

Public Services International

November 2009

The PSI World News is a monthly round up of events and news relating to the work of public service trade union staff and activists. To subscribe email communications@world-psi.org with the word/s: "english"; "français"; "espagnol"; "japanese" or "russian" in the subject line. Below is a selection of stories from recent editions.

Trading Away Human Rights?

Special Hearing on the proposed EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement

The EU is in the process of negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with Colombia – despite the terrible human rights situation in that country. Similar agreements with the USA, Canada and the EFTA group of countries have all been delayed due to human rights concerns and Colombian civil society are calling on the EU to suspend the negotiations until the human rights situation improves dramatically. On 9th December, trade unions and civil society groups are organising a special hearing in Brussels. Speakers include:

- US Senator Sherrod Brown (tbc), Democratic Party, on why the Obama Administration has refused to ratify a Free Trade Agreement with Colombia;
- Dr Domingo Tovar, General Secretary of CUT, Colombia's principle labour federation, on the ongoing violence against Colombian trade unionists;
- Colombian Senator Jorge Robledo, Democratic Pole Party, on why Colombia will not benefit from the proposed Free Trade Agreement;
- Miss Yessika Hoyos, human rights lawyer, daughter of a murdered trade union leader, and recipient of the AFL-CIO human rights award, on the crisis of impunity in Colombia;
- John Monks, General Secretary of the ETUC, on why the European trade union movement is supporting the campaign against the EU-Colombia trade deal.
- Chair: Richard Howitt MEP, Co-ordinator for the Socialist and Democrat Group for the European Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Committee

The hearing will take place:

4.30-6.30pm, Wednesday 9th December 2009

Room A3G-3, Altiero Spinelli building, European Parliament, Brussels

Simultaneous Interpretation will be provided in English, French and Spanish. For more information, contact info@justiceforcolombia.org or +44 207 794 3644.

[Click here](#) to download "Trading Away Human Rights - Why the EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is a step in the wrong direction".

Violence is NOT part of the job

PSI along with the ITUC and other Global Union Federations has renewed its campaign on the occasion of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25th November.

Violence against women, whether in the workplace, in the home or in the community is a trade union issue.

Sexual harassment and violence in the workplace are common and constant threats to working women's lives and livelihoods. Violence at work is not merely an episodic, individual problem but a structural, strategic problem rooted in wider social, economic, organisational and cultural factors. Violence at work is detrimental to the working environment and to the quality of services provided

"There can be no equality between men and women when gender-based violence - be it physical, verbal, psychological or economic - continues to be such a prevalent, unchecked and almost accepted part of our workplaces, our homes and our communities," said Kuini Lutua, Chair of the PSI World Women's Committee, "Trade unions must be ready to play their part in ending this cycle of violence against women." PSI encourages you to join this awareness campaign - send on a white ribbon or hold other activities. See www.world-psi.org/VAW

Ireland: Public sector strike on 24 November

Irish public service unions staged a 24-hour strike on Tuesday 24 November in protest of government plans for more cuts to public sector pay. Last March public servants already suffered a pay cut of around 7% and now the Government is prepared to do the same thing again, hitting family incomes, public services, and the local economy. Public sector unions are up for a fair and workable alternative but the Government isn't prepared to listen.

The strike was followed throughout the public sector, but the unions agreed to withdraw the strike notice from regions where recent floods and bad weather had caused widespread hardship and genuine emergency situations. Members of almost all public service unions affiliated to Irish Council of Trade Unions (ICTU) voted to strike. They include the AHCPS, ASTI, CPSU, IFUT, Impact, INO, INTO, POA, PSEU, SIPTU, TUI, Unite and the craft unions. Excepting essential and emergency cover, staff across education, health, local authorities and the civil service agreed to join the strike.

Gardaí (police) members of the Garda Representative Association (GRA) cannot legally take industrial action but they refused to perform overtime, and vowed to be lenient in handing out penalties for traffic offences. The GRA urged its members not to use their own laptops and mobile phones for official purposes. Off-duty gardaí joined pickets alongside health and prison staff.

PSI has sent a [letter of support](#) to its Irish affiliates and applauds their efforts to find workable solutions, which would not only see jobs protected but the level and quality of vital services maintained.

Read more from The Post.ie: <http://www.sbspost.ie/newsfeatures/pulling-the-plug-45784.html>

Click here for Impact's "Why we're on strike" flyer.

<http://www.impact.ie/iopen24/pub/crisis/strike/whyonstrike.pdf>

PSI participation at COP15 summit on climate change

PSI has just released its statement for the upcoming COP15 climate change conference in Copenhagen. Copenhagen must mark a turning point for global leaders. Only by working together for a planet which puts human needs and respect for our fragile, endangered planet ahead of corporate profits and greed will we succeed in this collective effort.

PSI is asking its affiliates to send letters to Governments urging them to ensure that the agreement in Copenhagen recognizes the importance of quality and sustainable public services in addressing the urgent challenge of climate change and the need for significant scaling-up of public investment after decades of cuts.

For details of these documents, see the Special page on COP15 on the PSI website:

www.world-psi.org/climatechange/COP15

For more information on climate change: www.world-psi.org/climatechange/

New Zealand Ministry of Justice workers strike over wage freeze

More than 1,700 members of PSI New Zealand affiliate Public Service Association (PSA) working for the New Zealand Ministry of Justice held a one hour strike on 27 October, followed by a further 24-hour action on 16 November. The industrial action began on October 14 with a work-to-rule. Workers held protest rallies outside courthouses in Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch, and numerous smaller towns. The union has used coordinated action using texts and email in order to contact members quickly. After the latest action, court services across New Zealand were severely affected for 24 hours.

The workers are protesting a government proposal to freeze wages and cut redundancy entitlements. The union has been in negotiations with the ministry since two previous collective agreements expired on 30 June.

According to PSA national secretary Richard Wagstaff, the Ministry of Justice workers are paid on average 6.3 percent below the median pay rate for public servants and are denied the right to collectively negotiate their contracts. The ministry wants to freeze wages until July 2010 and then implement performance-based pay increases.

Read more on www.psa.org.nz

New videos: unions against climate change

ITUC and Sustainlabour have just released four short videos showing unions' commitment to fighting climate change. PSI General Secretary Peter Waldorff appears in two of these videos. Please circulate them and post them on your website! Join us in making Copenhagen a success for the planet, a success for workers and a success for social justice!

<http://climate.ituc-csi.org/new-videos-unions-against-climate.html?lang=en>

WTO Ministerial - union statement

The 7th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will take place in Geneva, 30 November – 2 December 2009. Global Unions have published a Statement of Priorities for the Conference, setting out the key demands from the international trade union movement.

For public sector unions, the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) is the area of most relevance as all our members work in services. The issue of domestic regulations will affect crucial service sectors such as financial services, education, utilities and land development. The Global Unions say that current proposals for restrictions on domestic regulation should be withdrawn and GATS Article VI.4 should be deleted or revised in order to protect governments' ability to regulate and to enact domestic regulatory measures.

In practice, domestic regulations could abolish the right for regional and national government bodies to regulate. In a case driven by Antigua and Barbuda on US regulation on betting, the WTO panel says members' regulatory sovereignty is an essential pillar of the progressive liberalisation on trade in services, but this sovereignty ends whenever rights of other members under the GATS are impaired.

PSI will participate in the Ministerial, but only has NGO status, which excludes the right to speak. We will also participate in NGO meetings outside the Ministerial.

[Click here](#) to download the Global Unions Statement.

[Click here](#) to download the Global Unions Update.

Standing up for public employees

In Canada, NUPGE's Larry Brown defends the case of public employees who are being asked to pay the price for working in the public sector.

Tax cuts benefitting mainly the wealthy are the cause for current government deficits and it would be unfair and damaging to the economy of public sector workers become scapegoats and are forced to pay the price in lost jobs and pay cuts says Brown,

National Secretary-Treasurer of the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). His three-page opinion piece has relevance to all public sector workers around the world who are suffering the effects of the financial crisis.

See <http://www.nupge.ca/node/2672>

Exploring alternatives to privatization

The municipal services project (MSP) is an inter-disciplinary project made up of academics, labour unions, non-governmental organizations, social movements and activists from around the globe. PSI participates through its Research Unit, PSIRU, based in Greenwich University and directed by Professor David Hall.

The MSP website, accessible in English and Spanish, provides a valuable resource for those working to protect and improve public services. It features a diversity of publications and materials, from academic journal articles to video and audio documentaries. An interactive map allows visitors to see what's happening in the world of alternatives. The events listing will keep you up to date on engaging conferences, workshops and meetings.

We encourage you to visit the website. By becoming a member (www.municipalservicesproject.org/user/register) you can access all of the interactive features of the website, add your own publications and research material and create links to your own organisations.

www.municipalservicesproject.org

Violence in the Health Sector

Preparing for the Second international conference

The prevalence of workplace violence continues to rise in the health sector, as pressure mounts on the capacity of health systems to provide adequate services to patients and inadequate staffing levels leave health personnel more vulnerable to physical attacks.

PSI has joined with other international organisations in co-sponsoring a second

international conference on 27-29 October, 2010 in Amsterdam, where all stakeholders can collectively discuss the problem of violence and safety in the health care sector. The conference will build on the success of the first conference held in October 2008. The focus of the conference will be on violence against health care workers, and the specific aims are:

- To sensitize stakeholders to the issue of workplace violence
- To understand the manifestations and the human, professional and economic implications of workplace violence
- To promote effective policies and strategies to create safe work environments

Please see the attached announcement and submit an abstract for a presentation before the deadline of 10 March, 2010.

<http://www.oudconsultancy.nl/Violence-Healthsector/program.html>

PSI Executive Board meeting

At its meeting in Nyon, Switzerland on 17-18 November, the PSI Executive Board held fruitful discussions based on a very complete agenda. They endorsed the proposal concerning PSI activities for 2010 in line with strategy adopted in the 2007 World Congress. They adopted a new format for the 2010 budget in order to assure more transparency, better monitoring and accountability. On the second day, discussion focused on follow-up to the organisational review, they approved the decision to create a Programme and Policy Advisory Group, which will replace the Public Sector Steering Group, and a Constitutional Group in preparation of the 2012 PSI Congress. Other items on the agenda concerned on-going issues such as the PSI/EPSU merger, the forthcoming Copenhagen summit on Climate Change and other missions and activities. The Board listened to a report on the EPSU Mediterranean Constituency meeting in Israel and Palestine. They later discussed the planned 2010 Conference on Quality Public Services and the Board decided to create a PSI Public Service Award that will award a trade union on their initiative to attain and promote quality public services.

PSI Focus new online edition

PSI's magazine Focus is now available in a new interactive online format. The new features now allow readers to:

- Turn the pages like a real magazine, but online.
- Click on titles on the contents page to go directly to the chosen article.
- Zoom in and out, and use the scrolling wheel on your mouse to adjust the size of the text.
- Link directly to external websites mentioned in the magazine.
- Watch embedded videos directly on the screen by simply placing your mouse over the video title.

The French, German, Spanish and Swedish editions of Focus will also be available in the new format, starting with the latest edition from November 2009.

See www.world-psi.org/focus.

Please send your comments and feedback to communications@world-psi.org.