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Nobel says trade union rights "subordinate"

On behalf of PSI, Norwegian affiliate NKF recently approached the Nobel Committee in order to implement the PSI Executive Board resolution on Korea. PSI is seeking a review of the award of the Nobel Peace prize to South Korean President Kim Dae Jung having regard to his appalling record on trade union rights. In response, the Nobel Committee told NKF and PSI by letter that they do not meet with anyone but themselves. The Committee also said that they consider human and trade union rights to be subordinate to Kim's efforts for democracy in South-Korea and the work he had done to establish a closer relationship between South and North Korea. They said that they do not make any evaluation after the prize is given. The Committee sent a copy of the speech made when Kim received the prize. In this speech the Committee says it was aware of the problems concerning human and trade union rights. Following consultation with NKF, PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts, subsequently declined the offer of a meeting with the Secretary of the Committee on the basis of the response. Hans will discuss the situation with affiliates in Korea later this month at the rally for the launch of the Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU). For more information contact kjartan.lund@nkf.no

Dan Byung-ho sentenced to 2 years

Dan Byung-ho is one person whose rights are clearly subordinate to Kim Dae Jung's policies. On 18 March the President of the Korean Congress of Trade Unions was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for exercising internationally recognised rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. The outcome of his trial was immediately denounced by a 20-strong international union solidarity mission that was present for the verdict. See www.global-unions.org.

PSI pushes public services and rights at UN

Nora Wintour, PSI Equality and Rights Officer attended the 46th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York from 4-15th

March. Ines McCormack (Ireland) was also part of the PSI delegation. One of the themes of the commission this year was the eradication of poverty through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle in a globalising world. PSI participated in the drafting of additional texts to the agreed conclusions, which focussed on the role of public services in eradicating poverty, pay equity and the extension of labour laws to workers in the informal economy. PSI participated in a number of NGO side events on women's poverty, including the forum sponsored by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women and a panel sponsored by the ICFTU and Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ). Whilst at the UN, Nora and Ines helped the NGO human rights caucus to produce a statement on the treatment of domestic workers by some UN staff, and to protest the lack of union rights for cafeteria workers at the UN centre. The UN cafeteria is currently franchised to a multinational company. Contact nora.wintour@world-psi.org.

Canadian minister says equality is achieved

A rally of over 30,000 people in Victoria, British Columbia (BC), Canada late February protested recent statements made by the BC Minister for Women's Equality. The Minister, Lynne Stephens, said that women and men already have "exactly equal" opportunities. According to a newspaper report, she said that pay inequalities are due to more women wanting to work part-time. However this claim is contradicted by statistics from her own ministry. The figures for 1999 show that an average woman working full-time for a full year made less than 65% of what an average man made, and the that this percentage is decreasing. Stephens also said that her advice to those who want to get a better deal from tax cuts is, "well, then, make more money." She also said that domestic violence against women had nothing to do with equality. "More women are abused, not oppressed," she said. For more information contact diane.wood@bcgeu.ca.

South Africa shows the way

Unions in South Africa are applauding new labour laws in their country. Previous apartheid-era laws were changed by amendment this month. The new laws strengthen collective bargaining, encourage the idea of retrenchments as a last resort and prevent the exploitation of workers by the old practice of deeming them independent contractors, rather than employees. The new laws also transfer all contracts and collective agreements to the new employer when a company is transferred. Contact moloto@cosatu.org.

PSI lodges ILO complaint

In contrast with the changes in South Africa, new laws in British Colombia, Canada, have taken a regressive approach. PSI has associated itself with a complaint to the ILO made by its affiliate, NUPGE. The new laws in the Province are a violation of ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association according to PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts. Under the laws, employers may avoid the terms of existing collective agreements by simply contracting out work to other employers who are not bound by the agreements. Contact nora.wintour@world-psi.org

Common approach to union development

PSI's Christine Roos and Chris Jackson along with other education officers from nine global union federations met with the Nordic and Dutch funding organisations in Amsterdam on March 12-13. The meeting was held against a background of increased funding uncertainty arising from the election of new right-wing governments in some countries. The meeting focused on

joint guidelines for the planning and implementing of union development projects and agreed to carry out a series of joint training workshops in 2003. These workshops will target both field and headquarters staff of the global unions together with representatives from the funding organisations, and will focus on a common "Logical Framework Approach" (LFA) to be used by all parties involved. This will strengthen the capacity of the global unions and their affiliates to implement strategic plans and formulate comprehensive programs for union development. Contact christine.roos@world-psi.org

Hypocrisy in Argentina

In a breathtaking display of hypocrisy, the President of Argentina announced that the government will not be able to fully pay the salaries of its employees this month. President Duhalde said that this is necessary due to a sharp drop in tax revenue during the current economic crisis. However Duhalde apparently does not find it necessary to lead by example. He announced a few days earlier that his own salary and that of other top officials would be increased by 13% - to the maximum permitted by law. (New York Times report)

The perils of contracting out

On 11 March 2002 a flight training school in Florida, US, was notified that two of its former students were approved for student visas to study advanced flight training. The two men were those who crashed planes into the World Trade Centre exactly 6 months earlier. The late letters to the flight school were sent by a private contractor, ACS inc, which has a five-year US\$74 million contract with the US government immigration services. The contract with ACS inc was signed in October, after the 11 September tragedy. ACS's own media release at the time specifically mentions its "increasingly important task since the September 11 terrorist attacks". ACS currently operates in 29 countries. See www.thesmokinggun.com

Pacific nations adopt wrong model

According to leaders of PSI's Oceania affiliates (in Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, the Solomons, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Australia) some smaller island nations have lost almost half their population in recent years as a direct result of IMF-World Bank style restructuring. According to Paul Slape, convenor of the sub-regional group, such restructuring has also caused high unemployment and loss of social cohesion in countries where there is no alternative to direct government involvement.. However Paul said it is heartening that unions in at least two Pacific nations have been approached recently by the World Bank and IMF for their views on restructuring plans. Contact mike.ingpen@psa.org.nz.

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