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Equality: Our Right!

Don't forget International Women's Day on 8 March! PSI affiliates agreed to commemorate the day under the theme "Equality: Our Right!", which was adopted at the meeting of the International Women's Committee after the PSI World Congress in Ottawa, September 2002. Affiliates are urged to mark the day by calling for women's work to be recognised and valued fairly. Around the world, in developing or industrialised countries, women community care workers are expected to work long hours providing critical primary health services and child care but receive a small subsidy or "grant" not a wage. For more information about the campaign, including a model press release, a background article for your union journal and publicity stickers (in three languages), contact psi@world-psi.org.

Complaint/Bangladesh

On 13 January PSI submitted additional information related to the formal complaint lodged with the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association on March 19, 2002 against the government of Bangladesh. The complaint concerns harassment of the president and 10 other senior members of the Bangladesh Diploma Nurses' Association (BDNA) which is affiliated to PSI. The case has been through the Supreme Court, but the government chose to appeal, and the case is now referred back to the administrative tribunal. Through this long drawn out procedure uncertainty as to the fate of the unionists initially targeted has been growing, and more elected officials and members of the BDNA have been drawn into disciplinary proceedings. PSI concludes that the victimisation constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of association and the right to organise. All relevant documentation has been passed on to the Director-General of the ILO.

Protest actions/Colombia

On 22 January, PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts, sent a letter of

protest to Carlos Augusto Hernández, Director of Hospital Universitario del Valle in Cali, Colombia. The letter urges the director to withdraw the plans for privatisation of a number of services, as the result would be that only people with a certain level of income would be able to afford the services. Members of the local union, Sintrahospiciólicas, a PSI affiliate, occupied the administration offices to protest against the planned privatisation. A few days later PSI also called on the Colombian government to respect previous agreements not to privatise EMCALI. Details on this urgent action and model protest letters are available from the PSI website.

Migrant workers

Greece has agreed to ratify the UN Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights. This is the first time a European Union country ratifies the rights of migrant workers. Until now the UN Convention has been ratified typically by developing countries in other parts of the world. PSI is involved with migrant workers issues and is a member of the Steering Committee of the Campaign for the Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

Global Unions General Conference

PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts, and Deputy General Secretary, Alan Leather, attended the Global Union Federations' General Conference in London on 13-14 January. Campaigning was high on the agenda. Joint campaigning on the Global Union Aids Project is progressing. Joint work on a Global Unions "Respect...for workers rights" campaign, linking May Day to globalisation under the banner of "Respect", was discussed. Promotion of gender equity is another joint campaign area. Participating federations also discussed extended practical cooperation in a number of areas such as joint travel services and joint website consulting. The next annual meeting will be in Brazil. As for the timing, it will be considered in relation to the timing of the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, which will take place on 20-24 January 2004 in Davos and India respectively.

We the Peoples or We the Corporations?

When will the UN system wake up to the fact that it is rapidly losing contact with the democratic principles on which it was founded? The question was raised at the launch of a new publication "We the Peoples' or 'We the Corporations'?" written by Judith Richter and published by IBFAN-GIFA, Geneva. Alice Carl from PSI headquarters participated in an introductory meeting on 20 January, which concluded that public-private partnerships are not necessarily 'win-win' operations. A more appropriate description would be 'who-wins-what and who-loses-what?'. The publication is available from www.ibfan.org. PDF versions are available upon request. Email: info@gifa.org.

The Big Four

British PSI affiliate, UNISON, just published a report entitled "How the Big Four accountancy firms have PFI under their thumbs". Though British in outlook, the report is useful also outside the English realm; just listen to this: Accountancy firms help devise and develop government policy by sitting on government working groups. They recommend which tender to accept on individual contracts. They advise bidders. In their own names they tender for and win contracts. They push for more use of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). They advise foreign governments on the use of PPPs. And they produce supposedly independent reports claiming that the PFI reduces public sector costs. See www.unison.org.uk.

Democracy and regulation

British residents pay 44% more for electricity than do American consumers. They also pay 26% more for natural gas - and by European standards, British prices are low. In the developing world, where costs for labour and other inputs are lower than in the US, prices are typically far higher. What is the secret of the American formula? Greg Palast's new book "Democracy and Regulation", subtitled "How the Public can Govern Essential Services", answers the question like this: through open public access to information; and through full public participation in setting prices and standards of service. The book, co-written with Jerrold Oppenheim and Theo MacGregor, is available from Pluto Press, www.plutobooks.com.

Voice of labour

While waiting for the reports of PSI representatives from the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, to appear in FOCUS 1/03, news from the events can be found at a special "Voice of Labour" website, www.global-unions.org/wefwsf.asp. The site publicises the main trade union events, statements, press contacts and press releases from the Davos and Porto Alegre. It includes material in English, French and Spanish.

World unemployment on the rise

According to the new ILO report "Global Employment Trends 2003", issued on 24 January, the world employment situation is deteriorating dramatically. The economic slowdown has pushed the number of unemployed to a new high of 180 million, and little relief is in sight. Particularly hard hit are women and youth, but also the working poor and workers pushed into informal jobs represent worrying trends and uncertain prospects, which run counter to the UN Millennium goals. The publication is available from the ILO; see www.ilo.org for details.

New Director-General in the WHO

Dr. Jong Wook Lee of the Republic of Korea has been nominated by the Executive Board of the World Health Organisation to succeed Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland. The decision must be approved by the 56th World Health Assembly in May. For details see www.who.int/en.

Comments

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

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