

## Who are we ?

● The International Workers Committee Against War, Exploitation, for a Workers' International (IWC) was set up at the World Conference held in Mumbai ( India ) on November 19, 20, 21, 2016 gathering delegates from 28 countries.

● The IWC was set up on the basis of the Mumbai Manifesto against war, exploitation and precarious labour which was endorsed by labour activist and trade union and political organisations officers from 46 countries (\*)

● Its continuations committee is composed of labour activists from all political/ trade union backgrounds:

Innocent Assogba (Benin),  
 Alan Benjamin (USA),  
 Colia Clark (USA),  
 Constantin Cretan (Romania),  
 Berthony Dupont (Haiti),  
 Ney Ferreira (Brazil),  
 Daniel Gluckstein (France),  
 Rubina Jamil (Pakistan),  
 Apo Leung (China),  
 M.A. Patil (India),  
 Mandlenkosi Phangwa (Azania),  
 Sergio Pineda (Mexico),  
 Klaus Schüller (Germany),  
 Jung Sikhwa (Korea),  
 John Sweeney (Great Britain),  
 Mark Vassilev (Russia),  
 Nambiath Vasudevan (India).

(\*) Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Azania, Belarus, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

## For a workers' survey

Throughout the world - although in different forms - workers and their organizations are facing problems relative to the pandemic, its consequences, government policies and the positions taken by the labour movement.

We do not hide the fact that, on the basis of facts, we wish to illustrate what we have repeatedly said in all the IWC documents: the capitalist system - based on private ownership of the means of production - is driving the whole society to the brink. The positive solution to the unprecedented crisis facing mankind is in the hands of the working class.

This highlights the question of the independence of the labour movement from the capitalist class and the governments that serve it.

The results of this survey will provide the material for the preparation of the second international conference against war and exploitation, for a workers' international (which will be held, in application of our commitments, when conditions for traveling and meeting have returned to normal).

In order to facilitate the circulation of documents (in English, French and Spanish) among organizations, groups and activists of all tendencies from the 53 countries that have called for the conference, we kindly ask you to limit your contributions to 10,000 or 20,000 characters (2,000 to 4,000 words).

The 8 questions that make up this survey were published in newsletter n° 164 and are available upon request.

Already published:

- 1- Pakistan. Author: All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF) - Date: October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- 2- Canada. Author: Activists involved in IWC campaigns - Date: October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- 3- Australia. Author : Australia Asia Worker Links – Date: November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- 4- Indonesia. Author : Dian Trisnanti, Chair Person F-SBPI - Date : November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Report n° 5

### BENIN

Author: ASSOGBA Innocent – Date: November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**1/ What have the consequences of the health crisis for the population been - especially for the working class? What has the COVID impact been on employment, how many jobs have been lost?**

In Benin, the working class has been hit hard by the crisis linked to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Since March 2020, activities have slowed down in many sectors, especially for those working in the informal sector. Workers are managing to protect themselves from the danger around them. Accompanying measures adopted by the government have mainly targeted a portion of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Public sector workers were not affected at all by the social measures. However, the price of transport and basic necessities has been increased.

Concerning employment, the private sector and the informal sector have been

adversely affected by COVID. Some bank branches were suspended for 3 to 4 months, or closed permanently. Many small businesses in transportation and catering put their employees out of work. Unfortunately, we do not have figures to illustrate this.

**2/ Are there any figures available concerning the lives lost of workers in general and particularly front-line workers, including doctors and other hospital staff?**

In terms of figures, the Benin government has opted for opacity. As of November 18, 2020, the government's information site reports a total of 43 deaths in total, without it being possible to say how many workers in general or civil servants involved in the response to COVID have been directly affected.

**3/ What measures were taken or not taken by the government to cope with**

### **the pandemic? Were any wage deductions imposed by the bosses and governments?**

Measures taken by the government of Benin:

- A delayed closure of large gathering places;
- Control system at the airport and borders, with much malfunction;-
- Free but limited testing of the population;
- Distribution of masks in education, healthcare and some women's groups;
- Establishment of a cordon sanitaire at a given time;
- Testing (paid for by the individual) at the border since June 2020, etc.

Measures not taken:

- No closure of the airport and borders;
- Lack of monitoring of compliance with social distancing in markets and shopping malls;
- Inadequate training of healthcare personnel in the management of persons infected with COVID-19
- Maintaining large class sizes at the start of the September 28<sup>th</sup> school year;
- No measures to recruit teachers to reduce the number of students in the classrooms.

It is difficult to assert that there have been salary cuts in Benin, at least not in the public sector.

### **4/ What new attacks against workers' rights and democracy were launched by the bosses and governments during this year, as they took advantage of the pandemic?**

The Benin government has opted to manage this health crisis in general with a certain degree of opacity. This has resulted in retaliatory measures against workers who dare to speak out against the way the pandemic is being managed. For example:

- A hospital civil servant hospital received a six-month prison sentence, five of which were suspended,

for having alerted the public to the lack of protection experienced by the hospital staff; this situation resulted, he revealed, in positive cases among that staff.

- The spokesperson for the healthcare unions was harassed last July for having dared, during a program on an online radio station, to indicate that healthcare personnel are highly exposed, and lack the minimum to protect themselves against the spreading disease, and then to deplore the government's communication policy concerning the measures taken to counter the disease.

### **5/ For years, the number of workers in the informal sector has continued to increase. The fight against precarious labour must lead the labour movement to think about organizing these workers. The workers in the informal sector have paid a very heavy price in the health crisis. What has their situation been since March 2020? What reactions has this triggered?**

Informal sector workers have suffered from the closure of borders with neighbouring countries, the sanitary cordon imposed by Benin. Restrictions of all kinds have put many informal sector workers out of work for 3 to 4 months, even more for some actors such as managers of discos, nightclubs and managers of leisure activities around the beaches who are still unemployed.

The State attributed a modest financial envelope to limited number of crafts persons and trade persons.

Discontent exists in the informal sector, which has been hard hit by the government measures taken to counter COVID-19. This is noticeable in what has been said by many of the actors interviewed. However, there has been a lack of leadership from the labour movement to organize these workers.

### **6/ Women workers have also been particularly hit. They are the first to lose their jobs, the last to be taken back at their work places when they reopen. They have to**

### **take in charge their children deprived of schooling. Domestic violence has increased with the lockdown. What form has it taken? What mobilisations have taken place to defend the rights of working women?**

For the moment, we lack figures to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic has particularly impacted workingwomen. There has been no specific mobilization of workingwomen, although the cordon sanitaire and the closure of the borders, not to mention the closure of schools for one to two months for adults and more for students, have had a huge impact on their activities. Also, the systematic non-application of lockdown and the continued opening of markets seems to have given women the opportunity to avoid the harmful consequences of social isolation.

### **7/ With the new technologies, the capitalists dismantle labour relations, restructure companies and destroy jobs. What are the consequences and what are the threats to labour relations in the coming period?**

Long before the pandemic, Benin began reforms aimed at dematerializing services offered to the population. These reforms are on-going and will eventually lead to job losses or forced reconversions.

### **8/ What were the positions of workers' organisations and their leaderships during that period? What were the demands? What was their attitude towards the plans designed by the bosses and governments?**

The workers' organizations called for many more means to be made available to the workers for their protection. They asked the public authorities to invest more in the healthcare system. They called for accompanying measures, and asked to be consulted on the measures to be taken before schools reopen. They denounced the inadequacies in the policy proposed by the government in response to COVID-19. ■