

The LabourStart Conference in Istanbul, Turkey

November 18-20, 2011.

I attended this conference at the end of my holidays in Turkey. I had found out about LabourStart through an email which had been sent to me.

The theme of the Conference was "From Social Networks to Social Revolutions". At the conference there were approximately 100 delegates from 30 different countries including Egypt, Iran, Palestine, Kenya, Canada, the Netherlands and Israel to name a few.

LabourStart arranged a decent hotel room price at Taksim Gonen Hotel so a number of the delegates stayed there. Some of the delegates were billeted and some of us arranged our own lodging. The Conference was held on the Asian side of Istanbul so we were bused across the Bosphorus Straits (of mythical and historical lore) twice daily.

Petrol-Is is a large union in Turkey and it was in their office building that the Conference was held. At the opening plenary, the President of Petrol-Is, Mustafa Oztaskim, exhorted us to work against the system in the spirit of solidarity, to co-ordinate common struggles, that as Global Unions versus Multinational corporations we have to take simultaneous actions and create common struggles against corporate policies. The conference opened our eyes to just how much workers around the world do have in common and that our fight is a common fight.

The conference was educational and an eye-opener. But try as I did, unfortunately I was unable to talk to everyone there. One reason for this was there wasn't enough time!

There were 4 sessions per day on each of Saturday and Sunday. We talked during coffee breaks and lunches and still there wasn't enough time. What different union members and unions have to, or have had to, go through is shocking to find out.

For each of the 4 sessions there were 5 topics to choose from. Unfortunately there were always 2 sessions I wanted to attend at the same time. Decisions, decisions, decisions! In 2008 when I was in Egypt, a number of workers told me that in the near future something was going to happen. Their educational degrees meant nothing, their length of service meant nothing, they did not have a living wage, etc. the only way out was to marry a foreigner or bribe a government official for a better job. Something had to happen. For sure I wanted to find out about Arab Spring.

And did I ever find out about Arab Spring. Started by Unions! Unjust treatment not just over the previous year but for decades. The workers are slowly working towards much of which we still have so far, such as the right to organize. But keep on fighting they will.

A quote from a paper presented at the Conference titled "Perspective of the Confederation démocratique des Travailleurs (CDT) on the Democratic Movement in Morocco and the Arab World" pretty much sums up the basic problems: the lack of cultural awareness and intellectual production in the Arab world, the absence of the foundations and rules governing democratic practice, widespread illiteracy, the damaging political instrumentalization of religion, and oppressive regimes' grip over Arab societies, their ban on any enlightened thought and their fettering of minds, are all factors preventing the emergence of a strong democratic movement rooted in society and reflecting its needs and concerns in the Arab world."

The workers struggle in Iraq was to get out from under the tyranny that has been perpetuated since the fall of Saddam.

In Iran workers are fighting for the right to organize free and independent labour organizations, obtain the right to strike and seek the absolute end to systematic repression, persecution, imprisonment, torture, assassination and execution of labour activists and political opponents. In fact, one of the activists at the conference was from Iran and didn't know what he was going back to, including assassination.

Kurdistan labour activists were also fighting for the same basic rights as the Arab world.

Sub-Saharan Africa is an up and coming economy and want decent working conditions and rights as well. That is quite the struggle due to the despots and the abject poverty coupled with the desperate need to educate the workers.

The session "Israel/Palestine; New ways of organizing Arab and Jewish workers" was quite interesting. Organizing around ideologies, politics and religion wasn't going to work, they told us so they had to come up with new ideas. Finding commonalities instead was what they found worked. They also organized the youth and provided them with a small pocket-sized fold out to keep track of their work hours. On the other side were different hints and helps. (Enclosed)

I attended a session about Retail, only to find out it was about International Agreements with Multinational companies! The moderators spoke about how to get a National company to sign agreements resulting from Multinational Agreements! It's nice to see how another part of the Labour world works.

By having contact with workers around the world we can share our struggles and support each other. We can also WIN. Now when I get those emails asking for signatures on petitions or calling for work actions, they take on a whole new meaning! I'm also talking

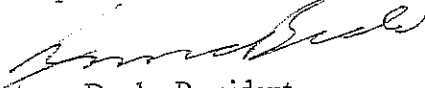
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to others in my Local about the importance of supporting others in their struggles and to check out the Alternate news sources to find out the full story.

It was a terrific Conference and I definitely praise it to anyone who asks. Next years' conference will be in either Berlin or in Australia (so far) and I would recommend a LabourStart conference it to everyone!

If you have any questions about the Conference, please contact me.

Respectfully submitted,



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