

PSI World News

August 2009

To read other similar articles, go to www.world-psi.org/worldnews

NHS under fire in the US: UNISON counter-attacks

Obama's health reform plan <<http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateRedirect.cfm?template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=23099>> has come under fire from the anti-reform campaigners who have chosen the UK National Health Service (NHS) as the target of their criticisms. PSI affiliate UNISON has sent an "NHS fact sheet <http://www.unison.org.uk/file/US_factsheet.pdf>" to its sister unions in the United States, which include PSI affiliates SEIU, AFSCME, AFGE, AFT, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Utility Workers Union of America and United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America.

UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis, referring to the misrepresentation of the NHS in the US said: "I, like so many other people in the UK, owe my life to the NHS. We are outraged by the gross lies and distortions, being spread in the US about our NHS. A universal health system that is free at the point of need is something that we can all be proud of - it is a mark of a civilised, caring society. "People love the NHS in this country because it is always there for them when they need it. Regardless of your income, the NHS provides peace of mind even at the most uncertain economic times, like those we're experiencing now. In the US losing your job, means losing your health insurance. "America may be the world's richest nation, but almost 50m people there are not covered by health insurance, so President Obama is to be congratulated for trying to bring in health reform."

Read the UNISON article here <http://www.unison.org.uk/international/pages_view.asp?did=9234> .

Read more from the BBC website here <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8198084.stm>> .

Show solidarity with the NHS and tweet your support on
<http://twitter.com/search?q=%23WeLoveTheNHS>.

Protests continue in Honduras

Photo courtesy of CEMH (Centro de Estudios de la Mujer-Honduras) and CAWN (Central America Women's Network)

Nearly two months after the coup d'état in Honduras on 28 June, trade unionists, popular movements and civil society organisations are continuing to defy the de facto regime and the army with demonstrations, protest marches and strikes, in the face of vicious repression.

At the national women's ministry, 16 workers were put on 'temporary suspension of labour' in late July, on the grounds that there were no funds to pay their wages, but they report that the de facto minister, Marta Díaz Velásquez, said she 'could not have a working relationship with people with political views contrary to her own'.

Public sector workers participating in the protests have been detained and in some cases maltreated by soldiers, union leaders' houses have been broken into and unions supporting the protests have been intimidated. On 8 August, Juan Gabriel Figueroa Tomé, a 30-year-old employee of the municipality of Choloma in San Pedro Sula, Honduras' second city, was killed for taking part in the protest movement. However, widespread strikes and protest actions persist.

Click here <<http://www.worldpsi.org/TemplateRedirect.cfm?Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=23225>> for more details.

Tri-national union declaration on NAFTA

Trade unions representing workers from Canada (Canadian Labour Congress), Mexico (UNT) and the US (AFL-CIO) have published a joint declaration on the occasion of the NAFTA Leaders Summit held in Guadalajara, Mexico, 9-10 August 2009.

Over the last fifteen years, NAFTA has been presented as a way to bring more and better jobs to the region while reducing emigration from Mexico to the United States and Canada. However, NAFTA did not create the jobs it promised. Instead, increased trade largely benefited the corporate elite in all three countries.

The current economic crisis has exacerbated the difficult social and economic conditions that surround NAFTA, and governments need to undertake measures to address them. These include rebuilding infrastructure, using clean, renewable energy sources, re-regulating the financial sector, reforming labour legislation and strengthening public services. The union declaration also addresses a number of pressing issues, which include labour law reform, migration and development and the promotion of the rule of law. In their conclusion, the unions say, "The time has come to recalibrate our relationship and focus on a path built upon shared economic growth and sustainable development. We hope that the Leaders Summit serves as an opportunity to lay out a new agenda for North America, one which makes our region competitive, sustainable and just, and our organizations commit to working together to promote that agenda."

Read the declaration in full here: Spanish <<http://www.worldpsi.org/TemplateRedirect.cfm?Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=26157>> English <<http://documents.clc-ctc.ca/International/NAFTA-Declaration-2009-08-EN.pdf>> French <<http://documents.clc-ctc.ca/International/NAFTA-Declaration-2009-08-FR.pdf>>

Decent work for domestic workers - to include workers delivering health, social care and municipal services in a domestic setting?

At the end of June 2009, PSI sent a circular entitled "Decent work for domestic workers" to affiliates regarding the proposed ILO instrument on domestic workers. This was a follow-up to the ILO questionnaire seeking views from its constituents on the form and content of the proposed instrument. The ITUC's guidance notes on completing the questionnaire were attached with the PSI circular. We

remind you that the deadline for responses to the questionnaire is 31st August 2009 and urge you to contact your National Centre as soon as possible in order to ensure that your views on the matter of an ILO Convention on Domestic Workers are fully taken into account in their completion of the questionnaire. We also urge you to take the time to complete the questionnaire and return to rights@world-psi.org. Your responses will help inform and coordinate our work on this issue.

Please click on these links to download a copy of the ITUC circular <<http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateRedirect.cfm?Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=25798>> relating to this questionnaire, the questionnaire <<http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateRedirect.cfm?Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=25799>> itself and guidance notes <<http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateRedirect.cfm?Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=25800>> from the ITUC on completion of the questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire will set the tone for the first discussion at the International Labour Conference in 2010.

Guyana trade union rejects lie-detectors for public servants

Public servants in Guyana are rejecting the government's recent move to introduce lie detectors in public institutions.

Thirteen people have been dismissed since the beginning of 2009 after having failed the polygraph test, introduced by the government to stamp out corruption.

Patrick Yarde, President of the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), a PSI affiliate, draws attention to the fact that no government ministers, permanent secretaries or other policy makers have been obliged to take the test. "It is a case of double standards," he added.

The tests are applied to staff of the customs anti-narcotics unit, the Cheddi Jagan international airport, the narcotics branch of the police force and the Guyana Energy Agency.

The GPSU said that there has been no meeting to obtain public opinion on the tests, which are known to be inaccurate and subject to limitations.

Read more on <http://gpsu.org> <<http://gpsu.org/>> .

Poll shows Canadians overwhelmingly support public health care

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is trying to persuade Canadians that their public health care system should be privatised, but a new poll <<http://www.medicare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/nanos.pdf>> conducted by the Toronto-based Nanos Research points to overwhelming support - 86.2 percent - for strengthening public health care rather than expanding for-profit services.

"With more than 8 in 10 Canadians supporting public solutions to make public health care stronger, there is compelling evidence that Canadians across all demographics would prefer a public over a for-profit health care system," said Nik Nanos, president of Nanos Research.

Nanos Research was commissioned by the Canadian Health Coalition (CHC), a nonpartisan group that supports Canada's public health system, to conduct a random telephone survey of 1,001 Canadians between April 25 and May 3

The Canadian government has released its report "Healthy Canadians - A Federal Report on Comparable Health Indicators 2008 <<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/pubs/system-regime/2008-fed-comp-indicat/index-eng.php>> , whose findings also show that "Most Canadians (85.2 percent) aged 15 years

and older reported being 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with the way overall health care services were provided, unchanged from 2005."

Michael McBane, national coordinator of the CHC, commented: "Throughout our campaign, Canadians have told us they want to keep our health care system public and to improve it with made-in-Canada solutions. They also have told us they flat-out reject [CMA President] Dr. Ouellet's proposal to provide us with American-style, two-tier medicine. This poll certainly underlines that for us. Eighty-six percent is a significant portion of the population. It is striking that Dr. Ouellet could be so out of touch with the pulse of most Canadians."

Read more here: <http://www.medicare.ca./new-poll-shows-overwhelming-support-for-public-health-care>

ASU launches human rights petition to outlaw the death penalty

PSI affiliate the Australian Services Union (ASU) has launched a petition calling for the national outlawing of capital punishment to protect Australians both at home and abroad from the death penalty.

The petition calls for the Parliament of Australia to prohibit the use of capital punishment against Australian citizens, wherever they are, as well as an expansion of the current repatriation program. The petition seeks to have all Australian citizens serving a custodial sentence in a foreign country repatriated to Australia.

The ASU web page to join in and sign the petition (either online or on paper) can be located at <http://www.asu.asn.au/campaigns/humanrights.html>

The <<http://www.asu.asn.au/campaigns/humanrights.html>> ASU is working with community groups like the "Make the Death Penalty History" committee from Victoria.

For further details, contact Greg McLean: gmclean@syd.asu.asn.au

UK: Most public sector workers lack knowledge about their pensions

Recent research shows that less than a third of public sector workers in the UK know the value of their final pension. The survey by pension advisory and management specialist Hymans Robertson found that just 29.7% of 1,809 public sector workers polled said they knew the value of their final pension. One-third of those asked said they were unhappy with the information they received on their pension schemes, rising to 42% for those working in the National Health Service (NHS).

The survey also found that four out of five of those polled said they would consider working beyond normal retirement age, with 27% of those in their late 50s and early 60s saying they would think about working until they were 70 to safeguard their retirement income.

More than half (54%) of public sector workers either think that private sector workers have the same working and retirement benefits or are better off. And one in ten public sector workers believe they will be worse off than their private sector peers when they retire.

"It is also worrying to note that 30% of those public sector workers surveyed are not members of any public sector scheme, with the highest proportion of non-members drawn from the least wealthy - 46% of respondents with household assets of less than £20,000 said they were not a member of a public sector scheme."

John Wright, head of public sector consulting at Hymans Robertson, called for better communication by public sector employers of the benefits they provide. "Employers should consider greater engagement with trade unions and other representative bodies in developing workshops and focus groups of workers,"

he said. "Members need not only to have a clearer picture of their totals reward in terms of benefits they receive, but they must be encouraged to value their benefits."

See more here: <http://www.hymans.co.uk/media/pressreleases/Pages/PSResearch.aspx>

Read the research report here:

<http://www.hymans.co.uk/knowledgecentre/InvestmentSurveys/Documents/Public%20sector%20survey%20final.pdf>

Jamaica to return to IMF borrowing

As the country absorbs news that the Government is to enter into a borrowing relationship with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a warning has been issued for Jamaicans to brace for tough times ahead. The warning has come from the Parliamentary Opposition and financial analysts as they assess the implications of the Government's decision to apply for a stand-by facility with the IMF.

There are predictions that, among other things, there will be a major slash in state spending as the Government will be under pressure to meet its fiscal target. This is expected to have a further dampening effect on the already weak economy.

In the meantime, trade unions have placed a question mark beside statements by Prime Minister Bruce Golding and Finance Minister Audley Shaw that there will not be job cuts in the public sector after the Government signs an agreement with the Fund. They say based on the conditions set out so far by the multilateral lending agency it will be a matter of time before Government-paid workers begin losing their jobs.

Read more here: <http://www.radiojamaica.com/content/view/20010/52/>

Read the union reaction here: http://www.go-jamaica.com/news/read_article.php?id=11086

New website database offers comprehensive WTO tariff information

Comprehensive information on customs duties is now available via the WTO website through a new database, the WTO Tariff Download Facility. Users can now search for members' customs duty rates, as actually charged as well as legally bound maximums, and in many cases imports, down to a high level of detail. See: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news09_e/tar_09jul09_e.htm

New to the News?

If you do not wish to receive PSI World News by email again, please reply with the word unsubscribe in your message. You can also subscribe in French, Spanish, Japanese or Russian. Pass it on!

PSI World News is brought to you by Public Services International

www.world-psi.org <<http://www.world-psi.org>> communications@world-psi.org
<<mailto:communications@world-psi.org>>