

C O N T E N T S

Page 1:
Trade Unions in action: Call Centre Action Month Special;

Page 2:
Call Centre Action Month & Global Union Solidarity;

Page 3:
Telecom Sector News;

Page 4:
Regulation and Trade Union Response;



TRADE UNIONS IN ACTION:

CALL CENTRE ACTION MONTH SPECIAL

Thousands of workers stood up for their rights!

Thousands of workers from 20 unions in 20 countries on 6 continents made Call Centre Action Month a great success.

Call Centre Action Month exemplifies what workers and their unions can do when they come together to campaign at the global level and to advance their work at home.

Tell Telefonica post cards have been signed by thousands of workers in Brazil, Mexico, Ireland, the USA, Swaziland, Uganda, South Africa, Australia, France, Switzerland, and in other places around the globe.

Many more have signed UNI's online petition to call on Telefonica to respect its workers rights and its global agreement with UNI.

UNI also released its research report *A World on the Phone* in October in English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese and Dutch. The report charts the day-to-day experiences of call centre workers in Latin America, the United States, Australia, Europe and Africa.



Ireland

The Communications Workers' Union visited call centres throughout the country, kicking off its campaign in Vodafone call centres in Dundalk and Dublin, meeting with around 1,000 workers.

CWU has a collective agreement with Vodafone, who respects its workers' fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. The relationship between CWU and Vodafone is an example of what can be achieved by working in partnership.

Vodafone workers signed post cards in solidarity with their colleagues at O2, a subsidiary of Telefonica.

Mexico

STRM brought workers all over the country together. The union visited call centres, asked workers to sign post cards, held seminars on workers rights and the importance of independent trade unions and shared organising strategies with other unions in Latin America.



On 28 October workers and their unions marched to the main square in Mexico

City, the Zocalo, demanding respect for their right to join independent and democratic unions.

Colombia

USTC visited many Telefonica workplaces, distributing material, providing information to workers and asking people to sign *Tell Telefonica* post cards.



Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist, with 49 unionists assassinated there in 2008. Many workers fear retribution for union activity, and despite this environment—workers signed *Tell Telefonica* post cards in the hope of bettering their conditions.

The Philippines

UNI Liaison Council & local unions are educating call centre workers about their rights.



Belgium

Call centre unions promoted their "Needs more hands?" campaign this year during call centre action month.



The campaign focuses on key issues for workers in the industry such as long and unsociable working hours which are incompatible with family and personal life. The union is calling for a change to rostering systems which currently do not provide enough time and flexibility for workers to plan their private commitments.

For more information on the campaign (in French) see the blog link below:



<http://www.cne218call-center.blogspot.com/>

Australia: First collective agreement for call centre workers in the taxi industry

The Australian Services Union (ASU) and its members have reached a collective agreement for call centre workers at the Black and White Cabs taxi company.



The agreement is a breakthrough for call centres in the taxi industry and is the result of many months of hard work by ASU members and activists.

Benefits include:

- Increased pay for Friday and Saturday night work

- Improved processes for rostering
- A grievance procedure including conciliation and arbitration

The ASU has been chosen as the Bargaining Representative and the collective agreement was supported unanimously in a ballot of union members. The ASU will continue in its efforts to improve conditions for workers in other taxi industry call centres.

Canada: A new union for call centres



The CEP in Canada has applied for union recognition after a majority of 1,450 call centre workers at the Bell Mobility company signed union cards indicating their support.

Bell Mobility is one of Canada's largest mobile phone companies and operates a number of call centres. This application comes after many months of hard work by CEP and union activists, organising around issues such as processes for work scheduling, questions of seniority and sick leave.

CEP Director of Special Projects, Alan Tate, says that "*hundreds of Bell Mobility employees have been involved in helping to build a union for their co-workers and we believe a majority of these workers have now decided they need a greater voice in their workplace and real representation to help solve some of their workplace issues.*"

Canada's Industrial Labour Relations Board will examine the application and if it determines that a majority of the workers support union representation, it will issue an order recognising CEP as the bargaining agent for all call centre workers at Bell Mobility in Ontario.

United States

CWA held its annual Customer Service Professional Appreciation Day on 21 October.



The union visited call centres around the country, celebrating the work of customer service workers and contributing to the global union campaign by asking workers to sign thousands of *Tell Telefonica* post cards.



UNI Africa: Organising with global agreements

Union leaders from all over the continent discussed future strategies, particularly in relation to building union membership, activity and power through campaigns to make and to implement global agreements with multinational employers.

MTN is the largest mobile telecommunications operator in Africa, with operations in 21 African countries, 15,000 employees and 1 million customers. UNI has established an alliance of trade unions organising at MTN which took decisions this week to intensify and to better coordinate the organising efforts between countries.

The Committee also considered other influential multinational players in the sector as targets for global agreement campaigns.

Following the successful merger of the IBITS and Telecom sectors in Europe in September and the creation of the UNI ICTS sector (information and communication technology and services), UNI Africa's Telecom Committee adopted a resolution to consider re-forming the sector as ICTS in its own region. This will be further discussed at the UNI Africa Telecom Conference in 2010.

France Telecom staff suicides continue

25 France Telecom workers have taken their own lives since January 2008.

There is mounting public controversy around this issue in France, where unions say "management by terror" and "moral harassment" create risks for staff health and well-being.

The company's chief financial officer echoed these concerns, stating that a lack of separation between work and home life causes stress for workers.

The French government, which still owns 27% of the company, called for a response.

FT's CEO's Didier Lombard has halted further management reforms and restructuring planned for end 2009 and has set up a telephone counseling service for staff.

The manager of FT's operations in its home country has been replaced.

Vodafone: Cost cuts & controversy

Vodafone announced a raft of cost cutting measures following a year of poor performance in the stock market.

The shares are underperforming due to the company's falling revenue in markets like the UK, Spain and Turkey, and low returns from investments in India and Africa.

In India, Vodafone is facing a price war, a USD2bn tax bill and may be forced to buy back shares from another investor.

At the same time, the government of Ghana says it will renegotiate Vodafone's USD900m (GBP550m) purchase of its primary telecom provider Ghana Telecom.

The announcement followed a government review of the deal in which it only received a fraction (less than USD300m) of the purchase price expected from Vodafone due to a series of complicated financial transactions.

The dispute, in which the UK's Serious Fraud Office has shown an interest, is problematic given that Vodafone sees Ghana as a key part of its strategy to expand in emerging markets.

Vodafone denies any wrongdoing.

Telefonica fights for Italy

Telefónica is facing political pressure in Italy over its 10% stake in the country's leading telecoms provider.

Telefónica is the largest shareholder in Telco, an Italian holding company that owns a controlling stake in Telecom Italia.

Paolo Romani, an Italian communications minister, said last week that the nation's telecommunications infrastructure should stay under local control and that he considers Telefónica's 42% stake in Telco to be a "relevant problem". Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has expressed a similar view.

Telco's shareholders will decide this month whether to extend an investor agreement which provides for Telco's existence.

Barbados: Crisis cuts for Cable & Wireless workers

Cable & Wireless is seeking to cut costs by reducing staff numbers throughout the Caribbean region. The company plans to retrench several hundred workers, which is likely to have a devastating effect given the low population and small economies of in the region.

The company made these plans known when it issued a series of around 100 redundancy notices to workers in Barbados, failing to comply with the proper process under the labour relations regime, and breach-

ing its collective agreement with staff.

Following an international union response, including a letter from UNI to the company's CEO in the UK, Cable & Wireless is now complying with proper process for redundancy.

However, the union says that the company is abusing the "financial crisis" as an opportunity to take these cost-cutting measures, since Cable & Wireless continues to make tremendous profits and to pay company executives exorbitant and record bonuses.

Bharti-MTN merger talks fail again

Bharti Airtel, one of the largest players in India was in merger talks with MTN, the largest provider of telecommunications services in Africa.

Talks expired on 30 September, without the parties reaching agreement, derailed by disagreements on the company structure.

The deal would have created the world's 4th largest mobile phone operator and an emerging markets giant with annual sales of USD20 billion and 200 million mobile phone subscribers throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Bharti has expressed its hope to keep discussions open and that the South African government will review its position.

This is the 3rd time in 18 months that merger talks between MTN and an Indian operator have failed.

T-Mobile and Orange seal deal in UK

Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile UK and France Telecom's Orange signed an agreement to seal the deal to merge their British operations.

This joint venture will be the leading mobile phone operator in the UK with 37% market share, pushing current leader, Telefonica's O2 to the second spot with 27% and the local company, Vodafone to an embarrassing 3rd place in its home market with only 25%.

EU: Telecom legislation passed

On November 5 2009, EU ministers reached an agreement on the EU Telecoms Reform. The reform strengthens consumer rights to information and quality of service, facilitates high-speed internet broadband connections to all Europeans and establishes a European body of telecoms regulators to complete the single market for telecoms networks and services.



The reforms are expected to become law in early 2010. EU countries will have 18 months to incorporate the new provisions into their national legislation.

This is the only part of the EU Telecom Package which has been decided on. Other issues such as the recognition of trade unions and workers as stakeholders remains under discussion.

USA: Connecting libraries



CWA is continuing its research and campaigning around issues of quality internet access in the USA.

Throughout 2009, the non-profit organisation, Connected Nation surveyed libraries and library users across the country. Single parents, minorities, low-income residents, and adults with disabilities rely disproportionately on the public library as their primary source of internet access.

Library internet users search for jobs online, communicate with government officials, engage in local and community events, and access healthcare information.

This means that libraries play an important role in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable members of modern society are able to access the information which can improve their quality of life.

CWA and its allies in the fight for equality in relation to internet access are supporting calls to the US Federal Communication Commission to provide fibre optic connectivity to "anchor institutions" such as libraries to ensure high-quality internet access.

UNI europa ICTS calls for a new Green Deal

91 participants from 17 countries gathered on 28-30 October in Helsingor, Denmark, to discuss the role of ICT trade unions regarding climate change.

UNI europa affiliates discussed future skills and training needs, technological aspects of greening the workplace or introducing green ICT into collective bargaining with representatives from the EU Commission, the European Parliament, NGOs and the ICT industry.

The Forum called upon participants at the Copenhagen climate summit for more ambitious CO2 emission reduction targets, greater investment in Green ICT and infrastructure to support economic recovery, create new jobs and facilitate the transition to a low carbon economy.

Forthcoming UNI Telecom Events:

23-24.11.2009

South Asian Committee meeting, Dhaka.

24-25.11.2009

ICTS Steering Group meeting, Brussels.

08.12.2009

SD Plenary Session 2, Brussels.

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