

PSI World News 7-04

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PSI REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES MEET

PSI's Regional Executive Boards for three of the four regions (Africa and Arab countries, Inter -Americas and Europe) met at separate meetings during March and April. The Asia & Pacific Regional Executive Committee meeting will be held in a few days' time and a short report will appear in the next World News.

The IAMREC met in Kingston, Jamaica, on 31 March-April 1st, and accepted into affiliation eight new unions. Among other decisions made, the participants urged all affiliates in the Americas to work with their national union centres to again call at the ILO Conference in June for a Commission of Inquiry on Colombia. They adopted a statement on the crisis in Haiti. The IAMREC also worked on plans for the 9th PSI Inter-American Regional Conference (IAMRECON) in Rio de Janeiro in November 2004.

The EUREC met on 6-7 April in Geneva and adopted two statements: one in support of the Thai trade union campaign, and one in support of Colombian affiliate SINTRAEMCALI in its campaign to oppose government plans to privatise the Municipal Water, Sanitation, Telecommunication and Electricity Company, EMCALI. The participants also expressed their support for the ILO Commission of Enquiry into violations of trade Union Rights in Belarus. They also supported the a new European Programme of Action, and a European Youth Programme that includes two sub-regional conferences in 2004 and an overall increase in the visibility of young public sector workers in PSI's work.

At the AFREC meeting in Senegal, 12-17 April, the participants adopted a statement condemning the violence in countries in the region, especially Palestine, Iraq and Sudan. They addressed a solidarity message to unionists in the Central African Republic who have not received their wages for more than 40 months. The Quality Public Services Campaign Coordinator Wendy Caird took participants through the campaign strategy and there was a good discussion on regional activities and priorities. A number of campaign initiatives are underway, including interesting work on developing alternatives to privatisation.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

As a result of some recent meetings on a range of related topics, the secretariat is seeking the following information: Do affiliates know of studies which have identified the number of new services (health, education, water, etc.) needed to meet people's needs, including the number of additional staff needed? Have any affiliates proposed or reached agreements with governments on incentives to get essential service workers (doctors, nurses, other professionals...) to go to work in deprived/rural areas - special allowances, housing incentives, promotion incentives? We urgently need data from studies which show that Public-Private Partnerships or Private Finance Initiative-type schemes are more expensive and/or of lower quality/quantity than using the public option alone; we also need data on public sector employment - the loss of staff because of poor public salaries, poor working conditions/morale, lots of older people retiring in a short period, problems in recruitment. Any such information or sources of that information would be gratefully welcomed by Mike.Waghorne@world-psi.org.

CANADA - 20,000 PSI AFFILIATE MEMBERS ON STRIKE

Twenty thousand public sector workers across Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada's eastern province, have been on strike since April 1st, after the province's Conservative government brought down a budget announcing the elimination of 4,000 public service jobs over the next four years.

The workers are members of two PSI Canadian affiliates - the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). Affected are hospitals, nursing homes, schools, the public college system, public housing, libraries, ferries, government offices, liquor stores and provincial highways.

The strike was caused by government demands for a wage freeze and major concessions in four areas: sick leave, pensions, classification system and hours of work for school board workers. On 20 April, after a weekend of talks, government walked out without any agreement being made. Details of the strike can be followed on www.nupge.ca. PSI Canadian affiliates would greatly appreciate your messages of solidarity and support. They can be sent by email to national@nupge.ca.

TUAC/PSI-PGC CONSULTATION

Each year, a TUAC -PSI delegation (mainly PSI affiliates) meets with the Bureau of the OECD's Public Governance Committee (PGC - formerly PUMA). This year we met on 14 April. Items discussed included:

- We commented positively on a draft of their next ten-year mandate, which stresses the need for policies to be context-dependent, not 'one-size-fits-all'.
- Public sector modernisation. Associated with this item was a draft paper outlining an approach to public sector employment - one of the most balanced and thoughtful papers we had seen from the OECD.
- The OECD has been running a multi-year programme on increasing contacts and cooperation with China. The present focus is on governance issues, run by PGC-GOV. We expressed our concerns: human rights; contacts which PSI affiliates have in China and our potential to help workers there deal with MNEs and EPZs; the need to get the government to look at the future of the relationship between the Party and unions; the need to discuss labour market issues with them.
- We briefed them on the Quality Public Services campaign: quality issues, national/global campaigns, the very different starting points for our affiliates and the relationship with the Millennium Development Goals work.
- We discussed their proposed 2005 -2006 work programme: PFIs; the management of public servants; integrity in government in which they talk about PPPs, public procurement and sponsorship and conflicts of interest in these areas; the role of central government in the context of devolution, decentralisation; key data and indicators of good government and of efficient public services.

Copies of the full report of this meeting, in English, are available from Mike.Waghorne@world-psi.org.

RESOLUTION ON "HUMAN RIGHTS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION" POSTPONED

The Brazilian resolution on "human rights and sexual orientation" which claims that sexual diversity is an integral part of Universal Human Rights as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was due to be presented at the 60th session of the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva in March. Introduced by Brazil last year and already postponed once, it is the first-ever UN resolution with a primary focus on human rights and sexual orientation.

However, due to the pressure by opposing groups, the resolution was again delayed to the next session of the CHR. Whereas there was disappointment that the resolution could not be passed, the delay offers another chance to strategize, mobilize support and present it again. Further information is available on the Women's Human Rights Network website: www.whrnet.org/international.html.

"GROWING PUBLIC"

This is the title of a new book on social spending and growth by Peter H. Limbert, published by Cambridge University Press. Limbert compares the level of social spending and economic growth over nine decades up to 2000 in 19 developed nations, including most of Western Europe, Japan, Australia, the United States and Canada. He focuses on social programmes, not overall government spending. There is a commonly-held belief that tax cuts help economic growth, but Limbert demonstrates that the opposite is closer to the truth. Countries whose tax revenue is high typically tax alcohol, tobacco and oil, which contributes to better health and environment, and healthier workers are generally more productive. Limbert also finds that public spending in nations with high welfare levels is also conducive to economic growth. The spending on education and health makes for a healthier population: people live longer and are thus more productive. Government support for working women in these nations also pays off. The difference between pay for men and women is higher in the United States than it is in most of Europe. It is small in Sweden, which provides generous child support. For more details of the book, email Mike.Waghorne@world-psi.org.

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