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World Economic Forum

PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts will represent PSI in this years' World Economic Forum to be held in Davos, Switzerland, 23-28 January. Among other things, he will take part in one of the official WEF sessions i.e. he will act as discussion leader in a session on public-private partnerships on 24 January. In an alternative session arranged by the Public Eye on Davos, he will present the public sector perspective on a high level panel on the issue of corporate accountability. See www.weforum.org for details.

World Social Forum

Meanwhile, Wendy Caird, Mike Waghorne and David Boys from PSI headquarters and Jocelio Drummond from the sub-regional office for Brazil will participate in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, also on 23-28 January. PSI's Quality Public Services campaign will be the focus of a one-day workshop (probably on 24 January), where the goal is to deepen understanding and forge alliances around the role of public services in eliminating poverty and building just and equal societies. There will also be a separate two-day event focused on water on 27-28 January. PSI affiliates and allies present in Porto Alegre are invited to attend the workshops. Contact the PSI delegation at the Hotel Parthenon Beverly Hills, tel:+55.51.302.12525 or fax:+55.51.302.12526.

Operation Gifts for Pascal Lamy

Back in December 2002, Jan Willem Goudriaan, PSI/EPSU, joined forces with the Belgian Postal Workers, ATTAC, and a number of members of the European Parliament in the "operation gifts for Pascal Lamy". More than 200 gift parcels from all over Europe, decorated with campaign materials denouncing the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) were delivered to the Brussels headquarters of European Trade Commissioner. One reason for bringing up this "old" news is that Lamy, in spite of a range of efforts, still argues that public services are not given away through the GATS. He further continues to believe that it would hurt the negotiating position of the EU if requests/offers were made public; and finally, he argues that social clauses are not part of the package, and that the idea of cooperation between the ILO and the WTO Secretariats is not serious!

PSI/EPSU meeting Lamy again

Another reason for bringing up the operation "gifts" is that the PSI/EPSU participation lead to a new opportunity to talk to Lamy. On 17 February, Hans Engelberts and Mike Waghorne from PSI headquarters will join Jan Willem Goudriaan in Brussels for a meeting with the European Trade Commissioner. The meeting, which is still in the set-up phase, will probably include PSI President Ylva Thörn, Dave Prentis, UNISON and Frank Bsirske, Ver.di. This meeting will take place in the crucial period between the Commission's first draft initial offer to the EU member state governments and the deadline for comments by the member states.

Planned GATS protests

Belgian PSI affiliates, CGSP and SETCA, will participate in a day of action being planned specifically for Brussels on Sunday, 9 February. At least 6,000 people are expected. A wider European day of action is scheduled for 13 March. The main demands are transparency, consultation, participation, and public services out of GATS.

Water is a human right

In November 2002, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (ECOSOC) finally declared formally that water should be treated as a social and cultural good, and not primarily as an economic commodity. The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, affordable, accessible, safe and acceptable water for personal and domestic use. This means that households can no longer be disconnected from water supplies, and that the authority enforcing such disconnection violates international human rights law.

See www.citizen.org/documents/therighttowater.pdf.

More on the water front

Could it be that the day-to-day running of public services such as water services is not so profitable in the longer term, and consequently not so attractive to business interests as expected? Suez/Ondeo is pulling out of its 25-year concession contract in Manila, Philippines. When the contract was awarded in 1997, it was the world's largest privatisation and hailed as the way of the future for the reform of public services and the best way to extend services to the poor. Five years later the dream is over. The public water operator in Manila, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), will have to take back the operation of the system.

Meanwhile, Vivendi Universal has been forced to sell most of its shares in Vivendi Environment, which is responsible for water, energy, waste and transport activities. The new owners are large French banks. Contact david.boys@world-psi.org for details.

Interested in utilities?

PSI Utility Bulletin, Asia-Pacific Region, is available to all PSI affiliates. Although the content is largely geared towards the region, the newsletter carries material of broader interest to affiliates organising utility workers. Contact Greg Mclean, APREC-PSI Utilities Network Coordinator, to get on the mailing list gmclean@syd.asu.asn.au.

New threats in El Salvador

On 6 January PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts, wrote to the President of El Salvador in support of PSI affiliates, STEL and ETESAL. He demanded a stop to the repression of trade union rights and the reinstatement of yet another 18 unionists dismissed arbitrarily. He further asked for a government guarantee that PSI affiliates could pursue their trade union activities in line with international principles such as ILO Conventions and the Inter-American Charter of Human Rights. This development comes on top of the recent explosion of popular protests in relation to privatisation of health care. See Inter-American Flash, December 2002, www.world-psi.org.

Labour market and social protection

Will the welfare systems traditionally associated with the European social model be able to survive - and if yes, how? A new book published by the Geneva-based International Social Security Association (ISSA), entitled "Labour Market and Social Protection Reforms in International Perspective" looks at major labour market shifts in the past three decades and come up with the conclusion that not all is gloom. The book is written by some 30 social policy and labour market experts and edited by Hedva Sarfati and Yannick D'Haene. It is available from Ashgate Publishing, www.ashgate.com, and exists in hardback and paperback at £50.00/£22.50 respectively.

Public sector issues seen by OECD

The OECD's PUMA publishes a small newsletter several times a year in English and French (Focus/Optique). It can be found on www.oecd.org/puma/focus. It is also possible to receive it automatically via the OECDdirect mailing list. Although the magazine represents OECD thinking, it often carries useful resources on public sector issues and could be potentially valuable for the Quality Public Services Campaign.

Professional Engineers and Scientists

Affiliates wishing to attend the Third International Conference of Professional Engineer and Scientists Organisations to be held in Copenhagen on 8-10 May can get invitations and registration forms from mike.waghorne@world-psi.org. Please supply your postal address.

Comments

Please email comments on PSI World News to psi@world-psi.org.

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