

PSI International Young Worker's Conference for the Commemoration of the 40 Years Anniversary of the Soweto Uprising: 15th – 18th June 2016, The Reef Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa

Brief Conference Report

1. 40 Years Commemoration of Soweto Uprising:

The PSI Young Workers South African National Coordinating Committee is proud, with the undoubted support, leadership and guidance of the Southern Africa Office, to have successfully hosted the International Young Workers' Conference Commemorating the 40 Year Anniversary of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, from the 15th to the 18th June 2016, at the Reef Hotel in Johannesburg. The conference is part of the flagship activities of the "Strengthening the Role of Young Workers Public Sector Trade Unions in South Africa" Project, sponsored by UNISON. The conference theme: "**Young Workers as Agents of Fundamental Social and Workplace Change**", is inspired by the transformatory role played by the 'Class of 1976' in the history and politics of the South African context. The young workers in the public services today felt they also need to take a cue from this generation which braved all odds to confront the fierce machinery of oppression, armed only with their courage and conviction that change in the education system and in the power relations in society was inevitable, and had to be achieved in their lifetime.

2. Conference Participation:

Participating in the conference were young worker delegates from PSI regions as far away as the Inter-Americas, Brazil, whose representative was João Gabriel Guimarães Buonavita. Fatou Diouf Seye, the Africa and Arab Region Young Worker Titular was also present. About 47 young worker delegates from 8 countries in the Southern African sub-region attended the conference, with the host country – South Africa- boasting of 24 participants of the total number of present delegates. The other 7 countries include Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also to participate in the conference were delegates from Solidarity International (SI) and the Boycott, Disinvestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.



3. Soweto Visit of Memorial/Heritage Sites:

On the 16th June 2016, to commemorate the 1976 uprising, the young workers visited all the key heritage sites of Soweto. The tour started off at the Morris Isaacson High School, where the student protests started off. The next stop was nearby Memorial Park (where addresses by present leaders were made, the Opening Address by SAMWU GS, Simon Mathe, and the experiences of the 1976 uprising were shared by the PSI Vice President, who is also the Deputy President of DENOSA, Thandeka Msibi), followed by the Hector Peterson Museum, then Vilakazi Street (where both the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutus' houses are), the Hastings Ndlovu Bridge (where the first student was shot by the police in 1976), and ended at the *Ubuntu* Kraal, where the young workers had something to eat. It is in this trip, to indicate their energy, zeal and vigour, the young workers speedily organised a march and sped off along Vilakazi Street, bearing the banner of PSI. Needless to say, this enhanced significantly the visibility of PSI and its affiliates in the commemorations, as the place was packed with a number of other people on varying tours of these heritage sites.



4. Lively Conference Speeches:

Moving speeches from a myriad of speakers kept young workers on their toes on the conference days of the 17th and 18th June 2016. Song and dance became a permanent feature, with a display of confidence, conviction, sacrifice and liveliness. Most of the speeches revolved around the challenges confronting young people (in general), and young workers, in particular, as well what they are doing to address these. The challenges include social ills like drug and substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, as well as facing ageism, sexual harassment, precarious work, unemployment and poverty, contractual work, inequalities, defending, advancing and promoting workers' and human rights, as well as the inability of unions to consciously develop young people into leadership. Still, far more important to all, is understanding the importance of confronting the very foundations of society, and it is only then can we safely say it is fundamental social transformation. In the context of continued privatisation, profit-maximisation, escalated neo-liberalism and global imperialism, young workers are presented with a mammoth task of eradicating all these for fundamental change to occur.

The key speakers for the whole conference were:

- a. PSI Vice President for Africa & Arab region, Thandeka Msibi (also DENOSA Deputy President).
- b. NEHAWU Deputy President, Nyameka Macanda.
- c. SAMWU General Secretary, Sam Mathe.
- d. PSI Africa & Arab region Young Worker Titular, Fatou Diouf Seye.
- e. PSI Southern Africa Young Worker Titular, Boemo Bato.
- f. PSI Young Worker National Chairperson, South Africa, Sibusiso Valashiya.
- g. PSI Acting Sub-regional Secretary for Southern Africa, Patrick Malatji.
- h. PSI Inter-Americas region representative, João Gabriel Guimarães Buonavita.
- i. NEHAWU Vuyani Baxa Regional Chairperson, Lulamile Sibanda.
- j. Former Wits SRC President, Mcebo Dlamini.



5. Forming Young Workers Structures within PSI: A Success Story!

Young workers within PSI are already forming themselves into a formidable force to be reckoned with, and that is a very important first step in the courses of action to take. It was apparent in the conference that young workers within PSI need to form themselves into a structure that will always ensure that young worker interests are advanced at all times. Equally important is the need for young people to be involved in campaign-work. *In the fight against precarious work, for example, how does it affect young workers in the public service?* The response to this question shall assist enrol the participation of young workers, it was highlighted. Country reports indicated a great deal of progress in as far as the forming and constitutionalization of young worker structures, and the support they get from leaderships. It is not without doubt that this support is not enough, but there is already an indication of a growing eagerness to back up the call for young workers forming their own structure by the leaders.

Furthermore, young workers are urged to read more, and learn from their older colleagues in both the workplaces and union. It is through effective and sustained education and capacity-building efforts that young workers can influence workplace policy, which the conference identified as yet another site of struggle for workplace transformation. All these can easily be achieved if young workers in PSI form and strengthen their own structures, and this is what was the common denominator in all the speeches and discussions during the conference. The proposed quota of 30% young worker representation was viewed as merely a start, but not sufficient to address young worker issues, interests and aspirations within PSI. Solidarity to countries like Brazil, Cuba, Palestine, Swaziland and Western Sahara was identified as key to the contribution of building a just global society.



6. Commission discussions & Way-forward:

Since the conference was also an interactive session, delegates also had ample time to deliberate on matters of importance, in addition to the enriching inputs by panellists and presenters. Campaign areas were identified, including calling for a ban on labour brokers, call for the transformation of education systems (to remove colonial legacies and architecture), access to quality, free education, Africa Solidarity Week Campaign (for countries still involved in the fight for democracy), 12th April Commemoration (for Swaziland), the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. All these campaigns the conference felt needed the focus going forward. There is also need for an aggressive educational campaign on many aspects, including, tax justice, sexual harassment. Recruitment drives, local beneficitation, the adverse effects of labour brokers, etc.

