

PSI World News

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PUBLIC SERVICES WORK!

As part of the Quality Public Services campaign, PSI has published a new booklet: Public Services Work! Information, insights and ideas for our future. The booklet provides powerful evidence that high quality public services underpin strong economies and provide opportunities for growth and development. Built on principles of community and solidarity, accountability and democracy, quality public services offer the opportunity to achieve the objectives expressed in the Millennium Development Goals, and to build a better world. Affiliates are invited to download the booklet from www.world-psi.org. Public Services Work! will be translated into all PSI languages. The official launch date will be communicated to affiliates.

WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The 2004 report from the World Bank, Making Services Work for the Poor, was released on 21 September. While the WDR claims to defend the central role of the state in public service delivery, it is replete with examples, sometimes based on erroneous information, giving present contracting out and other market-type approaches as the only way to improve the efficiency of public services. In addition, when the report deals with public-sector employees and their unions, it almost always presents them in a negative light. By putting much of the blame for the failures of service delivery on workers, the report diverts attention from the real causes of failure, "including catastrophic lack of resources, failure of political will and lack of empowerment of front-line staff". PSI, EI and ICN have issued a press release concerning the report, also published on the PSI website. For more information, contact mike.waghome@world-psi.org.

WTO CONFERENCE COLLAPSE

On Sunday afternoon, 14 September, the negotiations at the 5th WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancun, Mexico, collapsed. Nothing on the agenda would have been of benefit to workers. None of our issues were in the proposed final text, though one or two delegations were still discussing a text that may commit the WTO to hold discussions with other intergovernmental bodies and eventually be able to address wider social issues. However, there were several items on the agenda which PSI, much of civil society and the wider union movement had opposed - including the proposed Singapore issues of investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation. These all fell with the collapse of the talks. Is the collapse a good thing or a disaster? That depends on whose agenda is under discussion. It will be a disaster for the multilateral trading system unless the trade ministers can learn something from this process. They have been remarkably slow and reluctant learners in the four years since the collapse of the talks in Seattle, when they said they would need to learn. PSI will publish a more complete analysis of the Cancun talks in the next quarterly Focus, including some suggestions on how the WTO structures and processes need to be rebuilt and on how trade unions should be approaching trade issues. Unless the US and the EU now completely desert the multilateral system (and the US is more likely to do so), this collapse does give people two years to reconsider approaches to the trading system.

UNION DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ghassan Slaiby and Jenny Luck represented PSI at the ICFTU's 12th Middle East Coordinating Committee in Brussels on 4 September. The meeting discussed trade union development, the situation in Iraq and the bi-lateral programmes and activities carried out by the ICFTU and its affiliates and the different Global Union Federations. A delegation from the ACILS Solidarity Centre reported on their new initiatives in the region including opening an office in Amman, Jordan.

The Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) gave a report on the ongoing violence and aggression against workers in Palestine. Continuing reprisals have prevented the PGFTU from holding their Congress. Union meetings are very difficult to organise and they requested that solidarity and visits continue.

The ICFTU plans to send a small exploratory mission to Iraq as soon as possible. The US forces are opposed to workers organising in the public sector. One new union group was evicted under a 1987 law. They are not engaging with the ILO on any trade union rights issues, especially collective bargaining in the public sector. The UK forces have a more positive attitude to unions and have actively sought out the ICFTU. The ICFTU's approach will be to assist in the development of independent and democratic unions and institutions to defend the interests of working people through a multilateral approach. This will include development of unions from the inside, rather than imposing rules from the outside.

PSI'S UTILITIES ADVISORY GROUP CALLS FOR FOCUS ON ENERGY

The first PSI Utilities Advisory Group meeting on 2 September confirmed the need to campaign more actively in the energy sector to face the growing crisis in the neo-liberal model. PSI must focus its experience and its networks on this sector in order to influence the policies of decision-making institutions, notably the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the multi-national corporations (MNCs), but also the consulting firms that advise governments. These neo-liberal policies are not only costing our members their jobs, but they are also causing the breakup and privatisation of some solid public energy systems.

The group stressed that PSI should develop campaign materials that can be readily adapted and used by the affiliates. PSI should use all of its existing regional, sub-regional and national coordination mechanisms and meetings for the campaign and try to reach stewards and local union activists. We should build in elements of social dialogue, and use the ILO structures to assist with this, in order to bring government, employers and unions together to plan reform of utilities. Although the initial phase will consist of analysis of privatisation, the PSI campaign should quickly move in the direction of alternative policies for national governments and international institutions. This can be helped by linking up with NGOs, such as Prayas in India, and of the World Resources Institute (WRI).

BECHTEL PULLS OUT OF EUROPEAN WATER SECTOR

International Water Limited (IWL), best known for being driven out of Cochabamba by a local uprising, is now leaving all its water activities. Its owners, Bechtel (USA) and Edison (Italy) have been trying unsuccessfully for a year to sell the company. Finally, in August 2003, it was reported that IWL was selling its stakes in Tallinn (Estonia), Sofia (Bulgaria), and Aqua (Poland) to the English firm United Utilities (UU), its joint venture partner in these places. The cost to UU of buying these assets will be financed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) which will take an equity stake of up to 50% in United Utilities's European subsidiary.

IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST? RELAUNCH AND DISCOUNT PRICE FOR PSI AFFILIATES

Far-sighted and well written was how Britain's leading political weekly 'New Statesman' described 'In the Public Interest? Privatization and Public Sector Reform' by Brendan Martin when it was first published by Zed Books and PSI. Catching up with it last year, Peter Waterman, author of 'Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms' (Continuum, 2001) called it about seven years ahead of its time. To celebrate its 10th birthday, as an antidote to the World Bank's World Development Report 'Making Services Work for Poor People' and to promote Martin's forthcoming 'In the Public Service', Zed have relaunched it with a special price for PSI affiliates. Find out why it is highly recommended by Susan George of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam and a thoroughly informed and incisive analysis for Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. For just GB£10, or \$16 or US\$18 including postage and packaging and further discounts for more than one copy you can receive the latest reprint of what New Zealand's PSI affiliate called a rattling good read which every PSA official and member ought to possess. To order, email admin@publicworld.org or write to Public World, 29 Moresby Road, London E5 9LE, UK.

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