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World Bank and IMF cause poverty in Africa

The PSI African Regional Executive Committee meeting in Kenya last week resulted in significant media attention to the failings of World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs (SAPs). The Kenyan Minister for Labour, Joseph Ngutu in opening the meeting was widely reported as saying that SAPs have failed in Africa. He said that SAPs involving privatisation have resulted in increasing poverty and mass retrenchment of workers. Mr Ngutu asked unions to help the government initiate alternative local programs. Hans Engelberts, PSI General Secretary, who was at the meeting, told the media that IMF and World Bank policies have increased the poverty gap between rich and poor nations. See reports in Kenya Times, Daily Nation and the Kenya Standard 24 April.

The issue is trust

PSI Executive Officer, Ros Harvey addressed this year's Day of Mourning event to commemorate workers killed and injured at work. The event in Geneva on 28 April paid special tribute to emergency service workers. Ros said denying emergency services workers the right to organise and collectively bargain is gross hypocrisy. In many countries emergency service workers, are denied basic trade union rights. She said "We trust them to risk their lives to save us, but we don't trust them to organise and collectively bargain". Ros told the meeting "Gratitude is not enough. Governments should ensure all public sector workers have trade union rights". The ceremony was attended by over 1000 people, including ambassadors from many countries. Brian Cleary spoke on behalf of the fire fighters of New York where 343 were killed along with 50 other emergency service workers on 11 September. Kofi Annan (UN) and Juan Somavia (ILO) also spoke. According to the ILO, 2 million workers die each year due to work-related accidents or diseases. This is equivalent to 5000 workers a day - the same number of people who were killed at the World Trade Center.

Time to listen to the people

A court in Ontario, Canada has stopped government plans to privatise its electricity generating and transmission company. Legal action brought by PSI affiliate CUPE and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers' Union, resulted in the stop order. At the Ontario Superior Court, the unions argued that sale of the company, Hydro One, would violate the Electricity Act. The judge agreed that the Act allowed the Ontario government to acquire and hold shares in Hydro One, but not to sell them. Judy Darcy, CUPE President, said outside the courthouse on 19 April that the government should now listen to the people of Ontario. "They never sought a mandate to open markets or to sell off the electricity grid or anything else" she said. See www.cupe.ca.

15 million strike against privatisation

Much of India was brought to a standstill on 16 April. According to news reports, an estimated 15 million workers went on strike to protest government privatisation plans and proposals to make retrenchments easier for employers. Public sector unions, including those of banks and insurance companies, claimed complete success for the strike. A government statement admitted that it was near total nationwide as 15 million employees kept away from their workplaces. Strikers called for finance minister Yashwant Sinha's head for his proposals aimed at benefiting "the interests of big business houses and foreign players". See Financial Express article.

Epidemic of health workplace violence

A new study on violence in the health sector shows that it is as widespread in developing and transition countries as it is in the industrialised world. The research was jointly commissioned by PSI, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the ILO. It shows that in some countries, such as South Africa, Lebanon, Portugal and Thailand, health workers personally experience at least one violent incident each year at work. The restructuring of health systems is a contributing factor in the prevalence of violence according to workers. Ambulance staff, nurses and doctors are particularly affected. Contact Alan.Laether@world-psi.org.

Child labour World Cup campaign

The Global March Against Child Labour has organised a campaign involving a petition calling on the International Football Association (FIFA) to make the 2002 football World Cup free from child labour. As reported in PSI World News #7, PSI has signed on to the petition. However signatures from affiliates and other organisations are still needed. Affiliates that want to sign on should go to www.globalmarch.org, or see the PSI Website.

OECD to continue to monitor Korean labour rights

The OECD Committee for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELSA) has recommended the continuation of a special monitoring procedure in order to put pressure on the Seoul government to honour its pledge to respect core labour rights. The Committee's recommendation was made despite efforts by the Korean government to have the process suspended. It now goes forward for endorsement at a forthcoming meeting of the OECD Council. A group of six Korean trade unionists from both Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) and Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) attended an ELSAC consultation session on 18 April as part of the TUAC delegation to the OECD meeting. PSI thanks those affiliates who took up this matter with their member governments. Contact mike.waghorne@world-psi.org.

Minimising computer-related injuries

New research reported in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine says

that 21% of people using computers as part of their work develop hand or arm disorders each year. The study involved 632 people newly hired in jobs requiring at least 15 hours of computer use each week. However the study contradicts conventional recommendations on posture. It says that lower keyboard positions (that result in an angle of 120 degrees at the inner elbow), lower screen positions so that the head is tilted downward, and supports such as chair armrests can reduce injuries. Less surprisingly, the study also found that the risk of injury increases with the amount of computer usage. See www.interscience.wiley.com/jpages.

NEHAWU commits to AIDS fight

Major PSI affiliate, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) of South Africa has publicly committed itself to participating in partnerships that would ensure the success of the government's Nevirapine roll out program aimed at making the drug widely available for treatment of the disease. NEHAWU welcomed Cabinet's recent announcement on nevirapine and will support the program at all identified institutions. According to a union statement made in Johannesburg on 22 April "This effectively means all NEHAWU members will give 100 percent co-operation (to) management. Our branches in those institutions will meet and decide what is it in their institution that they can do to ensure that the roll out succeeds in spite of the expected challenges and difficulties." The union said it was encouraged by government acknowledgement that anti-retrovirals improve life and will fight to reduce the costs of the drugs. "The (government's) statement builds hope and positive attitude amongst those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS" according to the union statement.

Reminder on health questionnaire

The PSI Research Unit needs your help. Earlier this year a survey on health services privatisation was sent to all PSI affiliates. To date there have been few responses. The survey results will be used to help inform campaign strategies, to develop educational materials and to extend information on the PSIRU database. Please send completed returns to Mike Waghorne at PSI, or contact j.lethbridge@gre.ac.uk.

Holzmann involved in Argentina pension demise

The role of the privatisation of its pension scheme in Argentina's economic collapse was mentioned in World News #8. Further information this week from the ICFTU points out that a strategy paper by Holzmann and Jorgensen of the World Bank published in January 2001 boasted that "the World Bank has evolved into a key player and recognised depository of knowledge on pension reform" and "the first World Bank adjustment loan based purely on pension reform took place in ...Argentina." This suggests that the World Bank's Social Protection Unit, headed by Holzmann, would be more accurately named the Social Destruction Unit. The next edition of PSI's Focus magazine will carry an article on this issue.

We guarantee your comments on PSI World News will be listened to. Send to psi@world-psi.org.

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