

Employers and trade unions in the Bolivian region of Santa Cruz start the Industrial Safety Council

In various Latin American countries, employers' organisations and trade unions explore the possibilities to reach agreement amongst them, without the involvement of the government. In the Bolivian region of Santa Cruz the discussion partners got off on the right foot. Within a few weeks the social partners agreed on the establishment of the Council of Industrial Safety and Health at Work.



"Ok, the idea behind the bipartite social dialogue is clear," said Julio Kempff in November last year during a visit of Sip Nieuwsma and Peter Boorsma of DECP to Bolivia. "Employers and trade unions meet regularly in a good atmosphere and then take up a number of topics, starting with the less conflictive ones."

An excellent summary of the central elements of the Polder model, which - with some adjustments - seems to work in Latin America too. Peruvians already have serious plans to set up their own Labour Foundation and also in Colombia there is interest in bipartite social dialogue. In almost every Latin-American country there is something comparable to a Social-Economic Council. But usually it functions badly. In these councils the government has a strong control, with the consequence that employers and trade unions generally are hesitant to be frank. The idea that trade unions and employers' organisations can also try to come up with solutions is an eye opener.

Cross-cutting

Kempff is the manager of the Federación de Empresarios Privados de Santa Cruz (FEPSC), the employers' association of the economically most important region of Bolivia. Since 2014, FEPSC has been working regularly with DECP on

various projects. Kempff actively participates in cross-cutting projects with employers' federations from six different regions in Bolivia and brings in a lot of knowledge and experience.

When Kempff hears that Peruvian employers' organisations and trade unions are working on a bipartite consultative body, he is very interested. For Nieuwsma and Boorsma it is a reason to travel to Santa Cruz twice and to explain him the possibilities of a bipartite social dialogue, as well as the benefits for the employers' organisations and for trade unions.



Manager FEPSC, Julio Kempff

They not only meet with people from the FEPSC, but with representatives of the regional trade union center Central Obrera Departamental (COD) as well. DECP decides to ask CNV Internationaal to join and to support the Bolivian trade union movement for their part. Actually, CNV Internationaal would not start activities in Bolivia till 2019. But, seeing the opportunity, they decide to start right away and bring the budget forward, so that we can get along together.

Fact-finding mission

Nieuwsma and Boorsma speak several times with Marianne Lips, Latin America coordinator

of CNV Internationaal, and with Roel Rotshuizen, former director of the CNV Dienstenbond. Fed with information and contacts by DECP, Lips organizes a fact-finding mission in the autumn of 2017. During this trip, she has contact with the employers' organisations, as well as with the regional trade unions, with the help of CNV liaison Arnaldo Montero.



In January 2018, Nieuwsma and Boorsma get to know Montero themselves during an event at CNV Internationaal in Amersfoort. He is well-established in the Bolivian trade union world and knows the manager of the employers' federation in Cochabamba Javier Torres personally. Back in Bolivia, Montero establishes contacts and prepares the mission of CNV and DECP, later in 2018. In Cochabamba the social partners want to talk about 'job creation', in Santa Cruz about 'safety and health at work'. Montero suggests to contact the regional Association of Safety Experts.

Forum

At the end of April 2018, Kempff sends an email to the Netherlands telling he has had contact with the Association of Safety Experts and with the health care officer at the regional authorities, Joaquín Monasterio. He then took on the challenge and invited the regional trade union federation COD for an informal discussion. That meeting worked out very well, and it was decided to organize a Forum during which the creation of the Council for Safety and Health at Work by workers and employers, can be announced.

In the Netherlands, Lips, Rotshuizen, Nieuwsma and Boorsma synchronised their agendas and agreed to travel to Bolivia in August, with the intention of telling them what employers and employees in the Netherlands are doing to maintain a bipartite dialogue and under what conditions it will flourish. August is too far away for Kempff. Can you come sooner? The CNV-people could not, but Nieuwsma and

Boorsma are able to combine a visit to Santa Cruz with a trip to Lima in mid-June. Together with FEPSC and the COD, they set the date Friday 8 June.

August is too far away for Kempff. 'Can you come sooner?'

Sector meetings

Kempff uses the remaining time to organize five sector meetings in the week of 21-25 May to prepare the Forum. Bipartite meetings with construction, agriculture, catering, banks and ultimately industry were held. The meetings take place in a particularly good atmosphere, but there are still some questions and doubts. What exactly are the duties of the Council for Safety and Health at Work? And do employers run the risk that the Council will be used to denounce employers? Kempff explains that the Council is meant to prevent incidents from degenerating into a serious conflict.

Shortly before Nieuwsma and Boorsma leave for Bolivia, Lips is able to reschedule and she also books a flight to Bolivia. Henrik Hallgren of the Swedish NIR has also changed his plans to visit Bolivia in order to be present at the Forum. DECP agrees with Lips to take a look at things on Thursday afternoon and to hand out a uniform message. Unfortunately, because of the fatigue of Lips, this meeting does not take place. In very cold Santa Cruz (in the tropics!) the DECP representatives are able to speak extensively with Hallgren about the Swedish plans and about possible cooperation in Bolivia.



Congress pens

On Thursday, Boorsma, Nieuwsma en Kampff visit the printer. Kempff arranged a conference folder, an adapted brochure on bipartite social dialogue, two large banners and pens with the inscription 'Diálogo social - COD - FEPSC'. We have the opportunity to go through the program again, to meet the interpreter and to

exchange experiences with Hallgren. We will also look at the COD building, where the Forum will take place.



Central Obrera Departamental (COD)

The Council of Industrial Safety and Health at Work is set up with the aim of promoting the prevention of accidents at work and occupational diseases, including through awareness, but also through advice. The departmental health service *Sedes* will take care of the technical part of this new Council. The Council will eventually evolve in an Institute of Industrial Safety and Health at Work. There are rumours that the regional authorities are willing to grant a plot and that the government is willing to pay for a laboratory. The initiative attracts the attention, also in the governmental city of La Paz.

Friday morning June 8, the building of the COD - literally a stone's throw from the office of the FEPSC - is full of people. The Dutch are presented to safety experts, representatives of the catering industry - from both employers and employees - and to Joaquín Monasterio, the director of the regional health service and major promoter of the project. The CNV contacts Montero and Juan Carlos Vargas have also been transferred from La Paz and Lima.

The initiative attracts the attention, also in the governmental city of La Paz

Meanwhile there are rumours that the Minister of Labour will attend. In fifteen minutes the hall has filled up completely. There are not enough congress folders - and later a

shortage of meals reveals. It was decided not to wait for the minister and to start the ceremony.

Che Guevara

On the stage, before a wall painting with a hammer and pickaxe and a portrait of Che Guevara, a long table with eight people, apart from the minister who has not arrived yet. Nieuwsma, Kempff, FEPSC chairman Luis Barbary, COD secretary Ronaldo Borda, Monasterio, Lips, Boorsma and trade unionist Celestino Paniagua. In the hall at least 120 people on red chairs, the safety experts, pride in their reflective vests in the front row. Half of the audience is male, half female. Some have brought their children, who have found space to play on the left side of the hall. In the first row also a man with a fur hat with a Brezhnev pin - in the tropics.



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The speakers are remarkably uniform in their speeches. Of course there are differences and conflicts between employers and employees, the speakers acknowledge. But that does not release us from the duty to seek agreement. Because there are indeed cases where our interests are parallel. For example when it comes to safety and health at work. Borda says that there are employers who do not provide construction workers with the necessary protective equipment. But there are also construction workers who are given protective equipment from their employer, but who do not use them, he acknowledges.

Nieuwsma discusses the importance for employers and trade unions of institutionalizing the social dialogue in the field of health and safety and calls for the widening of the topics for social dialogue in general. Lips mentions the benefits of social dialogue for the functioning of the economy. Both DECP and CNV Internationaal are happy to support the Bolivian social partners in their search for a better relationship, they both emphasize.

The atmosphere is good. Luis Barbary in particular stresses the uniqueness of the fact that employers and employees have jointly taken the initiative to establish the Council. It is a first step that can create confidence and thus lead to a dialogue between social partners on more subjects.



A lot of media interest

Journalists

Then there is some noise in the hall because the Minister of Labour Hinojosa enters the hall, with in his retinue a number of officials, journalists and press photographers. He takes a seat at the table, scans the documentation and makes some notes. The minister also wants to say something. He tells that there are still many industrial accidents, especially in construction and agriculture. The ministry has already promulgated numerous laws and regulations to do something about this, he emphasizes. But an initiative like this Council is welcome, he says.

It is unique that employers and employees have jointly taken the initiative to establish the Council

Then it's time for journalists, filmmakers and photographers, often in the combination journalist-photographer or journalist-filmer. They put their recording devices on the table before the interviewee and listen patiently. Occasionally a question is asked. It is so busy and restless that it is surprising that they can still hear what is being said. When the minister leaves for a side room, the swarm goes after it. The same thing when Barbary leaves a little later.

Text Julio Kempff

It's time for the lunch buffet. The table on the stage is also needed to create enough place for all commensals. Delicious food. Employers and trade unionists are mingled and jokes are made. A few years ago Kempff wrote the text *La Marcha de los Trabajadores* (The march of working people) for the COD. The text is painted on one of the walls of the hall. "Text: Julio Kempff", is mentioned on the wall.

Why didn't you sing the march?, someone asks Kempff. "That is not possible. The text is so ardent that the trade union people present immediately would start to throw fireworks and stones; there will no longer be an employer left," says Kempff. The trade union people can laugh about it.



The Minister of Labour, Héctor Hinojosa Rodríguez

The Forum comes to an end and Boorsma goes back to the hotel with Barbary, right in front of the FEPSC office. The minister is enthusiastic about the initiative: "We are on the right track", he says.



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