

World News - N° 13 , 2002

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Global action in over 40 countries
The global unions' day of action in support of jailed unionists and rights in Korea was backed by affiliates in more than 40 countries*. (A full list of countries participating is at the end of this newsletter). The day of action, held on 27 June to coincide with the football World Cup finals, was backed by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), as well as by PSI and the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF). Protests included demonstrations outside Korean Embassies around the world, protest letters, marches and rallies, pickets and press conferences from Argentina to Turkey and from Thailand to Russia. In Geneva, PSI General Secretary Hans Engelberts together with leaders of other global unions, (the IMF, IUF, ICFTU and UNI) met with the Korean Ambassador, whilst Swiss affiliates demonstrated outside the United Nations building. The Ambassador accepted Hans' offer of a red card, a global unions poster, and a protest message. He will convey the protest message to the Korean President. See the PSI Website for more details. To all those affiliates that showed their solidarity:
Thank You!

ILO backs release call
Meanwhile the International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) Committee on Freedom of Association has called on the Korean Government "to take the appropriate steps so as to ensure respect for the fundamental principle of the recognition of the right to organize of workers without distinction whatsoever, including public servants and teachers." The Committee, meeting in Geneva in June, "expressed its serious concern over the detention of trade unionists and the judicial proceedings taken against them, for, it would appear, activities linked to collective labour disputes." The Committee encouraged the Korean Government to accept a direct contact mission from the ILO on the issue. See www.ilo.org.

Treatment plan needed in South Africa

Hundreds of delegates from all over South Africa attended the National Treatment Congress on HIV/AIDS, held 27 - 29 June. The Congress was jointly organised by the trade union centre, COSATU. Many of South Africa's leading HIV scientists as well as nurses, doctors and people living with HIV/AIDS gave presentations. Despite encouragement for best practice, most people with HIV are not receiving adequate treatment, care and support. HIV is having a serious impact on health services. The Congress concluded that the HIV epidemic has created an emergency in SA, and that a national treatment plan is needed to complement its prevention strategy.

According to the Congress the plan should include:

- piloting anti-retroviral treatment and diagnostics in the public service
- treating sexually transmitted and opportunistic infections through targeting vulnerable groups such as women and children
- cutting the costs of medicines and diagnostics through investing in public health care
- building capacity and will to treat HIV involving doctors, nurses and volunteers
- improving prevention information for young people. See www.cosatu.org

The most powerful global institution ever created

Well said: The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the most powerful global institution ever created. It enjoys world government powers that the UN can only dream of, according to an article in a major Canadian newspaper. The article, written on the occasion of the G-8 meeting in Canada last week, goes on to say that the WTO is, of course, world government in the narrowest sense. This because it enforces the rights of trans-national corporations against the sovereign authority of democratic nation states. Contact www.winnipegfreepress.com.

World Bank boycott grows

The boycott of the World Bank's source of funds is growing. Most recently the 1.5 million member US union SEIU endorsed the boycott of World Bank bonds. The SEIU will withhold investment until the Bank stops promoting privatisation, cancels all debts from poor countries and stops its destructive structural adjustment programs. Pension funds are a major source of World Bank funding. See www.seiu.org.

PSI project on IT in Africa

A new union development project has been approved that targets a key issue for many unions in Africa. The IMPACT-funded PSI project in East Africa aims to upgrade union IT systems so as to have computer based membership and accounting systems. PSI has 13 affiliates in East Africa. Contact khadija@todays.co.ke.

Latvians demand health funding

PSI affiliate in Latvia, LVSADA is taking strike action to improve health care. One of the key demands is to raise health care funding to 7% of GDP - more than double its present level of 3.2%. After a strike day on 20 June, a further day is planned for 18 July. Health care is in crisis in Latvia and the number of people with serious illness is increasing steadily. LVSADA has been working closely with the media and community groups on the issue. The next negotiations with the government are set for 13 July, prior to the parliamentary election in October. Contact Inta Gavarina, email

gavarina@lattur.lv.

SAMWU indefinite strike

The 120,000 members of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) started an indefinite nation-wide strike on 2 July. SAMWU's demands include an increase in the minimum wage from about USD190 to USD220 per month. According to SAMWU, municipal workers both serve and are part of the community. They share the same problems when it comes to the delivery of quality services. Community organisations have been asked for their support. See www.samwu.org.za.

China unions ILO sell out

The All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) was voted on to the ILO governing body as an alternative delegate last month. This is a significant and controversial move. The ILO mandate is to defend independent trade unions, whereas the ACFTU remains largely an organ of the Chinese government. Attempts by workers to form independent trade unions in China during the current period of massive restructuring have been met with violence and repression. The ACFTU appears to have done little to change this situation. The International Union of Food & Allied Workers (IUF), part of the global unions federation, has taken a particularly strong stand on this. The IUF says the vote at the ILO is a "sell out". See www.iuf.org.

Homeland security is war on unions

President Bush's proposed Department of Homeland Security will mean removal of union rights for 170,000 US federal workers. The proposal for the umbrella department is overseen by friends of the President - who has already removed union rights from lawyers at the Justice Department, and from federal airport security staff. There is already evidence that lack of union rights at the FBI has led to a culture whereby workers are afraid to blow the whistle on errors, thus jeopardising national security. The Homeland Security proposal has been described as the most fundamental assault on federal employee rights in decades. See www.populist.com.

Real doctors, not spin doctors

The UK government continues to be pressed on the issue of its commitment to decent public services. UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis, speaking at the union's 2002 Conference last month said: "If they would spend as much on real doctors as they do on spin doctors, perhaps all our health service problems would be solved." Dave also pointed out the importance of international union links. "We as a union achieve far more by working together with our sister unions across the world than we do by working alone," he said. See www.unison.org.uk.

Solidarity

*PSI and IMF affiliates supported the Korea Day of Action in: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Honduras, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Nepal, New Caledonia, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, USA.

Congress visas Canada: Forms can be downloaded at www.cic.gc.ca. Congress information has been posted at special events, Canadian government website for visa offices: www.canada.gc.ca

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