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Protest against unilateral cancellation of workers rights
PSI General Secretary, Hans Engelberts visited Israel in early April to meet with the Union of Clerical, Administrative and Public Service Employees (UCAPSE) and discuss the PSI Congress Resolution on the Middle East. His visit took place against a backdrop of unrest. Since 31 March some 100,000 local authority workers have been on strike and some 50,000 government ministry employees have been implementing work bans. The reason is a series of decrees issued by the government to slash wages and pensions, cancel collective agreements, increase the retirement age to 67 and put union-managed pension funds under government control. A Global Union protest letter was sent to Ariel Sharon on 3 April. Hans Engelberts met with the strike committee of UCAPSE and was interviewed for Israeli television confirming PSI's support for the union protests.

Joint statement on Colombia
On 3 April a joint ICFTU/PSI statement was read to the 59th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (Geneva, 17 March-23 April). At issue was the situation in Colombia, which ICFTU/PSI see as a deliberate plan to dismantle the trade union movement, under the combined effects of death threats, assassinations and labour law reform. In Colombia unionists are being killed, they disappear, or they are forced into exile. The labour law reforms undermine collective bargaining rights and violate freedom of association. According to government estimates the reforms will lead to a cut in public sector jobs (about 40,000 in 2003). The ICFTU/PSI statement also urged the High Commissioner to report the violations to the UN General Assembly, and to include a more substantive chapter on economic and social rights in the country at next year's session.

Doctors on hunger strike in El Salvador
On 3 April seven medical doctors decided to go on hunger strike to protest the governments' plans to privatise the health system. The situation is not new. The Trade Union of Doctors of the Salvadorean Social Security Institute (SIMETISSS) and the trade union of workers (STISSS) have been on strike since September 2002. PSI has sent a letter of support, and urges affiliates to join the urgent action by sending a protest letter to President Perez. Background details and a model letter are available from www.world-psi.org.

Global Unions' statement for Cancún

The international trade union movement released a statement (in En/Fr/Sp) setting out demands for the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) scheduled for Cancún, Mexico, in September. The statement opposes the opening of WTO negotiations on the so-called 'Singapore issues' of investment and competition policy on the basis of the proposals currently tabled. It also emphasises the need for developing countries to get a fair deal from globalisation. It further stresses that safeguards are required to ensure that public services and other services of general interest cannot be undermined by WTO support for private sector competition, which puts profit before public benefit. See www.icftu.org.

No investment negotiations in the WTO – sign on

PSI, along with other global unions, has taken a position not to support any of the 'new issues' or 'Singapore issues', (i.e. agreements on investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation) in the WTO. PSI was also one of the organisers of a recent meeting in Geneva, which led to the statement 'No investment negotiations in the WTO'. The statement, which calls upon members of the WTO to explicitly reject the launch of negotiations on investment and other Singapore issues at the Ministerial Conference in Cancún, and reject the NAFTA/MAI approach to investment liberalisation, is available in full on the OXFAM website www.oxfam.org. To sign on, send the name of your organisation and country to stopthenewissues@hotmail.com.

Registering for Cancún

The deadline for initial registration for the WTO Ministerial Conference is 30 April. NGOs wishing to attend the conference are requested by the WTO to supply details of how they are concerned with matters related to those of the WTO. The procedure is waived for those NGOs which were duly registered for at least two previous Ministerial Conferences. Qualifying NGOs are still obliged to register officially. Registration forms will be sent out by 31 May. They must be completed and returned to the WTO, External Relations Division, by 30 June. Confirmation of registration will be sent to NGOs as from 1 August. See www.wto.org.

Last call for May Day actions

1 May is fast approaching and additional information updates are available from www.icftu.org and www.global-unions.org in the run up to the Global Unions mobilisations. The updates are designed to provide reusable information for trade union organisations on globalisation. Other useful information includes lists of planned mobilisations around the world. Activities varying from mass demonstrations to sports events to conferences are being planned by unions who will be demanding "Respect" on a range of issues including workers' rights, quality public services, workers' health and safety, tackling poverty, and rights and opportunities for young workers. Respect for workers' rights is a major part of the agenda we are putting forward, particularly as we gear up for the next WTO Trade Ministerial meeting in Cancún in September, says ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder.

World Bank/IMF Spring meetings

The annual spring meetings (12-13 April) released a number of publications/reports e.g. the World Bank's 'World Development Indicators' and the International Monetary Fund's 'World Economic Outlook' (see websites www.worldbank.org and www.imf.org), but not much in terms of new commitments of funds for the war on poverty. Instead the war on Iraq threatened to take centre stage. Although no firm agreement is reported to

have been reached at the meetings, Nicholas Stern, Chief Economist at the Bank, is reported to have indicated that 'the risk is there' that the war in Iraq will divert attention and money that might otherwise go to the World Bank's efforts against poverty (International Herald Tribune, 15 April).

Watertime

Watertime is the name of a three-year, EU-funded research project aiming at producing a set of recommendations and a decision-making model for stakeholders in water supply and sanitation. Under the coordination of the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), six research institutes from different European countries will look at decisions made in 29 cities across 13 European countries, including EU and Central and Eastern European countries. The project, which was initiated in December 2002, just had its first steering committee meeting at Greenwich University in the UK. Consult www.watertime.org for details.

Write for the web – and make it snappy

Caroline Taleb, PSI's Communications Technology Manager, represented PSI at a UNI Journalists and Webmasters' Forum, 9-11 April. The forum focussed on issues specifically related to union websites. Participants enjoyed workshops on online indexing, writing for the web, giving websites international exposure, bridging the digital divide and the role of webmasters in unions. Reports from the workshops are available on the UNI website, www.union-network.org. 'Write for the web – and make it snappy' is recommended reading for all web writers.

If your union has a webmaster, please send contact details to Caroline.Taleb@world-psi.org.

Comments

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