

PSI World News 06-2004

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UNIONS UNITED AGAINST PRIVATISATION IN THAILAND

In their unprecedented anti-privatisation campaign in Thailand, unions have demonstrated non-stop since 23 February against the privatisation of the national electricity company EGAT. Private sector unions, NGOs, academics and public managers are also supporting the campaign. The Thaksin government has tried unsuccessfully to use scare tactics against the unions, warning that the stock market will crash if they don't privatise, that Thailand won't be able to afford new investment in electricity generation, that only by privatising will the government be able to set up an independent regulator to control prices! And finally, the government has banned PSI Utilities Officer from speaking to the demonstrators, a warning that the unions will ignore.

The government then tried to pay off the workers, offering them a special deal on the shares of EGAT, and regulating the share allocation such that all Thai citizens can buy EGAT stock (in response to the previous privatisations, where the vast majority of shares went to Thaksin insiders and to wealthy foreign investors). The unions refused the offer and continue to insist that the issue of privatisation go to a national referendum, which the government is too scared to hold, especially with national elections less than one year away.

28 APRIL: SAFE AND HEALTHY WORK FOR ALL

Workers' Memorial Day is held each year on 28 April to remember those who die or are injured as a result of a workplace accident or a workplace-related illness. Each year, 2 million people are killed, 1.2 million people are injured and 160 million people are diseased because their employers decide that their safety is not an important priority. Unlike those dying in war or major incidents, these victims are not publicly remembered. Workers Memorial Day remembers them all as part of the campaign to make workplaces safer, to reduce deaths, injuries and illness caused by work.

Workers Memorial Day is recognised as a national day in nine countries: Peru, Argentina, Bermuda, Canada, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Portugal, Spain and Taiwan. Unions in nine more countries are pursuing government recognition in 2004: Benin, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Malta, Nepal, New Zealand, Romania and Singapore. The primary theme for 2004 is "Safe and Healthy Work for All", with "Employer Accountability" as the secondary theme. Make 28 April 2004 a day to remember! For ideas on activities and action plans, see www.hazards.org/wmd. Let us know what you have planned for 28 April - email alan.leather@world-psi.org.

LABOUR LAW - THE REALITY

PSI has received the following request from The Labor and Worklife Program at the Harvard Law School: We want your views about labour relations in your country for the first ever Global Labor Survey (GLS) of labour practices around the world. Currently, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report asks corporate executives their views about economic conditions in their country. But labour experts and activists have no means to relay what they know about practices that affect workers, unions, and firms. The Labor and Worklife Program at the Harvard Law School is conducting the Global Labor Survey to provide a vehicle for the labor community to report on practices governing workers and firms around the world. The survey is located at:

<http://gls.law.harvard.edu/>. It's available in English, French and Spanish. This survey is completely confidential. You will not be identified nor added to any mailing lists. We know that it takes a few minutes of your time to fill this in, and we appreciate the effort that you'll be making. Once you've filled in the survey yourself, if you could pass on this message to other knowledgeable persons, and encourage them to complete the survey that would also help us. The Labor and Worklife Program will release results of the first Global Labor Survey in May 2004 and anticipates worldwide attention. Your responses and those of others can make a difference in raising the profile of labor issues. Thanks very much. Elaine Bernard, Elaine_bernard@harvard.edu and Richard Freeman, freeman@nber.org

PUBLIC SECTOR = NO POLITICS?

One of PSI's Canadian affiliates the Public Service Alliance of Canada has made the following request: The Canadian federal government has recently adopted the Public Service Modernization Act, which, among other things, deals with restrictions on political activities for public service workers. We are currently engaged in consultations with the government and are interested in gathering information about legislative or regulatory restrictions placed on public service workers pertaining to their support of a political party or candidate, or their running for office as a candidate. Please send any input to Janice Manchee, Public Service Alliance of Canada at manchej@psac.com.

GLOBAL UNIONS STATEMENT FOR IFI SPRING MEETINGS

Global Unions' statement for the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank (Washington, 24 -25 April 2004) has been finalised. These meetings are usually attended by development ministers, finance ministers or central bank governors. Global Unions' recommendations to the meetings include a call for a number of important changes in the way that the IMF and World Bank operate. The IFIs can respond more quickly and effectively to the need for change by engaging in regular exchanges with trade unions, especially when their interventions have an impact on labour, and by taking account of the results of these meetings when designing loans or formulating country-level policy advice. The full statement (11 pages), a summary (2½ pages), and a letter (1 page) that affiliated organisations may wish to adapt and use for submitting the statement to their government before the meetings are all available on the PSI website www.world-psi.org

GLOBAL UNIONS RESEARCH NETWORK LAUNCHES www.GURN.INFO

The Global Unions Research Network (GURN) is a follow up of the millennium debate of Global Union Federations (GUFs) (see World News 3/04). On the new GURN website www.gurn.info you can find information on bilateral & regional trade agreements, migration, and corporate governance. Topics will be developed on PRSPs/IFIs, social and labour impact of multinationals, global trade union strategies, and more.

A regular newsletter provides information about new research, policy papers and research initiatives. If you would like to subscribe to the newsletter and the GURN listserv, send an email to researchnet@ilo.org.

GMOS AND BIODIVERSITY

The IUF has produced The GM Industry's Attack on Biodiversity as it bears directly on the US WTO complaint against the EU ban on genetically modified organisms as well as the wider discussion on the relation of the WTO to Multilateral Environment Agreements and international human rights law generally. It is available in English:

http://www.iuf.org/cgi-bin/editorials/db.cgi?db=default&ww=1&uid=default&ID=182&view_records=1&en=1

German:

http://www.iuf.org/cgi-bin/editorials/db.cgi?db=default&ww=1&uid=default&ID=185&view_records=1&de=1

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