

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a poor, landlocked country located in the heart of Africa with a subsistence agricultural economy and a national legacy of political instability and economic setbacks. Since the bloodless coup which overthrew the Bokassa government on September 1, 1981, President Andre Kolingba has made tentative steps to restore constitutional rule to the people of the CAR. The AFL-CIO welcomes the continued improvement in the human rights record of the CAR and urges the Kolingba government to hasten the restoration of democratic institutions and processes for workers in that country.

However, the AFL-CIO regrets certain actions noted below taken by the Kolingba government with regard to the General Union of Central African Workers (UGTC). In spite of the CAR's ratification of ILO conventions on the freedom of association and the right to organize and bargaining collectively (Convention Nos. 87 and 98), the UGTC was dissolved by a Presidential Decree on May 16, 1981.

The CAR has also been formally cited by the ILO for imposing compulsory labor sentences on prisoners jailed for unauthorized political activity. The situation continues unchanged, and the Government of the Central African Republic has not seen fit to respond to the ILO citation.

In addition to the worker rights violations mentioned above, the CAR systematically fails to enforce its own laws and regulations regarding child labor.

1. Freedom of Association

In May of 1981, the UGTC was dissolved by the Government of the CAR by administrative fiat. No effective labor movement, save for the government-sponsored National Confederation of Central African Workers (CNTC), which exists mainly on paper, has been in existence since then. Along with the UGTC's dissolution, four senior trade union officials were dismissed from their jobs for their union involvement. The UGTC's assets were frozen, premises were occupied, and censorship was imposed on the organization. For all intents and purposes, the government wiped out the 15,000-member central federation. Today no vestige of union activity remains in the CAR.

2. Right to Strike and Bargain Collectively

On May 15, 1981, one day prior to its impending dissolution and following unsuccessful attempts at collective bargaining with the government and employers, the UGTC gave its required notice and called a general strike throughout the private sector. The

government rejected the list of grievances presented by the workers and accused the UGTC of exercising a trade union monopoly. The UGTC was then dissolved.

3. Child Labor

While employment of children under 14 is prohibited by law, many children under that age are in the labor force. No significant effort on the part of the government is made to remedy these infractions.

4. Compulsory Labor

The government has been cited by the ILO for violations of ILO Conventions 29 and 105 for allegedly imposing compulsory labor on prisoners jailed for political activities. Originally filed by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the case remains open because the CAR had not provided the documentation requested by the ILO.

Conclusion

Since 1981, The Central African Republic has refused to allow workers to establish organizations of their own choosing and has prohibited workers from carrying out trade union activities. For these reasons and because of the country's policy of sentencing political prisoners to compulsory labor, the AFL-CIO recommends that the privileges of GSP be denied the CAR.