

The Working Class Summit Returns

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On 05 August 2022, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) hosted the second Working Class Summit to discuss issues like the rising cost of living, the rising electricity blackouts, to elevate the fight against the austerity programs and against the privatisation of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The second Summit attracted hundreds of individuals who represented over 150 organisations. It, the Summit, also agreed to undertake the fight against crime including gender-based violence (GBV), to fight against the killing of police officers and the catastrophic impact of climate change, among issues that deeply affect the working class.

This was after the last summit held in 2018, where similar issues were raised. Four years later the issues have now developed into unrest. The Summit was attended by many organisations, from trade unions to community-based organisations such as Simunye Workers Forum, Casual Workers Advice Office, Khanya College, Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia, Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), and campaigns such as #paythegrants amongst others.

The Summit took a strong position in favour of the Basic Income Grant for the unemployed and as a form of waging the war on poverty. In the build-up to 05 August 2022, Saftu and the Working Committee organising the Summit profiled out-of-job youth from the Assembly of the Unemployed, producing short video clips in which members gave messages stating why they supported the Summit.

On 05 August there were presentations from the different organisations on the swelling cost of living and the struggle for a living wage, a campaign against the rolling electricity blackouts and against privatisation of Eskom and other SOEs, campaigns against wage freezes and cuts on working conditions and attacks on the basic public services for communities such as healthcare, education and fighting crime etc., job losses and high rates of unemployment and a campaign against high crime rates that includes GBV. Speaker followed speaker.

The gathering condemned the Zama-zama informal mining saying it is all about the exploitation of miners, both local and migrant, by syndicates who make big profits out of the life-threatening form of mining. The Summit also highlighted prevailing inequalities worsened by the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns. The government of South Africa did not even feature Covid-19 in the budget or its fiscal plan for 2020, leaving many working class households to sink deeper into poverty.

The Summit is meant to mobilise workers and communities to join the war to end privatisation and to unite forces beyond just the labour movement, also to get the youth, women, and the unemployed to fight the capitalist crises system. The 2022 summit has commenced this year after the devastating pandemic as there is a strong need to organise and mobilise against the capitalist system and its imposed conditions.

Ferron Pedro, Working-Class campaigns Coordinator and Educator from SAFTU said that they had hoped to have a National Day of Action on 24 August 2022 and wanted a decision agreement and consensus on the same date, a minimum program and commitment from all organisations that are planning to mobilise.

In the Declaration for the Summit it introduced, the different campaigns mentioned the reason for mobilising and organising at this time, which includes the incidents at the Enyobeni tavern and in other taverns in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. There were shootouts that occurred as well as gang rapes that were committed against women in Krugersdorp amongst other issues causing unrest.

In July 2018 at the first Summit, the call was to “mobilise the working class” which remains doubtful if it has been performed well enough by the left in South Africa convening as the Working Class Summit, however this year took the next step. It made an announcement for 24 August 2022 would be a day of the national shutdown and had set to send a notice to the National Economic Development and Labour Council for the strike to be fully protected.

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