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Governing body flays Korea on rights

The ILO Governing Body's Committee on Freedom of Association has made a particularly strong statement about the PSI complaint on Korea's denial of trade union rights to public servants. The Committee meeting in Geneva last month said that the Korean government should extend the right to organise to all categories of public servants in accordance with freedom of association principles, should limit restrictions on the right to strike to essential services and should speedily bring laws into line with freedom of association principles. It also noted new reports of further arrests and urged release and dropping of all charges. Contact Alan.Leather@world-psi.org.

Bridging PSI's digital divide

PSI's plan to help affiliates to get connected to the Internet is progressing. However help from major Northern affiliates is needed. PSI has developed a priority list of affiliates in developing countries that need technical, educational or financial assistance. Funding has been sought from several sources. The next phase is the provision of direct assistance to unions high on the priority list on a pilot basis. In order to do this PSI will need technical expertise - especially people competent at communications technology and who could provide short-term training at seminars for staff of the unions involved. In most cases, English or Spanish ability will be sufficient. French and, in one case, Portuguese will also be needed. The project will involve international travel in order to set up the Internet connections, and provide necessary training. Northern affiliates who might have such staff available for short-term secondment, or who could identify other suitable people are asked to contact dain.bolwell@world-psi.org.

Quality Public Services - for all of us

PSI's proposed global Quality Public Services campaign is under development for discussion at Executive Board, and especially at the September World Congress in Ottawa. PSI Executive Officer Ros Harvey is

writing a strategy. This will be further developed. The campaign is proposed to run over 5 years, will be targeted to areas where there can be significant and measurable impact. The campaign will focus on changing the policies of both governments and International Financial Institutions on public services. It will involve community and political tactics, as well as a collective bargaining approach. It is also proposed that the campaign will involve solidarity projects in developing countries. One suggestion for a campaign slogan is: Quality Public Services - for all of us. Any other ideas are welcome. Contact ros.harvey@world-psi.org.

PSI urgent action on Palestine

PSI has issued an urgent action in relation to the situation in Palestine. It asks affiliates to contact their governments and the UN in order to help avert what is a deepening tragedy. It suggests support for Israeli troop withdrawals, immediate ceasefire on both sides and for consideration of the Saudi peace initiative - recognition and security for both Israel and the Palestinian State and a return to the 1967 borders. Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU has recently returned from a visit Palestine and Israel unions. Contact nora.wintour@world-psi.org.

Civil servants get rights in Kenya

The Union of Kenya Civil Servants has long shown on the PSI database as a symbolic entry only. The comment attached to it says: Union banned by Presidential decree 1981. However the ban has now been lifted. Civil servants in Kenya are now free to join trade unions, and the UKCS is set to legally operate for the first time in more than two decades. This is a welcome win for PSI affiliates in Kenya and for civil servants in general. In a further indication of improved attitudes in Kenya, the Human Rights Commissioner recently rebuked the Director of the Agricultural Research Institute for trying to prevent his staff from joining trade unions.

PSIRU at Monterrey

Jane Lethbridge of the PSI Research Unit (PSIRU) took part in the Monterrey Global Forum on sustainable development 14-16 March in Mexico. This was held to enable NGOs and civil society groups to discuss the Monterrey Consensus, a paper drafted by a range of international agencies and groups for approval at the UN financing for development conference. There was strong criticism of the Monterrey Consensus because it did not challenge the neo-liberal model and it still recommended direct foreign investment and public-private partnerships. Jane's report is available on the PSI website.

HIV/AIDS code of practice

The newly-developed ILO code of practice on HIV/AIDS is planned to become the central element of PSI's efforts in this area. The code of practice rests on principles such as non-discrimination against those infected, no compulsory screening for job applicants or workers, and work environments that minimise risks. Unions are encouraged to address related issues through collective agreements. PSI's Alice Carl has opened discussions with global NGOs on the issue as it relates to international trade agreements. PSI is also seeking resources to help inform affiliates about the code and how it can be used as a union tool in negotiations, campaigns and for information. Copies of the code will be made available from PSI offices and are available now at the ILO Website (www.ilo.org/aids).

Between a rock and a hard place

This is the title of a new booklet from the UK Institute of Employment Rights. It looks at problems of creative workers such as journalists, photographers,

musician and film directors. Common abuses of these workers - whether public or private-sector based - include unequal employment contracts, lack of collective bargaining rights, and the abuse of fixed term contracts. Proposals for change include worker friendly model contracts, collective organisation using communications technology and better spreading of information. See www.ier.org.uk.

Protests in China largest since 1949

There have been recent reports of widening labour unrest in China over the issue of privatisation of state-controlled industries. The New York Times carried an article last month that pointed to the largest protests over labour issues since the Communist Party took power in 1949. The protests centre on disputes over redundancy benefits and corruption as China opens more industries to competition following its recent admission to the World Trade Organisation. (see www.nytimes.com/2002/03/19).

Temporary migrants

Mike Waghorne, PSI Assistant General Secretary, addressed a recent WTO Symposium on GATS for member states considering the implications of the part of the GATS which covers workers who go from one country to another for a specified period of time to provide a service. Until now, that was defined as mainly high-level professionals such as architects, engineers or financial advisors providing contract services for a foreign company, as well as transferred senior managers of multinational companies. But the treaty could cover a much wider range of workers, such as nurses, teachers and even other skilled or unskilled workers. However, governments are cautious about opening their labour markets to this wider coverage. It is a very sensitive topic between developed and developing countries (the latter seek a dramatic widening) and it raises questions of brain-drain, the rights of temporary workers, the abuse of procedures by governments to keep their own workers' (such as nurses) wages low. The responses of member states to Mike's presentation was very positive but now affiliates will need to find out what their own government's position on this matter will be - it is one of the key issues in the GATS negotiations.

Social security privatisation in Argentina

A new study by the Centre for Economic and Policy Research in Washington shows that the privatisation of the public pension system in Argentina was a significant factor in its economic collapse. The privatisation policy was pushed by the International Monetary Fund. Whilst scapegoats for the collapse have included regional government spending, corruption, and the pegging of the peso to the US dollar, the new study shows that the government had to find extra money to pay retirees when worker contributions were channelled into private funds.

IMF bankruptcy law lives

Meanwhile the IMF proposal to institute a form of international bankruptcy law has got a reprieve. The plan has gained support from the IMF's biggest backer, the United States. Under the plan, debtor countries would get protection from creditors in a similar way that companies are protected under national bankruptcy laws. According to the IMF this would help contain financial crises of the kind most recently faced by Argentina.

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