



Trade Unions International of the Metal Sector (TUI METAL) of the  
World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)

## CONVOCAION AND INVITATION to the INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MINING AND METAL WORKERS TRADE UNIONS

**19-20 Of May 2008, in the city of San Sebastian, Basque Country (Spanish State)**

Comrade workers:

THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE OF THE CONGRESS and the WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (WFTU) convenes affiliated and fraternal organisations to take part in this mega event of metal and mining workers.

### GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE MINING SECTOR

Minerals have been, and are, a raw material of great importance for industrial development. The struggle for the political and economic control of mining facilities has marked many phases of international confrontations and strategies to dominate peoples of the world, driven by the centres of capitalist and imperialist power.

This strategy of exhausting and exploiting resources has prevented many raw material producer countries from achieving balanced economic development; they have become mere suppliers to the major economies while they have to import all manufactured products. The paradox in which producer countries are sometimes net importers of minerals is even reached.

Despite progress in research and modern technologies, the human race still depends on basic mineral resources (iron, copper, zinc, etc.) for the productive cycle.

Mining is the first link in all productive chains and it is considered an activity that involves great hazards for the people who work in it. However, it is very profitable in economic terms for the owners or multinationals that run the mines. The highest investments in the world today are made in fossil fuels, metals and industrial minerals as the starting point of a manufacturing or handling chain in which profit margins or added value increase spectacularly, leading to great accumulations of capital.

With speculation in the markets, dependent economies are very vulnerable and can be affected at any time; they may even fall back while private profits are channelled to a number of international centres. These are, specifically, developed countries that consume the highest amounts of industrial minerals (aluminium, copper, nickel) and energy resources (oil, gas, coal).

Latin American and African countries have traditionally been attractive for mining, with Canada, Australia and the United States as the countries with the highest participation in terms of investment. For example, Latin America (Brazil, Chile and Mexico) is the leader in concentrates and metals (copper, aluminium, iron, silver and molybdenum), while Peru is the first world producer of silver followed by Mexico, Australia and China.

However, mining is carried out in the midst of serious economic and social contradictions. Large and medium-sized mining companies have taken over almost all the

natural resources, in contrast with the scant development of the affected nations and their peoples. The corporations always come out on top, but the social and economic situation of the communities or regions in which mining centres are located continues to worsen in terms of standard of living, poverty, unemployment, education, health and transport.

This offensive by the transnationals is part of a global strategy aimed at the hegemony of capital, which wishes to express itself in economic, geopolitical, cultural and, of course, military terms too.

This is why the workers' struggle for decent working conditions in many countries is linked to the demand for the nationalisation of facilities, or the intervention of the public authorities to impose conditions on the multinational owners, and to make progress in the economic and political sovereignty of peoples, nations or States.

**Mining and the environment** - The greed of the multinationals in the exploitation of resources, linked to an exclusive economic interest, is leading to serious impacts on the environment. Irrational exploitation and the enormous amount of waste products produced (mine tailings) cause pollution from heavy metals, and the leaching of minerals, damage from dust particles and chemical acid contamination are realities that have an effect on the overall health of the planet.

The large-scale destruction caused by mining, particularly from the inadequate use, exhaustion and pollution of water sources and the deterioration of the soil, the disappearance of forests and its effect on rivers, lakes and underground water, are collateral consequences that affect the living conditions of people in producing (i.e. plundered) countries.

## OVERVIEW OF THE METALLURGY SECTOR

The world capitalist market is dominated by transnational corporations that monopolise marketing/sales and prices, which impacts on the development of peoples. Metallurgy is a case in point. According to the UN, these corporations account for over half of world trade, and one-third corresponds to transfers of assets between different branches of multinationals. Two-thirds of international transactions of assets and services depend on the operations of these companies.

The 37 biggest transnationals in the USA account for 48% of the world's earnings. Together with Japan, Germany, the UK and France, transnationals from these countries obtain 79.4% of total earnings. This means that developed countries not only concentrate capital but also earnings/profits, often produced outside their countries.

Within this scenario two phenomena are characterising the evolution of the sector. On one hand, the concentration of finances and production in international groups that monopolise steel and iron, and on the other, the transfer of production (relocation) in companies that are derived from these commodities: the automotive sector, capital goods... the transnationals are moving to countries with low wage costs and labour regulations in the search for a level of competitiveness that will improve their earnings and profits.

In the process the big corporates want to take advantage of quitting easily with no or little cost when the market faces a crisis by closing down the units in developing countries. Their main principle is to earn maximum profit, protect the capital and leave the workers to their fate.

The basic metal industries (iron and steel, non-ferrous metals), metal products, machinery and capital goods, the aeronautical sector, shipbuilding, railways, the automotive sector... are very dynamic areas with a large number of derived processes. Each of these industrial subsectors has its own characteristic work processes, complexities and specific features for the development of industrial and military infrastructures.

The automotive sector plays a key role in the industrial profile of the western world. It is a capital-intensive and labour-intensive industry that is dominated by transnational companies. It is the sixth highest-earning industrial sectors in the world, after oil, chemicals-pharmaceuticals, computers, telecoms and food production. The sectors in the metal industry are also dynamic. Capital goods and machine tools continue to be dominated by developed countries, which puts the brake on access by other economies and peoples. Something similar happens in the case of the military industry.

## THE DOMINANCE OF TRANSNATIONALS AND PRIVATISATION POLICIES

The world economy is dominated by the transnationals and their subsidiaries. 65% of world trade is carried out through exchanges among these corporations, then there is a small part corresponding to commercial relations with other State sectors, while the so-called "free market" plays a minority role (15%) and the vast majority of national States are in a position of great weakness.

The transnationals are making progress in dominating strategic economic areas of nations. In the case of mining, metallurgy and metals, the transnationals operate with great facilities extended to them by neo-Liberal governments within the framework of policies imposed by the financial bodies behind imperialism, and this allows them to appropriate large tracts of land, together with their natural resources. The World Bank supports the indiscriminate extraction of oil, gas and minerals without the slightest evaluation of the social and environmental consequences.

Mining, metallurgy and metals are industrial sectors dominated by transnational capital, the result of privatisation policies carried out in almost all countries. The dominance of corporations is increased through privatisations, alliances and mergers that lead to an effective multinational monopoly. This situation needs to change, and the struggle should be organised against privatisation to stop, prevent, and even reverse the process.

## SITUATION AND RESPONSE OF THE WORKER

**Occupational health** – In mining, working conditions continue to be deplorable in almost all the countries of the world. Workers are exposed to high accident rates and deterioration in their health. Toxic dust and acidic gases that are handled, the unhealthy atmosphere with a lack of ventilation, levels of vibration, and extreme cold and heat cause serious illnesses or accidents, and a high price is paid in human lives.

It is not only a case of conventional work hazards. Occupational illnesses and new industrial pathologies seriously affect workers' health and that of their families. The processes involved in metalworking and the extraction and processing of metals create carcinogenic substances that are not immediately perceived but which ravage workers' health, leaving them completely unprotected and with serious repercussions on their children. This goes on while the owners of multinationals count the profits of their mines and/or companies.

In mining, then, as is generally the case in the metallurgy sector, hazard and health prevention continues to be considered as a cost, and there are no policies for investment in health and safety in the workplace. The workforce is exploited with a total lack of consideration in the interest of maximum profit.

**Working conditions** – In both mining and metallurgy working conditions continue to regress. Working hours, the way people are contracted, the guarantees included in a work contract or new regulations on the expiry of work contracts are configuring a model of labour relations in which the workforce is treated as if it were goods, with no consideration shown towards workers and their rights.

Insecurity in all forms, or the so-called *flexisecurity*, are instruments used by employers and multinationals to reduce costs, and particularly to have total power over contracting and the termination of labour relations. In other words, job quality (or a job with rights) is being weakened by the policies implemented by multinationals and regulations passed by the governments of most countries. Labour reforms in many countries continue to unbalance the relationship between capital and work through legislation that gives more unilateral and arbitrary power to companies in the field of labour relations.

This trend opens the field up to restructuring strategies, which (through mergers, acquisitions or alliances) take the form of drastic reductions in employment levels. The legalisation of massive layoffs for so-called 'economic reasons' has become standard practice in many mining and metallurgy multinationals.

The subcontracting and outsourcing strategies used by multinationals are also leading to lower wages/salaries for workers. The result is social dumping that favours lower costs and the deterioration of working conditions.

**Pay conditions** – Wage/salary levels continue to be insufficient in relation to the profits earned. In mining, exploitation and low wages affect all countries, although this is more marked in underdeveloped areas where workers continue to live in conditions that are close to poverty. In metallurgy there is a wide range of situations, depending on the type of company and country, but in all cases there is a trend to wage levels that reflect the exploitation of the workforce.

The pay policies of the transnationals are aimed at reducing their operating costs by continuously reducing the real value of wages/salaries, thus maximising their income and private utilities and increasing the margin of capitalist earnings.

It is necessary to point out the stabilisation of double or tripe wage/salary scales through the entry of women and young people into metallurgy companies.

**Trade union rights** – In this respect we find a very wide range of situations, from the persecution of trade unions and workers' representatives in many countries and companies, and also restrictions on trade union activities through a wide range of laws or regulations. It is clear that class oriented trade unions continue to be an enemy to be weakened and restricted by multinationals and States. At the same time, trade union organisations that cover up for the system and the economic orientation of the multinationals are rewarded.

In this scenario the need to coordinate and globalise trade union action with demands in terms of union rights, working conditions, etc. becomes a priority for the class oriented trade union movement that the WFTU wants to drive forward.

## THE TUI OF THE MINING AND METALLURGY INDUSTRY

The Trades Unions International (TUI) was created during the World Trade Union Conference held in London and Paris in 1945, which gave rise to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in the different industrial branches. The II World Trade Union Congress, held in Milan (Italy) in 1949, determined the *modus operandi* of the TUIs. As time went by, these became international organisations in their own right for trade union action, unity and solidarity among the organisations that made up each TUI, in conjunction with the WFTU.

In 1949 the International Union of Mining Trade Unions was set up in a Constituent Conference held in Florence (Italy). In 1982 the IX International Conference of Metallurgy Workers was held in Moscow.

This TUI extended its field of action in 1983 to energy workers. In 1984 the IX International Conference was held in Prague (Czech Republic). The TUI for Mining and Energy played an important role in solidarity with British miners, who were on strike in 1984-85. That year several mining organisations affiliated to different organisations decided to create the Miners' International Federation. In 1986 the TUI became the TUI of Energy Workers (TUI ENERGY); it later interrupted its activities. In 1998, in Havana (Cuba), it reorganised as the Trade Unions International of Energy, Chemical, Oil and Allied Industries (TUI EMCOAI).

The changes in Eastern Europe affected the WFTU, which started a process of recovery and reconstruction. The XIII World Trade Union Congress held in Damascus (Syria) in 1995 was a success; the XIV Congress was held in New Delhi (India) in 2005 and in 2005 the XV Congress was held in Havana (Cuba). The WFTU is currently in a new phase of struggle, and as a result is planning the strengthening of the different TUIs in a number of industrial branches.

In the congress held in Mexico in September 2007 the TUI EMCOAI was transformed to set up the TUI Energy and give way (at the same time) to the TUI of the Mining industry, Metallurgy, Steel, Metal and Allied Sectors (TUI METAL). The idea now is to create this new TUI so that the workers in these productive sectors can coordinate, cooperate and plan a global struggle to benefit the demands and objective of international class oriented trade unionism.

The new TUI METAL sets out to be a dynamic, modern, unitary, supportive and inclusive international organisation that can improve on previous experiences. It should not restrict itself to management or administration but should mobilise workers from all continents based on functional Statutes, clearly defined class principles, and a good programme of trade union action.

**International unity and solidarity** - Capitalist globalisation means the loss of trade union conquests and social rights and ideological and political submission to a model that is

presented to us as the only alternative. It is also an attack on the sovereignty and the right to self-determination of peoples that are subjected to the dictatorship of the large multinationals.

The TUI Metal should be an instrument in the class struggle that fully exercises solidarity among all its organisations and throughout the workers' movement worldwide.

For all these reasons, comrade workers from the Metallurgy and Mining industries, we invite you to the

## INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MINING AND METALLURGY TRADE UNIONS

To analyse the world situation of the mining and metal sectors, together with the struggles and alternative of the working class, The CONGRESS PREPARATORY COMMITTEE and the WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (WFTU) calls on affiliated and fraternal organisations to participate in this mega-event of mining and metal workers.

The Congress will take place on the following

### BASES

- 1- The International Congress of Mining and Metalworkers Trade Unions will be held on 19-20 May 2008 in the city of San Sebastián in the Basque Country (Spanish State), and will be hosted by the Basque National Trade Union LAB.**
- 2- The International Congress will cover the following issues:
  - a. The situation of the mining, metallurgy and metal sector at world level and in each country.
  - b. The situation of the workers at world level and in each country.
  - c. The discussion and approval of strategies for struggle and the Core Document put forward for the consideration of the Congress, together with the new Statutes of TUI METAL.
  - d. Election of the Executive Council of TUI METAL.
- 3- The International Congress will take place on the basis of the programme prepared by the local organising committee.
- 4- Each delegation will have up to 8 minutes to make its presentation. There will be simultaneous interpreting in the Basque, Spanish, English and French languages.
- 5- The sessions will be held in a Convention Centre arranged by the Basque National Trade Union LAB in the city of San Sebastián (Basque Country).
- 6- Regarding the registration and accreditation of congress delegates:
  - a. Each affiliated and fraternal organisation will be represented by 2 (two) delegates.
  - b. Travel expenses of delegates will be covered by their own organisation.
  - c. LAB, as organiser of the event, will cover the costs of infrastructure, accommodation, meals and local transport directly related to the Congress.
  - d. If an organisation wishes to enrol more than 2 delegates, all expenses for any delegates above 2 (two) will be paid by their respective organisations.
  - e. In the congress sessions each delegation will have 2 (two) votes.

**7. The Organising Committee of the Congress is:**

President: **Ardhendu Dakshi** CITU- INDIA  
Organisation: **Jesús Gete Olarra** LAB (Basque Country)  
Coordinator: **Valentin Pacho** WFTU  
Mobilisation Committee: **Sioulas Kiriakus** PAME (Greece)  
**Luis Castillo** (National Federation of Mining and Metalworkers of Peru)  
**Assis Flavio Da Silva** (Metalworkers-CSC-Brazil)

8. Delegations attending should confirm their participation in the Congress. People requiring a visa should contact LAB in good time (e-mail: [nazioartea@labsindikatua.org](mailto:nazioartea@labsindikatua.org))  
Fax: + 34 943 320 471, Tels.: + 34 943 326 782. Mobile: + 34 609 483 045.  
Postal address: Pokopandegi bidea, 9-2º, 20018 - San Sebastián – Basque Country (Spanish State). Website: [www.labsindikatua.org](http://www.labsindikatua.org).  
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WFTU [info@wftucentral.org](mailto:info@wftucentral.org), Tel: +30 210 921 4417 and Fax: +30 210 921 4517
9. Delegations should send the complete names of their representatives and their nationality, indicating their passport numbers and the dates of issue and expiry of these passports.

***Workers of the world, unite in defence of the immediate and historical interests of our class and of the peoples of the world!***

Fraternally

**Ardhendu Dakshi**  
CITU –India  
President, Organising  
Committee

**Georgie Mavrikos**  
Secretary-General, WFTU

**Rafa Diez Usabiaga**  
Secretary-General, LAB