

Simunye Workers Forum Holds First AGM

By Simunye Workers Forum

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On 8 May 2021, the Simunye Workers Forum held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM), as part of a process to officially register as a trade union.

The AGM was attended by 158 workers, 85 women and 73 men, from 47 workplaces. A Standing Committee of 10 workers was elected to carry out the resolutions that workers take collectively at their fortnightly general meetings.

In 2015, labour broker and casual workers began organising in large numbers across workplaces and industries around Gauteng. They came together to launch the Simunye Workers Forum on 6 February 2016.

Workers chose not to register Simunye as a trade union at the time because of the bad experiences they had with unions in their workplaces. Since 2016, Simunye has held general meetings in Germiston every second week. On average, 250 workers used to attend each meeting from different companies (before the COVID-19 pandemic).

At general meetings workers share their experiences of fighting struggles against their bosses. The general meetings also run educational and cultural activities. Unlike the unions who only offer education to shop stewards, Simunye encourages all workers to attend general meetings.

In December 2020, workers eventually decided to register Simunye as a trade union. But workers were clear that they did not want Simunye to become like all the other unions. They insisted that Simunye must continue to function in the same way as before.

The main reason to register Simunye is so that workers can have the opportunity to win some of the organisational rights that exist in the Labour Relations Act (LRA) – such as the right for unions to enter workplaces or the right to be represented in the CCMA and bargaining councils. But even once Simunye is registered, workers will still have to fight difficult battles to win some of these rights in their workplaces.

Despite the difficulties that workers and unemployed workers are facing currently, the atmosphere at the AGM was upbeat. The event marked an important step in consolidating the work of Simunye over the last five years and building a stronger organisation going forward.

The primary task remains to build unity amongst workers in the workplace and across sectors and, ultimately, to contribute towards building a new workers movement.

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