



Movement of Christian Workers

# REVIEW

Issue 48 October 2012

## Find a place for your voice and your faith

"I was on the March". What March? Paul Edwards reports in the Review that on police estimates, over 100,000, demonstrated against the cuts which are affecting millions of people. Yet you would be hard pressed to know about it. Few major English Daily newspapers reported on it.

Why would the peaceful voices of so many be ignored? Why was it not considered worthy of publicity? It would be interesting to know your views.

However, the impact and feeling of solidarity for those who were there will still have been felt. It would have affirmed many that they are not a lone voice in feeling concerned at the austerity measures taking place and its affect on the poorest and most vulnerable.

What is important to draw attention to is that whilst the march could be seen as against the cuts, as demonstrated by the many banners and placards its title 'A Future that Works' has a positive side to it. Not only does it imply the need for funding and creating employment it also 'nods', albeit cautiously, at possible alternatives, the theme of our last newsletter.

The Union Unite is planning to establish a network of Credit Unions

to challenge the extortionate interest rates of payday lenders. Another idea voiced at the march was support for a finance transaction tax. The idea is to impose a small charge on transactions of currencies, bonds and shares traded at banks and financial institutions. The money raised could go against the European countries' debts. There is however arguments against the idea including the UK who are apparently particularly opposed to it because of the implications for the City of London.

Many Christians taking part in the march would see it as an action in solidarity with those who are and will suffer the most because of the changes to the Welfare State. It is imperative that we find a voice, share a voice and have a voice along with the modern day equivalent of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. In practice if we are not with, or for them, then are we against them?

This edition focuses on the actions of MCW members who have found a place for their voice and a direct expression of their faith.

Our National Conference's theme in November is 'The Mission of the Movement Today'. It would seem that Ann, Marcus & Paul are living it.

## Making a difference when we can whilst living out our faith

by Marcus Rodgers



I was going through a very low moment whilst unemployed and decided to contact my union in desperation. I met with one of the education officers who told me of their migrant workers alternative education project who invited me to volunteer teaching English. I liked the idea, mentioned it to Grace, my wife, who encouraged me to go for it. I had completed the PTTLS (Preparing to teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) a few weeks before and saw this as an opportunity of putting theory into practice, with an opportunity of employment in the future.

“United Migrant Workers Education Project (UMWEP) is a non-profit organisation under the umbrella and sponsorship of Unite the Union which promotes equality and diversity by attracting as many different minority ethnic groups as possible. The project implements an alternative education model, with its methodology and pedagogical concepts applying realistically to the true education needs of our learners.” (UMWEP). I have just completed by third teaching session. The learners are mainly Spanish speakers from Colombia and Ecuador. The Portuguese speakers hail from Angola, Brazil and Portugal. They are mostly working in the cleaning industry, some of whom work two hours in the morning cleaning offices and maybe another two hours in the evening. Those with employers that have union agreements get paid the London living wage i.e. £8.30 per hour and those who don't receive the national minimum wage of £7.08 per hour. The workers struggle to make ends meet on these wages and some have families to support. Their inability to speak English has an impact on their lives with regard to regulations in the workplace whether about Health & Safety or employment legislation to protect them. They are terrified of complaining about poor

working conditions for fear of losing their jobs. They live precarious lives, ignorant of educational or health facilities that may be available to them and their children. They are also exploited by greedy landlords. The project holds seminars on employment rights, regulations and possible alternative economic systems.

I have about twenty learners in my class, all very anxious to learn English and to improve their prospects of better jobs. There is great camaraderie amongst them. Because of their experiences and hardship the group are being encouraged to participate in the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012 protest against the cuts.

Although I follow guidelines to teach beginners, I find I have to improvise and adapt to their needs as best I can. It can be painstaking both for the learner and for me when I see how much they want to learn yet how difficult they find it.

There is so much appreciation at the end of the class it makes the teaching worthwhile although challenging.

I always wanted to be involved in union work back in South Africa, but this ambition was only realised here in the UK with this teaching post coming after my spell as a trade union representative for five years.

I am so fired up by this opportunity and see it as a real site of activism giving direct expression of my faith.

## The MCW group in B45

For many years I had received newsletters and occasionally met some of the MCW members socially, particularly in the Birmingham and wider West Midlands area, but I had never had any greater contact than that. I realised the need for the MCW but didn't feel I had the time to start a group. In November 2009 I suddenly decided to go to the MCW AGM in London. In my ignorance, I had imagined that there would probably be several hundred people in attendance. However, the reality was very different. There were about two dozen people there, but I was completely bowled over by the amount and quality of the work that this small number of people were engaged in and this inspired me to try and start something.

Upon my return and in discussion with other Birmingham members we decided to focus on South Birmingham, the area closest to all of us and I suggested that maybe my old parish St Dunstan's in the Kings Heath area of the city maybe a good place to begin. The clergy were amenable and we planned a two hour introductory meeting for Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010. This was attended by 21 people who were definitely interested in the idea of setting up a group, but I wasn't sure how we were going to take this forward as geographically we were all several miles apart.

By this time I had also been talking to people where I live in the B45 postcode. The majority of these friends and acquaintances were not Catholics but we had very stimulating conversations about the recession and its effects on people's circumstances and that there didn't seem to be a place in church to discuss and take action, so we decided to take action and start a group! I felt inadequate in trying to formulate enquiries and initially had help from Frank Foley. Our first get together was

in December 2011. Frank gave a potted history of the YCW and MCW and Cardijn's three truths: a little daunting for the uninitiated but it provoked lots of discussion and all were keen to continue.

There were five at first who remain the core group. David McLoughlin has joined us and is invaluable in leading the gospel enquiries. There have also been significant steps taken by individuals relating to their work or voluntary position and I am sure these can be highlighted in another article.

To celebrate St. Joseph the Worker's Feast Day we had an evening celebration, to which we invited friends and local clergy and other MCW and ex YCW members. This had been reported in the previous newsletter.

We are planning to celebrate The Feast of Christ the King and have a Christmas celebration too.

The value of the group, as several members have said in differing ways is that they no longer feel alone in raising these issues; that there is a place for them in the church and that as lay people we can take action and be effective. We haven't completed our first year yet and are just feeling our way, but I have already had enquiries about setting up other groups!

Let's build this Movement together; if I can do it anyone can! This is a call to action; start a group. The results are amazing.

### **Ann Smith B45!**

Ann, pictured here on the left planning the next group meeting.



## A Future That Works

“Austerity isn’t working... Our country faces long-term economic problems. But our political leaders have failed to face up to them. For the next five years or more, unless policies change the economy will not grow, incomes will not rise, and there will be almost no new jobs.”

These were the words that the Trades Union Congress used to mobilise huge numbers of demonstrators in Glasgow, Belfast and London to show the coalition government that its plan A with ‘A’ standing for Austerity is simply not working.

I joined the 150,000 people who marched in London. Large numbers of demonstrators also turned out in Glasgow and Belfast.

Speaker after speaker in Hyde Park reminded us all, not that we needed reminding, that the coalition is making ordinary working people and their families pay for an economic crisis not of their making.

Wage freezes; hikes in energy and transport costs; cuts to housing and disability benefits; hundreds of thousands of job losses; the raising of retirement age; whilst more than one million young workers are out of work with many more in temporary or part time work; the young workers struggling to get onto the ladder that will help them to find a place and a role in society:



These are just a few of the recurring themes ever present on this march. Despite this negative backdrop the march was full of good humour and a real sense of hope that together through collective action and solidarity a different model of society can be achieved. Clearly there was a complete rejection of the austerity plan and a call for a change of course and an economic strategy that puts the needs of the people at the heart of policy and not the demands of super rich multinationals. It was equally clear to me that on what was a largely labour movement march at which there was a common agreement that a fundamental change of direction is needed, there is far less consensus on the detail. It’s vital therefore that women and men of goodwill engage in the debate and actions which will lead to a world based on justice and equality for all. **Paul Edwards**

### National Conference & Annual General Meeting – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Taking place at the MCW Headquarters, St Joseph’s, London, NW4 4TY.

The theme is: **The Mission of the Movement Today**

The conference will give us all an opportunity to think about and discuss what place the MCW currently has in relation to both the Church and Wider Society.

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

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