

World News - N° 13 , 2003

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Health sector trade unionist assassinated in Colombia
Carlos Barrero Jiménez, member of the National Association of Health and Social Security Public Employees and Workers (ANTHOC) was shot down and killed by unknown gunmen as he was leaving work on 23 July 2003. Carlos Barrero Jiménez was a well-known trade union activist, who had taken a lead role in protesting against the local government's plans to privatise sections of the public health services in Barranquilla District. He had also denounced the hospital administration for corrupt practices and embezzlement of public funds. Workers at the hospital are owed up to 8 months in wage arrears and there have been a number of cases of arbitrary dismissals. PSI has written a letter of protest to the Colombian Government calling for a full investigation into the assassination of Carlos Barrero Jiménez and that the intellectual and material authors of this crime are charged and brought to trial. PSI has also called upon the government to protect the right to health of all Colombian citizens by providing a system of health care and protection, which is available, accessible and affordable for all. PSI is requesting its affiliate unions and organisations to send similar letters of protest to the Colombian government. For further details see www.world-psi.org.

Workers in Tamil Nadu, India, struggle hard for their rights
Public sector trade unions in the Tamil Nadu region of India have been struggling since early July following a protest strike against the State government's decision to withdraw long-established pension benefits. The government has dismissed around 200,000 public employees and teachers and arrested 2400 union leaders and members. President of PSI affiliate the Tamil Nadu Government Officials Union, Mr G. Suryamurthy, was among those arrested. PSI affiliates sent protest letters, and on July 21, the Supreme Court issued a legal opinion requesting the government of Tamil Nadu to reinstate all dismissed employees by July 24. The Court has called for each employee to present a written letter pledging not to take further industrial action. TNGOU President, G. Suryamurthy, has called upon the government to reinstate all employees unconditionally. The unions taking part in the strike have also urged the Government to withdraw criminal charges against the union leaders and members who were arrested during the first days of the strike. They have called for a meeting with the Chief Minister Jayalalithaa and a negotiated solution to the initial dispute over the proposed reforms to existing pensions and other benefits. For further details see www.world-psi.org. PSI has written to the ILO Director General requesting the direct intervention of the International Labour Organisation.

New US visa rules may affect participants at WTO Ministerial, Cancún

The United States has tightened transit visa requirements for foreign travellers, which will particularly affect flights to and from Latin America and Asia, particularly passengers from Peru, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea and the Philippines. The US has suspended two programs that allowed foreign air travellers to pass through U.S. airports without visas to connect to another international flight. The suspension affects the "Transit Without Visa" and "International to International" transit programs. If you planned to transit via the US on the way to or from Cancún, remember to make the necessary visa arrangements.

Quality Public Services – new booklet to be published in September
PSI is planning to significantly raise the public profile of the Quality Public Services campaign during September. We will be launching a new booklet on the importance of quality public services, in response to the publication of the World Bank's World Development Report. Rather than simply argue against the pro-privatisation stance adopted by the World Bank, we'll be making the case that public services are the foundations on which a fair and equitable society is built. The booklet will show the history of public services, and how much of the developed world has built its wealth and capacity on services such as education and health. It will also canvass alternatives to privatisation, such as public sector reform, new methods of financing government, worker and community involvement in decision-making and public/ public partnerships. The booklet will be available around mid-September and will be progressively translated into PSI languages for affiliates' use in campaigning.

Annual ILGA world conference, Manila

The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) is organising its 22nd World Conference in Manila, Philippines, 14-18 November. There will be a workshop on Labour, Economy and Poverty and discussions on discrimination and job security. For a full list of planned activities and a downloadable registration form, see www.ilga-asia.org.

Human Development Report 2003 – are cows worth more than people?

The UN's annual Human Development Report reveals the widening gulf between the rich and poor in the world. The report shows that the progress on the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is slow. Sub Saharan Africa has the slowest growth and at current progress, will not meet any of the UN's 2015 development goals. Thirty of the 34 countries classified by the UN as "low human development" are in Sub Saharan Africa. Countries in the region would not be able to halve poverty until 2147 and it would be 2165 before child mortality was cut by two thirds. Every day, 799 million people in developing countries – about 18% of the world's population – go hungry. Over half of these are in South Asia or Sub Saharan Africa.

However, other regions in the world also suffer from poverty and under-development. Income declined in the CIS countries, particularly in Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. South Asia is home to the largest number of poor people in the world. In Brazil, the richest 10% have 70 times the income of the poorest 10%. The list goes on. The UN considers that to meet the Goals, aid from rich to poor countries would, as a minimum, need to be doubled to around \$100 billion per year. In the 1990s, however, aid fell, by nearly a third in Sub Saharan Africa. In rich countries, each cow gets more subsidy than aid per capita to that region. See www.undp.org/hdr2003/.

Behind the scenes at the WTO: The Real World of International Trade Negotiations

This new book by Fatoumata Jawara and Aileen Kwa, published by Zed Books, takes the lid off how the WTO really works and what really happened before, at, and after the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha in 2001. It is based on interviews with 33 Geneva-based delegates to the WTO and 10 WTO secretariat staff members. It reveals how the WTO ensures that the “agreements” that are reached are those the major powers want, irrespective of the views or interests of most developing countries. According to the authors, “Any country whose political system operated as the WTO did before, during and after the Doha Ministerial [...] would not only be rightly condemned by the international community as undemocratic and corrupt, it would also face a real and constant threat of revolution”. The book can be ordered from www.zedbooks.demon.co.uk. Price per copy is paperback UK£ 12.99/\$19.95 and £36.95/\$59.95 for the hardback edition. Discounts are available for NGOs depending on location and quantity as follows: Northern NGOs: up to 5 copies: UK£ 10.72/US\$16.46 - 6 to 20 copies: UK£ 9.57/US\$14.70 - 21 to 50 copies: UK£ 8.57/US\$13.17 - 51 to 100 copies: UK£ 7.79/US\$11.97 - more than 100 copies, negotiable. Prices do not include postage. Southern NGOs: up to 10 copies: UK£ 7.79/US\$11.97 - 11 to 50 copies: UK£ 6.50/US\$9.98 - more than 50 copies: negotiable. Postage is free for Southern NGOs. For bulk orders e-mail Farouk Sohawon (Farouk.Z@zedbooks.demon.co.uk).

Database on human rights

Human Rights Network International (HRNi) has created a website containing the full texts of judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and of the UN Human Rights Committee. It also covers international and regional conventions on human rights, reports of the United Nations or non-governmental organizations, scholarly articles, bibliographic references, and a portal of Internet sites on human rights and a list of actors (NGOs, universities, international organisations) playing a role in this field. See www.hrni.org.

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