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Global Justice

Municipal workers make gains in South Africa



International Solidarity officer Rhonda Spence with members of SAMWU

By Rhonda Spence

OUR SISTER UNION in South Africa – the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) continues to move ahead with their organizing campaign. In partnership with CUPE, SAMWU made a commitment to organize marginalized workers, mostly women, doing work for private contractors that rightly belong in the public sector.

Not only has the union begun to make inroads in terms of numbers of workers, the project has also proved to be an excellent opportunity for activists to hone their skills and to develop the

next generation of union leaders. For example, in Eastern Cape Province, 1200 new members have joined SAMWU, some through contracting-in, and also by the union negotiating full-time status for many workers who were considered ‘volunteers’ and paid minimal stipends.

Organizing new members has brought SAMWU activists face-to-face with broader issues that go to the heart of improving the lives of the majority of citizens. Providing adequate public services like sanitation, water and electricity are some of the biggest issues facing the country. SAMWU Continued on page 2

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CUPE

International Trade Union Confederation holds first conference on women and work

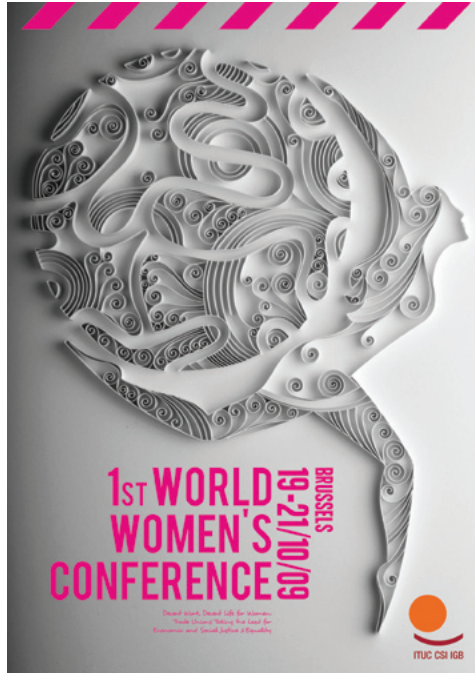
By Maureen Morrison

THE FIRST EVER International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Women’s Conference was held October 10-21 in Brussels, Belgium. Over 450 delegates from 100 countries took part in the Conference: “Decent Work, Decent Life for Women.”

One of the biggest challenges in the struggle for decent work is the growing number of workers, particularly women, in the “informal” economy, which is characterized by part-time, temporary, casual jobs with little or no protection in the form of unionization and/or labour standards. A panel discussion on organizing domestic workers vividly illustrated the day-to-day realities of women who do this type of work.

Another discussion panel of young women workers spoke eloquently about the effect of the financial crisis on young workers; and how they are more likely to find only precarious work in the informal economy.

There was a special session on Climate Change with guest speaker Ms. Buyelwa Patience



Sonjica, Minister for Water and Environmental Affairs from South Africa. The Minister pointed out that women and children are directly affected by climate change, for example, in terms of access to water, but that women are often excluded from the debate.

Several of the recommendations coming out of the workshops include:

- That unions develop an Action Plan for organizing women

workers, including domestic workers and other women in the informal economy;

- That unions address gender equality issues such as the pay gap, pensions, job security, work/life balance, maternity and parental leave, harassment and violence, and that they develop methods for monitoring progress;
- That unions ensure that women are included in programs dealing with the environment;
- That unions continue to campaign for quality public services, including health, education, transportation and water;
- That unions take a lead in achieving gender equality in all their internal programs, policies, structures and activities and develop ways of measuring progress.

The information and resource documents produced for the Conference will be very valuable in helping CUPE develop its “Living Wage” campaign, which will focus on women’s equality. For more information please visit: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/1st-wwc-conclusions>

SAMWU organizing

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members are on the front lines supporting demands for adequate public services. This is a politically charged issue and SAMWU members continue to demonstrate

strong leadership.

The South African Municipal Workers Union has plans for a major skills building workshop this year. Understanding municipal finances and budgets, research skills and media training are high

on the list for the workshop.

Building on success and overcoming challenges, educating activists and building community coalitions are the key to growth of union membership and improving services to the public.

Defending human rights in the Philippines: a worker-to-worker solidarity exchange



Visiting a school represented by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT). The military conducts “awareness” campaigns here advising teachers and students to stay away from organizations and unions such as ACT.

By Kelti Cameron

AS PART OF THE CUPE

Global Justice Fund, the “Defend Human Rights in the Philippines: a worker to worker solidarity exchange” project sent a 10-person delegation to the Philippines, from January 2-17, 2010. Members of CUPE 2079, 3393, 4600 and their community partner the Ontario Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (OCHRP) were hosted by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) and the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE).

The purpose of the tour was to build relationships of solidarity between workers in Canada and the Philippines. This was the second phase of a two-phase project. During the first phase in May 2009, (reported in the

Global Justice newsletter Spring 2009 <http://cupe.ca/global-justice/Global-Justice-2009>) CUPE and community partners across the country hosted a visit by two members from the Philippine labour movement; the national chairperson from ACT and the national president from COURAGE.

During the second phase in January 2010, the Canadian delegation travelled to the Philippines and met with workers and farmers; students and teachers; trade union, human rights and community activists who are all struggling against privatization, political repression and killings in the Philippines.

We visited with workers on picket lines, in public schools, on sugar plantations, in urban poor communities, in government offices and in export processing zones (EPZ). Some have been laid off due

to the economic crisis, others have experienced violence on their picket lines; most have been harassed due to their union involvement; and some have been the victim of physical violence. We met with the family members of trade union leaders who have been murdered.

Workers who struggle for basic human and labour rights as well as better working conditions in the Philippines are not safe. Communities that oppose the privatization of water or the displacement of their homes are met with harassment and violence. There have been over 1000 killings of trade union and human rights activists since 2001. The courage and determination of our partners, ACT and COURAGE, to continue organizing under these conditions is inspiring. We hope to continue to support the work they do in the future.

CUPE in Copenhagen



“Hopenhagen” billboard in the centre of Copenhagen

By Matthew Firth

THE FIFTEENTH Conference of the Parties (COP 15) United Nations Conference on Climate Change in December 2009 drew people to Copenhagen from every corner of the planet. One-hundred and ninety-two nations took part in formal climate change negotiations, while 46,000 accredited delegates from all sectors of society were registered.

The union was represented by a diverse delegation that included CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer Claude G n reux; rank and file environmental activists and national environment committee members Robert Coelho (CUPE 3904) and Carolyn Unsworth (HEU); national executive board members Charles Fleury and Nathalie Stringer; CUPE national staff Pam Beattie and Matthew Firth. All brought expertise in different areas to this huge event.

The CUPE delegation was part of a broader Canadian labour delegation and also part of a 400-strong international delegation of trade unionists from dozens of

countries guided by the International Trade Union Confederation.

Delegates took part in COP 15 by tracking Canada’s performance at the negotiating table, meeting with politicians from various levels to urge the federal government to push for an ambitious, fair and legally-binding accord in Copenhagen, and by networking with labour and non-governmental activists from all sectors of civil society.

With Denmark as the host, the LO (the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions) hosted the World of Work Pavilion from December 14-16. This was one of many events that ran concurrently to COP 15. CUPE delegates participated in workshops that ranged from discussions on Copenhagen’s combined heat and power system that has drastically reduced energy use in Denmark’s capital to a session from a Uruguayan trade unionist on resisting water privatization. Many of the sessions at this event focused on the enormous job creation potential that a more climate-stable

economy will bring.

The People’s Climate Summit (Klimaforum 09) was another concurrent conference that proved a valuable source of information. One highlight was taking part in a session with acclaimed British journalist and climate change activist George Monbiot.

Another focal point for CUPE members Unsworth and Coelho was a tour of the Copenhagen zoo where workers explained various green workplace initiatives they have taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions at work.

Despite a weak formal outcome from COP 15 that will not guide the planet to climate stability, this experience was rewarding for CUPE delegates. The opportunity to interact with a vast international labour delegation and take part in stimulating climate discussions will inform CUPE’s environmental work for years to come. For more information about COP 15 please visit: <http://cupe.ca/climate-change/cop-15-copenhagen-climate-change>