Note from the editor: [climate change and construction labour]

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Climate change and construction labour
The content of this issue is again a demonstration of the ‘high potential’ of European and international networking. Sub-editor Colin Gleeson, together with Linda Clarke, has collected an interesting panorama of subject articles that deals with the need for what is called by several authors a ‘New Green Deal’, and is by others seen as a complete break with the past of economic growth and businesses dominated by financial capitalism and short termism. And, finally, for some it is no less than the only way out of the actual crisis. Next to authorities in the field we also received contributions from newcomers, notably in the review sections.

The theme of this issue is related to important question marks that the construction industry will have to face in the actual economic turmoil: is it possible for a contractor, not to say for a whole industry, to transform into a productive entity that is sustainable, based on long term strategies, not on boom and bust? What are the consequences of the option for complete regeneration and a farewell to a long tradition of relative neglect of environmental concerns? And what about the consequences for the most involved actor and stakeholder, the workforce?

The contributors to this issue have not come up with the ultimate answers in this area, but at least they have raised the questions. And that is far more than important and dominant parts of the industry actually do. Often some lip service is paid but the slogan ‘sustainable growth’ most often must be read as: more economic growth so that we can build again. The industry abstains from further structural reflections and so do the trade unions. Even the EF-BWW, the European umbrella organisation of building and woodworkers unions, so far stayed rather vague about the trade unions’ political intentions in this area.

In the new Action Program 2012-2015 Building a Social and Green Europe, adopted in December 2011 in Palermo, the Federation spends the sections 1.17 to 1.22 on the need to formulate a new policy for the industry related to sus-
tainability. First, the EFBWW believes that the construction and wood sectors are key sectors for Europe to live up to its climate change commitments. Buildings account for approximately 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions as well as primary energy consumption in the EU. And an increased use of wood as building material would by itself reduce greenhouse gas emission, since wood is a carbon neutral and renewable material that stores carbon. In the following sections, the Federation asks for the extension of the present requirement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to reach zero energy standards by 2020 in all new buildings and also the existing building stock. What is needed is a policy of energy-efficiency and the promotion of the use of environmentally sustainable building products based on a ‘life cycle approach’, taking into account the costs over the whole life cycle of the product. However, in the section dedicated to the priorities for the building sector in the years to come, these expressed engagements are not made operational.

With this issue of CLR-News we make a start in bridging the gap. Therefore, a warm welcome to the re-elected leadership and secretariat of EFBWW – there is serious work to do.