

A closer look at liberalisation

An excellent new book from the ILO: **Winners or Losers? Liberalizing Public Services**, examines and questions the liberalisation of public services around the world. PSI has contributed extensively to this book, and we are delighted with the result. Seven areas are covered: health services (including mental health and nursing home provision); secondary and higher education; pensions; public employment services; labour market training; criminal care (particularly prisons); and social care for children and the elderly. What are the impacts of privatisation on employees? What happens to clients? when services start competing with the public service? How rapidly is liberalisation taking place; in which countries, and by what means? The book also addresses questions of governance, making useful recommendations for policy makers, employers, trade unions, civil society, academics, and international organisations. It is available free on request by emailing your name and address to: distr@ilo.org

WTO talks: dead or just sleeping?

The collapse of the WTO talks is a tragedy, a tragedy engineered by Northern governments, who have put the interests of 'their' multinational companies before the interests of the planet as a whole?, says PSI's Mike Waghorne. For a closer look at the reasons behind the failure of the talks, see <http://www.world-psi.org/content5>

Privatisation and the MDGs

An important new working paper from United Nations Development Programme examines whether market-oriented reforms and the use of private sector agencies might help achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Concentrating on health, education, energy and water, it concludes that "market-led policies fail to contribute to the MDGs and often reduce the likelihood of achieving them". The paper is available from <http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/newsletters/WorkingPaper22.pdf>

The fall and rise of public services

The BBC recently sent reporters across the globe to seek out "the best public services in the world". The resulting Newsnight series reports that countries have now rejected the model in which the state retreats from welfare provision in order to cut taxes. In almost all OECD countries, public spending has actually been increasing. Strong public services are now seen as an essential foundation for decent societies, supporting investments in education, research and development. Healthy and secure populations also make businesses more competitive. The countries with the highest levels of spending (principally in Scandinavia) enjoy strong, export-led, knowledge-intensive growth. With the right political choices, economic efficiency and social justice can go hand in hand. The documentary series can be downloaded here:

<http://nes.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/5252962.stm>

PSI Programme Officer vacancies

There is still time (but not much!) to apply for a programme officer position at PSI headquarters in France. The two posts we are offering are: Equality and Rights Officer, and Health Services and Community Services Officer. Further information is available at <http://www.world-psi.org/>. The deadline for applications is 28 August.

Whiteband victory for Zambia

The Zambian government says the country will save about US\$180 million in debt servicing costs following last year's decision to write off debts, following the Global Call for Action against Poverty. This money will be channeled into economic growth and poverty reduction programmes, with an extra 10,000 teachers and 800 core health workers being employed. About 3,074 teachers have already been recruited, while about US\$22 million had been allocated to the education sector.

World breastfeeding week

This month the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action invited individuals and organisations in more than 120 countries to celebrate the 15th World Breastfeeding Week (August 1st-7th). 2006 also marks the 25th anniversary of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk

Substitute, which regulates the promotion of commercial milk products. The promotion of breastfeeding in an important dimension of ILO Convention 183 on Maternity Protection (see: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C183>), which PSI is actively promoting. Article 10 states:

1. A woman shall be provided with the right to one or more daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed her child.
2. These breaks or the reduction of daily hours of work shall be counted as working time and remunerated accordingly."

For more information on the value of breastfeeding see <http://www.waba.org.my/> or <http://www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>

Passport to rights in Canada

Thinking of travelling to Canada for work? Know your rights as a worker, and find out how to join the trade union. This is the message of the "Passport to Worker and Union Rights in Canada", launched this month by the BC Government and Service Employees' Union, part of the National Union of Public and General Employees. The passport comes with other information materials for migrant workers like fact sheets on union rights in Canada, details on employment and living conditions, information for young workers, and other basic information. Providing information to prospective migrant workers even before they leave their country is important to help them make the right decisions and to prevent exploitation. PSI makes this possible through union-to-union cooperation in both origin and destination countries. In September, PSI will be launching the Pre-Decision Kit for migrant health workers. To find out more, visit <http://www.worldpsi.org/migration>.

UK: Quality public services for all

The UK House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts has published a report setting out 10 criteria for achieving high quality of public services. Of interest to the many PSI unions who are dealing with the same question, the report is available here:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmpubacc/1530/1530.pdf>

Unions and sustainable development

A new Sustainable Development Unit has been launched by the ICFTU, GURN, TUAC and Sustainlabour. The unit's website (in Es, Fr and En) provides country profiles on sustainable development issues such as energy, climate change, health and safety, asbestos, HIV/AIDS, union rights, and corporate accountability. See <http://www.tradeunionsunit.org/>

GURN has also established a sustainable development page on its website:

<http://www.gurn.info/topic/susdev/index.html>

A closer look at Swedish unionisation

Sweden probably has the world's highest unionisation rate, at about 78% of the paid workforce, although Finland (78%) and Denmark (75%) might argue this. Closer analysis of the Swedish data by the Swedish Federation of Trade Unions (LO) recently produced two interesting facts. Firstly, the proportion of members who are female has risen, with women now almost 7% more likely than men to be union members. Secondly, people born outside of Sweden are slightly more likely to be union members than those born inside the country. More than 15% of LO's members are born in another country, and more than 25% have a foreign background.

Ghost workers still haunt Cameroon

The authorities in Cameroon have discovered that they are paying civil service salaries to 45,000 employees who do not exist. These "ghost workers" were uncovered by a census of public servants as part of a drive to stamp out corruption. In 2005, the public service ministry found more than half of its 2,700-strong workforce did not exist. See

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4785721.stm>

In defence of non-profit health care

For-profit nursing homes and hospitals often provide an inferior quality of care, compared with their non-profit peers, according to a US study published in the journal Health Affairs 4-2006. The authors carried out a systematic analysis of 162 studies of non-profit versus for-profit health care providers. The analysis found a pattern of differences between non-profits and for-profits in cost, quality and accessibility. For example the authors report that eight studies found non-profit hospitals have lower mortality rates, versus one study finding the opposite. There is evidence that for-profit providers are more likely to mark up prices to maximize revenue and are more likely to have complaints lodged against them. See <http://www.world-psi.org/content4>

Struggling for rights in Colombia

Over the past 20 years, more than 4,000 Colombian trade unionists have been killed, according to a new report from the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. ?No group in Colombia has been more specifically singled out? than organized labour, and no group has shown more daring tenacity in continuing to operate under threat,? said Lisa Haugaard, executive director of the Latin American Working Group, at the report?s launch. The report also examines gender discrimination, child labour abuses, and how labour law, hiring practices, and failing labor authorities undermine workers' attempts to organize. Justice for All: The Struggle for Worker Rights in Colombia can be downloaded from:

<http://www.solidaritycenter.org/content.asp?contentid=516>

Other country reports are available for Jordan, China, Mexico and Sri Lanka, with further reports in preparation for Swaziland, Thailand and Guatemala.

India puts ?disinvestment? on hold

India?s government has put a key energy privatisation proposal on hold following opposition from alliance partners. The dispute is over a plan to sell (or "disinvest" in) a state-run power company.

Nearly 35,000 workers at the company went on strike in protest. The government is coming under increasing pressure from some of its allies, as well as communist parties on whom it is dependent for support.

Solidarity helps Korean workers

After a long and difficult dispute, PSI affiliate the Korean Health and Medical Workers Union (KHMWU) has signed a collective agreement with the Sejong Hospital Management. The agreement restores wage and working conditions which the management had ignored, and includes the introduction of a 5-day working week. The management also agreed to end unfair labour practices and the use of hired guards, who had attacked union members. During the struggle many international and trade union organisations sent letters of protest to management and the Korean government. PSI sent letters and organised an urgent action appeal, as well as sending a letter on behalf of the World Women?s Committee. It worked!

Workers Out!

Last month Montreal hosted Workers Out! an important lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) international conference. Close to 40 keynote speakers attended, including Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The goal of the conference was to design an international strategic plan to promote LGBT rights at work. There were more than 200 workshops, geared toward a better understanding of LGBT issues, mobilisation techniques and an appreciation of the relevant international structures. The resulting plan, contained within the Montreal Declaration, is available here:

? http://www.montreal2006.org/Doc/Declaration%20of%20Montreal_EN_F.pdf (English)

? http://www.montreal2006.org/Doc/Declaration%20of%20Montreal_FR_F.pdf (French)

? http://www.montreal2006.org/Doc/FINAL_Declaration%20of%20Montreal_ES.pdf (Spanish)

AFSCME's new organising initiative

Faced with what President Gerald McEntee called ?a newfound audacity from anti-union business leaders, and the politicians they bankroll?, delegates to the AFSCME convention have approved sweeping measures to fight back. The plan calls for 40,000 volunteers to register 90% of AFSCME members for Election Day, and commits to winning representation rights for 70,000 new workers per year. It also includes a legislative campaign to reform health care, making affordable care universal. Delegates approved a \$3 a month increase in dues to create a \$60 million war chest for the new organising, political and legislative campaign.

Human rights in migrant discussion

Ensuring that migrants are afforded basic human rights, regardless of status, was the key message brought by about 60 civil society and union representatives to the UN Civil Society Hearings on Migration and Development, held in July. The union delegation included the ICFTU, PSI, AFL-CIO and the American Solidarity Center. UNISON and the AFT also participated, as part of the PSI delegation and partners in PSI's project on migration and women health workers. ??Examining migration and its relationship to development must begin from the framework of rights, otherwise we risk treating migrants as the means and not as the end in itself,? said PSI's Genevieve Gencianos. PSI will be joining civil society organizations in activities during the UN General Assembly High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, in September 2006. For more information see: www.world-psi.org/migration.

Cuts endanger UK workplace safety

Hazards magazine reports that as the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is moving away from hands-on workplace inspections, figures for fatalities and major injury rates are rising. The HSE wants to further reduce the total number of staff, but, as Steven Kay of Prospect points out: ?Evidence shows it is inspection backed by enforcement that is the most effective way of ensuring employers comply with their health and safety responsibilities. ...Less investigations will mean workers that suffer horrendous injuries will not get justice.? The union is calling for government intervention to reduce the financial pressure crippling HSE.

Canada: Federal workers harassed

Canada's latest Public Service Employee Survey, a massive undertaking involving more than 100,000 federal workers, has found that more than one in five workers (22%) feel they were harassed on the job during the past year, while 17% believe they were discriminated against in the performance of their duties. The survey is conducted by Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada. The National Union of Public and General Employees plans to use the results to help represent members during collective bargaining and in other areas of engagement with the employer. It also fully expects to be involved with the government in addressing issues raised in the survey.

English: <http://www.hrma-agrh.gc.ca/survey-sondage/2005/results-resultats/index-e.htm>

French: <http://www.hrma-agrh.gc.ca/survey-sondage/2005/results-resultats/index-f.htm>

Assessing the quality of aid

The Netherlands has topped the world's wealthiest 21 donor nations for its policies to promote development, according to the 2006 "Commitment to Development Index". They were followed by Sweden, Norway, New Zealand and Australia. Japan ranked last, as it has every year since 2003, behind Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Greece, in descending order. Total foreign aid from the donors rose by 31.4% from 2005, to a record 106.5 billion dollars. Of that, however, nearly 20 billion dollars came from debt write-offs. The U.S. placed 13th. Interestingly, with the exception of Japan, the worst performers on aid were the best performers on trade. See: http://www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_active/cdi

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