

**Short report of the ICEM World Conference  
for the Rubber Industries  
6-7 April 2006  
Istanbul, Turkey**

**1. Opening:**

**1.1. The conference elected Ron Hoover as chair of the conference in the absence of Leo Gerard:** Brother Hoover apologised for the fact that Leo Gerard, the International President of the USW, was unavoidably absent because of an important meeting in the US with the AFL-CIO and 'Change to Win'.

**1.2. Abdullah Karacan, President of the host union Lastik-İş welcomed the delegates to Turkey:** He explained the 57 year old history of Lastik-İş and its longstanding international relationship with the ICEM. He also described the current difficulties concerning negotiations over a new collective bargaining agreement for the Turkish tyre companies and the risk of a strike.

**1.3 ICEM General Secretary Fred Higgs welcomed the delegates to the ICEM World Rubber Conference:** He drew attention to the gains achieved since the last World Conference and the need for increased coordination of trade unions activities globally. The process of globalization influenced the trade unions in nearly every country. Instead of gaining the same rights for all workers in the world, unions are faced with pressure from employers to accept reductions in workers rights in industrialized countries in light of competition from developing countries. The GS concluded by encouraging the conference to develop an effective strategy for the rubber sector.

**2. Essential developments and main challenges in the rubber industry**

Michael Wolters presented the rubber report and explained the main topics:

1. The Shortage of Natural Rubber in 2015
2. The growing Chinese market
3. New competitors (big tyre companies) from China, India and Russia
4. Growing Market in CEE
5. Higher demand for special tyres such as OTR and Earthmover
6. New technologies in the tyre and non-tyre business

In the following discussion a delegate from Japan asked about the ICEM policy concerning China and the Chinese trade unions and also expressed concern that there needed to be more information of the non-tyre rubber industry – drawing attention in particular to the rubber shoes and soles industry.

Delegates from South Africa and from Brazil expressed their concern about the increasing pressures from multinational corporations (MNCs) on trade unions. Both stressed the need for more coordination and communication to strengthen the labour movement.

A delegate from the TGWU, UK asked for the solidarity of the conference with the GMB in the UK and its struggle to save the jobs of its members in the Dunlop plant in Washington, Tyne and Wear, UK whose closure had been announced by the Goodyear management the previous day.

The French delegate from the FCE-CFDT said that 82% of the rubber sales in France were made by MNCs and that those employed in the sector is decreasing.

The delegates from the USW in the USA provided an update and additional information about their struggle against Continental Tyres of North America (CTNA) and its plant in Charlotte.

The ICEM General Secretary and industry officer then responded to the various questions.

### **3. Global Framework Agreements and Global Union Networks**

The General Secretary explained the background to and aims of the ICEM Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) and also addressed the challenges faced by unions in setting up and administering the ICEM global union networks if they are to be effective and sustainable. He stressed in particular that to work in networks does not mean organising meetings; they can be successful through working with email contacts which allow for much more frequent contact and interaction than would be possible through meetings.

### **4. Panel: Networks and Global Agreements**

**Bernd Schneider**, Chair of the EWC of Freudenberg

**Ron Hoover**, Executive Vice-President Rubber/Plastic USW

**Mitsuo Nagumo**, President of Japanese Rubber Workers' Union Confederation

**Cyrille Poughon**, Member of EWC of Michelin

Michael Wolters asked Bernd Schneider and Cyrille Poughon to explain the work of the European Works Councils (EWCs) in their companies.

Bernd explained the history and structure of the Freudenberg EWC. The main problem in the first 5-6 years was to find a way to accommodate the different industrial relations cultures in the various countries. Nowadays, the EWC seeks contact with workers representatives in Poland, Romania and Turkey. Therefore the EWC needs the help of the national trade union as well as support from EMCEF and ICEM. The specific structure of production at Freudenberg allows the company to shift production within 24 h from one country to another. At the moment, India is a big target region for Freudenberg.

Cyrille covered the economic situation at Michelin and the specific structure of the EWC. Every member of the EWC has the right to have 5 days of paid training for EWC matters. The EWC has initiated an occupational health, safety and environment (OHSE) survey in 7 truck tyre plants. As one result, the company granted the EWC special health and safety training for every sub-contract worker on the Michelin sites in Europe to decrease the figure of injuries.

Mitsuo Nagumo reported on the Bridgestone network and its steering committee, which meets every year. The main goal of the global union network is to improve the OSHE in each region, because this is a topic which is of interest for all trade unions. As an example of the success of this work, Mitsuo mentioned the installation of one employee in each Bridgestone plant, who is responsible for health and safety and various HIV/AIDS projects.

Ron Hoover told the story of the Goodyear global union network. Unfortunately, the administrator of the network had retired some months ago. The USW had helped the management to save the company from bankruptcy. The USW had signed an agreement with Goodyear, which allows the USW to nominate one candidate for the board of Goodyear. In the US the union also negotiated an agreement with the company called "true neutrality agreement" which is designed to ensure that the management won't use union busting methods, if the trade union tries to organize a Goodyear plant in the US. The USW had also produced several issues of a "global solidarity newsletter" for all Goodyear unions in the world.

Bernd Schneider explained his experiences with the GFA between ICEM, IG BCE and Freudenberg. At the beginning the management in the US-sub-sidiaries had not addressed problems of union busting, and the management in Germany doesn't pay much of attention to the agreement which is still not mentioned on the Freudenberg website. OSHE is a main topic of the management and the shop stewards, works councils and trade unions world wide; this should be improved.

At the end, Michael asked all participants of the panel to mention two main targets to improve the work of their described institutions.

**GUN Bridgestone:** Global agreement regarding health and safety

**GUN Goodyear:** Global agreement regarding Labour rights and OSHE

**Michelin:** It would be better, if the EWC could influence important decisions of the management before a plant gets in economic trouble.

**GFA Freudenberg:** Get in touch with other branches to show the close synergies between several branches, e.g. car producer and automotive sector. Getting more information and improving communication about hazardous substances.

After the panel the General Secretary summarised the experiences from the ICEM. Each global union network needs an administrator; every GFA included the US and this would continue; ICEM GFAs differ from some agreements with other GUFs in that the ICEM GFAs are designed to be truly global rather than simply 'international';

if there is not enough money for translation of documents, unionists should consider using the translation machines on the web, that – in the case of simple communications - can improve understanding between countries and languages.

## **5. Women in the rubber industry**

The General Secretary addressed the question of the women in the rubber sector and the challenges they face. He said that the main project of the ICEM Women's Committee was to fight for "equal pay for work of equal value".

## **6. Contract and agency labour**

The General Secretary went into some detail about the recent activities of the ICEM regarding contract and agency labour. In January 2006 the General Secretary proposed the ICFTU, the TUAC and the GUFs cooperate on a joint project on this matter and all of them agreed. A number of delegates took the floor and agreed with the need for a strong policy to deal with this problem, because of an increase of contract and agency workers all over the world. They also agreed on the need to organise these workers and to try to get collective bargaining agreements for them. There was unanimity on the need to work on this matter.

## **7. Evaluation of the questionnaire**

In a response to a question about the result of the questionnaire, Michael Wolters explained he had only received 13 responses and this was insufficient to show a representative overview of the sector. Those unions, that had answered expressed their concern about the increase of contract labour or explained how they had resolved this problem.

## **8. Health, safety and environment in the rubber industry**

Reg Green presented the main challenges in the field of health and safety in the rubber industries and explained the typical diseases and health problems in this sector. He also showed how to deal with these challenges and offered the support of the ICEM, if requested. It was also important to use the existing Global Framework Agreements regarding OSHE, as well as achieve new ones and improve the work regarding occupational health and safety of the current global union networks.

## **9. Action plan for the future**

The General Secretary proposed a 5-point action plan for the next four years, which was accepted by the delegates unanimously. The action plan includes: 1. Audit of existing networks, 2. Strengthening of OSHE in the Global Framework Agreements,

3. Priority of contract and agency labour, 4. Dialogue with MNCs in the rubber sector to discuss new GFA (target companies: Continental and Michelin);

The delegates further agreed unanimously 2 resolutions. One of them declared support for Lastik-İş in its bargaining round with the multinational tyre companies; the other expressed solidarity with the unions and their members in the UK and Poland in their fight to save jobs at two Goodyear plants targeted for closure in the near future as announced by the Goodyear management shortly before the conference began.

The full text of the action plan and the two resolutions is attached.

#### **10. Election of the chair of the ICEM rubber industry section**

Leo Gerard from the USW was nominated for re-election and the delegates unanimously elected him as the chair of the ICEM rubber section for the next four years.