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Dear Colleague,

Letter to Pakistani trade unions

Public Services International strongly supports your national mobilisation against privatisation of the electricity sector. Experience shows that electricity privatisation is a disaster for almost all involved, except perhaps a very few who manage to squeeze profits from rising tariffs, reduced wages, increased outsourcing and precarious labour, and other unethical practices.

We salute your courage and determination over the years in denouncing the misguided privatisation policies and the corruption of the political system by external actors such as the IFIs and a few self-interested individuals. We agree that massive mobilisation of workers is required to block the dangerous privatisations. As electricity underpins most sectors, we find that all unions can support this campaign.

However, we find that fighting privatisation on the narrow basis of worker rights and interests does not succeed in the long run. The trade unions must develop a long-term outlook and series of proposals for the whole sector, which take into account the needs of families, communities and businesses. It is easy to situate this in the context of Quality Public Services, given the links between electricity and development indicators – health, education, etc. The union should associate itself with proposals for improving existing performance in the sector, for new investments and new connections. It can also include proposals for fair taxation and necessary public investment. We also find that advocating mechanisms of transparency, accountability and participation in policy making and implementation are essential.

We have also seen that a range of actors need to be brought into such campaigns, including the business sector which is dependent on reliable and affordable electricity. We also try to include civil society organisations as the needs of families and communities are deeply affected. In the past, a number of PSI affiliates have successfully combined civil society concerns with those of the workers in order to create the pressure and the mass mobilisations required to change policy. However, such approaches need to be tailored to the realities of each country.

As always, PSI remains available to assist the unions in developing long-term, coherent strategies for each sector. The PSI Research Unit remains available to conduct more studies, and they are connected to some solid research centres in Lahore and Karachi, which could probably also help. As important as developing a critique of privatisation remains (especially the involvement of the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank), it is equally important to develop a coherent body of policy advice, which would credibly allow Pakistan to achieve universal access to reliable electricity services.

We look forward to discuss with you the assistance which would make sense for your ongoing campaign.



PETER WALDORFF
General Secretary

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