

PSI World News 11-2004

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- World Bank study discusses problems with privatisation
- American elections
- ILO resolution on gender equality, pay equity and maternity protection
- Improving public services
- Discussion on migrant workers
- European energy unions sign transnational solidarity accord
- France puts off privatisation of state utilities
- PFI projects reduce pay and conditions
- PSI addresses ILO Conference Plenary
- Korean government decides against privatisation

WORLD BANK STUDY DISCUSSES PROBLEMS WITH PRIVATISATION

Speaking at a press conference to release the new study: "Reforming Infrastructure: Privatization, Regulation and Competition", World Bank chief economist François Bourguignon has characterised past policy on infrastructure reform as: "sometimes blindly pushing privatisation in a doctrinal fashion". The communiqué puts it more bluntly: the Bank was driven by "irrational exuberance" over the potential benefits of privatisation. The new study insists that effective regulation must be in place before any privatisation, as a flawed privatisation process is difficult to correct after the fact. While maintaining that telecommunication offers the best case for privatisation and liberalisation in developing countries, "the case for privatising transport network infrastructure is much less compelling"; the scope for successful privatisation of water supply is "limited"; and electricity privatisation can be "problematic". The book contains several contradictions, and seems to be an attempt to add new agenda items rather than change policy. It is available on the Bank's web site, and the press release is available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish: http://www.econ.worldbank.org/prr/reforming_infrastructure

AMERICAN ELECTIONS

American unions are campaigning hard to ensure that George Bush is not re-elected. On top of everything else, Bush is preparing a major assault on labour rights in the USA. In preparing for the union's congress this month, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) President Gerald W. McEntee said the union will be running its "most aggressive member mobilisation program ever". AFSCME is one of the nation's largest and fastest growing public service employees unions, with 1.4 million members, and has a sophisticated hands-on political action program. The union's political toolkit "Ten Steps to Political Action" can be viewed here: <http://www.afscme.org/politics/index.html>

ILO RESOLUTION ON GENDER EQUALITY, PAY EQUITY AND MATERNITY PROTECTION

The 92nd annual ILO Conference (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reilm/ilc/index.htm>) has just come to an end. Participants have adopted a resolution calling for governments, social partners and the ILO to take a set of specific actions to address the gender wage gap. The resolution, the only one to be adopted, also recognises the essential role of quality public services in promoting women's access to employment and notes that globalisation processes can have negative consequences for women. The text is the first substantive statement on gender equality adopted by the ILC since 1985. Over the past two years PSI has been instrumental in developing a resolution on pay equity and has been a key partner in the maternity protection campaign. Specifically the resolution proposes that social partners negotiate the introduction of gender-neutral job evaluation schemes, statistical indicators, as well as gender equality reviews at the work place, taking into account other forms of discrimination. This resolution will be a useful advocacy tool for trade unions wishing to promote pay equity and it directs the ILO to provide funding to implement the resolution and to carry out training programmes on job evaluations. For the full text of the resolution see <http://www.world-psi.org/>

IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICES

To assist unions in their struggles to improve public services, PSI is building up a resource bank of stories and experiences relating to campaigns over the quality of public services. Around the world, experiences are often replicated and our goal is to help us learn from each other. For example, privatisation, cuts to services and job losses are affecting workers and communities in most countries. The resource bank will collect and publish the stories of how unions are responding, as well as providing information to assist in developing bargaining and campaign responses. To make this work, we need your help. If you have stories and ideas, please send them to us for inclusion in the bank, which will be up and running as part of the new PSI website by September 2004. Please send any material to wendy.caird@world-psi.org

DISCUSSION ON MIGRANT WORKERS

As a part of the ILO Conference agenda this year, a general discussion on migrant workers was held. This included representatives of employers, workers and governments. Overall, the final conclusions adopted were quite positive for workers and migrants in the public sector. As part of PSI's campaign copies of "Women and International Migration in the Health Sector" were distributed (see Publications - Equality at <http://www.world-psi.org/>). This helped to underscore public sector workers' concerns about migration.

EUROPEAN ENERGY UNIONS SIGN TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY ACCORD

Delegates at the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) congress have unanimously agreed a transnational solidarity accord for the European electricity and gas sectors. The accord states that companies who violate social standards, or companies who do not sign the appropriate collective agreement for the electricity sector, will be targeted by all EPSU energy unions. EPSU's energy affiliates will engage in a solidarity campaign to ensure compliance of the company with these standards. Companies operating in the European electricity and gas industry have to commit to the Core ILO Labour Rights Conventions, including the right to organise and right to collective bargaining (87 and 98), equal opportunities and equal pay (100 and 111), no forced labour (29 and 105) and no child labour (138 and 182). EPSU affiliated unions will not accept violation of these standards.

FRANCE PUTS OFF PRIVATISATION OF STATE UTILITIES

Nicolas Sarkozy, France's finance minister, has given up any immediate privatisation of EdF and Gaz de France, the electricity and gas utilities. This represents a further concession to mounting union protests against any change to these state entities, and underlines the extent of the centre-right government's retreat from its original plans. It had hoped to use the European Union's July deadline for opening up 30 per cent of the French non-residential energy market to partially privatisate the two utilities. Only last month Mr Sarkozy spoke of cutting the direct stake to 70 per cent. On Tuesday, on the first day of the parliamentary debate on the bill converting the state entities into normal companies, it was evident the government would do the minimum necessary to comply with Brussels energy liberalisation directives.

PFI PROJECTS ONLY SAVE MONEY BY CRUSHING STAFF PAY AND CONDITIONS

The cost savings promised by privatising public services come at the expense of workers' terms and conditions, not through any real managerial innovation. This is the conclusion of a new wide-ranging study from UK think tank Catalyst, looking at how private finance initiatives (PFIIs) and public-private partnerships (PPPs) operate in the public sector. The research focuses on the reality of conditions in the prison service, hailed by the government as a model for public private partnerships. The paper is available (in English only) from:

<http://www.catalystforum.org.uk/pubs/paper23.html>

PSI ADDRESSES THE ILO CONFERENCE PLENARY

During the discussion on the report of the Director General, PSI Equality and Rights Officer Nora Wintour gave a presentation on behalf of PSI. The ILO has estimated that over 15 million public sector jobs were lost between 1999 and 2000, and in its report Organising for Social Justice, notes that changes have been introduced without discussion or negotiation, resulting in public employees becoming demoralised and the public service ethos undermined. PSI pointed out the contradiction between the UN's calls to meet the Millennium Development Goals (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>), which require a major commitment to health and education, or the WHO initiative on delivery of anti-retroviral drugs, and this policy bias in favour of private sector solutions. The speech emphasised that quality public services are a critical path to building strong economies and inclusive societies. PSI also called for a UN day on the Right to Energy similar to the UN Day on the Right to Water. The speech outlined some of the major cases where over the last year public sector trade unionists have been subjected to discrimination, including arbitrary dismissals and arrests, and on occasion murder. The cases of Tamil Nadu government employee unions and the municipal workers of Chile were mentioned specifically. PSI called for greater action on the part of the ILO supervisory mechanisms in the case of Colombia.

KOREAN GOVERNMENT DECIDES AGAINST PRIVATISATION

The Korean government has discarded its plan to partition and sell off the power supply division of state-run KEPCO, "in order to ensure the effective operation of the power industry". This follows a recent study jointly conducted by the energy union and government representatives. Last months PSI World News (available at <http://www.world-psi.org/>) contains more background.

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