

## MALI

### *“This war has been imposed on us by France”*

**Hammadoun Amion Guindo, General Secretary of the Workers' Trade Union Confederation of Mali (CSTM), along with his comrades, tell us about the situation in the country and their trade union fight.**

#### 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 Novembre 19, 20 and 21 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 45 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),  
**Gloria Gracida** (Mexico),  
**M.A. Patil** (India),  
**Mandlenkosi Phangwa** (Azania),  
**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, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Venezuela, Zimbabwe

**Can you tell us briefly about the political and social situation in which the CSTM's struggle along with the Malian workers is taking place ?**

**Hammadoun Amion Guindo:** I will begin first of all with the situation in the north of the country. For us, this is not a rebellion. It is banditry fabricated by France. France has led the international community to believe that this movement is a rebellion, with the intention of recovering the north of Mali in order to, on the one hand, get their hands on its mineral wealth and its potential mineral wealth, and on the other to occupy Tessalit for geo-strategic reasons.

Remember that this French project to gain control of this part of the country is an old project. It dates from the colonial era where France, through the 10 January 1957 law n° 57-27, wanted to amputate Mali (ex-Soudan) from its northern region which, along with parts of Mauritania, Algeria, Niger and Tchad, was to constitute the Common Organization of the Saharan Regions (the OCRS), yielding a territory that would be distinct and independent. René Coty was then president of the French Republic and Guy Mollet was at the head of the government.

It is the underground wealth in this region of the Sahara that stokes France's coveting. All the actions led by France concerning this region become coherent when we look at them through this prism: the accepting of the overture made by an official representation from the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (the MNLA) in Paris, the declaration for the "independence of Azawad" made on one of the French State's television networks, and the military intervention. But before I continue, I must specify that Azawad is not a region of the country that is the traditional "homeland" of any ethnic group.

Remember that the Workers' Trade Union Confederation of Mali (the CSTM), denounced the 4 July 2006 Algiers Accord and had considered this agreement as a betrayal.

"Azawad" is simply a pasture area north of Timbuktu. Moreover, the Tuaregs and the Arabs, in the name of whom this plot has been organized, make up only 15% of the population in the regions of north Mali (Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal). France has manipulated this question of a "rebellion" in the north of the country in order to take the State of Mali hostage. Through the intercession of the MNLA, France was able to take over Kidal, and that was in order to keep Tessalit. The State of Mali has no control over Kidal.

The Malians - the Malians at home as well as abroad - have now understood that this war has been imposed on us by France, and that France has intervened solely to combat the Mujao and the Ansar Dine, i.e., Muslim extremism, in order to protect its ally the MNLA, who has provided France with the means to have a control over the whole of Mali's sovereignty.

Our problem today is that the president, in spite of

the engagements for which he was elected, has in reality been taken hostage by France who is impeding the Malian State from having sovereignty over all of the territory. Operation Barkane and the MINUSMA have mortgaged any and all attempts to take back Kidal; the country is under a military embargo.

We have the clear conviction that the president is left without any room for manoeuvre in relation to France, and that as a consequence of this assessment, he has subcontracted both the security and the liberating of the country to Operation Barkane and the MINUSMA.

The CSTM had requested the holding of a national conference in 2012, for the Malians to be able to hear each other and exchange, to analyse the profound causes of this crisis, in order to provide us with a vision of the way out of the crisis, a roadmap, a programme for an team of men and women to lead the liberation of the country to completion. Unfortunately, we were not listened to. Let us hope that the conference that has been announced by the head of State for March 2017 will take place.

On the political and administrative level, things are inter-dependent. When things don't go well on the political level, all the sectors are affected. For some number of years now, Mali has been in political instability. We had thought that by having elections - for want of not being able to hold the national conference - we were going to have legitimate power for coming back to the State prerogatives. The elections took place in 2013. No president has ever been as democratically elected as the current one, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Unfortunately, the assessment is bitter.

#### **The CSTM is forced to fight in a very difficult situation.**

Mali is in a situation where although all of the institutions are in place, the country is paralysed, due to the chief of State's absence of vision, immobilism and silence. This situation has led us into a sort of moral decline, which is being felt by the entire population. This deliquescence is illustrated by the unlimited strike of court judges that has been going on for two weeks, in violation of the regulatory texts.

Over the last two weeks, no dispositions have been taken. The head of State, the number one magistrate, knows this but hasn't budged. The labour inspectors are currently on strike as well. Higher education is also threatening to strike. This is a very special situation, and practically unprecedented.

There are economic actors who are taking advantage of this situation. The CSTM is being forced to fight in a very difficult environment. The rights and demands of the workers are often recognized as being legitimate, but they are left without any response. Even the State is not implementing the engagements that were freely signed.

In the private sector the situation is even more serious. Not only have the demands not been satisfied, but also the bosses have on occasion refused to apply court decisions and are terrorizing the workers. This is a problem for the activists because as soon as there is a strike, the comrades are fired and families are broken apart because of the financial situation resulting from these dismissals. The environment is not favourable to the workers' combat. The comrades who are here with me will give you examples of this situation.

**Yocouba Traore, activist of the Miners' Federation:** We work in a sub-contracting company of the Sadiola gold mining company. In 2011, we produced more than what had been required (15 million cubic meters, instead of 10 million). We had the right to an output bonus. Furthermore, the government had increased wages by 7% for all workers, but the mining sector refused to apply this increase, making a recall on the months that were concerned (they wanted to pay the increase on only 4 months instead of 36). So the demands were being made on these two elements: the output bonus and the recall on 36 months instead of 4.

### 467 workers fired for going on strike

A strike was set off. But instead of entering into negotiations with the employees, the management fired the members of the CSTM union committee. Yet the Miners Federation had posted the notice of a strike in due form. Nevertheless, those who went on strike were dismissed (27 union officers and 30 activists from the Union Committee). The affair was taken to the company's administrative board and to Justice. The court ruled in our favour, but our rights have not been paid to us and we have not been put back on the job. The State is complicit. They are seeking the put down the CSTM activists. At another site, in Loulou, 467 workers were fired in 2012 for going on strike to demand their housing bonus.

**Haidara Almoubachar (General Secretary of the Food Industry and People in service Federation) :** Independent trade unionism is very difficult in the private sector, in spite of the fact that Mali has ratified all the international conventions relating to labour rights and trade union freedom. Each time workers want to get organized on an independent basis, they are dismissed. Last year we set

up CSTM trade union committees in several food industries. The members of those committees were fired – giving way to all the problems that this raised for their families – and three members of the bureau were even put in jail for three months. These dismissals were made even though the labour inspection had not given its approval. In the bakery industry, employees are not even paid the minimum wage, but as soon as they begin to get organized to demand their rights, they are fired. With all this, it is very difficult to do independent trade unionism.

### Issues that overlap the ones that were brought up in the Mumbai Conference

**Hammadoun Amion Guindo:** So those are some insights into the issues that we are facing in Mali. They overlap the ones that were brought up at the Mumbai Conference that you have just talked to us about. In India, trade unionists are imprisoned. In Mali they are doing the same. We should unite our forces to fight exploitation and precarious labour together.

Interview conducted on January 27 2017  
by S. K. Koza

## ICELAND

### Seamen and Fishermen on Strike for Over Two Months

#### An interview with Valmundur Valmundsson, Chairman of the Seamen's Federation in Iceland and Holmgeir Jonsson, General Secretary .

**Your federation is affiliated to the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASI). What is the importance of the fishing industry in your country?**

We are, in our union, most of the seamen of the North. The Seaman's Unions are a Federation with 18 members unions around the county. There are about 3000 seamen. In Iceland, tourism is the biggest industry now. Then come the fisheries and the aluminium factories.

**Can you tell us about the dispute?**

It is an important dispute about the working conditions and the big companies. The boats that are smaller than 15 tons are not on strike. The negotiation is with the ship owners, and there are about 140 companies with 10 to 12 companies that are very big, with nearly 80% of the quotas in Iceland, so the big companies are ruling the negotiations. The strike is now all frozen. We are giving no discount on our demand, and the bosses are not giving any discount on their demands either. For the last decades, fishermen strikes have always been asserted by laws in the Parliament, but here we haven't managed to close any deal. We did have a deal in 2004, that was the last contract we had . In 2006 and 2011, we had

no contract with the ship owners. There are a lot of things that we need to negotiate. It is very hard to be without a contract for six years, that is a fact, this is a problem. So the dispute is very hard now.

**What is your main demand?**

The wage system is a share system. The old prices affect how much we keep. And now the prices come down and one of our main aims is to get a bigger share. We have 100% and we just take 30% of this 100%. We want an increase of 3%. This is our main demand.

**You want the share of the wage to be increased because they are seeking to reduce the cost of labour, is that right?**

That is one of the things we want. We get paid everyday for the cost of our food . But that is not enough. So I will demand that they get free food when they are at sea. And we think that working clothes should be free from now on. And there are also the costs of telephone and Internet on board, which are very expensive, and the fishermen have been paying for the equipment on board.

**How long do you stay out at sea, on average?**

We have, about 40 days out on those

twenty-three big fishing boats. Then there are also two days out, on average, on the small boats.

**Is the strike organized in other ports or only in Reykjavik?**

There is one general strike, in particular in Reykjavik. Furthermore, the 18 unions each correspond to particular companies. As for the skippers, they have a contract, and they are not on strike.

Interview conducted by Pierre Priet and Jean-Pierre Barrois, on 27 January 2017

**“And if Iceland joined the European Union”...**

The president of the Fishermen's Union of Iceland has explained: *“The Icelandic government is contemplating calling for a referendum on whether Iceland should join the European Union. For the fishermen, this would have immediate consequences. Today, Icelandic fishing boats can fish up to 200 kilometres off the coast. According to the regulations of the European Commission, this will be reduced to... 16 kilometres!”*