

World News - N° 20 , November 2002

Colombia - join the campaign!
Going to the World Social Forum?
Planning for the future - health services
Social dialogue in the ILO
Fighting violence in the health workplace
Drugs to the poor
Unions for women, women for unions
Education in Latin America
Young people are interested in politics and social issues
Stop the WTO Mini-Ministerials!

Colombia - join the campaign!

PSI is urging all affiliates to call for an end to impunity in Colombia, where over 130 trade unionists were assassinated this year without legal consequences for those responsible. PSI is sending an international mission to Colombia to coincide with International Human Rights Day, 10 December, and to show solidarity with public sector unions in the country. A circular and a model letter will be sent all affiliates. The relevant texts can also be picked up from www.world-psi.org.

Going to the World Social Forum?

The next World Social Forum will be held in Porto Alegre in Brazil on 23-28 January 2003. PSI will send a small delegation and would like to know which affiliates intend to be there. In particular, PSI would like to know of any people who would be able to present their union's views on water privatisation. PSI would like to host one or more events focusing on public service issues and making use of affiliates' experiences. Names and contacts should be sent to mike.waghorne@world-psi.org before December 12.

Planning for the future - health services

Some 25 affiliates participated in the PSI Health Services Task Force meeting on 17-18 October in Geneva. One of the main tasks of the meeting was to identify the best ways in which PSI could implement the health components of the new Programme of Action (POA). Within that, one element of work was to devise campaign objectives and strategies which can contribute to the success of the PSI Quality Public Services (QPS) campaign. Much will be based on research material compiled by the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU). The meeting also spent time on migration and HIV/AIDS issues and prepared for the ILO Joint Meeting on Social Dialogue, to which Brendan Martin, Public World, had prepared a "PSI Briefing Paper for the Worker's Side". Contact mike.waghorne@world-psi.org.

Social dialogue at the ILO

The ILO Joint Meeting on Social Dialogue in the health services, 21-25 October, adopted a resolution promoting health care as a basic human right and an essential requirement for improving working and living conditions. The meeting also adopted conclusions containing proposed ILO actions concerning practical guidance in strengthening social dialogue, and concerning migration of health services workers. For example, the ILO should create awareness

among other international agencies about the close interrelation between social dialogue, decent work and quality health services, collect data and undertake studies on pay equity and the gender gap in health services, and consider the development of a database to facilitate social dialogue at national level. The ILO should also bring to governments' attention the fact that health workers moving to another country on a temporary or permanent basis have the right of freedom to emigrate and the right to return to their home country. The resolution and the conclusions will go to the Governing Body in March 2003 for approval. Follow-up meetings are under preparation. Contact mike.waghorne@world-psi.org.

Fighting violence in the health workplace

With violence afflicting one of every two health workers worldwide, time has come to do something about it. On 24 October a joint task force, comprising the International Labour Office (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and PSI launched a set of "Framework guidelines for addressing workplace violence in the health sector". Research shows that about 25% of all violent incidents at work occur in the health sector, and more than 50% of the workforce in the sector, often female, have experienced violence. The consequences for the effectiveness of the health system at large are also becoming increasingly apparent, especially in developing countries. See www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=5141.

Drugs to the poor

According to the Washington Trade Daily (28 October), Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Supachai Panitchpakdi, is optimistic when it comes to providing poor countries with access to generic life-saving drugs. It is essential that WTO member countries meet the December deadline for resolving the issue so that the Doha Development Round can remain on track. The issue has pitted drug companies in the US and Europe against generic drug manufacturers in developing countries, such as Brazil and India. Western drug companies have for years argued that heavy spending on research and development of safe and effective products warrant patent protection and relatively high prices. Who can argue against that? Families USA, has looked at the issues and published a report, entitled "Profiting from Pain", which shows that large companies spend as much as two and a half times as much on marketing, advertising and administration as they spend on research and development. See www.familiesusa.org.

Unions for women, women for unions

Nora Wintour, PSI Equality and Rights Officer attended the 86th Meeting of the ICFTU Women's Committee on October 17-18 in Brussels. The meeting discussed preparations for the 8th ICFTU World Women's Conference, which will take place in Melbourne, Australia, 18-21 February 2003. The theme of the conference is "Unions for Women, Women for Unions." PSI is planning a delegation to the Melbourne conference. The meeting also severely criticised the comparative lack of women at the most recent ILO Conference. Together with ICFTU, PSI will continue to campaign to increase women's representation both as delegates, secretaries and chairs of the different committees and as elected members of the governing body in the ILO. Contact nora.wintour@world-psi.org.

Education in Latin America

PSI Education Officer Christine Roos attended an evaluation seminar in Chile from 14-15 October. Educators from PSI Swedish affiliate SKTF have trained 189 local municipal leaders in collective bargaining techniques since 1999.

These facilitators will have an important role to play in the future to develop and strengthen their respective grassroots organisations and regional federations. Five PSI activities are planned for the week November 26-30, all in São Paulo, Brazil.

Young people ARE interested in politics and social issues

Mike Waghorne, PSI Assistant General Secretary, represented PSI at the European Social Forum held in Florence, Italy on November 7-9. Together with Susan George, Attac, Mike acted as keynote speaker at a GATS workshop organised by the World Development Movement. The workshop had to be run twice as the room became dangerously overcrowded, with people spilling out into the corridors. Whilst it would be wrong to describe the Forum as a young persons' forum - there were thousands of people of so-called middle age and older - the Forum did raise a challenge to unions because a large majority of those present were young people. Unions have to look seriously at themselves if they are not attracting young workers into the movement, as young people clearly are interested in both politics and social issues.

Stop the WTO Mini-Ministerials!

On 14-15 November trade ministers representing some 25 countries and about 80% of world trade met in Sydney, Australia. The meeting was advertised as an informal gathering to facilitate a better understanding of a number of issues being discussed as part of the Doha Development Agenda. Such mini-ministerials could very well become a trend in the lead up to Cancùn. The danger is that the future of the trade agenda could be decided in such meetings by selected members, without written records, and not by the full WTO membership through genuine consensus. PSI has joined a growing number of NGO allies in a campaign against such mini-ministerials and "Green Room" type decision-making.

Comments welcome

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