

Reflecting on the 24th Annual Khanya College Winter School

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Between 23 – 28 July 2023, Khanya College held its 24th Annual Winter School with the theme “Organise!” Khanya College was joined by 20 different organisations, which delegated 53 participants in total from different provinces around South Africa. This year the winter school was composed of 63% of youth who were quite diverse in culture, sexuality, interests, and sectoral work done by the organisations they come from. And, amongst the youth-dominated group, there was a strong and felt presence of women, which also is a part of promoting feminism and feminising struggles. It was a very positive combination and brought energy and enthusiasm.

The school mobilised and created a great engagement amongst the participants on the current issues and the context of society. It initiated a space for the comrades to reflect, discuss and plan around the struggles they have experienced and their approach to their struggles as well. They were able to begin to establish networks with other organisations represented at the school, to create relationships and solidarity moving forward in the struggle for social justice.

The participants at the school engaged in a lot of theory for organising but also the development of the necessary skills needed in working class organisations and in the skillset of the mostly youthful activists. The skill workshops included fundamental ones such as writing and planning the logistics of events and campaigns, and technology skills to action the theory discussed into practical work. The workshops were on social media market where participants learned how to use social media to promote their organisations and market ideas for social change. There was a legal workshop in which the content was around legislation on gatherings and how to stay within the law while organising those.

The media workshop broke into three – the abovementioned on the social media market, on photography which eventually saw the participants attending this taking photos during the school and the final media workshop on how to write a media statement or press release. It was the activists in this workshop who later put together the media statement to explain the reasons for the picket the school embarked on. The fifth workshop was on theatre.

There was also a chance for debate amongst participants, with everyone sharing their views, beliefs, and understanding of the issue of debate about ‘bheja’ in relationships. To bheja was a contested idea, with the team supporting the motion saying it is an expression of love through showering the partner with gifts and money while the opposing team argued that it undermined the status of women as the latter are usually the recipients while men give. On this last part, comrades also deliberated about apparently newer trends where men seek out employed women and date them for material gain, that is to say, bheja. The debate invoked a lot of contrasting emotions.

The school zoomed closely on the three moments of social change which were dramatized as the activists demonstrated that they understood what the moments entail. And the school further looked at the importance of feminizing our struggles

and putting organising into practice through organising a picket that sought to address the water crisis that we have in the country today. The 23rd winter school proved to be a great success and a lot of knowledge was passed on to comrades on how to organise effectively without feeling the need to be destructive to things like the community's infrastructure.

On Wednesday, 26 August 2023, the activists executed an action they planned the previous day, having prepared placards beforehand. The moment of action initiated what was meant to be the beginning of an organising era with youth and communities, where a picket was organised, by the participants themselves using the skills they learned in the workshops and their own experiences.

The picket point was at Constitution Hill just outside the court. The picketers stood along the contours of the yard outside the court handing out flyers stating their demands, placards messaging concerns, and more demands to resolve water-related crises across the country. Later during the legal timeframe for the picket, the activists who attended a theatre workshop performed a sketch scripted by the participants themselves. The high-energy performance drew the attention of the people that were there, with many stopping to take a snap or to record a clip of the activist play unfolding before them.

There were some fun and heartwarming moments but there were also some sad moments shared amongst everyone through the reflections initiated through the programme such as the remembrance sessions, a biodanza dance session as well as a talent show on the last evening of the school that created an aura of relaxation, emotion, and freedom for everyone. During the remembrance part, the participants took the time to remember important people in their lives and those who made lasting contributions to the social justice movement although they have now departed this world.

The school bore fruits of unique relationships and connections and perhaps a spark to youth participation and activeness in struggles and communities. Currently popular is the word, 'ewe!' – an isiXhosa word meaning 'yes'. For the participants, this affirmation carries with it the memories created during school while singing songs to lift morale.