

LIGA NEWS



MONTHLY OF DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

1991/N°4

MAY DAY OF FREE UNIONS IN PEOPLE'S PARK

INVITATION

Dear friends,
It is the third time we have organised the Free Labour Movement's May Day celebrations in the People's Park of Budapest. Please do join us with your family and friends. We would like to have a genuine labour day, a joint feast for white and blue collar workers, for pensioners and for the unemployed as well, to celebrate national and international labour solidarity. Our programmes will be open to anyone and free from the patronage of any of the political parties. The highlight of our whole day programme is the workers' assembly followed by a discussion forum for interest groups to be held in the Planetarium with the participation of representatives from government, employers and labour. Various cultural events and fun for kids will be available all day. In hope of having a real great solidarity day I am looking forward to meeting our friends again.

Pal Forgacs
President of the League

The League's members would like to thank their French brothers and sisters in FO for their contribution in the form of printing our May Day posters. Merci beaucoup!



LET'S ALL CELEBRATE SOLIDARITY

This year we are looking forward to a grand event indeed. The highlight of the day will be the workers' assembly to be held on the park stage at 11 o'clock. Arpad Goncz, President of the Republic of Hungary will be the main sponsor of the assembly.

There will be various programmes all day: League affiliates will set up their tents in the park, fun for kids will be provided by conjurers, music will be serviced by amateur rock groups, but the fans of new wave, or gipsy folk music will also find their entertainment.

Those who are interested in more serious matters will be received by speakers and experts on environmental issues, organisation, representation and on old age pension schemes. Delegates of international confeder-

ations and several trade unions are expected to participate at the workers' assembly and other programmes. ICFTU will be represented by Anna Oulatar, head of the unit for Central and Eastern Europe. ETUC cannot send a delegate this time when they are busy organising their congress. There will be representatives of the WCL, the CGT-FO and the CFDT of France, the Polish Solidarnosc, the Romanian FRATIA, the Bulgarian PODKREPA, as well as the newly formed Albanian free unions. Our brothers and sisters of the AFL-CIO will be represented by Kenneth Young, general secretary, who will transmit a message of Lane Kirkland, president, to the Hungarian free trade union movement.

(See right box.)

MAY DAY LETTER FROM AFL-CIO Brothers and Sisters:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I am delighted to extend warmest fraternal greetings to Hungary's free trade union movement on this, the second May Day celebration of the new democratic era.

Please be assured of the American labor movement's solidarity with your struggle for economic justice, worker dignity and trade union rights. We support the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions and its allies in their effort to help fulfill the promise of freedom and democracy in your country, and we shall continue to do everything we can to help you build a society in which every worker has a voice in determining his or her own future. You have every right to be proud of your accomplishments, and we wish you continued success in your efforts to create strong and democratic free trade unions. Your brothers and sisters of the American labor movement stand with you always. Sincerely,

Lane Kirkland President, AFL-CIO

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING CALLED FOR 20TH APRIL

The League's Council consisting of one delegate for each chartered union group is convened bimonthly. The reason why this extraordinary meeting is called is that our rapidly growing organisation needs to handle more and more urgent issues that cannot wait. One of the regular items on the council's agenda is the vote on the affiliation of new organisations. The continuously updated list is getting longer every time, now consisting of about 30 new union groups waiting for being chartered with the Democratic League of Free Trade Unions. Another urgent matter is the modification or amendment of the League's constitution originally designed for a much smaller organisation. Finally, the Executive Board of the

League needs to prepare its policy proposal on the company councils and the advocated union elections. Here are some of the complex issues the League's membership will have to consider before policy is decided:

What is the function of company councils? Ideally in these participatory organisations all groups of workers should be represented. Members of the company councils would have full access to all relevant information on the company's production and financial standing. This way the unions and the employees would also be regularly informed about the company's position.

Matters decided by the company council should not be negotiated bet-

ween the unions and the employers. Company councils are for exchange of information, consultation, and co-ordination of interests. The collective contract, however, is the agreement made by the unions and the employers.

The company council decides on various welfare matters and on the distribution of welfare services and benefits provided by the employers, such as contributions to costs of housing, access to holiday facilities etc. The company council also has a right to establish the company's selection procedure concerning layoffs, retraining or retirement.

The company council should be consulted before the employer makes any major decisions that will influence the majority of employees. That is to say, in these matters the employers make the final decisions but they must consult the company council beforehand on issues such as the introduction of new technology, privatisation, new investments, marketing strategy, diversification etc.

The company management ideally should be obliged to inform the company council in an annual report or on any major structural changes which will effect at least 10 of the employees in the company. In addition, the management should have an obligation to inform the company council on various other issues, such as disciplinary actions, working conditions, wage rates etc. on request.

The company council, in turn, should treat all information as confidential, should be co-operative and obliged to mediate between management and employees.

The Unions, on the other hand are voluntary organisations to provide collective representation for their members before the management. Their main function is to represent labour interests in the collective bargaining process. Unions can represent workers before the management but also on other levels such as the local or branch government authorities.

Apart from representing labour in the bargain over the collective contract, unions should have a right to request information on any decision or policy that would effect a large enough proportion of employees.

Unions should be consulted before major changes in practice patterns, rules or working conditions are introduced.

Unions should claim the right to monitor the observation of safety or employment regulations. If any of the agreed rules, practice patterns or procedures are violated, unions

* DOCUMENT *

On April, 10th Wednesday, the League and the Workers Councils gave a press conference where Pál Forgács and Imre Palkovicsa, presidents, answered questions from Hungarian and foreign journalists explaining a public notice sent to all political parties.

NOTICE TO THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES IN HUNGARY

The Executive Council of LIGA and the National Council of the Workers' Councils' National Confederation welcome and support efforts made to reach an agreement seeking ways out of the present crisis. However, no agreement on how the costs and burdens of economic changes should fairly be shared by society will be reached unless all interest groups and organisations including those freely elected by employees are given a hearing.

The rapid deterioration of living standards and working conditions is a daily experience for many Hungarians. With intimidated, defenceless employees deprived of their means and unaware of their rights, often subjected to the use of force, this country will not be able to solve its mounting problems.

THEREFORE THE LEAGUE AND THE WORKERS' COUNCILS APPEAL TO THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES TO CREATE PROPER CONDITIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LEGITIMATE INTEREST GROUPS AND LABOUR REPRESENTATION MANDATED TO NEGOTIATE AS EQUAL SOCIAL PARTNERS.

In order to achieve this goal, the parliamentary parties should reach consensus on the importance of renewing labour representation and on the necessity of trade union elections.

The proposal is to cover the following issues:

1. The government should guarantee protection for free association and organisation.

The government should set up an office where the observation of international labour conventions ratified by Hungary is monitored.

2. The trade unions and workers' councils should be consulted on policy making, whenever wage earners' or pensioners' social and economic conditions are likely to be effected.

a. The company councils should be institutionalised without imposing restrictions on trade unions.

b. All employees should be guaranteed the right to have a say in the privatisation of state companies as well as to come up with possible alternatives or competing proposals etc.

c. The MSZOSZ's furtive attempts to transfer the trade union's property into a holding company should be prevented.

d. A new Labour Code adjusted to the requirements, mechanisms and agents of a market economy needs to be established.

e. A crisis and conflict management service needs to be set up with the participation of trade unions and workers' councils.

f. Regulations on the access to statistical data and other relevant financial information concerning economic, employment and social problems are required.

3. The trade unions should be completely separated from state or government authorities. Equal opportunities for operation and access to resources should be guaranteed as well as fair conditions for union elections.

a. Assets and property of the former trade union should be frozen, proposals for joint access and property management with the involvement of all legitimate labour organisations should be worked out.

b. Legal guarantees for free union elections to create the framework for a fair competition among all labour organisations should be provided.

The LIGA Executive Council and the Workers' Councils' National Confederation demand that the Hungarian Parliament pass the laws needed. Legislation on union elections is required, its specific rules not covered by the general election law should be worked out.

should have a right to investigate and as a last resort, to veto actions that are subject of collective agreement and not decided by the company council. The unions should also have a right to take industrial conflicts to impartial and independent arbitration courts in case such conflicts cannot be satisfactorily handled between labour and management within the company. Privileges for union officers should include reduced hours, paid extra days off, and approval of higher level union organisation before disciplinary action is taken against a union officer.

UNION ELECTIONS

The League will have to set its policy concerning the conditions and the participants of union elections. First of all, legal guarantees for equal opportunities should be granted. The question is whether these guarantees should be provided by parliamentary legislation, government intervention, or a joint tripartite agreement, or by an agreement among labour organisations.

Should the union elections and the election of company councils take place at the same time or separately? Who can run on these elections? Should only confederations be eligible or shall national organisations of any kind be allowed to run? Should it be based on regional or branch organisations or should membership, say of above 30,000 be required for running candidates? When should the elections be held? As soon as possible or only after the new Labour Code has been passed? How long should the duration of company council membership be and how long should unions be mandated to bargain once they have won the election?

These and other purely technical matters will be discussed on the League's National Council meeting. And as we know, these seemingly purely technical matters are very important and will have a lasting effect on the future of labour and management relations in Hungary.

Moreover, an additional issue likely to be on the agenda is whether the prolonged dispute over the future of union assets and property accumulated by the former state supported union should be settled once and for all during the elections, or should a separate deal be made?

All we hope is that the delegates will have enough time, enthusiasm and stamina to sort all these problems out on the April 20th council meeting. The League's Executive Board did a wonderful job preparing a ten-page discussion material available for all delegates before the meeting. The LigaNews will report on the policy decisions made by the national council.

WE STILL NEED SOLIDARITY

In March the Liga News published a few cases of unlawful practices against some union activists. Since then some new cases have been reported and some of the pending ones have been settled -- not always favourably though.

THE CASE OF THE SUGAR PROCESSING PLANT IN KAPOSVAR

The Free Trade Union of the Sugar Processing Plant in Kaposvar was formed by 25 members and was registered and chartered with the League in January, 11th 1991. The 25 founding members decided that the old trade union was not representing their interests properly and was not able to provide due protection for workers critical of the plant's affairs. The new union wanted genuine representation and partnership with the owners of the newly transformed *Agrana International Holding Company* (Vienna, Holnadstrasse 2.) that has taken over the plant. Unfortunately, the company's Managing Director, who is also Chairman of the Board, did not want things that way. 8 out of the now 30 union members have been threatened with various forged charges or were eventually fired:

Laszlo Haz, Technical Manager, one of the union's founding members was dismissed on grounds of alleged professional incompetence. Haz has often criticised the dictatorial ways of the Managing Director and demanded negotiations or calling an assembly meeting to settle disputes. He also initiated a non-confidence motion to challenge the Chairman-Managing Director.

Menyhert Karolyi, power technician, member of the union's elected executive board, signed the non-confidence motion initiated by Haz and handed it over. He was also actively involved in setting the union's programme. A disciplinary action is pending against him.

Peter Novacsek, interpreter, member of the executive board, one of the union organisers. He refused to interpret on negotiations until agreement is reached on the union's recognition and the workers' involvement. He was forced to give in his notice and leave.

Laszlo Molnar, electrician, union or-

ganiser and elected executive board member. He ratified the minutes taken on the first union meeting. The Managing Director pressed him to withdraw his signature from the foundation documents of the union and thereby discredit the union. Disciplinary action was taken against him and the verdict was suspension of bonus payment.

Szilard Dakos, electrician. Union organiser, who was distributing leaflets describing union activity among workers. Disciplinary action is pending against him.

Geza Kotanszky, shop-manager in charge, union organiser and member of elected executive board. He also signed the non-confidence motion and has always been very popular among workers. He was dismissed on grounds of reorganisation.

Zoltan Komlossy, works manager, union organiser and executive board member, he also signed the non-confidence motion and distributed union leaflets among workers. He was downgraded.

Gyula Molnar, technical controller, organiser, ranking member of executive board. He chaired the first meeting of the newly founded union. He was dismissed on grounds of reorganisation.

The victims appealed to the League for solidarity and support and try to reach the workers by distributing newsletters on the repercussions they suffered. The union also tried to gain support from a wider publicity campaign and get coverage in some national and local dailies. This action was so successful, that the news statements were often used against the "offenders", i.e. the Managing Director blamed these union activists for destroying the company's reputation in the press.

FOLLOW UP ON SOME EARLIER REPERCUSSIONS REPORTED IN OUR FEBRUARY LIGA NEWS

* **CSAKANYDOROSZLO** appeals to the health, welfare and human rights committee of the mayor's office in Budapest. There is only one union member already who has not been dismissed from the health care institution and hospital in Csakanydoroszlo, where the new union strongly criticised professional incompetence, mismanagement and disregard for union rights of

the management. The Budapest Mayor's Office's Health Welfare and Human Rights Committee is requested to investigate the state of affairs in the Csakanydoroszlo health institution by the League's counselling service, JOJOBA. So far appeal to the Ministry of Health has been of no avail. Two union organisers and outstanding health care experts, Ms

Kopcsandy and Peter Kamondy have been forced to leave their jobs.

*** TWO SMALL SUCCESS STORIES: SENTENCE REPEALED, JOB REINSTATED.**

A soil conservation company in Velence fired Peter Kusnyer for organising a union group in his workplace. The case was taken to an Arbitration Court, which repealed the dismissal verdict on grounds that the union had not been consulted before Kusnyer was fired.

Laszlo Csaja in Kecskemet was reinstated into his former job by verdict of an appeal court.

Congratulations and thanks to the League's devoted legal advisors.

LEGAL GAPS CAUSE CONFUSION IN JURISDICTION

Two industrial disputes have not been yet settled because Hungarian law does not stipulate for the enforcement of the Association Act.

In Somogyvar the construction workers' union filed a case against their employers, who, by harassing union activists, violate the principle of equal treatment and discriminate against those who claim their right for association, i.e. form unions. The unfavourable verdict was that unions cannot claim right for association, only individuals.

The same happened to the former employees of Free Europe Radio who lost their jobs because of forming unions. Since they filed a case as a union group contra the employers, the court's verdict, again was that a union group has no right for association, only an individual, therefore such a right cannot be violated.

The League's legal advisors' advised these clients to re-file their case as individual citizens rather than union groups and have urged the League's executives to lobby at the parliamentary parties to change legislation that would make enforcement possible in the future.

WE STILL NEED SOLIDARITY

Two years ago the League won its first battle for a better legislation on strikes backed by the letters expressing international solidarity. Now we ask our brothers and sisters all over the world to express their solidarity with our members fighting for their rights. Send your supporting letters to the League's address or directly to Mr. G. Schamsula, state secretary of labour.

TRAINING * TRAINING * TRAINING * TRAINING * TRAIN

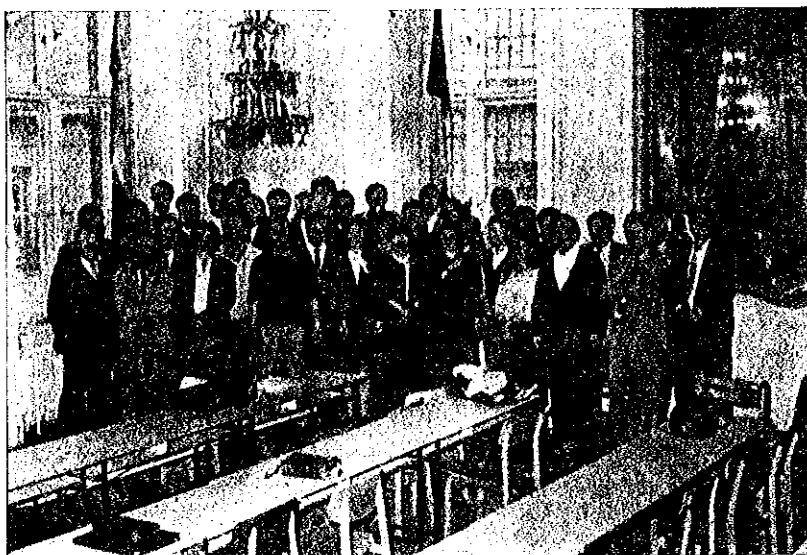
TRIPARTITE TRAINING SESSION FOR FUTURE NEGOTIATORS

Employers, union members and government officials were sitting side by side on a four-day training session held in Budapest on negotiation skills. William Lincoln, American negotiation expert taught the tripartite group of about 30 people how conflicts can be resolved for everyone's satisfaction when the negotiation partners learn to be co-operative and seek mutually acceptable agreement.

The training session had some visitors from

Poland and Czechoslovakia, our Polish friends were also given opportunity to demonstrate their skills in training.

There are plans to set up a special training center for negotiators in Budapest. Although this school would train all sorts of people who need to negotiate, such an institution would undoubtedly be most needed and useful for the members of our union.



The participants of the training with Bill Lincoln (second in the first row, right) and Ray Shonholtz (first in the first row, left).

ICFTU SEMINAR TO BE HELD IN KAZINCBARCIKA

From April 22nd through 25th ICFTU instructors from the Italian CISL, the Israeli HISTADRUT, the Austrian OGB and the US AFL-CIO will give a training session on various matters of organisation, union rights and representation. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions with its international trainers will share labour experience with a group of about 20-30 Hungarian

League members.

BELGIAN LIBERAL UNION ON UNION ELECTIONS AND OR- GANISATION

In May CGSLB, the Belgian liberal union confederation will send instructors to hold a two day training session in the League's regional office in Baja, south of Hungary.

LIGA NEWS, HUNGARY. Editor: Ms Ildiko Melis.
ADDRESS: 1071 BUDAPEST, Gorkij fasor 45. Phone: (36-1) 142-6957;
FAX (works 24 hours): (36-1) 142-8143

Donations to the LigaNews or to the Democratic League of Free Trade Unions can be made to the following bank account: OTP XIII. Ker. fiók, 217-98292, B-94715

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