



The crisis of the capitalist system

by Michalis Papanikolau,
member of the UITBB secretariat



The profound crisis currently affecting the capitalist system is not the result of a mere hiccup

nor, as some would have us believe, of the fact that major figures in the economy have made mistakes in their actions or errors of analysis. The cause of the crisis lies in the very nature of a system whose basic aim is the adulatory pursuit of profit, leading to hardship for the majority and boundless wealth for a minority.

The globalisation process we have witnessed over recent years shows that the aim of big business which controls the big multinationals is to

increase its share in the wealth created, and also that it has succeeded in grabbing a large share of the profits generated.

This process is always carried out to the detriment of the workers, who are the vast majority of every country and who suffer considerably as a result of wage cuts and the rise in unemployment and all the problems these bring for them. Still, this isn't a problem for the ruling classes, who throw caution to the winds – on the pretext of "boosting the economy" – and demand ever greater sacrifices and further concessions from the workers.

We only need to look at the recent history of the European Union to find telling examples. Those in power have tried and in most cases succeeded, again by referring to "boosting the economy", to introduce flexible working and reduced social protection, irrespective of the disastrous

consequences their policies have for the workers.

In the developing countries where the trade union movement is particularly weak, the situation is especially serious, even tragic. Working conditions in those countries are a disgrace to humankind. The multinationals exploit the nations' natural resources, reducing the people to poverty and hunger. Faced with this unacceptable situation every person who values human dignity, every progressive person, is duty bound to join the struggle to change the lives of the people.

As an organisation based on the class struggle, whose sole objective is to serve the noble cause of all workers, the UITBB must play its full role in this battle which will not be easy. It is time for all workers and progressive forces to make a determined effort to present a united front in the struggle for a better life and a fairer society.

The UITBB condemns the massacre in Gaza (extracts)

The Trades Union International of Workers in the Construction, Wood and Building Materials Industries, UITBB, representing millions of building and wood workers on all continents strongly condemns and repudiates the massacre of Palestinians carried out by the armed forces of Israel, which invaded Gaza.

The world is witnessing a hideous crime against humanity committed by the Israeli invaders with the open support of the United States administration and the European Union against a people who have suffered a criminal blockade imposed by Israeli leaders, leading to a

humanitarian crisis where the population is deprived of its basic human rights to food, health and shelter.



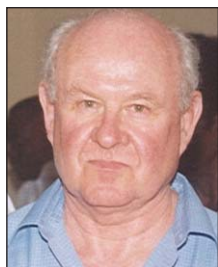
The International Community and the United Nations have the moral obligation to act immediately using all means to halt the Israeli aggression and to force Israel to withdraw its troops from Palestinian land.

The UITBB expresses its firm solidarity with the heroic people of Palestine and calls on building and wood workers around the world to express their strongest protest against this barbaric aggression, to demand:

- The immediate end of the war
- The withdrawal of all Israeli troops from Gaza
- The establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the borders of 1967 with

THE WORLD CRISIS – WHAT NOW?

by Robert Brun (UITBB)



The causes — a reminder:

Over the last 18 years the world gross domestic product (GNP) was multiplied by 2 and the money supply

for finance and trade by 6.5. Following the Asian crisis of 1997-98 and the recession of 2001, the United States flooded the market with money it created, which in turn unleashed the speculation on property loans.

For speculation to be possible, three elements are required: a large amount of money in wide circulation, the necessity for high profit margins and a product in great demand on which to speculate. The United States provided the money supply, the technological revolution allowed interest rates to rise to 15% and higher, and there was a surge in demand for housing. To these elements of speculation must be added the fact that growth began to slow. In fact, consumer spending is the main component of growth, yet for 30 years social deregulation policies and job insecurity have been undermining purchasing power. In such conditions debt became the driving force behind growth; in the United States in 2007 it represented 93% of GNP.

Let us leave the conclusion on causes to the experts, in this case noted by market analysts in a document for the authorities responsible for monitoring operations in 2006: "We are in the process of creating a monster. Let's hope that we shall be rich and retired before this house of cards collapses!"

The effects:

For twenty years poverty in the world's 20 most developed countries (OECD) has been growing. In the USA 25 million families have lost their homes since March 2008, 10,000 tenants a day have been evicted since September, thousands of pension funds have gone up in smoke and 29% of people approaching the age of 70 are still working.

Worldwide, a child under the age of 10 starves to death every 5 seconds, 100,000 people a day die of malnutrition and 923 million people are critically under-nourished on a

permanent basis. The price of basic necessities rose by 50% over the first 7 months of 2008.

The impact of the financial crisis on the real economy, the creation of wealth, is at present a matter for guesswork. It is thought that 2009 and 2010 will be the most difficult, with probably a further 20 million losing their jobs.

The crisis has also overturned the doctrines of the market economy. The myth of a self-regulating market as a factor of growth and improved living standards for all no longer holds water. The same applies to the idea of an international management of the economy that would take over from the United States, whose importance would consequently shrink. Steps should have been taken to find a political solution, so decisions would be taken by nation states. The doctrines of the IMF and the World Bank have also failed. It is now obvious that structural reforms and privatisation schemes only make things worse, depriving individual countries of the means of effective action. The question now arises of who controls the money market, economic and social policies and the right to protect national production, taking different levels of productivity into account. In fact, the economies that are best surviving the crisis and its effects are those least dependent on the world economic system. People cannot, however, expect that capitalist governments will draw lessons of progress from the present crisis. The system is based on money making more money, which inevitably widens the gap between rich and poor and lays the basis for the next crisis.

The Washington summit on 15th November 2008, although it criticised the self-regulating market, came up with no solutions and put off any decisions to the next summit in March 2009 whose only concern, we can be sure, will be to perpetuate the system. The only people we can count on are ourselves!

What now?

At the social level, we are more than ever justified in demanding guarantees for the workers – guarantees for their wages, jobs, social protection, working conditions, freedom of association, and so on. We do not want to suffer the effects of the crisis.

At the political and economic level, we are justified in demanding a ban on company relocations, an end to tax havens, public control of capital movements and the steering of money towards the real economy in order to meet the social needs of jobs, training, housing, social protection, the development of public services, and so on.

Mario Huaman Rivera, general secretary of the civil engineering union of Peru, expressed it well in an open letter to his country's prime minister: "...Do we as citizens not have the right to a political opinion? We shall defend the rights and democratic freedoms that we have won through struggles and sacrifices ...". And in the present circumstances, the rights and democratic freedoms that we need to win!

The UN general assembly has fixed 8 goals to be achieved by 2015:

- eradicating poverty and hunger
- providing basic education to all children of school age
- promoting equality between the sexes and autonomy for women
- reducing infant mortality
- improving the health of mothers
- fighting AIDS, malaria and other epidemics
- drawing up a world agreement on development.



What a heavy crisis!

The budget for these projects has been set at 16.4 billion dollars a year for 5 years, i.e. 82 billion in total. In comparison, the 27 countries of the EU freed 1,700 billion euros* in 2008 for inter-bank lending, and for the Iraq war alone the USA is spending 400 million

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4th World Urban Forum – UN / Habitat

The 4th World Urban Forum was held in Nanjing, China, from 3rd to 7th November 2008, organised by the UN agency Habitat. In the light of the recent sub-prime mortgage crisis and against the background of worldwide economic and financial crisis, the forum was able to put forward strong guidelines for housing policies based on the lessons from these crises.

UITBB President John Sutton attended the forum and gave us an interview:



Q. The sub-prime crisis in USA — one of the factors that unleashed the financial and economic crisis — fully revealed the mechanisms of

speculation, i.e. artificially increasing the demand on one product so as to push the prices upwards and generate substantial gains (fees and capital growth) for those manipulating the

market. Did the recent World Urban Forum (WUF) meeting in China (which you attended) analyse this problem?

A. As far as I could see, the WUF generally avoided substantial debate or commentary about the big issues such as the global financial crisis and the US sub-prime housing mess which kicked off the eventual world financial contagion.

It's true to say some experts touched on these issues in a pretty low-key way in some of the various seminars and workshops – however, in general I don't think the WUF provided sufficient commentary or the requisite urgency commensurate with the size of the problem.

Too many of the participants at the WUF seemed to me to be technicians concerned with the mechanics of housing finance or housing construction, rather than seeing themselves as agitators and political fighters for the urgent need for realignment in economic and political power in our unjust world.

Q. Housing is a basic human right and need, in the same way as food. Don't you think that housing should be exempt from speculation and be a key focus of public policy aiming at offering social rental housing on a widespread basis?

A. Indeed housing and the right for

human beings to live in decent dwellings is a basic human need which a civilized society should meet.

Unfortunately, because capitalism is not civilized it allows some humans to live in luxury while many others are housed inadequately or are homeless.

The WUF seems to me to be an event that exhibits the general strengths and weaknesses of all United Nations organisations or agencies.

It is concerned to discuss and develop ideas and proposals to spread decent housing and accommodation, but it mostly looks at the solutions through the prism of the capitalist market place. Hence the major tool in vogue at the WUF meeting in Nanjing seemed to be a current capitalist favourite called the Public Private Partnership (PPP).

This funding and delivery mechanism for public projects like housing developments and large-scale public works has developed a bad name in many countries, where it has become synonymous with merchant banks and property developers raiding the public purse, rather than efficient planning and construction which was the initial promise held out.

Overall the WUF seems a mecca for urban planners and NGOs but is hamstrung by the prevailing capitalist political economy which still holds sway in our world today.

The world crisis ...

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dollars a day, i.e. nearly 1,500 billion a year.

In order to deal with the crisis, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has recommended a rise in budget expenditure and temporary tax cuts of 120,000 billion dollars worldwide – 2% of world GNP.

Sub-prime: Housing loans to households without checks on their credit rating. The repayment rates are fixed for the first few years and variable thereafter.

Leverage Buy-Outs (LBO): Operations by which a successful company can be bought on credit with extremely low interest rates.

Securitization: Mechanism by which a loan originally recorded under “bad debts” can be turned into a security.

* **Rate of exchange: 1 euro = 1.369 US dollars**

From the UITBB programme for 2009

● **Secretariat:** January 2009 in Paris and June in Geneva

● **Executive Committee:** Second half of 2009

● **Regional meetings:**

Europe: 4-5 May, Canary Islands

Asia: 14-15 March in Indonesia. 7th regional meeting of construction workers' unions of the Asia-Pacific region

Africa: 13-16 May, Bamako, Mali: regional seminar organised by UITBB in cooperation with ILO/ACTRAV.

Topic: OHS and social protection of building workers

Latin America: 09-20 March, Training course jointly organised

with Flemacon, the construction workers' union of Cuba and the WFTU regional office.

● **Women's Committee:**

Implementation of the proposals and recommendations made at the Women's Committee meeting, 25-26 November 2008 in Canberra, establishing a network of national contact points for organising women in the construction sector

● **Newsletter:** Publish 3 editions

● **Website:** Continue the efforts to improve the quality of the website in order to make it an efficient working tool for UITBB affiliates and the broader public.

● **ILO:** To take part in the 28th Session of the ILC in June 2009 in Geneva

AFRICA

On 25th October every year — focus on compliance with norms for health and safety at work

Excerpts from the statement by African trade unions affiliated to the UITBB

African trade unions in the construction, wood and allied industries affiliated to the Trades Union International of Workers in the Building, Wood, Building Materials and Allied Industries (UITBB-WFTU) have decided to make 25th October every year a day of information, action and challenging the authorities to achieve compliance with international labour norms, in particular those on health and safety at work.

The spirit of Convention 98 is being flouted in many countries, where governments set up their own trade unions to work with, refusing to discuss with independent and genuinely representative organisations.

Threats against and even the imprisonment of trade union leaders for going on strike are common currency in many countries. The same applies to the non-ratification of Convention 183 on the protection of maternity, even though our construction industry is employing a growing number of women.

We call on all African unions in our trades, irrespective of their international affiliation, to make this day a success by choosing those actions best adapted to their own situation and experience.

United in support of our rights and dignity we can win!

NIGER



Abdoulaye Hamidou

On three days – 7th and 25th October and 7th November – Synnbaroutes (union of construction and road building workers) mobilised workers and their unions, liaising with their

centre, the USTN, and joining with the CNT. The meetings held with workers highlighted the low wages, the abuse

of sub-contracting and temporary jobs, the non-declaration of many workers to the national social security office, the absence of personal protective equipment and the lack of compliance with minimum labour norms, which explains the recurrent collapse of buildings.

Following those three days, a list of grievances was sent to the government, demanding compliance with the norms of decent labour conditions and especially in support of jobs, workers' rights, social protection, social dialogue and the urgent establishment of a collective agreement. On the days themselves interviews were also broadcast on the radio.

CAMEROON

FENTEDCAM used 25th October to express its views in the media on norms for health and safety at work.

The wood workers' union FENSYTEIFCAM intervened with the prime minister on the same subject.



Cameroon 25th October — (top) the wood workers FENSYTEIFCAM group which intervened with Prime Minister and (below) reading their declaration.

BENIN

A press conference was held on 24th October. In Cotonou on 25th October, a wreath was laid at the monument to the dead in honour of construction and wood workers, followed by a march from the labour exchange to the ministry to hand in the union's demands for compliance with international labour norms.

In Abomey a rally and a meeting were held, and the same demands were presented to a manager at the department of labour.

SENEGAL



Assane Diop

A meeting was organised, attended by the UTS general secretary, brother Ibrahim Sylla, to explain the aims of this day.

The general secretary of the national construction union proposed that the day be extended by a week of action with general meetings in workplaces and petitions sent to the national assembly and to employers, and that an overall assessment be made of the action in mid-December. The proposal was adopted by the participants.

TOGO

A conference was organised on health and safety at work. The 2,700 serious accidents that occurred in 2007-2008, including 102 deaths, were deplored.



Obim Ama Kafui

The conference set itself the task of organising a publicity campaign, a demonstration and a sit-in at the labour ministry in order to bring this scourge to an end.

WOMEN – EQUALITY

Dynamic meeting in Canberra, Australia, on 25th and 26th November 2008

Ever since the last UITBB Congress a process has been under way to ensure that the place of women in the construction, wood and building materials sectors and trade unions has been given proper consideration by the unions of our industries.

The purpose of the Canberra meeting was to confirm the need for a women's committee and to define its role and work. The wealth of information and proposals that emerged during the meeting cannot be summed up in a single page, so we have decided in this issue to give you an overall view of the meeting as a whole, together with the proposals and resolutions, and in future issues to publish extensive excerpts of the participants' contributions.

You can also find the essentials of the meeting on the UITBB website – www.uitbb.org

The meeting was attended by representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Colombia, Cyprus, India, Syria and Togo, i.e. from all continents. This, in brief, is what they had to say:

Anne Duggan, Australia



"The participation of women in the Australian construction industry has fluctuated between 10 and 13% over the last 10 years.

The participation of women in Trades and Related occupations was less than 2% whilst the participation of women in associate-professional and professional occupations was between 23 and 25%. Women earn 12.6 % less than men. Australia is only one of two OECD countries that fail to provide paid maternity leave support to women. Australia has not ratified the main ILO Convention on child labour No. 138 (1973), the Minimum Age Convention."

Kawsar Jasmin Chowdhury, Bangladesh



"The construction sector is considered part of the informal economy, outside the coverage of labour

law and the labour inspection system. Despite the long struggle, trade unions in the construction sector have not managed to obtain a social safety scheme for the country's workers. Very few skilled women workers are working in the sector. Most of the women workers work as a 'helping hand', carrying building materials, road cutting, etc. Our union is trying to improve working conditions both for male and female workers and equal wages for equal work for female workers."

Edith Consuelo Medina Chito, Colombia :



"Colombia is the second most unequal country in the region. The armed conflict has forced internal exile on 4 million

people, 70% of whom are women and children. On average the conflict causes the death of one woman every day and 1,600 women have been murdered in 4 years. They are the victims of domestic violence and abuse by their partners. Women are being subjugated to a process of flexibility imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. In the tax-free zones you can find sweat-shops where the work is hard and badly paid and where 90% of the workers are women."

Marina Stavrinou Koukou, Cyprus



"Across the EU as a whole in 2005, average gross hourly earnings of women were, on average 15% below those of

men. In six countries – Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Slovakia and the UK - the gap was 20% or more. The EU is undermining the welfare state, which aggravates the exploitation of women. According to data released by UNIFEM, roughly one in three women suffers from some kind of violence during their lives. Women make up 60% of poor working people. The trafficking of women and sexual exploitation is an international phenomenon and constitutes a form of modern slavery. As Lenin said: 'The proletariat cannot achieve complete freedom if it does not gain full freedom for women'."

Malathy Chittababu, India :



"Construction is the worst model of patriarchal culture. Out of 32.6 million construction workers, about 8.2 million are women. Of these,

only 0.12 million are engineers, architects, designers and administrators. Most of the others are engaged in unskilled manual jobs. About 80% of female workers start working in the construction industry at the age of 10-12. Women have to work 10-12 hours in a day. 92% of women workers in this industry are illiterate. Almost 90% of women workers are in temporary jobs. Women carry head-loads, bricks and other construction materials."

Huda Maleehi, Syria



"How can we separate the continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan Heights and other Arab lands on the one hand, and the development, security

and safety of Syrian women on the other hand? How can one ignore the rights of Palestinian, Iraqi and Southern Lebanese women under continued occupation and aggression? Transforming the role of women in our society can only be achieved through guaranteeing security and equal opportunities for women and men, through the empowerment of women."

Obim Ama Kafui, Togo



"The fall in the exchange value of raw materials and the devaluation of the CFA franc, together with our country's structural adjustment

programmes and the long-standing political crisis, have had a seriously harmful effect on the national economy. Togo is part of a group of countries known as the least developed countries. In the construction and civil engineering sectors women account for 9.3% of

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WOMEN – EQUALITY

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the workforce, 1.2% of manual workers, 46.3% of technicians and project supervisors and 10.8% of managers. The effect of women on the process of development has not received the recognition it deserves; women are inadequately represented in trade union structures and have few possibilities to take part in, influence or define policies. Women in construction and civil engineering are up against a basic challenge, namely their participation in decision-making bodies."

Karin Pedersen Pryn,
Denmark (by email)

"Out of some 33,000 members working in the building sector, 1.2% are women. We have established a women's committee inside our Union. We want to investigate why women are leaving our technical training and our trade. Women in the industry are paid 18% less than their male colleagues. We noticed that some tried to argue that this is because women have less physical strength, whereas studies have shown that it is precisely women carrying out the heaviest jobs."

Resolutions

- Motion "No Violence against Women".
- Motion expressing solidarity and support to the struggle of Colombian women for a life free of violence.
- Motion supporting the fight for withdrawal of all foreign occupation troops from Iraq, the Syrian Golan Heights and Southern Lebanon and the other territories and condemning the foreign intervention in other countries' domestic affairs.
- Motion calling for the Australian Labour Government to immediately abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission (the ABCC) and to immediately repeal the draconian Building and Construction Improvement Act 2005.
- Motion of support and solidarity to Noel Washington for his brave



stance against the ABCC, who is likely to go to jail for having the audacity to stand up for worker's rights.

Recommendations

- Each member organisation of the International to appoint a contact person on equality issues.
 - The Women's Committee to consist of 1 representative per continent and 1 for the Middle East region.
 - To have a representative on the UITBB Executive Committee, who for the time being would be Marina Stavrinou Koukou.
 - Within the framework of Congress, to organise a special session on women's issues.
- Such provisions should allow a work plan to combat all forms of discrimination against women and to promote gender equality.

Photos: Above – workshopping recommendations; meeting Aus construction workers. Below – rally with Aus workers to present a petition to Government.



Asbestos & carcinogens — production & use up

THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES operating a total ban on asbestos has stagnated at 40. Worse, the market for the product is actually growing. Imports are at an all time high in India and China. African city skylines are dominated by asbestos roofs. The European Commission is seeking to prolong indefinitely the exemption on asbestos in membranes for the process of electrolysis in the manufacture of chlorine and to extend it to other articles installed or in use before 1st January 2005 — opening the door for the commercialization of white asbestos in asbestos cement and brake pads.

According to the Finnish Federation of Insurers latest quarterly review, China and Russia produce 500,000 metric tonnes of asbestos a year, about half total world production.

Almost 10,000 **Russian** workers are producing white asbestos which is permitted even in new products. Russian companies think the ILO and WHO bans are baseless and that protective equipment is adequate to deal with any risks. The ILO believes nearly 10,000 people die in Russia annually from asbestos related illnesses.

EU member **Estonia** has not ratified ILO Convention 162 on safe use of asbestos. With 70% of the country's buildings containing asbestos, tens of thousands of workers have been exposed to it. However, asbestos-related illnesses are not recognised and reported. Generally, workers dare not admit to having an occupational illness for fear of being sacked and with no insurance available, doctors don't declare them to protect their patients.

While asbestos dominates our concerns, we also need to be alert to the carcinogenic nature of new products, such as nanotubes, and the **synergies between carcinogens**.

Trade Unions must act

On all continents, there will be no lasting ban on harmful products or consistent implementation of precautionary principles without a constant mobilisation of the workers in defence of their health and working conditions. The trade union movement must not relax in its work to inform and mobilise, so that nothing is seen as more important than workers' lives and health.

VEIKKO PORKKALA – honorary UITBB president, general secretary from 1960 to 1983 – celebrates his 100th birthday

Born in Loviisa on the Baltic coast of Finland on 22nd November 1908, Veikko was 9 years old when the civil war between social classes broke out in Finland. This fratricidal conflict whose violence and acts of vengeance are unequalled in the history of Europe had a great impact on his life. His father, an army nurse in the Red Guard, was executed by commandos of the White Army who, together with soldiers of the German

Kaiser, unleashed a veritable bloodbath against anyone, man or woman, old or young, who was on the side of the revolution. This led to some 36,000 Finns being killed, 9,000 of them in combat and the rest shot or starving to death in the camps and prisons of the Whites.

Veikko began working at the age of 12, when he became an apprentice carpenter in Helsinki. In 1927 he joined the carpenters' union and in 1932 he became a member of the illegal communist party. He was arrested by the secret police and sent to prison for subversive activities and conspiring to commit high treason.

Released in 1935, he was deprived of his citizenship for 3 years and then sent back to prison at the approach of the 2nd World War, and not released until 1944.

Following the victory over fascism, Finland experienced an unparalleled expansion of the forces of the left and powerful struggles by the trade union movement that led to what would later be known as the Nordic welfare state.

The founding congress of the UITBB was held in Milan from 14th to 16th July 1949. The UITBB set up its offices in Helsinki and until 1995 was headed by Finnish general secretaries, of whom Veikko was one from 1960 until 1983.

In his memoirs, written at the age of 91, he talks about his meetings with figures such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Lazaro Peña, Ho Chi Minh and Salvador Allende which had a great impact on him.

Three months after he was elected, the WFTU suggested moving the UITBB's office away from Finland. His response was unequivocal: "I am not against the offices being moved from Finland, but I believe that the UITBB, and indeed the offices of



All the veterans, from left: Bryan O'Callaghan (ILO), Johan Lövblad (former Gen. Sec. IFBWW), Lothar Lindner (former Pres. UITBB), Mauri Perä (former UITBB Gen. Sec.), Dasha Nebesca (former Sec. for Int relations of CSSR Construction Union), and Veikko Porkkala.

all the TUIs, should be based in capitalist countries, on the ground where the class struggle is being fought, as close as possible to the workers and their problems". In the light of recent history, Veikko's analysis has proved to be significant.

Asked about outstanding moments of his time at the head of the UITBB, he smiled and after consideration listed, among other subjects:

- solidarity with the continent of Latin America and its working class;
- pride at having, together with UITBB president Lothar Lindner, set up the Latin American federation of building, wood and building materials workers – FLEMACON – whose founding congress was held in Lima, Peru, from 23rd to 25th October 1970;
- the campaign of solidarity with the workers of Vietnam under the slogan "A sack of cement for Vietnam".

Veikko also attached great importance to the work done by the UITBB to develop ILO labour legislation and norms. In April 1964 the UITBB, on behalf of the WFTU, started to work on research into proposals for implementing ILO conventions, a subject that has always been important to him. He spoke as well about the UITBB's efforts on job security, the situation of young people, migrant workers, the struggle against the multinationals, the development of health and safety at work, the right to housing and the struggle for disarmament.

He remembered the failures, too: "I was deeply saddened by the situation that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Europe and also by the weakening of the WFTU and our International. Today I am satisfied to note a

clear revival based on the struggles being waged by workers on all continents, especially in Latin America.

"The future of the WFTU and the UITBB are close to my heart. I follow their work to the best of my ability. If I may offer a word of advice based on my experience: You must maintain unity and constantly seek common action without ever renouncing your principles!"

Excerpts from messages

Building workers' union Cuba

"Among your many activities, especially the role you played in setting up the Latin American federation of building, wood and building materials workers (FLEMACON), there is one in particular that we, as Cuban building workers, would like to recall: your decisive contribution to the construction of the "PUPO" nursery school in the Guiterras region of Cuba by a brigade of Finnish building workers – a symbol of the friendship and solidarity between Finnish and Cuban building workers."

Valentin Pacho, WFTU deputy general secretary

"Veikko Porkkala's contribution has always been sought and appreciated by building workers the world over for the clarity and strength of his convictions. Indeed, it is impossible to forget his words on the importance of proletarian internationalism or the example we building workers must set in the struggle for workers' and people's rights and social justice and against the exploitation of man by man."

Robert Brun, former UITBB president

"As you know, we at the UITBB have not dropped the baton you passed on to us, nor forgotten the aims of action and unity of action, nor solidarity, nor the lessons of past struggles, and despite the difficulties we have confidence in the workers' ability to achieve their emancipation."

John Sutton, UITBB president

"Your leadership of the UITBB over 23 years and your lifetime of militant struggle is still an inspiration to us all today."

Meeting between WFTU and Chinese unions

Invited by the Chinese trade union federation, a WFTU delegation, including UITBB general secretary José Dinis, visited China from 2nd to 12th December 2008.

The programme included a meeting with Chinese unions, 2 seminars and a meeting with trade union activists from a big multinational. The participants were unanimous in stressing the need to strengthen cooperation between the Chinese federation and the WFTU and among their respective industrial unions.

The Chinese unions accepted an invitation to the UITBB's 7th regional meeting for unions in Asia and the Pacific, which will be held in Indonesia from 13th to 15th March.



WFTU seminar in Lisbon, Portugal, on 15th-16th December 2008

On the agenda: Globalisation and workers' rights. The seminar was attended by 150 participants from 24 countries and 5 continents. It adopted a statement summarising priority lines of action to defend and promote workers' rights (full text can be seen on the WFTU website www.wftucentral.org).

The WFTU announced that it was going to promote 1st April 2009 as an international day of struggle for workers' rights against exploitation.

UITBB seminar for Middle East unions

The Cypriot union of construction workers, the union centre PEO and the UITBB organised a training course in Larnaca from 15th to 17th October, attended by 20 construction union activists from 6 Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Jordan,

Kuwait, Sudan, Syria and Yemen). Two of the participants had this to say:

Khaled Khoder from the construction union of Syria: "This kind of initiative is extremely useful, as it allows links between unions to be strengthened and experiences, knowledge and information to be shared as essential tools in the struggle for workers' rights".



Haroun Mersief from the construction union of Sudan: "Today we are seeing attacks against workers' rights being stepped up on a daily basis, and we believe this seminar will help us in our struggles to protect workers' rights and gains."

"The discussions, exchanges of experiences and the conclusions reached will be of great assistance for our work in our respective countries."

A great trade union victory

Some months ago joiners, locksmiths and carpenters in the state of Sao Paulo in Brazil undertook a wide campaign of mobilisation in support of higher wages. After numerous actions and difficult negotiations they have just won a 10% wage rise which they accepted, stating,

"United and supported by their union, the workers will always be victorious!" The UITBB congratulates them on their victory.

Greece: Strike in solidarity with the people of Palestine



In response to a call from the militant workers' front PAME, dozens of workers went on strike on 7th January to express their solidarity with the people of Palestine and to demand an immediate halt to Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian soil. Among those leading the demonstrators were activists from the construction workers' union who staged a 24-hour strike. The day of protest closed with a big solidarity concert in Athens's main square (Syntagma).

Trade union solidarity is alive and well!

UITBB condemns the massacre in Gaza

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East Jerusalem as its capital
 ● The stopping of the inhuman blockade by the Israel.
 The Palestinian people need our international solidarity now. Let us act

now and support their resistance and their struggle for their right to live in their independent and sovereign motherland.

**The UITBB Secretariat
 Helsinki 5 January 2009**

