

Gigantic Step Forward

Migrant Workers' Conference - A Gigantic Step Forward

**Melbourne, Australia,
November, 1975**

The 2nd Migrant Workers' Conference held at the Melbourne Trades Hall on November 7 & 8 1975, constituted a gigantic step on the long road for the rights of migrants as workers and citizens.

400 delegates attended the Conference. Most delegates were migrant workers elected to represent their fellow workers. The Conference attracted 40 delegates from Sydney, Wollongong and Adelaide.

The Conference was conducted in six languages: Italian, Spanish, Greek, Yugoslav, Arabic, and English. The main reports were given by the secretary of the Migrant Workers' Committee, George Zangalis, the Spanish woman worker Maria Pozos, the secretary of the Meat Workers' Union Mr. Wally Curran, the Minister for Labor and Immigration Senator McClelland and the black Australian Marcia Langton.

The Conference was supported by the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

It received messages of support from such organisations as the World Federation of Trade Unions and the three Italian Confederations of Labour.

The delegates of the different national origins, met separately for 7 hours and made approximately 200 proposals for action to improve the position of migrant workers.

The views and spirit of the delegates were summarised in a DECLARATION which was

approved unanimously at the closing plenary session of the Conference.

The Conference elected a 41 member workers Committee, consisting of representatives from the 6 language groups. Seventeen members of the Committee are women.

It was also decided that the next Migrant Workers' Conference should be held within a year, and that it should be a national one.

The findings of the Conference will be discussed in the workplaces and in the Unions.

The Labor Government had agreed to study the Conference's proposals.

The proposals

The Migrant Workers' Committee elected by this Conference must be considered as a permanent body of the Trades Hall Council and of all Trade Unions in order to give greater strength to the Trade Unions, to increase the participation of migrant workers in the life of the Trade Unions, and to elaborate the proposals relating to the solutions of problems peculiar to migrant workers, and particularly the proposals to be included in the requests of the Trade Unions.

The recognition of the right to work as a right which is legislated upon must be considered with absolute priority, and must be the principal objective of the future Migrant Workers' Committee's work, in its relation with the Unions and in relation to the necessary consciousness raising of all the public and of the mass of migrant workers.

The right to work presupposes amongst other things:

Prohibition of indiscriminate sackings and sackings without proper reason;

Prohibition of dismissals of those workers engaged in Union activities, those workers who have almost reached the time limit to be entitled to Long Service Leave, those workers who are absent from work because of illness or because of injury suffered at work;

Prohibition of compulsory overtime;

Prohibition of compulsory piece-work systems, and the right of participation by the workers in the decision of work rhythms;

Compensation for illness must never be less than 85% of the base salary, and must be paid as from the first day of such illness;

Reduce pensionable age to 60 years, with an increase of basic pensions, abolish the means test and relate the amount of pension to the amount of time worked;

Setting up of Committees made up of workers who will decide on the general standard of hygiene and safety;

Setting up by the employers and by the local and State authorities of child care facilities in factories with a predominance of women workers, in industrial zones and residential areas, with the participation in their running of the interested communities;

Introduction of a scheme of national workers' compensation for sickness and injuries directly or indirectly related to the type and/or place of work;

English to be taught on the job, during working hours and without loss of pay;

Unions to distribute safety and health regulations to new member in his/her own language;

Introduction of flexible working hours to cover all workers;

Trade Unions to recognise overseas qualifications;

Establishment of the 35 hour week to cover all workers in all jobs;

Unions to publish information on Union policies in all the major languages spoken by the ethnic groups, and all Federal and State laws and Acts, which effect the migrant work force directly and indirectly, to be published in migrant languages;

Schools to have bi-lingual teachers to maintain cultural heritage of all children; these teachers to be recruited from original birthplace of children;

Ethnic Radio's existence to be permanently secured; such Radio should become political and involve itself in the problems of workers, and should educate workers about their rights and obligations as workers and as citizens.