

Report on the visit of young members of Kommunal to Chennai and Tirunelveli, India

A team of six young Kommunal members, accompanied by Kristina Olsson, International Secretary of Kommunal, visited Chennai and Tirunelveli from 14 to 17 April 2010 to learn about Kommunal's involvement in trade union development cooperation, the participating unions, workplace conditions and the work of PSI. Earlier they had visited the IUF project in West Bengal.

On 15th April a meeting was arranged at Chennai with the representatives of four PSI affiliates – Tamil Nadu Government Officials Union (TNGOU), All India Association of Inspectors and Assistant Superintendents-Posts (AIAIASP), Indian National Defence Workers Federation (INDWF) and National Organisation of Government Employees (NOGE). Kannan Raman, PSI South Asia Trade Union Rights Project Coordinator, presented PSI's work, the sectoral issues based on the work in South Asia, the campaigns and project activities and the international solidarity and union development co-operation with Swedish unions. T.V. Sundari, Secretary of the Project working Group, briefed the group on the project work and how the project is assisting the unions to raise awareness and lobby for legal trade union rights for government employees. Dr. Madurai Veeran, who is doing the research on trade union rights, gave highlights of the findings and stressed the need for continued solidarity support. R. Srinivasan, INDWF General Secretary, spoke of the trade union situation in India and the impact of the project on the union and its membership. Kristina Olsson briefed the participants on the purpose of the visit, gave an update on the trade union movement in Sweden, the trade union rights situation and the trade union development work of Kommunal.

Periasamy, a young member of TNGOU, briefed the visiting team on youth participation in the trade union movement in India, the challenges they faced and the work the unions were doing to motivate young people to become union members. The six visiting young members spoke of their work in the unions in Sweden.

On 16 April, the team visited Tirunelveli, located 650 km from Chennai. They met the Zonal Chairman and the Mayor of Tirunelveli Corporation. The visiting team was informed about the functioning of the corporation and was told about: the challenges faced in providing quality public services, the environmental issues and employment opportunities for youth and industrial relations in the local bodies. There was a press conference which was attended by the print and visual media (see press cuttings attached). During the press conference the team appreciated the initiatives of the Corporation on the environmental front but expressed the need for legal trade union rights – right to organise, collective bargaining and the right to strike to the government and local body employees. This was well covered in the print media.

An interactive meeting with the visiting team and the members of the Tamil Nadu Federation of Municipal and corporation Officials Union, which is affiliated to NOGE, was held. The union office-bearers explained the structure of the federation and the important issues being addressed. R. Seetharaman, General Secretary of the Federation, explained how over the last 2-3 years the project assisted in organising the cadre unions in the 10 corporations and 148 municipalities into two federations and described the efforts to obtain legal trade union rights for the employees. Seetharaman requested continuing support from the Swedish team. Olsson described how SEKO was supporting the trade union rights' project and about the committee of PSI affiliates in Sweden which jointly decide on priorities issues for union development cooperation.

On 17 April, there were two workplace visits, one to the solid waste segregation and disposal at Kokirakulam and another to Vellanadu Pumping station which supplies drinking water to Tuticorin city. The team held a useful discussion with the employees about the atmosphere in the workplace.

Olsson mentioned her satisfaction with the way the project was being run by PSI and said she was impressed with the work of the PSI affiliates and their participation in the project. She assured that she would talk to Carl and SEKO about the importance of the project for PSI affiliates in India and would insist on their continued support.

The visit and the media coverage helped highlight the issue of legal trade union rights for government employees. It also helped raise the profile of the municipal and corporation federations.

MEETING WITH PSI AFFILIATES AT CHENNAI





WITH THE ZONAL CHAIRMAN, PALAYAMKOTTAI- TIRUNELVELI CORPORATION



WITH THE MAYOR OF TIRUNELVELI CORPORATION



PRESS CONFERENCE



MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF NOGE



SOLID WASTE SEGREGATION/DISPOSAL

