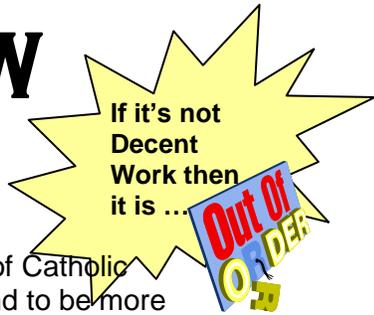




Movement of Christian Workers

REVIEW

Issue 53 July 2014



If it's not
Decent
Work then
it is ...

Decent Work

This edition of the MCW Review has an overall theme of Decent Work. It may be the first of a few Reviews that focuses on this subject. This is because the International (WMCW) and the European (EMCW) Movements identified the need to critically reflect on the values of decent work and the dignity of the human person being enhanced when it is present and violated when it is not.

The media in recent weeks have covered various studies and articles which indicate that simply being in work does not protect individuals or families from poverty. There has also been coverage about the economic recovery not improving the standard of living for all. In addition the continual rise in the number of people on zero hour contracts or in self-employment does not protect everyone from low incomes, insecure work or long hours.

Whilst poverty is not confined to the jobless it is essential that the call for decent work also encompasses a living income for those not in paid work: Decent working conditions and decent provision for those not in paid work are indispensably and fundamentally two sides of the same coin.

The Catholic Church's tradition of teaching on good work in its social encyclicals has been an attempt, in very different social and political circumstances, to address the tension between work as a blessing and work as a curse; as life enhancing or as alienating. In the midst of all this change certain principles have emerged which

form the building blocks of Catholic Social teaching. They tend to be more philosophical than theological built on sound human reasoning to address the widest possible audience; all people of good will. Some of these key concepts, the priority of the human person, the common good and solidarity, can be recognised within the short extract of David McLoughlin's presentation at a recent public meeting organised by a local MCW group.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines decent work 'as productive work ... in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity'. A Statement of Catholic Inspired Organisations (13/06/13) supported the ILO's effort to promote work as a means of eradicating poverty and linking it to social protection. It called for social protection to safeguard workers and their families when unemployed or suffering ill-health with special concern being acknowledged for young people as well as migrant workers and their families. This same statement noted that "job quantity cannot be detrimental to job quality; work must be decent. Achieving decent work involves many and various organisations and people for example, Governments, employers, trades unions and activists." It is the latter that we illustrate in this Review. Alison, after an enquiry in her local MCW group, started to attend her trade union. Now with the support of her MCW group she is a work place TU representative and in taking on the concerns of her colleagues illustrates that one individual can try to have an impact on promoting decent work.

Why Vote: A Christian Response

The MCW B45 Group, having followed the Election Special Enquiry produced in the March 2014 MCW Review newsletter, decided to organise an open meeting. The chosen theme was "Why Vote?" particularly in relation to the



European Elections where they felt there was a particular degree of apathy towards casting a vote. Feeling it was important to encourage participation and highlight issues that were pertinent to the European ballot before putting any



final cross in place they invited David McLoughlin, Senior Lecturer in Theology, Newman University, to speak about why people of faith

should care about these elections.



The 28 people who attended also heard two members of the B45 group; Jane (left) and Alison talk briefly about their experiences

of being involved in action to increase the awareness of issues that matter to them.

This short report can only give a flavour of all that took place on the evening of Monday 12th May. However, it was felt to have been an excellent meeting with much food for thought. The issues

covered at the meeting were also relevant to the Local Elections taking place on the same day (Thursday 22nd May 2014) as well as the forthcoming General Election in 2015.

David began by emphasising that the outcome of the EU elections would shape the legislature of the EU for the next half-decade having major implications for those who lead the EU as well as our daily lives. The European Conference of Catholic Bishops, Christian Aid, the Baptist, Methodist and Reformed Churches had all issued statements encouraging Christians to go to the polling booths and to start engaging, during the run-up to the elections, in constructive dialogue with their MEP candidates.

Not least of the considerations as to why we should vote was our **freedom to do so** which had been hard won by the sacrifices of others.

Secondly those seeking office needed to be aware of issues which for most Christians were central to our concerns. For example, being aware of the collateral damage of the banking and economic crises. Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby have consistently drawn public attention to the plight of those already poor and vulnerable, the young and the disabled, not forgetting the growing number of "**new poor**" pushed into poverty by the crisis.

David went on to say that the approach of the churches is one of hope and a firm conviction in the possibility of a better future for all because of the belief that individuals, communities and even nation-states must be capable of putting aside particular interests in pursuit of **the common good**.

The **principle of solidarity** at the base of Catholic social teaching should be seen to govern policy at every level

across the EU. We have still to build a different Europe with solidarity at its heart. We can only do this in mutual support.

From a Christian perspective, underpinning all areas of socio-economic policy is a vision of humanity rooted in profound respect for **human dignity**. Europe is a continent on the move and **migration, internal and external**, impacts on the life of the individual and society. The responsibility for migrants and asylum seekers needs to be shared proportionately by member states. It is vital that treatment at the point of entry be humane, that human rights are scrupulously respected and every effort be made to secure successful integration into host societies within the EU.

It was noted that being a member state does make a difference. **Human rights and combating human trafficking** are being addressed through cross-border information sharing. Areas blighted by rural and urban poverty has received EU funding to help address problems. We benefit from **common transport systems, IT networks** and recognition of **educational qualifications** so that we can work abroad if we choose to do so. It has also been a force for **good in the lives of UK workers, particularly women** by pushing reluctant British Governments into adopting legislation including, equal pay, pro-rata rights for part-time work and improved maternity leave to name but a few. So much in the news over recent months, it is because of the EU that **Tax justice** legislation has increased transparency in how companies present their accounts whilst also calling for public registers of the real owners of companies and organisations.

As people of faith addressing first our own fellow believers we need to emphasise that the EU project should not be put at risk nor abandoned under current duress. It is essential that all of us – politicians, candidates, citizens, young and older should contribute constructively to fashioning Europe's future. We and our planet have too much to lose if the European project is derailed. It is essential that all of us go to the polling booths and cast votes in response to the promptings of an **informed conscience**.

The MCW 2014 Appeal

Thank you so much to all who have contributed to our appeal so far. We will keep you informed as to how the money is being spent. There are already plans to update our website in the autumn. A particular thanks to those who have taken the time to write to us to share their own experiences of being in either the YCW, or MCW, or their reflections on the elections and the difficult task facing those willing to put themselves forward for political office on whatever level. It was good to hear from you all.



The YCW National Executive Committee (NEC) wrote to the MCW to congratulate Paul Edwards on being a newly elected local councillor and Mary Foy for her re-election. The MCW NEC would like to extend their congratulation to Jude Kirton-Darling, who contributed to our Election Special March Review edition, on being elected an MEP.

In the last MCW Review it was reported that the European Co-ordination of the ECWM presented to a member of the European Parliament cards from members of the Portuguese Movement printed with the words, "Decent Work means to me" How would you finish this sentence? Please send us your response. Email mcworkers@aol.com or write to Jo O'Brien at the MCW HQ (Full Address below).

MCW Enquiry in Local Group Provokes Activism

The B45 MCW group is an ecumenical group which meets on a regular 4 to 6 weekly basis. They follow either a set enquiry or carry out a review on local issues which concerns one or more members.

Alison started to attend the group when it was newly formed. At one of their enquiry meetings, participants started to reflect on the implications of the latest re-organisation of the NHS, and the possible downgrading or even closure of a local hospital. Alison says that these discussions on the likely impact it would have (for both the community and hospital staff) encouraged her to find out more, and that her activist involvement “springs from that”.

As a worker in the NHS she agreed to attend the next public meeting to see what was happening and bring back the information to the group. Over the next few months Alison also became involved with the trade union in her place of work and ended up as a Workplace Rep.

For Alison, decent working conditions for everyone regardless of their job really matters. Working conditions and job security is something she appreciates has been hard won in the past and it remains important that they are maintained and developed for all. From this view point it is understandable why some public sector workers, like fire-fighters and teachers, are trying to protect what could be viewed by many

other working people as a privileged position. The social protection that some public sector workers hold (which is now under severe threat), can be seen as a standard for others to seek and work towards, rather than accept that a 'race to the bottom' in pay and working conditions is necessary and inevitable.

One element of work that concerns Alison is that of fairness of pay, and the need for everyone to be able to earn a living wage. Carers, for example, undertake incredibly important roles yet generally they are paid less than a living wage, and zero hours contracts are the norm. Whilst some parts of the media are quick to criticise levels of care (in some cases rightly so), little acknowledgement is given to the conditions of work that they have to tolerate. For Alison this is another side of the story which gets less publicity: the carers themselves are not necessarily shown compassion or care in their difficult role and can even be living in poverty because they only receive the minimum wage or less, and are not offered enough regular hours to live on.

Alison supports the living wage campaign in the name of the common good, to ensure hardworking people can live without being reliant on benefits, and to reverse the increasing income gap between rich and poor. Alison's mantra when asked why she had taken up these trade union reins was “you have to be in it to win it”.

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

Publisher: National Executive Committee

Editor: Paul Edwards

Movement of Christian Workers, St Joseph's, off St Joseph's Grove, London, **NW4 4TY**
Tel: 0208 203 6290 Email: mcworkers@aol.com Website: www.mcworkers.org