

PSI World News

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TAKE WORKERS' RIGHTS TO CANCÚN

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference will open in Cancún on 10 September. The issue of workers' rights is not expected to take centre stage during the Conference, so it is important that unions keep the issue alive in the run up to the meeting. The Global Unions Campaign on Globalisation (www.global-unions.org/globalisation) provides information and ideas on how to deal with the issue in a trade union context. Even though they have committed themselves to defend fundamental workers' rights, the WTO's members have deliberately chosen to exclude consideration of the worst forms of child labour, the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as principles of equality for women and other workers who suffer from discrimination. The international trading system encourages a race to the bottom, with the global expansion of export processing zones (EPZs). An estimated 43 million workers, most of them women, are employed in EPZs and suffer from systematic violations of workers' rights. Cases reported include workers being locked into factories to carry out forced, often unpaid overtime work; workers being fed amphetamines to keep them going through excruciating long shifts; and women being dismissed for getting pregnant. There are no binding international rules to protect these workers who work the longest hours for the least pay.

GLOBAL UNION MEETINGS IN CANCÚN

A group of Global Union representatives will visit EPZs in Honduras on 8 September, on their way to the WTO Ministerial in Cancún. PSI will be holding a two-day seminar on GATS, the WTO and health care workers in the Americas on 8-9 September at the headquarters of PSI affiliate Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social (SNTSS). Several other meetings are planned for the days preceding the Ministerial and there will be Global Unions' daily briefings for the duration of the Ministerial itself. For details of all these meetings, see

www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991218301

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS – THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) and CIEL, the Centre for International Environment Law, are holding an event in Cancún, on 13 September at 2 pm about the legal dispute launched by the US at the WTO to force the European Union to accept genetically modified foods. PSI has supported this campaign because we believe that people have a right to know whether their food contains genetically modified organisms or not. The campaign asks people and organisations around the world to sign Citizens' Objection to the WTO. The Objection paper will be available at Cancún and can also be downloaded from the website www.bite-back.org

Useful background information giving the EUâ_Ts policy on food quality is available in the EU booklet Health Food for Europeâ_Ts Citizens, available in pdf format on http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/publications/booklets/move/20/index_en.htm.

GENERIC DRUG AGREEMENT â_ BUT WILL IT BENEFIT THE POOR?

The WTO announced on 30 August that an agreement had been reached that will allow poor countries to import generic copies of patented drugs to treat national epidemics. The agreement was originally designed to permit countries, mainly in Africa, without adequate pharmaceutical production facilities of their own, to import drugs under compulsory licensing agreements to treat AIDS, malaria, and other widespread serious diseases. However, the final agreement provides more assurances for western pharmaceutical multinationals than for the millions of sick and dying in developing countries that the program is meant to serve. In a joint media release, Oxfam and MÃ©decins Sans FrontiÃ¨res (MSF) point out that the agreement â_ohas thrown up new legal, economic, and political obstacles to ensuring production and export of generic medicines in the future.â_ While poor countries are able to import generic drugs that are already in existence, there is no incentive for companies to produce generic alternatives in the future, which will leave poor countries with little choice but to do without the expensive, life-saving medications they so desperately need.

A CONSCIENCE CLAUSE FOR SCIENTISTS

A conference will be held on 25-26 September on the legal protection for scientists and engineers who find themselves in a conflict of conscience with their employer. Scientists who have had the courage to denounce their employersâ_T lies or silence have often suffered dire consequences. Defamation campaigns, threats, legal action and personal pressure have made their lives miserable, leading to depression and sometimes suicide. The Association for the Promotion of Scientific Accountable Behaviour (APSAB) and the Fondation science et conscience de lâ_Thomme (FSC) have organised the conference, which is supported by PSI and Union Network International (UNI). The conference will include testimonies by whistleblowers in the industry. PSI will present the viewpoint of non-governmental and labour organisations. Mike Waghorne, PSI Assistant General Secretary will speak in a joint session with Roy Jones from the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC). For details see www.apsab.span.ch/clc.

FUNDING FOR UNION DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Jenny Luck and Christine Roos from PSI headquarters met with the LO/TCO Council and affiliates in Sweden on 19-20 August to discuss funding for union development and capacity building projects. Currently activities are underway in all African subregions, South Asia, Chile and South East Europe (Turkey and Moldova). PSI Swedish affiliates participate in the development of these projects and provide resource persons to seminars and workshops. A project to recruit young workers into unions is proposed for next year in Belarus and Russia.

CORROSIVE REFORM: FAILING HEALTH SYSTEMS IN EASTERN EUROPE

PSI and the International Labour Organisationâ_Ts Socio-Economic Security Programme have jointly published this book about the challenges faced by health care staff in Eastern Europe. Steep cuts in budgets, training and investment and, in some cases, official disinterest, created a system failure and terrible consequences for patients and their families, for communities and for workers. The book illustrates the dedication and professionalism of health care staff who try to maintain standards while working in dreadful conditions. Copies can be obtained from the ILO Socio-Economic Security Programme Secretariat tel: +4122.799.8893, Fax: +4122.799.7123 or Email

ses@ilo.org.

ILO BULLETIN OF LABOUR STATISTICS

This publication is issued by the ILO four times per year, and gives the current statistics on employment, unemployment, hours of work, wages and consumer prices. The subscription price of 115 CHF includes four issues, four supplements and a special annual supplement. It's a trilingual document in English, French and Spanish. See www.ilo.org/public/english/support/publ/textsub.htm.

PSI IS LOOKING FOR MEDIA CONTACTS

In order to intensify campaign work, notably in relation to the quality public services and water campaigns, PSI is asking all affiliates with a 'media contact person' to email that persons' email/contact details to comit@world-psi.org . The 'media contact person' may be the union press officer, but may have a different title in your union. The person should ensure that media releases get spread around the union (via newsletters/magazines/messages) and will handle relations with the local press on the basis of material which PSI will send.

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