

Colombian unionist calls for day of protest

A prominent Colombian trade unionist and human rights lawyer is calling on Canadian labour leaders to organize "a simultaneous day of protest against privatization."

The call came in mid-May from Maria Eva Villate, of a Colombian public service union affiliated to the United Federation of State, Public Service and Community Workers and Professionals (FUTEC) and Public Service International.

She and other Colombian trade unionists toured Canada to draw attention to the negative impacts of privatization, globalization and the increasing criminalization of social protest. "We need to stop the government from killing trade union leaders," she said. "We need to stop them from putting trade unionists in jail."

The day will be harder to organize in Colombia where 60 per cent of the people live in poverty and illiteracy is high, she said. "But we need to strengthen our unions at the base by working with each other and with other social partners."

In observing the current push to privatize in British Columbia, Villate said the effects of such policies are similar to what occurs in her country. There are layoffs, firings, worsening conditions at work, weaker unions, reduced public service and overwork.

However, the way it's done is different. "Yes, they use regressive legislation as they do in BC," she said. "But in Colombia they persecute trade unionists for speaking out against privatization. Paramilitary squads violently attack trade unionists."

In health care, the Colombian government has turned citizens against

health workers and stripped the once public system, leaving it open for privatizing by transnational corporations.

"The government began to undermine the public system that was in place before 1993," she said. "They set up a list of illnesses that could be treated by private companies. They made sure the most ruinous diseases could not be treated privately."

"In this way," she added, "the public system was manipulated to fail. Then they forced public health care facilities to charge for services, another blow designed to turn the people against public health care."

Health care workers themselves had a modest system before privatization began, but this too has been attacked. The Colombian media has also played into the government's hand by focusing on patients dissatisfied with the care.

"It's so perverse," Villate said. "They have designed it so the people are blaming health care workers for the deterior-

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CoDev program director Carol Wood and Colombian trade unionist Marta Eva Villate take a break together during CUPE's week-long labour school in sunny Naramata.

ation in service and hospital closures. They have to endure the social as well as the political costs of privatization."

"Workers cannot win the fight against privatization alone," she said. She hopes a protest day will help build a global social network against privatization. "We need to teach our members that being a trade unionist goes beyond the walls of the office or factory."

While in BC, Villate met with CUPE BC leaders and visited CUPE members on the job. She also spoke at CUPE's labour school in Naramata.

The tour, sponsored by CUPE, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Labour Congress and other unions, was organized under the title "Defending Public Services - Canadian and Colombian workers on the front line."

• *CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev) links labour, community, women's and student groups in Canada with similar organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean.* www.codedev.org

RON VERZUH • CUPE COMMUNICATIONS REPRESENTATIVE

UN study warns against globalization

A United Nations study warns that globalization is polarizing the world between rich and poor, corporations and workers, and developed and developing countries.

The report, calling on governments to "rethink globalization" finds that opening borders to trade has not helped the global economy to grow nor has it fostered social equality.

Instead, countries representing 14 per cent of the world's population are dominating half the world's trade. And worldwide unemployment

totalling 188 million people is threatening the future of developing countries.

Globalization is not only widening the gap between rich and poor within developed countries like Canada, Britain and the US. It has also taken a toll on workers who badly need international labour protection to defend them from exploitation by profit-making multinationals.

The report concludes that actions must be taken to end forced labour, child labour and discrimination in

the workplace, and to protect the right to organize.

But the struggle against globalization has not been easy, especially under the constant assault from trade deals like NAFTA and the GATS, which give corporations special rights and tie the hands of governments. In communities where public and private partnerships are taking root, trade deals open up public services to multinationals, putting our jobs at risk and locking in P3 contracts.

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