

PSI World News 20-03

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PSI CONDEMNS MASS ARRESTS OF TRADE UNIONISTS IN ZIMBABWE

Police in Zimbabwe have arrested ZCTU members in order to prevent a march to pressure the government to reduce taxes.

Mr. Peter Munyukwi, Central Region Chairperson based in Gweru, was severely assaulted in the 8th of October protest. Mr. David Shambare, Western Region Vice Chairman is based in Bulawayo. Shambare had already received threats for organising industrial actions at the National Railways of Zimbabwe and at one time was told to vacate his home. Their whereabouts are unknown.

Police have also arrested six members of the ZCTU General Council in Harare and 60 ZCTU leaders, including the secretary general, Wellington Chibabe, the president, Lovemore Matombo, and the vice president, Lucia Matibenga. The General Council was meeting at a hotel to review responses from the police to the National Protest when riot police stormed the meeting. Other trade unionists, NGO representatives and independent journalists were also arrested. Several were severely beaten. In a worrying development, the ZCTU Secretary General, Wellington Chibabe was separated from the rest and they are now holding him in solitary confinement.

There are indications that several hundreds of people are in police custody. This interference by the police is a further violation of internationally recognised trade union rights. PSI is following the events closely. PSI's Sub-regional Secretary for Southern Africa, Des East, is in Zimbabwe at the moment and is holding discussions with our affiliates.

IT'S TIME TO END IMPUNITY IN COLOMBIA!

Since the beginning of November, three Colombian trade unionists have been assassinated. PSI has written to Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe, to express its concern at the continuing incapacity of the government to address this human rights tragedy and to identify and put on trial those responsible. PSI, together with other global unions, has declared International Human Rights Day on 10 December a day of action to end impunity in Colombia. Around the world, affiliates have responded to PSI's request to organise events on 10 December to call for an end to impunity. Many affiliates have generously offered to contribute to the campaign, either with a financial donation or by agreeing to host a Colombian delegation to their country on 10 December. Colombian public sector trade unions will be visiting Sweden, South Africa, Barbados, Brazil, USA and Puerto Rico, Spain and the UK. Other unions are calling on their local branches to carry out solidarity work, and the Fire Brigades Union (UK) is organising a signature campaign. PSI has made a model letter and press release available on our website www.world-psi.org together with other ideas for action.

PSI General Secretary Hans Engelberts invites you to join in this action "Nowhere in the world apart from Cobrbria do unionists work in constant fear for their lives. The government has failed to protect their most basic rights. There can be no genuine trade union rights in these conditions. We continue to urge the government to take concrete steps by identifying and putting on trial those responsible for the assassinations. Your contribution can make a real difference to strengthening the vital role of the international community."

TAMIL NADU WORKERS DISMISSED, BUT WILL CONTINUE TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS

G. Suriyamoorthy, President of the Tamil Nadu Government Officials Union (TNGOU), the PSI affiliate was among 587 government officials who received dismissal notices on November 19. A three member panel of Madras High Court Judges, set up following a Supreme Court decision to review the cases of mass dismissals, ruled that over 2000 officials could be reinstated but would be demoted and suffer increment cuts over a three year period. Only 132 officials have been reinstated without penalties.

On 15 November, the TNGOU held a strategy conference to discuss actions in the event of dismissals. Union leaders are planning to meet with the Chief Minister to contest the dismissal and penalty clauses. If this attempt fails, the unions will consider further legal action and recourse to the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association.

The July 2003 strike of government employees was to protest at the government's unilateral decision to withdraw long-established pension benefits. The proposal included a plan to raise the pensionable age and to reduce payments by 50%, providing instead 50% of the amount in questionable bond issues in Tamil Nadu state (see PSI World News 13-03).

WORLD AIDS DAY 1 DECEMBER

This year's World Aids Day on 1 December will also be the launching date of the Global Unions' Campaign on HIV/AIDS. In its first stage, the campaign will focus on:

-raising the profile of the fight against HIV/AIDS as one of the central issues for trade unions,

-in countries particularly affected by the disease, helping unions which are not yet active to take their first steps in developing approaches to tackling the disease, especially at the workplace level,
-promoting better understanding of the role unions can play with non-trade union actors, particularly employers,
-mobilising additional resources to support or expand trade union-specific action on HIV/AIDS at international, regional and national level,
-developing partnerships with key international and national actors active on HIV/AIDS, in particular, the ILO and UNAIDS,
-promoting best practice responses to the scourge of HIV/AIDS, based on the wide range of experiences which already exist in this area,
-integrating the work on HIV/AIDS with trade union work in other fields, such as sustainable development.
PSI Focus 4/04 will include a special centre-fold on HIV/AIDS.

MIGRANT HEALTH WORKER CAMPAIGN IN ECUADOR

National Campaign Coordinator of PSI's Migrant Health Workers Campaign in Ecuador, Jacqueline Bonilla, recently submitted a well-prepared and comprehensive final report including information on structural changes in health sector labour markets and trends in migration. Despite the fact that 30% of health workers interviewed had plans to migrate and 37 out of 50 had colleagues who had already left the country, Rosa Santamaría, President of the Ecuadorian Nurses Federation, pointed out that the Government has not implemented any policies to stem migration. The top two items on workers' list of suggestions for union action included: 1) The need to lobby the government to increase spending on public health and 2) The need to assure stability of employment for health workers.

MIGRANT WORKERS: NEW PSI PUBLICATION

PSI has recently published An Introductory Guide to International Migration in the Health Sector for Workers and Trade Unionists. A product of PSI's Campaign on Women and International Migration in the Health Sector, this new publication provides an introduction to the topic of migration including the benefits and risks for migrant health workers and health systems worldwide. The guide also contains a handy checklist for workers considering migration. Throughout the guide, best practices for trade unionists in both "sending" and "receiving" countries are highlighted. The guide illustrates many ways in which unionists can use the issue of migration as a vehicle to recruit and mobilize union members and strengthen international trade union solidarity. The guide is available on the PSI website or from rights@world-psi.org.

3PLUS -U LOOKS AT THE WORLD OF WORK

The ILO has created a powerful new resource for students (and their teachers) preparing for a position in the workforce. Called 3Plus-U, this fully animated interactive adventure into the world of work is a featured part of the UN's Cyberschoolbus web site. A lively array of stories, challenges, adventures and quizzes on this Flash enabled site introduce students to the fundamental rights of people in the work place and many other important work-related issues.

Play 3Plus -U by visiting <http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/3PLUSU/>

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