

International Women's Day: March 8th

PSI's International Women's Day campaign to promote public services as essential for women's equality received considerable support from affiliates throughout the world. Post boxes were crammed with the post cards calling for improved funding of public services, from Bangkok to Bamako to Brasilia. However, at the same time, marches to claim women's rights in Turkey and Nepal met with severe repression. The global unions used the occasion of March 8th to submit a petition to the Colombian Ambassador in New York calling for an end to the repression of women trade unionists, and an end to impunity. The Ambassador agreed to forward it to President Uribe. For more information on March 8th campaigns [subscribe now](#) to PSI Women and receive the March 8th supplement.

Trade union reform

Trade unions around the world are struggling to come to terms with the relentless social, political, economic and technological change of the last few years - much of which requires a profound re-thinking of union roles and practices. PSI has written an introduction to the subject of trade union reform. This is available here: <http://www.world-psi.org/reform>, or by email from communications@world-psi.org (English, French, Spanish, Japanese, German and Swedish). It will also feature in the next edition of FOCUS, which is due out next month.

Historic equal pay award in UK

[UNISON](#) has agreed the biggest ever equal pay award, involving 1,500 women working in the health sector. The women each stand to gain between £35,000 and £200,000. The union waged an eight-year legal battle for 14 different working categories, using five different male comparators. The women range from nurses and healthcare assistants to catering assistants, domestics, clerical officers, sewing machine assistants, porters and telephonists. Their pay was compared with craftsmen/joiners, building labourers/wall washers, works officers, craftsmen supervisors and maintenance assistants. Hours of work, pensions, weekend working rates and sick pay were also included in the comparisons. A new pay system negotiated by UNISON in 2004 should end such pay discrimination in future.

Social security in the USA

A huge battle is developing around plans to privatise social security in the USA. According to estimates the average retiree who lives 20 years past retirement and chooses a private account will be \$154,000 worse off than under current arrangements. The American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees ([AFSCME](#)) is making two million phone calls to voters in 33 congressional districts across the country to educate voters, and ask them not to support the President's plan. They have also called 25% of their 1.6 million members on this issue.

World Bank watch

President Bush has chosen Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz, a key architect of the Iraq war, as the U.S. nominee to head the World Bank. The announcement came soon after Bush's nomination of John R. Bolton, another prominent hawk, as ambassador to the United Nations. PSI has joined many other organisations in asking European heads of state to challenge the nomination.

Beijing Platform of Action reviewed

Global unions have fielded their largest ever delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women for the ten year review of the [Beijing Platform of Action](#). The meeting took place from 28 February to 11 March, and PSI's delegation included World Women Committee members Gloria Mills ([UNISON](#)); Diane Wood ([NUPGE](#)); and Birthe Josephson ([Kommunal](#)), together with representatives from Verdi and PSI staff members Nora Wintour and Sandra Massiah. Over 6,000 NGO delegates were also present. The US government obstructed the adoption of a declaration to reaffirm the Beijing Platform of Action with an amendment claiming that the Platform did not create the right to abortion. Global unions worked with women's economic justice NGOs and were able to thwart US positions on reproductive rights, and to include language on the positive role of public services in creating an enabling environment for women's equality, and on equal pay issues. For further information contact equality@world-psi.org

The Water Business

A new book by [Kommunal](#) journalist Ann-Christin Sjölander looks at the privatisation of water around the world. Today, two giant corporations, Veolia and Suez-Ondeo, control 80% of the

international private water market, with some 300 million customers. Protests have broken out in country after country - Bolivia, Argentina, Ghana, South Africa - and the water giants are switching to new markets in China, North America and Europe. Meanwhile well over a billion people still lack access to clean water supplies. **The Water Business** tells the story behind these facts, taking us far beyond simplistic arguments over public vs private provision. It is essential reading for all who work in the field, particularly union organisers and policy makers.

Is the IMF blocking HIV/AIDS relief?

A new report by humanitarian agencies in Africa accuses the IMF of effectively undermining the fight against HIV/AIDS. PSI health sector co-ordinator Alan Leather joins the authors in deplored this situation. More than 4,000 trained nurses and thousands of other health workers in Kenya are sitting unemployed when they could be working to combat the virus. IMF restrictions on public spending make it difficult for countries to hire doctors, nurses, and health workers, or to buy medicines. Spending constraints also block poor countries from accepting desperately-needed outside help. In 2002-2003, for example, Uganda was nearly forced to reject a \$52 million grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria because it sought to stay within the strict budgetary constraints it had agreed as part of a loan from the IMF. The report can be downloaded here:

<http://www.aidc.org.za/?q=book/view/360>

Solicomm

ILO-ACTRAV is building a new communications facility for the labour movement. It's called **Solicomm**, and it is available in English, French and Spanish at <http://www.solicomm.net/>. **Solicomm** offers affiliated unions and their members free email addresses, conferencing systems, and online document storage. The developers should be congratulated for the extra work they have put in to ensure that this system works in countries without fast or reliable Internet access. Beginning from early May 2005, **Solicomm** will also be providing a free website service. Any union affiliated to PSI can take advantage of this facility. For more information email communications@world-psi.org

Conditionality rethought

After years of lobbying, Britain has decided that it will no longer require privatisation programmes as a condition for receiving development aid. The decision was announced at an OECD meeting on aid effectiveness. The UK will also press fellow donor countries and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to relax their own conditions. "We welcome this significant

advance in government policy, which has come about as a result of dialogue with trade unions and NGOs," said the head of UNISON's international department Nick Sigler. "It is a very positive step towards stemming the tide of privatisation in the developing world." A copy of the government's report: **Partnerships for Poverty Reduction: Rethinking Conditionality** is available on request (in English only) from communications@world-psi.org

Making poverty history

2005 could be the year that sees a radical change for the world's poor. Oxfam, one of the organisations participating in the [Global Call to Action Against Poverty](#), has produced an online video in which Bono and Scarlett Johansson tell us how we can make poverty history. See: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/about_us/video/05/mph1.htm

An update on this campaign is currently being prepared for PSI affiliates, and should be received in about 10 days.

Protection for labour inspectors

Following the murders of labour inspectors in France and Brazil, the ILO has reported that "Violence and negative attitudes towards labour inspection are on the increase. These are merely indicators of a deeper problem". According to Jukka Takala, Director the ILO's [SafeWork](#) Programme, prevention plays a central role: "The earlier the problems are corrected, the smaller they finally will be. With 134 ratifications, ILO Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection is one of the most ratified of the ILO's 185 Conventions and serves as a basic instrument to put this principle into practice. SafeWork is also developing an Integrated Labour Inspection Training System to promote the idea of integrated labour inspection on a larger scale and to share good practices internationally.

PSI's young European unionists have developed a strong and forward-looking youth network. Their latest initiative is the PSI CONNECT web site (<http://www.world-psi.org/connect>). The page also links to an online discussion forum. If you would like to become involved, you can start by subscribing to the Connect newsletter (also available from the web page).

Stop privatisation of EMSIRVA SA

disposal company in Cali, Colombia. **SINTRAEMSIRVA**, a PSI affiliate, considers that privatisation could cost up to 1000 jobs, with increased costs to the community and a two- tier system based on capacity to pay. PSI has written to the Mayor of Cali calling upon his office to intervene to prevent the privatisation.

New WWWork

PSI has produced several new web pages for you to look at. As always, your feedback and ideas would be very welcome.

* PSI work in Europe

English: www.world-psi.org/europe

French: www.world-psi.org/europefr

Spanish: www.world-psi.org/europa

Youth: www.world-psi.org/connect

* PSI work in Africa and Arab countries

English: www.world-psi.org/africa

French: www.world-psi.org/afrique

English: www.world-psi.org/africa/arabcountries

French: www.world-psi.org/afrique/paysarabes

* Global Call to Action against Poverty

www.world-psi.org/gcap

If you would like to add a link to the PSI's website from your own, try this piece of code. And let us know if you would like us to send you a logo. Public Services International (PSI)

Correction...

Last month's PSI World News carried a report in which we stated that the recent PSI mission to Israel and Palestine had met with the Israeli Labour Minister. It was actually the *Palestinian* Labour Minister they met with. We apologise for any confusion this has caused. A full account of the mission is included in the forthcoming edition of FOCUS, and can also be previewed on the website: www.world-psi.org/focus

International migration and women health workers project

PSI is delighted to welcome Genevieve Gencianos as the new coordinator for the second phase of this Dutch and UK funded project, which will run until October 2006. This phase of the programme will seek to build union partnerships between sending and receiving countries, lobby for the implementation of ethical recruitment guidelines, and compensation schemes for the health systems of developing countries. The project will also seek to build capacity around organising migrant workers. Genevieve worked previously as the coordinator of Migrants Rights International, an umbrella organization of migrant workers' organisations, and at the Bank Information Centre, with which PSI has strong links. A Philippine national, and a migrant worker herself, she brings a wide range of skills and experience to the position. For more information, contact: genevieve.gencianos@world-psi.org

Members Only

The PSI General Briefing is about to be sent to all affiliates. It contains the minutes from the last Executive Board meeting. Executive Board members can also access the (passworded) document from their new web page here: <http://www.world-psi.org/exec>. We would be keen to know what else we can provide for you on this page.

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