

THE JECH GALLERY

On the right to health in El Salvador: no to privatisation

A protest against the privatisation of the Social Security System on 23 October 2002, on the streets of San Salvador saw the largest demonstration since the signing of the peace agreement between the government and the guerrilla forces in 1992. The protest deepened into a strike for 45 days with the workers of the health system demanding that the government provide the legal means to avoid privatisation of public health services.

More than 150 000 people joined the protest organised by health workers intent on stopping a package of laws recommended by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that would permit the privatisation of the Social Security Salvadorian Institute. This demonstration was a part of a strike with the protest being led by the El Salvador College of Physicians.

The government measures of privatisation are in line with the Chilean and Colombian health reforms. These are being applied in a climate of growing economic crisis, widespread unemployment, deterioration of the democratic freedoms, and an increase in poverty. If pursued they will lead to inequity in access to health care and could create social unrest in a country whose recent history is of revolution and social violence.



Picture credit: Carlos Flores, Secretaría de Comunicaciones, Universidad de El Salvador.

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APHORISM OF THE MONTH

Professionals should be on tap, not on top

The idea that the relationship between professional workers and communities and citizens should be one of equality is recent and remains novel to many in health care. The Eldon Street Association (the Eldonians) in Vauxhall, Liverpool UK can trace its origins to the refugees from the Irish potato famine of the 1840s; for over 150 years they have endured the worst health statistics in what was the first city of the British Empire. The worm finally turned in the late 1970s when the city council decided to forcibly remove the remaining inhabitants from their degraded housing conditions. This community organised itself, fought back, and reached new heights of self determination wherein professionals from a range of disciplines were only allowed access to partnership on democratic terms. For too long, they had felt exploited and abused by professionals who came in and stayed long enough to achieve the necessary experience for the career move, while being paid handsomely and usually leaving little of enduring contribution to the community.

In the ensuing 20 years, this community has taken charge of its own housing, employment prospects, education and training, environment, recreation and health, and social care.

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