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Quality Public Services Campaign (QPS)

Wendy Caird, QPS Coordinator, visited the UK in mid-January and met with PSI affiliates to discuss their views and needs in relation to the QPS campaign. Several affiliates are currently running relevant campaigns and are learning lessons which are pertinent to the larger campaign. One of the next steps will be to examine affiliates' relationships with NGOs and community groups and identify areas of work where such cooperation can strengthen the overall campaign. Contact wendy.caird@world-psi.org.

Rights, health and future for public emergency workers

Alan Leather, PSI Deputy General Secretary, participated in the ILO Joint Meeting on Public Emergency Services: Social Dialogue in a Changing Environment held in Geneva, 27-31 January. PSI promoted this first international meeting for public emergency workers, because of the acute problems many of them face at their workplace. These include lack basic rights or resources, limited participation in decisions that affect their health and safety and an uncertain future. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a set of guidelines, which can be used to open up discussions with employers on a range of issues critical to the future of emergency service workers. See www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/.

TILS meeting

Hans Engelberts and Mike Waghorne represented PSI at a meeting of Global Unions on Trade and International Labour Standards (TILS) to prepare the international union positions for the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Mexico in September. The issues under discussion were the most comprehensive ever considered by the Global Unions: development issues, TRIPS (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights) and access to medicines for developing countries, core labour standards, GATS, transparency and internal democracy in the WTO, investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement, trade facilitation problems,

environmental concerns and agriculture. The potentially most contentious were the so-called new issues (investment, competition, procurement and trade facilitation). Global Unions intend to produce a more nuanced presentations of these matters to facilitate discussion among the rank-and-file members.

Meeting Lamy

A delegation of senior PSI and EPSU leaders met with EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy on February 17 to discuss public sector union concerns about the current GATS negotiations. Topics dealt with in the largely constructive meeting included: definitions of 'public services', to give them better protection under the GATS; the impact of GATS discussions on the ability of governments to regulate with certainty; the impact of GATS liberalisation on developing countries and on EU public services; and the negotiations over greater access to Northern labour markets for temporary service workers from the South. While Lamy continues to be more optimistic than unions about the regulatory powers of governments and the security of public services, he agreed with our concerns about the impact of World Bank and IMF pressure on developing countries to liberalise and privatise their services and the consequent unfair pressure being put on them to make irreversible GATS commitments. He also agreed that the EU must do more to grant developing countries greater access to temporary labour markets in the North, although he was less convinced about any 'brain drain' effects. He gave absolute assurances that the EU will insist that such temporary workers must have all the union and worker rights that EU residents have when they work in the EU states. He also insisted that he intends to make no fresh commitments on the EU's public services. In fact he is looking for a more solid expression of what the EU currently calls 'services of general interest' but which he thinks should be called 'services of public interest'.

Healthcare strike in El Salvador

The good news is that international and local pressure helped bring about the release of 21 members of PSI affiliate STISS, arrested on 29 January. The bad news is that the government apparently has given National Civilian Police (PNC) chief Mauricio Sandoval the green light to do whatever is necessary to crush the resistance to health care privatisation. A new anti-terrorism law being pushed by Sandoval focuses on gang activity, but it would also give the police power to clamp down on union organising. The anti-privatisation movement, which translated into a multitude of protest actions in recent months, remains on high alert. PSI supports the longstanding strike. See Inter-American Flash, forthcoming March edition.

Water multinationals in retreat

A new report from the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) clearly demonstrates that privatisation is in trouble in the water sector. The report, entitled "Water multinationals in retreat – Suez withdraws investment", reveals corporate inability to make money from the poor. Companies are realising that the previous profits model for water privatisation in developing countries is unsustainable, and they are preparing to walk away unless they are offered guaranteed profits. The most basic lesson is for governments, development banks, donors and community organisations concerned with water to recognise these facts. As for the International Financial Institutions and water specialists preparing for the Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan (16-23 March), the companies' new attitude presents a problem. Will they continue to develop mechanisms to facilitate or even impose private control of water services? Will they develop new mechanisms to reduce corporate risk and guarantee corporate profits? The

report is available at www.psiu.org. As for the Water Forum, PSI is planning a strong presence. Contact: david.boys@world-psi.org.

Surprise from the World Bank

“In firms where industrial relations are of ‘high’ quality (in terms of a low number of unsolved grievances, low strike activity, and so on), the presence of unions tend to increase productivity levels”, said Robert Holzmann, the World Bank’s Director of Social Protection, at the launch of a new report, *Unions and Collective Bargaining: Economic Effects in a Global Environment* on 12 February. So, the World Bank has been looking at unions and found that a country’s economy may fare better if a large number of its workers belong to unions. High unionization rates can lead to lower unemployment and inflation rates, higher productivity and faster adjustment to economic shocks. In short, labour standards are now on the international agenda. PSI already raised these issues in discussions with the Bank in 1995. It has taken the Bank a while to publish the research as it runs counter to conventional wisdom in the World Bank environment, and it is likely that country-level Bank staff will stick to “old style” recommendations, at least for a while. See www.worldbank.org.

Making global trade work for people

A new publication from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Making Global Trade Work for People* notes that although trade has enormous potential to contribute to human development, the current trade regime has fallen far short of expectations. It also notes that the resulting inequities are at the core of controversies surrounding globalisation. The current trade regime needs to shift its focus from promoting liberalisation and market access to providing developing countries with policy space. The publication is available in PDF format (376 pages) from www.undp.org. It is published and distributed by Earthscan Publishers (www.earthscan.co.uk) in London and will be available in retail outlets worldwide in March.

HIV/AIDS

The ILO recently published *Implementing the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work; an education and training manual*. It is a rich source of information and contains several useful training modules. It also offers the opportunity to renew the drive towards prevention of HIV/AIDS. The publication is available in English from ILO, Geneva. French and Spanish versions will be ready in March. It is priced at CHF50 (or equivalent, with reductions for bulk orders), and can be ordered from pubvente@ilo.org. Unions in low to middle income countries can receive free copies from leather@ilo.org.

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