers.
- Lifting of the state of emergency that has been in place for the last 30 years.

To date only the state of emergency has not been lifted. All the other points have been obtained. With the setting up of a new regime we are demanding the reinforcement of the trade unions that are currently very weak, the freedom of association, of trades unions, expression and of the press. We are very aware today that we are only at the beginning of the revolution and that there remain many obstacles to overcome.

There are some priorities. Currently the country is subjected to heavy financial losses due to the cessation of tourism. It is necessary to do everything to bring back tourism. Concerning those newly elected to the House, they have to give information about their financial circumstances before the election in order to prevent personal enrichment. We are also demanding that there will be more young people among those who are elected. One of the essential demands is that we become a lay society. It is going to be necessary to change the constitution for this, which is going to be very hard.

The role of young people in this revolution has been a very strong. They were large in number and very motivated. All united beyond religious conviction.

All religious leaders, be they Muslim, Orthodox or Catholic had said to the youth not to go to Tahir square. But the youth did not obey. They went doubtless in the knowledge that it would cause a rupture between them and the religious authorities.

It was extraordinary what happened in Tahir Square that has never been seen before in Egypt.

We were linked together by a great sense of fraternity. We shall walk together towards a common aim. One day the Police wanted to chase some Muslims who were praying in the square. Some Christians formed a human chain around the Muslims to protect them. We are often asked about the Muslim Brotherhood. But I am not worried.

The Muslim Brotherhood is about one million. The Christians are about 8 million in a population of 80 millions. In a democracy all forces must be proportionally represented. To ensure there is not a return to fundamentalism, we must fight together so that the people can be lifted out of their misery. The Christians of Egypt must play a big role in the affairs of the country.



Sabah, second from left with Egyptian delegates
WMCW Nantes October 2009

We must be present in the trade unions political parties, and everywhere in which the future is being constructed. For us, members of the MTC Egypt, this is a very strong calling.

I am very happy and proud to have participated in this revolution. As a Christian movement, we are small in number but very present as actors in this struggle. As a Jesuit priest said to us, "In this Square, among this large crowd, you are the leaven in the dough."

In Memory of Seàn

Seàn and Jackie members of an MCW group in London were enjoying a trip with friends in the Welsh country side on the Friday afternoon 30 September 2011 when they were involved in a tragic car accident. Jackie was seriously injured, and Seàn tragically lost his life at the young age of 41. Seàn got to know the movement through his partner Jackie and was always able to make clear, sensible and informed contributions to the discussions in our meetings.

His global knowledge of beers was of Mastermind proportions he shall be sadly missed.

Perhaps the words of Michel Quoist may bring some comfort.

"Death, grotesque character, bogey-man of little children non-existent phantom, I don't take you seriously, but I am disgusted with you. You terrify the world, You frighten and deceive men, And yet your only reason for existing is life, and you are not able to take from us those that we love." Prayers of Life.

**You are all invited to the
MCW National Day Conference
incorporating the AGM**

**on
Saturday 19th November 2011**

from

10.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m.

A light lunch will be provided

**at
MCW Headquarters,
St Joseph's
off St Joseph's Grove, Hendon, London NW4 4TY**

The theme of the National Day Conference, beginning at 1.00 p.m. is

**The Welfare State
Past, Present & Future**

To book a place and lunch please phone MCW HQ on 020 8203 6290 or email
mcworkers@aol.com

As you will have read in the last newsletter the MCW has the privilege of hosting the annual seminar of the European Christian Worker Movement (ECWM) at All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney.

To date we are expecting 60 participants from at least twelve countries throughout Europe.

The focus of the conference is our lifelong security in terms of health, education and welfare particularly in the light of the hard economic times which Europe is currently experiencing.

We look forward to giving you a full report in the next newsletter.

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

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