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Union members out at sea combat pirate attack



Image

In the battle of union members versus pirates, chalk one up for the union members. This story shows that when working people have the choice to form unions, they can ensure that they receive the proper training to keep safe on the job.

The American crew members of the Maersk Alabama - a ship recently hijacked by Somali pirates - regained control of the ship. The seamen specifically cite their union membership as a reason for how they were able to beat the pirates.

One of them said, "We are American seamen. We are union members. We stuck together, we did our jobs. And that's how we did it."

Watch the video here: <http://action.seiu.org/page/invite/pirates>

Outsourcing costs billions



Image

A recent study by PSI affiliate FOA in Denmark indicates that municipalities could make huge savings by putting an end to outsourcing. If they ensure tasks like cleaning and catering in schools, care centres and hospitals, on a nationwide scale the savings could reach billions of kroner.

"The mantra of the right-wing government in recent years has been outsourcing to make services cheaper," says Dennis Kristensen, President of FOA (photo), "but on the contrary, the expenditure of municipalities increases with the degree of outsourcing." FOA's calculations show that every time a municipality increases the extent of private actors by 5 percent, it costs each citizen of that municipality 136 kroner, or 18 euros. Multiply that amount by the number of citizens nationwide, and the figure reaches 3-4 billion kroner (400-500 million euros).

Until now only employers' organisations and the strong liberal think tank CEPOS had examined the figures. Kristensen says there is a need for independent economists who can calculate the financial implications of outsourcing. Danish taxpayers need to know that the money they pay in taxes is used as efficiently as possible.

Norway-Palestine cooperation



Image

During the war in Gaza, Norwegians Mads Gilbert and Erik Fosse (photo) were the only western doctors working in the midst of the population of Gaza. Now Norway has made a further step in its solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The Board of Oslo's University Hospital has initiated a friendly partnership agreement with the aid organisation Norwac to send doctors and nurses to Shifa hospital in Gaza and Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem. Are Saastad, local branch leader of PSI affiliate Fagforbundet and psychiatrists Sidsel Gilbert and Svein Haugsgjerd were part of the group of employees at the Oslo hospital who wanted to know how they could help their Palestinian colleagues.

Now the Norwegian Foreign Ministry has agreed that this friendly partnership agreement is in line with government policy, and has asked Norwac to put it into practice. Oslo University Hospital employees will be able to receive paid leave to work on cooperation projects in the Palestinian hospitals. www.norwac.no

Maori skills recognised



The collective agreement for allied and public health and technical staff in hospital now recognises the cultural and language skills of Maori health workers (hauora Maori). The agreement, which was negotiated by the PSA, covers all district health boards. Hauora Maori are defined as working almost exclusively with Maori patients and clients and hired because of their knowledge and expertise in Maori cultural matters, in addition to their clinical competence. They will be assessed for both their cultural knowledge and expertise and their clinical competence. The results of these assessments will determine the employee's starting level on the hauora Maori salary scale. Some of the factors to be taken into account include proficiency in te reo, knowledge of tikanga and one's own whakapapa and access to mana whenua. The PSA and the DHBs worked with Maori health organisation Te Rau Matatini to secure this significant achievement.

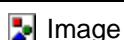
ADB 42nd Annual Meeting in Bali

The 42nd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) will be held at the Bali International Convention Centre (BICC) in Bali, Indonesia, 2-5 May 2009. This year, the delegation of global unions will include not only PSI but also the Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) and Union Network International (UNI). Nearly eighty PSI/BWI/UNI staff and affiliates in the Asia and Pacific region will attend, as will the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). In 2006, PSI was given formal accreditation by ADB to join the Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors as a trade union representative and has since participated in the annual meetings. PSI/BWI/UNI will have a meeting with ADB President, Mr. Haruhiko Kuroda, meetings with ADB country delegations, and will participate in forums and panel discussions, ADB seminars, media work and civil society solidarity dialogue.

PSI and its electricity affiliated unions in Indonesia will organise a Electricity Workers' Forum "Electricity Reform in Indonesia and Asia-Pacific: Role of ADB and JBIC" on 2 May. On 3 May, Global Unions will organise a forum on "Addressing the Impacts on Workers of the Global Financial and Economic Crisis".

For more information, please contact PSI AP Regional Secretary: katsuhiko.sato@world-psi.org

Ukrainian unionists to obtain special payment cards



Unionists in Ukraine will soon be able to benefit from payment cards that also take account of their union membership and privileges.

On 26 March, the Federation of Trade Unions signed an agreement with the National Bank of Ukraine to introduce the cards for 80,000 users by 2010. The following year, their use should be extended to all union members.

The cards combine the functions of credit/debit cards and an electronic union member ID card, confirming a member's right for services such as travel and medical care privileges, and buying vouchers to attend the Federation-run sanatoriums.

The cards are being introduced in the framework of the Federation's target programme for social protection of working people, which aims to support union members during the recession.

Unions in Guatemala sign collective agreement



Image

After a long negotiation process and several days of demonstrations by health workers, the National Health Workers Union of Guatemala (SNTSG) and the Ministry of Public Health and Welfare (MSPAS) began the process of a collective agreement on working conditions. As a result of the negotiations, it was agreed to form committees to guarantee the feasibility and compliance of the agreement. The process will also involve institutions responsible for finance, the national budget, MSPAS and the health trade union forum, who also be members of the committees.

See the final agreement here: http://cid-3d7b44805ddaa61e.skydrive.live.com/self.aspx/Public/pacto%7C_colectivo%7C_SNTSG%7C_2009.pdf?lc=3082

How Canadian citizens benefit from public spending



<http://www.world...>

The majority of Canadians enjoy a higher quality of life because public services funded by their taxes come at a solid bargain, says a new study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

The study concludes that an average middle-income family in Canada would have to spend more than half its yearly salary to buy health care, education and the other 'free' public services now paid for with tax dollars.

Canada's Quiet Bargain: The benefits of public spending responds to incessant

calls for tax cuts and concludes public services make a significant contribution to the majority of Canadians' standard of living – worth at least 50% of their income.

The study adds up the value of public services offered by all levels of government, including child tax credit, pension, employment insurance, health visits, expenditure on roads and traffic, and broad-based public benefits like environmental protection, national defence, foreign affairs and international development. It shows that middle-income Canadian families enjoy public services worth about \$41,000 – or 63% of their income.

Nordic delegation visits water affiliates in Peru



Image

A ten-person Nordic delegation visited Peru in March 2009 to support PSI affiliates and evaluate the projects that they fund. The mission focused on establishing partnerships at the local level, and to investigate if public water companies have enough resources to invest and improve services.

The previous FENTAP congress instituted policies to be more proactive in terms of environment, youth, and gender parity and the new women and youth leaders explained the statutory reforms that

have been put into place. They also talked about a new opening for an environment secretary, in line with PSI policy.

Concerning partnerships, FENTAP leads this process on a national level and participates actively in the international sphere. They said that a successful way to stand against privatisation was through public-public partnerships. The mission also met with CONA AGUA Y VIDA who together with FENTAP will construct alliances that can bring about change in the economic and political situation in the country.

Members' organisations of the PSI national coordinating committee for Peru also met the Nordic delegation and stressed the importance of support from PSI for their ongoing struggles and made special mention of capacity-building training.

Mortuary workers and medical workers on strike in Nigeria



Mortuary attendants at the Ebonyi state University Teaching Hospital, Nigeria, have joined an indefinite strike of doctors and nurses.

The strike started on 20 April 2009 in response to the sacking of 14 doctors and 18 nurses, and the state governor's refusal to pay the new Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Scheme (CONTIIS). PSI affiliate the Medical and Health Workers' Union (MHWU) insists that there is a firm agreement with the employers that salaries based on the consolidated salary scale should begin in January 2009. The union states that the sacking of the hospital workers is "in contravention of the provision of the Nigerian Labour Law 2005."

In Imo state, Nigeria, health institutions have also been shut down by indefinite strike action by state health workers, provoked by the "failure of the state government to assent to the agreements reached on December 9, 2008, by the enlarged negotiating team set up by Governor Ikedi Ohakim."

The workers are striking because of "non-implementation of the consolidated health workers salary in line with the NDDC states, non-restoration of call duty, shift duty and rural posting allowances to health workers in the local government areas." They also deplore the "poor infrastructure and inadequate equipment in government hospitals, and lack of current reference materials in state owned hospitals."

Millennium Development Goals Report 2008



The United Nations has released its report on the progress of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which offers a mixed analysis of the different goals. The 56-page report says that the overarching goal of reducing absolute poverty by half is in reach for the world as a whole, but this varies greatly among regions: sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to reach that goal. Deaths from measles and AIDS have fallen, but every year more than 500,000 prospective mothers in developing countries die in childbirth or of complications from pregnancy. Some 1.6 billion people have gained access to safe drinking water since 1990, but almost half of the developing world's population still live without improved sanitation. On climate, the use of ozone-depleting substances has been almost eliminated, but carbon dioxide emissions have continued to increase. The report recognises that achieving some goals will depend on country-wide systems of qualified and adequately equipped personnel and an effective institutional infrastructure. Building these capacities requires strong political commitment and adequate funding.

Read the report here: http://www.undp.org/publications/MDG_Report_2008_En.pdf

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