

PSI World News - November 2004

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Winning the Water Fight

Last month we reported on a national referendum on water being held in Uruguay. The result is now in: two thirds of the voters opted to make water privatisation unconstitutional. PSI wishes to congratulate the people of Uruguay, and especially the members of FFOSE. This exemplifies a campaign strategy which has been useful in other countries as well: national referenda. Swiss unions used the same process in 2003 to block the sale of public energy utilities (though referenda are a tradition in Switzerland). The strategy was previously used in Uruguay to prevent privatisation in their oil sector, and has recently been used in Hamburg, Germany, to protect public water. In New Orleans, USA, the government must now go to a referendum if it wishes to privatise its water system. Thai workers are also demanding a water referendum.

<<http://www.psiu.org>> Only 5% of the world's water services have been privatised, despite years of sustained pressure from international financial institutions and multinational corporations. This is a struggle we are winning. The Public <<http://www.psiu.org>> Services International Research Unit has just produced a report entitled Making Water Privatisation Illegal - New Laws in Netherlands and Uruguay (available from <<http://www.world-psi.org/water>> <http://www.world-psi.org/water>) which looks at these developments in the context of international law.

Colombia: Trade unionists expelled

In the days leading up to a regional meeting of Global Union Federations in Colombia, four international trade unionists were refused entry, detained, interrogated and then deported. PSI's Cam Duncan (pictured) was one of the four. The government has since admitted it was at fault. More workers, unionists and human rights activists are assassinated, kidnapped and reported missing in Colombia than in any other country. In 2003 alone the ICFTU reported on 90 people killed for their trade union activities.

Global Call to Action Against Poverty

Unions and NGO's are about to come together in a way seldom seen before. Next year at least 100 civil society organizations, including PSI and the ICFTU, will start jointly campaigning for increased and fairer aid, debt relief and fair trade. For a range of reasons 2005 offers a unique opportunity to challenge policies which promote privatisation of public services. A website will soon be available for campaign information and we'll include details of this in the next issue. This is a great opportunity to put the quality of public services on the world agenda. To join the Global Call mailing list email <<mailto:wendy.caird@world-psi.org>> wendy.caird@world-psi.org.

A closer look at working time

According to a new publication from the ILO, 20% or more of the workforce in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan work at least 50 hours a week, compared with fewer than 10% in most European countries. During the late 1990s, people working in excess of 50 hours per week in the US and Australia increased from 15% to 20% of the workforce. Only Japan (28.1%) and New Zealand (21.3%) had a higher proportion working more than 50 hours per week. By contrast, in most EU countries (prior to the 2004 expansion) the number of people working 50 hours or more per week remains well under 10%, with figures ranging from 1.4% in the Netherlands to 6.2% in Greece and Ireland. The only exception is the UK, where some 15.5% of the workforce spends 50 hours or more at work. The publication concludes that finding a balance between business requirements and workers' needs will require policies in five areas: promoting health and safety; helping workers to better meet their family responsibilities; encouraging gender equality; advancing productivity; and facilitating worker choice and influence. For more information about Working Time see: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/time/index.htm>.

Unions setting the Agenda

UNISON's health members in the UK have voted decisively (75%) in favour of "Agenda for Change". This is the proposed new national health pay, terms and conditions system, which seeks to introduce new pay bands and to harmonise terms and conditions for NHS workers. It is a fantastic achievement. Agenda for Change has been negotiated by government health departments and UNISON, together with other health unions, over the last five years. It is based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, and introduces a common 37.5 hour working week, more annual leave and new entitlements on training and development. This will affect one million health staff working across every occupation. For more information on Agenda for Change see: <http://www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/a4c/index.asp>

Public-Private Partnerships and health

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are promoted as the innovative policy model of the new millennium. Should we be concerned about the rush to closer relationships with business? What are the effects of this policy on the decision-making powers of nation states and the UN system? A new publication from Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs summarises the findings of a review of public interest safeguards. A lack of space for open discussion about the new policy paradigm is identified as a key obstacle. The report argues for a re-examination of safeguards in UN institutions and suggests ways to strengthen the international system's integrity and its role in international policy making and public interest advocacy. The report can be downloaded here:

http://global.finland.fi/julkaisut/pdf/public_private2004.pdf and hard copy can be requested by e-mailing keotilaus@formin.fi

ILO: Active labour market policies

A new ILO report reveals that the countries most open to global markets: Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden (measured by the trade share in GDP), are also those that have a tight network of labour market institutions and policies. In other words, these are the countries that spend most on protecting workers from the adverse effects of globalization. The study shows how worker perception of security increases along with spending on these labour market policies. It recommends new ways of financing such policies, and looks at the importance of social dialogue as a tool for establishing labour market flexibility whilst also maintaining security. See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/pr/2004/50.htm>

World Social Forum: Where to now?

PSI is trying to determine its approach to the next World Social Forum, to be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from 26-31 January 2005. Traditionally we have sent a small delegation of staff and teamed up with the PSI affiliates who were at the Forum. As the event grows ever more complex, we need to review this approach. We would like to know as soon as is possible which affiliates intend going to the Forum (and how big their delegation will be); and whether those unions would be willing to work together as a PSI caucus in terms of determining which events to cover and what kinds of interventions to make. Please note that we cannot help with affiliates' financial costs. Replies should be sent to wendy.caird@world-psi.org

Request for information

Dutch union federation FNV <<http://www.fnv.nl/>> has written to PSI seeking information about union work at community level. Increasingly the Dutch government is devolving responsibility for issues including social security and labour market policies to local governments. For the trade union movement, it is therefore of growing importance to consider their community role and involvement with local politics. FNV would like to learn from union experiences abroad... for example worker centres in local communities; coalitions with community organisations; the role of trade unions vis-a-vis local governments, etc. Can you help them with any relevant literature on these issues, or identify local initiatives which may be of interest? Information can be sent in English, Spanish, French, German or Italian to Dirk Kloosterboer, FNV at dirk.kloosterboer@vc.fnv.nl

psssst! Pass it on!

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