

Autumn 2007

International Newsletter

A quarterly newsletter on UNISON's international work



Burma - another military crackdown

Horrendous crackdown of pro-democracy demonstrations sees global response in support of demonstrators

The unprecedented scenes unfolding on our television and computer screens of monks and pro-democracy activists being shot, beaten and gassed by the army of the Burmese military junta have only served to strengthen the resolve of the international community to support the Burmese people.

At the time of going to press the UN Security Council had met in New York to discuss sanctions against the



regime, but China and Russia used their veto. Foreign secretary David Miliband

in his speech to the Labour Party conference called for a return to democracy and the reinstatement of the NLD, who were democratically elected in 1990.

During the week of protests in Burma, UNISON stood with other trade unionists and Burmese activists outside the Burmese embassy in London.

A national demonstration is planned for 6 October and UNISON is involved in the planning and stewarding of the event. General Secretary Dave



Prentis gave an undertaking to the FTUB that UNISON would offer what support it could. He has also called on UNISON activists to write and protest to the Burmese Embassy. Also, write to the Russian and Chinese Ambassadors, asking them to support a UN Security Council resolution on Burma and to use their influence with the military junta.

Write to David Miliband asking him to support a referral of Burma to the International Court of Justice for the continued use of forced labour by the junta and its armed forces. Details and addresses at www.unison.co.uk/international

Palestine lobby of parliament

UNISON supports mass lobby of parliament in support of Palestinian people this November. Where does your MP stand on the issue?

UNISON in continuing its support for the people of Palestine is supporting the Enough! mass lobby of parliament on Wednesday 28 November in London.

UNISON activists are encouraged to attend with branch and regional banners. Write to your MP and

ask for a meeting on 28 November to discuss the continuing repression in Palestine.

Full details of the lobby and questions for your MP will be posted on the Enough! website when confirmed. www.enoughoccupation.org

Zimbabwe

ZCTU Secretary of the Women's Advisory Council visits UK as repression in Zimbabwe continues

In September UNISON sponsored a visit to the UK of Sithokozile Siwela, Secretary of the Women's Advisory Council of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions. Amongst a packed programme during her 10-day visit Sithokozile attended and spoke at the TUC's annual conference, briefed one of the Prime Minister's special advisers on international issues, and spoke at a number of UNISON events.

One of the many important points she made was the value of the Dignity! Period fundraising appeal for money with which to buy sanitary towels – both a practical necessity for women and a valuable organising tool for unions which distribute them. Please contact the International Unit (details on back page) if you would like copies of the fundraising leaflet to distribute to branch members.

National delegate conference 2007

International issues high on the agenda in Brighton with several international guests addressing delegates

This year's national delegate conference at Brighton welcomed guests from as far apart as Sweden and Burma. All the guests (below) were introduced to UNISON by general secretary Dave Prentis at the Monday evening international rally.



Maung Maung, general secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions - Burma (FTUB) and Ywa Hay, his counterpart in the Karen Federation of Trade Unions were both welcomed to conference. Maung Maung

told the packed rally about the plight of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand and the many displaced persons in refugee camps, as well as the imprisonment of labour activists in the notorious prisons of the military junta. Trade unions are banned in Burma and forced labour is widespread.

Annie Geron of PSLINK addressed conference to speak about the attacks on public services in the Philippines and the continuing crack down on trade unionists. Annie experienced first hand the difficulties faced by trade unionists when she was targeted by her employer for blowing the lid on corruption. Full speech under 'recent documents' www.unison.org.uk/international

Conference passed three international motions on Cuba, Palestine/Israel and public services in developing countries. The full text of the motions can be viewed on the UNISON website.

HIV/AIDS pandemic

Government funding on its way for UNISON workplace project on HIV/AIDS in southern Africa

A funding grant from the Department for International Development (DFID) will assist in UNISON's ongoing work on HIV/AIDS in the workplace with sister public service unions across southern Africa. This financial support will take UNISON's project through to 2010, by which time vital capacity building work will have been undertaken with over 30 unions to enable them

to be more effective in combating discrimination and illegal employment practice in the workplace. The HIV/AIDS project has been running since early 2006, supported by funds from the UNISON International Development Fund (UIDF). A project website is due to come online shortly, and will feature in the next issue of the newsletter.

UNISON's international activists

Branch international relations officers' (BIROs) take up training opportunities to help develop international activities in branches

BIROs weekend seminar

As with previous seminars, the Cardiff international weekend in mid-October is oversubscribed - evidence of the popularity with branch international officers of these twice-yearly events.

The October seminar includes sessions on the impact of international debt on public services in developing countries, Malawi, Zimbabwe, core labour standards, labour migration and modern day slavery.

The seminar is an excellent opportunity for BIROs to obtain information about campaigns and how you can develop international work back in your branches.

BIROs training - national training course

The first national training course for BIROs was held in London over 2 days in July. The course was designed by Learning & Organising using current

campaigns and materials to enable activists to develop the skills needed to undertake international work and develop campaigns back at the workplace.

Feedback from participants was very positive. In



particular activists said the course enabled them to get briefed on UNISON policy and help them develop international work back at their branches.

It is now hoped to roll the course out to the regions. Details of future courses will be posted on the website. New BIROs are particularly encouraged to attend.

Solidarity with trade unions across the globe

UNISON urgent action network continues to respond to requests for solidarity from workers under threat in other countries

The past few months have seen a worsening of conditions for trade unionists overseas. UNISON members familiar with attacks on public services in the UK as liberalisation policies bite, are seeing similar attempts in other countries to privatise public services. Unlike the UK, where public demonstrations are permitted, and where unions can negotiate with employers and lobby government, colleagues in other parts of the globe fare worse.

In August UNISON issued an urgent action following the murder of a trade unionist in El Salvador during protests against water privatisation.

Other countries where UNISON has taken action include:



Palestine
Iran
Burma
Iraq
Zimbabwe
Swaziland
South Korea (left)
Egypt

UNISON set up the urgent action network to respond to calls for shows of solidarity and for pressure to be put on governments and others to respect the legitimate activities of trade unionists in defending the rights and interests of their members. Feedback from our sister unions which have faced repression shows that these actions can have an effect. In one case, a trade unionist who had been intimidated by the police, thanked UNISON for writing to the authorities.

To find out more about the recent urgent actions UNISON has taken go online to www.unison.org.uk/international and click on solidarity/action. Subscribe to the network and use the urgent actions in your branch.

PSI Congress 2007

Public Services International (PSI), the global union federation for public service unions, held its quinquennial congress in Vienna in September. UNISON had a strong presence at the congress which has just celebrated its 100th year. www.psi100.org
The full report will be published soon.

International news from the regions

South West region takes over twinning agreement with sister province in Cuba and stalwart regional international contact says farewell

The **South West Region** have announced that they have taken over the twinning agreement with Pinar del Rio province in Cuba from the Greater London region who originally set up the twinning.

Regional officer, Chris Howe, said the South West regional international committee had welcomed this opportunity to twin with a sister region in Cuba. He said a fringe meeting of the regional council in October would mark the initiative, and hoped that a regular exchange of information would take place between the two regions.

Greater London Region are now hoping to set up a 'capital to capital' link with Havana in place of the Pinar twinning.

If this is not done prior to the retirement of regional international officer, Martin Smith, the team at head office would like to formally thank him, and acknowledge the sterling international work that Martin has done over many years (in addition to his full-time post as regional education officer). Martin

can be seen in the photo on page 3 at the BIROs training (on the far left with walrus moustache!). We wish him well in his retirement.

In September BIRO Matthew Egan and **Salford City branch** organised a music event in Manchester to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Burma. The event combined an eclectic mix of Manchester music, from acoustic to reggae sounds, with a powerful speech from Burmese political activist and Burma Campaign UK officer, Myo Thein, who put across the gravity of the situation in Burma.

Despite Burma very recently starting to gain international headlines, the presence of Myo gave many of the people who attended their first real insight into what is happening in the country, and emphasised the important role that UNISON has to play in raising the profile of Burma amongst its members and the people of the UK.

The event also raised much needed funds for Burma Campaign UK to which UNISON is affiliated.

International committee

New committee appointed

Following this year's National Executive Council (NEC) elections the following members have been appointed to UNISON's international committee for the next two years.

Susan Brealey (West Mids), Mary Ferris (Northern Irl), Helen Jenner (Y&H), Angela Lynes, vice-chair (Scotland), Kevin Naylor (Y&H), Alison Shepherd, chair (GLR), Linda Sweet (Cymru/Wales), Jessie Russel (SE), Sofi Taylor (Scotland), Linda Wilkinson (Y&H).

Farewell to colleagues

Susan Cueva and Peter Hulme whose contracts have ended, and Gary Willis who covered for Polly Jones while she was on maternity leave. Thank you and good luck for the future.

International Unit

Getting in touch

Staff members

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