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PSI makes financial donation to Gaza



PSI has made a contribution of €15,000 to the ITUC Solidarity Fund in solidarity with the workers and population of Gaza. Echoing the call of UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon, PSI also calls upon the international community to start the rebuilding of lives of the people of Gaza. PSI welcomes the ceasefire and the retreat of Israeli armed forces from Gaza.

PSI expresses its support and solidarity with its Gaza affiliate the General Trade Union of Workers in Health Services. Health care workers have been at the forefront of the human disaster during the war. Emergency services in hospitals had to deal with more than 100 casualties per day during the conflict, in dire circumstances without electricity or a proper water supply. Ambulance drivers were bombarded and killed. Doctors had to face dilemmas about which casualties to treat first, with many people whose sicknesses were not considered as life-threatening being turned away.

PSI continues to monitor the situation closely and calls upon its affiliates in Palestine and Israel to strive towards a lasting solution in the region.

French unions strike on 29 January



French unions are struggling to counter the effects of the economic and financial crisis, especially concerning employment and buying-power. Many companies have reacted to the crisis by cutting down on jobs and wages, but the unions suggest measures to increase buying-power and reduce inequality. They condemn the fact that companies are using the crisis to re-structure, while they continue to remunerate their shareholders.

All French trade unions joined in a general strike on 29 January. For further details (in French): www.29janvier2009.fr.



Irish unions seeking framework for economic recovery talks

The Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Brian Cowen has urged unions to help the Government pare an extra €2bn off public spending, but the country's biggest public sector union IMPACT, a PSI affiliate, has assured its members

off public spending, but the country's biggest public sector union IMPACT, a PSI affiliate, has assured its members that they will not discuss any measures outside of an overall framework, which would recognise the need for all to contribute according to their means over a medium-term recovery period.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) is in talks with Government representatives to see if it's possible for the social partners to agree on such a framework.

IMPACT general secretary Peter McLoone said that if the social partners were willing and able to agree, it would mean an engagement from all on the immediate crisis in public finances, ie the need to save €2 billion in 2009. "This is a real and immediate problem and the public sector pay bill would be part of any solution. This would certainly involve substantial challenges to our members. But we've made it clear that public servants and other working people did not create this crisis and, while we recognise the stark realities, we will not ask working people to shoulder the burden alone," he said.

Bolivia says no to GATS for health services



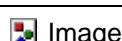
Image

On 11 November 2008, Bolivia notified its intention to modify some of its international trade obligations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) relating to health services. Bolivia had previously made commitments within GATS to allow the activity of private corporations from other country members in hospital services. However, the country is now seeking to remove those commitments, in order to keep health services public.

According to WTO rules, Bolivia may be obliged to offer compensation to other member countries if it modifies national trade obligations under GATS.

PSI is very interested in hearing from unions in Bolivia and other countries as to the outcome of this modification. Contact Jorge.Mancillas@world-psi.org.

Indian power workers strike in Uttar Pradesh



Image

Around 45,000 power employees and engineers from the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation began an indefinite strike on January 1 over the government's refusal to implement recommendations from the Sixth Pay Commission. Power breakdowns remain unattended and revenue collection has been affected.

The state government has deployed additional security personnel to power installations and mobilised engineers and technical staff from other government power utilities to maintain services.

Following rumours that three union leaders had been arrested, the VKSSS union (Vidhyut Karamchari Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti) said that its members would present themselves for mass arrest if the union officials or other employees were victimised or jailed.

The corporation management has threatened it will use the "full force of the police" if workers establish pickets or hold demonstrations. The union will hold discussions with finance and state ministers in the coming days.

Lithuanian trade unions organise mass rally, 16 January



Image

Lithuanian trade unions organised a mass protest rally in front of the Seimas (parliament) and the government buildings in the capital Vilnius on 16 January. The protestors urged the government to save by reducing the government apparatus expenditures, by introducing real estate taxes, and by adopting a progressive tax system. Unions demand that the civil servants base salary and financing for institutions providing public services must not be reduced, and that there be no privatisation of strategic state objects (for example the Lithuanian Railways) or speedy liberalisation of employer-employee relations.

Contract workers in the Indian water industry



Image

The Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board Workers' Union in India has demanded the regularisation of contract workers and measures to fill new vacancies. The board had appointed a number of contract workers since 1998 to staff water supply schemes. The union considered the board should have appointed permanent staff to maintain the schemes. The contract workers were very low-paid despite 12-16 hours working days. The union asked that these workers be regularised with effect from their first working day on a contract basis. The State Government has issued an order for the filling up of 2,037 vacancies in order to have enough workers to maintain drinking water schemes. Oscar Fernandes, Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment, said that the Labour Conference scheduled to be held in New Delhi in the next weeks will discuss problems faced by contract workers and discuss whether the introduction of a comprehensive act is needed to protect their interests.

Canada: Healthcare jobs at risk



Image

Unions in Ontario, Canada, warn that nearly 5,000 healthcare jobs could be lost along with 9 million hours of patient care if provincial underfunding of hospitals continues.

In 2008, hospitals received a funding increase of 2.4 per cent from the provincial government while the healthcare inflation rate was 3.5 per cent, said Mike Hurley, president of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, part of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

"We are predicting in the coming fiscal year ... you are going to see an ongoing and aggressive downsizing of the system that we haven't experienced for some time. The losses will translate into longer wait times for the public and a "general deterioration" of the quality of services, he added.

At a news conference on 12 January held by the Canadian Auto Workers Union, CUPE, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Service Employees International Union, Hurley warned small and rural hospitals are particularly at risk. Ontario Health Minister David Caplan defended his government's record in the health sector. "There have been no funding cuts," he said, "the March budget provides a 2.1 per cent increase

in funding for hospitals in 2009-2010 and that will not change." Hurley noted that even with a 2.1 per cent funding increase – still 1.4 per cent below inflation – Ontario hospitals would leave up to 4000 positions unfilled and up to 1000 hospital employees would be laid off.

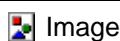
World Migration Report 2008



The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has recently launched the World Migration Report 2008. The Report focuses on the theme of "Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy," arguing that demands for increased efficiency in production as a response to fierce global competition has implied that workers are now increasingly living in an inter-connected world of work, resulting in greater labour mobility. Recognizing its work on migration, Public Services International was requested to contribute a page in this report,

focusing on the social impact of the migration of women health workers. The report can be accessed at <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/newsArticleEU/cache/offonce?entryId=20343>.

Demand to re-nationalise electricity distribution in Guatemala



PSI affiliates in Guatemala along with other social organisations, united in the Frente Nacional de Lucha (National struggle front) demand President Alvaro Colom to re-nationalize power distribution companies in the country, currently held by Union Fenosa and Iberdrola, two Spanish corporations. A communiqué issued on January 19, requires that both corporations return the amounts over-charged illegally to their users, and that the government terminate the contracts made nearly two decades ago with these companies. As part of the PSI global campaign for quality public services in Guatemala, they were asked to return the electricity supply distribution networks to the National Electrification Institute for Energy (INDE), a state-owned company that can efficiently provide this service.

WTO launches new database on regional trade agreements



The WTO has launched a new database on regional trade agreements (RTAs). This contains all the relevant documentation received by the WTO following notification by a WTO member that an RTA has been established. Read the WTO press release here: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres09_e/pr548_e.htm Access the database here: <http://rtais.wto.org/?lang=1>

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