

ILO / a course in Turin on information and rights **Work can be reported better**

Original article written by Maurizio Minnucci and published in *Rassegna Sindacale* (Trade Union Review) on 25 October 2007

How many of us know that in the world there are 13 million people doing forced labour? How many of us know about the many “free zones” like Indonesia or North Korea, where there is no trade union freedom? Or of the fate suffered by hundreds of journalists whom various regimes found “awkward”? Not many. The ILO (International Labour Organization) *is* aware, and it has organized a course on communicating labour rights for media professionals. The aim is to generate synergy between the media and the United Nations on the subject of human rights.

The workshop is to take place in Turin from 29 October to 2 November, with 29 journalists, most of them from developing countries, taking part. They will bring to it their own experience of how hard it still is, in many places, to provide information freely. Afterwards, three “exemplary” cases will go directly to the United Nations and thence, it is hoped, to the attention of public opinion.

During the course presentation, held on Thursday 25 October at the headquarters of the FNSI (the Italian journalists’ trade union), several people stressed the strength of the link between information rights and labour rights. It is shown by the fact that the number of trade unionists and the number of journalists who suffer all kinds of repression and torture in countries with dictatorial regimes always coincide. But it also happens that silence on labour issues can be attributed to the media themselves, at least in western countries. That is according to Cecilia Brighi of the CISL International, who points out how what is happening in Burma has filled our newspapers and television news reports in the last few weeks: “It’s a good thing they are talking about it now. But protests by workers and peasants have really been going on for years. It’s just that now you’ve got the monks in their robes – much more attractive to the TV stations. All too often the media tend to ignore events if they don’t have certain features. And the world of work never seems to have them.”

The ILO’s objective is precisely that of equipping the world of information with tools and knowledge with which to report on work as well as possible. “The ILO produces a lot of material on the subject,” says Alessandro Chiarabini of the ILO Turin Centre, “We have data bases that are kept constantly up-to-date and a study centre that focuses on international labour standards. Last but not least, a global report on rights, which we publish every year. They are all useful tools for anyone who wants to talk about these issues.”

“Journalism is going through a very difficult time. In Italy, we have the problem of renewing our contract; in other countries, there are much graver issues. Initiatives like these are welcome,” says FNSI General Secretary, Paolo Serventi Longhi, showing how the union thoroughly approves of the initiative, “I’m thinking first of all of repression, which is at unsupportable levels these days: thousands of journalists around the world have somehow been reduced to silence, and then vanish into thin air. We have to do everything possible,” he concludes, “so that the media spend less time on political sideshows and more time on social issues and human rights.”