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WATER UTILITIES RESIST PRIVATISATION

PSI has recently published on its website two reports of how municipalities in Brazil and Colombia have resisted pressure from the World Bank and the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) on privatisation of their water systems. In Brazil, the World Bank loan was approved after the municipality insisted on removing Bank clauses in the loan document requiring privatisation and private management contracts of the water system. Brazil's federal and state governments supported the municipality, which had to resist very strong pressure from the Bank. In Colombia, the IDB has refused to pay further loan instalments after the municipality reversed a decision to privatise the water utility. Municipal representatives will meet the IDB to ask them to eliminate the privatisation requirement. These examples show that it is necessary and possible to resist the development banks and still get access to their loans for solid public sector projects. See the reports on www.worldpsi.org

WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION - SRI LANKA

The Public Service United Nurses Union (PSUNU) of Sri Lanka recently received Kim Van Eyck, PSI's Consultant for the "Women and International Migration Campaign" in Colombo 6 February to 12 February. G.M. Chandralatha, PSUNU Treasurer, who has been serving as the National Coordinator for the campaign, facilitated the visit. Kim visited two hospitals where she met with directors, hospital matrons and medical staff. She interviewed six nurses who had left to work overseas for several years in the Middle East and who had subsequently returned to work in Sri Lanka.

Although the PSUNU continues to be a strong representative of Sri Lankan nurses (having won a wage increase in January), public sector wages for nurses continue to deteriorate relative to the cost of living. There is a shortage of 7,000 nurses in the public sector, with very limited slots for government sponsored nurse training programmes. If more nurses are not trained, shortages are expected to grow to 25,000 by 2010. In addition to acute staffing difficulties, where individual nurses attend up to 50 patients, a lack of hospital beds means that nurses in the largest hospitals attend to an average of 500 "floor patients" every day. The tremendous growth of investment in private health care in Sri Lanka (the private sector currently employs 15,000 health care workers and has established private training institutions for "nurses' aides") has prompted the PSUNU to call for the development of ethical recruitment and foreign investment guidelines in the health sector. They want to ensure that a) nurses who are privately trained are fully qualified according to standards set by the Sri Lankan medical board and b) that private institutions do not train nurses exclusively for "export" to countries such as the US or Italy, particularly when they are so desperately needed in Sri Lanka.

GLOBAL UNIONS' RESEARCH NETWORK (GURN)

For several years, the global unions have been discussing (within the context of the ICFTU Millennium review) how best to generate and use research on issues associated with globalisation. Many large and/or well-resourced unions have research staff but most unions do not. The latter need research data and analysis but where do they get it? There is a

patchwork of union-oriented research around the world but no mechanism for being able to collate what is being done, to identify priorities, to stop the re-inventing of the wheel flowing from poor coordination.

As discussions have matured in recent months, it was decided to bring together a number of these researchers, research institutes, global unions, including PSI, and people from the ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) to see if we could settle on a mechanism to bring this altogether. The ILO hosted the meeting at its Turin Training centre, which attracted 48 participants from 39 countries. They reached an initial agreement to establish a website for a Global Union Research Network, with links to key web pages on selected topics (regional trade agreements, for example), with a guide to the best union-friendly resources.

Any union with research staff or using a union-oriented research unit that would like to be listed on the network should send full contact details to Mike.Waghorne@world-psi.org but they should commit themselves to GURN's principle of reciprocity and exchange.

QUANTIFYING PRODUCTIVITY IN PUBLIC SERVICES

A recent debate in the UK has brought about new thinking on the way to quantify productivity in public services. Conservative attacks on the perceived lack of productivity, and "waste of money" in provision of public services have been tackled by a whole new study on how that productivity has been measured, and the flaws in the method of measurement used until now. For example, productivity in teaching is measured by "pupil hours taught", so a teacher with a class of 20 pupils is deemed less productive than one teaching 30 pupils. In health, prevention programmes do not enter into the equation, even though they have brought numbers of patients down. Police productivity is counted by the number of arrests made, so if fewer crimes are committed, productivity is actually cut! In the UK, these measures are going under review, but it would seem worthwhile to carry out similar reviews in other countries to ensure that if productivity in public services is measured, the method used is fair and accurate.

TRADING AWAY OUR RIGHTS

Oxfam has published this new report, which presents a sobering account of the effects globalisation is having on women working at the bottom of the supply chain to the fashion and food industries. Companies are using their power at the top of global supply chains to squeeze their suppliers to deliver. This pressure is dumped immediately onto women workers in the form of ever-longer hours at faster work rates, often in poor conditions and with no job security. Trading away our rights says that millions of women are being denied their fair share of the benefits of globalisation as a result. The report accuses the World Bank and International Finance Institutions of pushing developing countries to remove legal protections for workers. In a response, the World Bank's star economist David Dollar defends the Bank's approach. Though admitting that the free-market policies create "losers", he states that the entire country will eventually benefit and that "this is the best economic system we've found." Dollar is also quoted as stating that developing-country women who work long hours at less than the minimum wage are doing so voluntarily: "It's a choice they are making compared to other choices they might make." World Bank economists seem to have a rather particular view of reality. You can download a copy of the report from www.maketradefair.com.

A DO-IT-YOURSELF KIT FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

This set of documents seeks to provide information on how to strengthen protection of migrant workers and members of their families with international human rights treaties. It has a concise and cross-referenced collection of information that can be used by individuals, NGOs, administrations and other interested parties. The do-it-yourself kit is available on the International Catholic Migration Commission's website, and is posted as a series of pdf files under:

<http://www.icmc.net/docs/en/programs/advocacykit00>. Comments and enquiries about the publication can be sent in English, French and Spanish to Mariette Grange, ICMC Advocacy officer grange@icmc.net.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT: THE SAPRI REPORT

This new book by the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review (SAPRIN), subtitled The Policy Roots of Economic Crisis, Poverty and Inequality, presents a comprehensive and real-life assessment of the impacts of the liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation and austerity that constitute structural adjustment. It is the result of five years of collaboration between citizens' groups, developing country governments, and the World Bank itself. The authors reveal the practical consequences of structural adjustment for manufacturing, small enterprise, wages and working conditions, social services, health, education, food security, poverty and inequality. The book is available in English from Zed Books, at a cost of GBP59.95 or US\$75.00 (hardback) or GBP16.95 or US\$25.00 (paperback). It will be translated into Spanish and possibly French and Arabic. For more details contact Mohammed Umar, Zed Books, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, Tel +44.(0)20 7837 4014, fax +44.(0)20 7833 3960, email sales@zedbooks.demon.co.uk <http://zedbooks.co.uk/>.

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