

World News - N° 11 , 2002

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Our team won't be playing

PSI is asking its 600 affiliates to take part in a global solidarity action for Korean union rights on 27th June. "Workers everywhere should have the right to be a member of a union and be able to exercise their rights without fear of imprisonment, violence or intimidation," says Hans Engelberts, PSI General Secretary. Yet more than 730 Korean trade unionists have been sent to jail since President Kim Dae-Jung came to power, for actions that would be considered legitimate union activities in all other OECD countries. The day of action will focus on the demand to release imprisoned unionists, as well as to recognise government employee unions. Affiliates have been asked to organise protest rallies outside Korean missions in their countries. PSI itself has written to the Korean government and will be meeting with the Korean Embassy in Geneva later this month. 27th June is just prior to the final of the football World Cup and should prove a significant embarrassment for the Korean government. The action is supported by all global unions, especially the ICFTU and the IMF (Metalworkers). See www.world-psi.org, and www.global-unions.org. The sites also contain poster and postcard material for downloading along the theme Our team won't be playing at the World Cup.

Not currently behind bars

The trade union rights situation in both Korea and Japan will also be featured during a lunch-time seminar at the ILO, as part of a meeting of PSI's Executive Board on 7th June. The seminar will include two union speakers from Korea who are not at present behind bars, and two from Japan - where freedom of association and collective bargaining rights are also in jeopardy. Contact nora.win.tour@world-psi.org, or Kim Seok at the KGEU (kisto@jinbo.net)

Maternity protection panel

As part of the Global Unions maternity protection campaign, ILO Conference delegates and staff have also been invited to a panel discussion on maternity protection on 6 June in Geneva. Speakers will highlight how to successfully campaign for national ratification of Convention 183, and how maternity protection can be extended to workers in the informal economy. Kamissa Dembele, the women's education co-ordinator for French-speaking Africa, will speak on behalf of PSI. Marina Ferreira Rea from the International Baby Food Action Network will also feature. Contact nora.wintour@world-psi.org.

Unopposed

The new PSI President, following the decision of Bill Lucy to step down after September, will be Ylva Thörn of the Swedish Municipal Workers Union. Ylva will be the second woman president of PSI. Long-serving PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts, will be re-elected for a further 5-year term from September 2002. Both Ylva and Hans were unopposed at close of nominations on 1 June.

Innovative link

PSI sub-regions Southern Africa and Brazil may be far apart geographically, but they are increasingly closer in co-operation. In an innovative approach to union development, the two sub-regions are co-operating in programs involving Angola, the Southern Africa country that has recently resolved its long-running civil war. No PSI staffer in Southern Africa speaks Portuguese, but Jocelio Drummond, the sub-regional Secretary in Brazil, does. Jocelio will be helping his counterpart, Des East, on Angola where Portuguese is the common language. Contact desmonde@psi.wn.apc.org.

WSSD: eight years pays off

Eight years of lobbying by trade unions on key worker issues could finally be coming to a successful conclusion. In Indonesia on 31 May at the preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), trade unions were successful in negotiating much of the wording they have sought since the Rio Summit in 1992. Employment, decent work, HIV/AIDS, and worker health and safety are now squarely on the agenda for discussion at the WSSD in South Africa later this year. This includes wording to explicitly link workplace health and safety structures to employment and public health programs. There is agreement for governments to develop workplace-based partnerships and programs, including training and education programmes aimed at sustainable development. PSI's David Boys took an active role in the negotiations. Contact david.boys@world-psi.org.

Pay equity at ILO Conference

Nora Wintour, PSI Equality and Rights Officer, was at the EPSU Gender Equality Committee on 29 April to discuss the PSI pay equity campaign. As a result of the discussion, EPSU affiliates will be asked to lobby their ILO delegations and governments to support the PSI-ICFTU resolution on pay equity at the forthcoming ILO Conference. Also at the Committee meeting, a submission to the collective bargaining seminar and to the EPSU Executive was changed. It now calls on affiliates to achieve a 2-5 percentage point reduction in the gender pay gap over the next 5 years, outlines mechanisms by which this can be done and calls for a regular monitoring process. Contact nora.wintour@world-psi.org.

Workers out!

PSI supports the second World Conference of Lesbian and Gay Trade Unionists, to be held in Sydney, Australia 31 October-2 November. The Conference, known as Workers Out! aims to integrate gay, lesbian, bisexual

and transgender workers' rights into union programs, promote legislative and union policy changes on lesbian and gay workers' rights, and facilitate the development of workplace policies on HIV/AIDS. Registration is cheaper if made before 31 July. See www.workersout.com for details and on-line registration, or contact Workers Out!, Labour Council of NSW, level 10, 377 Sussex Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000 Australia.

Unhealthy and irresponsible

According to the global NGO Save the Children (SCF) a suggestion by the World Trade Organisation's incoming director-general, Supachai Panitchpakdi, is both unhealthy and irresponsible. Supachai suggested that developing countries could make balance of payments gains by supplying health services to foreign patients from the overstretched national health systems of Europe. But according to John Hilary, trade policy adviser to SCF, most developing countries are struggling to meet the health needs of their own people in circumstances infinitely more serious than Europe. Diverting essential resources towards treating foreign patients is the last thing they need, he says. When it comes to basic services such as healthcare... all governments have a prior obligation under human rights law to meet their own people's needs first, he said. This is the blind spot at the centre of the WTO's GATS negotiations, according to the NGO.

Contact GATScrit@yahoogroups.com

PSI lobbies US Senate

PSI President, Bill Lucy, lobbied in support of the Corzine amendment in the US Senate last month. The amendment aimed to prohibit US negotiators from pressing for the privatisation of public services in trade agreements. In an incisive speech to the Senate, Corzine said that trade agreements should not include a commitment by the US to privatisate significant public services such as national security, social security, public health and safety, and education. Corzine said that negotiations may well lead to agreements under which services traditionally administered by governments would be on the chopping block. US negotiators now are pressuring Chile to keep their retirement system privatised. As a result, the financial security of Chilean retirees may depend on international negotiations rather than the needs and wishes of the Chilean people. Consider how Americans would feel if the roles of the two countries were reversed, he said. For the speech contact GATScrit@yahoogroups.com.

Spain general strike

PSI has sent a letter of support to CC.OO and UGT in Spain that have together organised a general strike for 24 May. The government responded to the strike call by a unilateral decision to change employment laws by executive decree, making dismissals easier, and reducing access to unemployment benefits. The situation parallels similar moves in Italy over the last few months. Contact Internacional@ccoo.es and Internacional@cec.ugt.org.

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