



Summer 2007

International Newsletter

A quarterly newsletter on UNISON's international work



2007 National Delegate Conference

As in previous years there will be a full international programme at this year's National Delegate Conference in Brighton. The programme will include the international rally, fringes and international speakers

Events will kick off with the traditional international rally on Monday night with a range of speakers, hopefully including a prominent LGBT activist from Jamaica.

Guests from a number of sister unions in Europe, Australia and North America have been invited as the international 'theme' for the conference will be defending and promoting public services across the world. We will be holding a number of workshops with our guests so that we can learn from each others' experiences and concerns about what is a common struggle. These issues will also be raised at the international fringe meeting on Tuesday lunchtime.

Speakers at the meeting will include a representative from Oxfam; Jane Carolan, NEC Chair of Policy Development and Campaigns Committee, who will talk about the challenges facing public services in the UK and Europe; and Karen Jennings, UNISON National Secretary for Health. Karen, who has just returned from a mission to Malawi will compare and contrast public services in the UK and the developing world. And public services in the developing world is

the subject of one of two international motions submitted to conference by the NEC.

The second international motion from the NEC covers issues relating to 'trade union rights under threat' - a subject which will be central to the contribution from our proposed guest speaker to conference, Annie Geron (left), the general secretary of PSLINK, one of our sister unions in the Philippines. Under the regime of the current president of the Philippines some 800 people have been the subject of 'extra-judicial' killings, most of these killings being attributed to the security services and the 'para-militaries' linked to them. A very large number of those killed have come from the ranks of trade unionists. They have also been subject to intimidation, violence and forced relocation. The picture emerging in the Philippines is depressingly similar to the situation in Colombia where we have been working for a number of years.



Branch international officer course

UNISON course for branch international officers will be run in London in July

The branch international officer course (for existing and new officers) will take place on Tues-Wed 3-4 July at the NUT HQ, Mabledon Place, London WC1 (10.00am start on day one; 12.00 noon end time on day two). The course is free to branches, and will include:

- understanding the role of the branch international officer
- understanding the role of the international committees and international unit

- understanding UNISON's world-wide links
- international campaigning issues
- working with your branch to organise a campaign.

Download an application form and flyer www.unison.org.uk/international.

The closing date for receipt of applications is 1 June but late applications will be accepted subject to places still being available. Contact Peter Tearle for more details (p.tearle@unison.co.uk)

Situation in Zimbabwe continues to worsen

ZCTU say 'independence not freedom' is what is needed in Zimbabwe

Lucia Matibenga recently visiting the UK on a UNISON-sponsored visit said Zimbabwe needed 'independence not freedom.' Lucia is the 1st Vice-President of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).

Her statement starkly describes the challenges facing trade unionists in Zimbabwe today, trying to protect their salaries and jobs against an increasingly oppressive Mugabe-led state apparatus and an economy in freefall with 3,700% inflation levels.

Lucia and Lovemore Matombo, President of the ZCTU, were badly beaten up last autumn while in police custody. The fact that they were eventually released without further harm was in part due to the urgent action network that swung into action as soon as UNISON and other unions heard of their detention.

UNISON members can provide support through the *Dignity.Period* fundraising appeal. The ZCTU attaches a great deal of value to the appeal to raise funds for sanitary protection to be distributed to women. Not only does it make accessible an otherwise unavailable essential product for women, but the distribution of the sanitary towels is also a recruiting vehicle for the Zimbabwean trade union movement. The sanitary products are made in Zimbabwe, so supporting the appeal also supports the local economy and unionised labour. UNISON has now reprinted the appeal leaflet. Requests for quantities of the leaflet for distribution to Gary Willis, International Officer, 020 7551 1214 or g.willis@unison.co.uk

Please sign up to the Urgent Action Network IRelations@unison.co.uk and encourage branch members to do so.

UNISON and the CGT joint action on public services

UNISON joint seminar with French trade union CGT discussed areas of mutual interest as public services in both countries continue to come under threat

UNISON has developed increasingly close contacts with the CGT over the last 3 years. The seminar, held in mid May in London, looked at public service reform, including privatisation and the use of PPPs, in France and the UK and what joint work our two unions could undertake, especially in the context of the European Union, to defend our members' interests. We were also joined by colleagues from the CSN trade union in Quebec, Canada, who are faced with many of the same problems and who have been able to run some successful campaigns resisting

privatisation and outsourcing of services. It soon became apparent during the two days that the same process of attacks on public services is underway in all three countries.

The seminar discussed ways in which we could share information, research and campaign strategies more effectively and how we could make better use of the existing trade union networks at European and international level, including EPSU, PSI and European Works Councils.

G8 summit

In the run up to the G8 world leaders told 'The World Can't Wait'



Chair of UNISON's international committee, Alison Shepherd, calls on the G8 to 'cancel the debt - invest in public services'

Thousands of UNISON members supported **MakePovertyHistory** in 2005, and this year UNISON

has again been one of the key supporting organisations of *The World Can't Wait* coalition of civil society organisations. Thousands congregated on the banks of the Thames on 2 June and raised their voices against poverty, to tell the UK and other G8 governments to keep their promises on healthcare, education, safe water and sanitation, for

Africa and the rest of the developing world.

With 25 million people in sub-Saharan Africa living with HIV/AIDS, around 38 million children of primary school age not in school, and half a million women worldwide still dying in pregnancy and childbirth every year, clearly the world can't wait. UNISON has been at the forefront of trade union involvement in G8 campaigning. As the UK's leading public service union its members know that only public sector provision can respond to large-scale need for health and education. And they know that water and energy in developing countries must stay public and not be privatised if poverty is to be eliminated.

Branch and regional international work

UNISON's international work takes place at all levels in the union. Regions and branches continue to be very active in their international work. In this issue we focus on some recent initiatives that have taken place around the country.

Cuban humanitarian efforts in Pakistan praised (NW region)

At a packed meeting in Manchester recently members of the Pakistani community came together to watch the premiere of the UNISON/CSC *Made In Cuba* DVD. The audience watched a moving first-hand account of Cuba's humanitarian response to the 2005 Pakistan earthquake. Cuba sent 2,465 health workers, engineers and technicians to set up and run 32 field hospitals. The team treated 1.7m people and continued working in the worst effected areas long after the TV cameras had left.

In the face of religious, language and cultural differences the Cuban medical brigades were praised for their sensitivity. Many lives were also saved because of the high number of women doctors in the brigades who were able to treat those females who had difficulties with seeing male doctors.



Former Manchester Lord Mayor Afzal Khan talked of his own visit to the stricken area and the ongoing need for support and assistance. He praised the efforts of the Pakistani community in Manchester in raising money and support for the

area and specifically highlighted the Cuban decision to award 1,000 medical scholarships to Pakistani students to study in Cuba.

Dr Juan Carlos Dupuy Núñez, head of the medical brigade, will be speaking at the CSC fringe at NDC.

(copies of the DVD from www.cuba-solidarity.org)

Loan to Lidl owners deferred following joint trade union campaign (GL Region)

UNISON twinned German union ver.di came to the City of London to protest at the HQ of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.



The EBRD channels public money into eastern European countries to 'foster the transition of former centrally planned economies to open markets and democracies'. It is

promoting neo-liberal policies in Europe familiar to the World Bank's global policy. But, ver.di alleges that the EBRD is putting money into companies with anti-union policies that exploit and bully their workers, such as the German owned Lidl supermarket chain.

In simultaneous protests in Bucharest and London

(assisted by GLR UNISON), ver.di exposed the practices of the Schwarz Group, who own Lidl, as violating International Labour Organisation standards, just as the EBRD was deciding on a €40b loan to the retail giant.

ver.di had a one-hour meeting with the German EBRB board member and presented their 'Black Book on Lidl in Europe'. The campaign has made board members sit up and listen – the loan decision has been deferred.

Contact Greater London Region for a special ver.di briefing note on EBRD, Schwarz and Lidl and an update on the passage of the EBRD loan.

(Please let the international unit know about your own twinning arrangements and any activities in which you've been involved. Contact m.power@unison.co.uk)

Hertfordshire Council branch activist sees Chilean trade unionism first hand

Branch international officer, Andrew Kilmartin, spent three weeks in Chile meeting with trade unionists whilst working as a volunteer journalist for an NGO.

Among those with whom he met were officers of ANEF and AEMRE who represent civil and fiscal workers. They said they would like to build links with other unions and would welcome UNISON's expertise on negotiating and mediation training. The president of one of the transport unions said he is being taken to court for supporting one of his members. UNISON is following up on this.

Chilean trade unionists, according to the ITUC, still face anti-union practices, including threats and the barring of union officials from entering work places. Last year 70% of cases of unfair dismissal were abandoned by workers, owing to the huge backlog and the long and costly legal proceedings.

Andrew's trip was part-funded through UNISON's individual grants scheme. If you would like a copy of his report and details on individual grants please contact IRelations@unison.co.uk

Safety project in Pakistan initiated by Rochdale branch aims to save lives

Up to 80 workers are electrocuted every year working on lines in Pakistan. This gruesome statistic spurred members of Rochdale local government branch to travel to Pakistan to see how they could help.



Ghulam Rasul Shazad vice-chair of the North West International Committee and Mike Watts, UNISON member and chartered member of IOHS visited

twinned partner the Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Hydro Electric Central Labour Union in March this year. In addition to meeting with government and trade union officials, the team spoke at a specially organised conference, visited several grid stations and ran a training workshop for union safety reps.

After the conference organised by the union the pair said, 'it was evident that they were very enthusiastic, optimistic and committed to improving safety for workers.' Ghulam said, 'I am pleased that the visit has been so successful and in light of the feedback, I shall be developing other projects'. The pair are now working closely with IOHS on future OHS courses.

The project was funded by UNISON international committee and Rochdale local government branch.

Iraq – trade unionists continue to come under fire

Iraq continues to dominate the news but the plight of trade unionists is largely ignored by the world's media.

Every day Iraqi workers struggle to survive against all the odds. In addition to being targeted by insurgents (many workers and trade unionists have been kidnapped and murdered), trade unionists do not enjoy the freedoms granted to them under international law.

When the new Iraqi government was installed after Saddam's removal several anti-union laws remained in place (specifically Decree 150 which bans unions in the public sector) and the new constitution decreed that union finances would be controlled by the government. UNISON protested the decision.

Recently the GFIW's Executive Bureau issued a declaration which concluded with the following resilient statement: 'The terrorist acts, the annihilation of trade unionists, the destruction and occupation of trade union offices, the freezing of the trade union movement's assets and the putting of obstacles in our way will only increase our resolve to build an independent, democratic trade union movement that is free of government and party hegemony.'

The TUC's Iraq appeal was set up to help trade unions in Iraq. You can donate to the appeal on line.

www.iraqtradeunions.org
www.tuc.org.uk/iraqappeal

International Unit

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