

PSI Meet To Build Bonds



by
Tan Sze Wei
Secretary, AUPE

The Public Services International (PSI) Asia Pacific Regional Executive Committee (APREC) meeting opened with members of affiliates singing to Michael Jackson's "Heal the World" with candles in their hands. The opening ceremony led by the Asia Pacific Youth Network (APYN) signifies PSI's support for young workers' hope and aspirations in building a strong Labour Movement. AUPE General Secretary Teo Yock Ngee, Vice President Maniam s/o Murugiah, Secretaries Jefry Mohamad and Tan Sze Wei attended the meeting held in Bali, Indonesia from 8-11 April 2008 together with participants from SURAWU and HDBSU.

Co-chair of the meeting Mr Kenji Okabe, highlighted key challenges for the Asia Pacific region such as climate change impact on workers and the need to ensure quality public service. He called on all affiliates to continue their efforts and to build stronger international solidarity in face of future uncertainties.



The committee discussed on pension reform, the formation of several networks, including a Steering Committee on public and state administration, a network for fire-fighters and ambulance workers. The formation of Asia Pacific Youth Network to involve young workers in decision-making and to give them more exposure was also recognised at the meeting.

Prior to APREC, a workshop on China was conducted with guest speakers from various non-governmental organisations, global union federation and trade unions. Vivid discussions and hot debates at the workshop focused mainly on the approach PSI should take in addressing China's labour issues and engaging

its trade unions. This is a critical topic for the Asia Pacific region, as we know very well of China's growing influence both in the global economic market and political scene.

At the APREC meeting, I managed to get hold of newly elected PSI General Secretary, Peter Waldorff and re-elected PSI President Ylva Thorn who despite their hectic schedules generously shared with me their life philosophy and the work they do. **U**



For The Love Of The Workers

Madam Ylva Thorn who is terrifically approachable and down-to-earth feels that there is nothing bigger in her life than helping and improving the lives of an ordinary worker.

Her first trade union assignment where she was entrusted to make negotiations on behalf of her colleagues with the employer was still fresh on her mind. There was another negotiation two years ago that left a lasting memory on her. She recounted that the situation was rather bleak as there was little support from other unions. It was so bad they were on the verge of issuing a notice for strike. However, the end results of their relentless negotiations were stunning and they got the best wage agreements amongst all unions negotiated in that year. Moreover, women made up 80 per cent of her Swedish union!

Madam Thorn who loves watching her 15 year old son playing soccer and ice hockey matches is a walking testimony of a trade union leader that can empower and impacts others positively. Speaking of her working style, she said: "My working style and what I enjoy most in my work, goes hand in hand. As a leader of my union in Sweden, I would like to have as much contact with our members and their everyday working life as possible, for example replying to letter and phone calls from members. What I like most is meeting members at their workplaces. This gives me knowledge and information to represent the members with politicians and employers."

Dedicating His Life To The Trade Union Movement

Peter Waldorff has been serving in the trade union movement since he was a 20 year old young worker, dedicating his life and efforts for workers' interest and his newest job – steering PSI to greater heights amidst increasing global uncertainties.

Anticipating a new chapter in his life after winning the election, Mr Waldorff smiled as he revealed that it was a long campaign for him. Aside from making adjustments to his lifestyle and family commitments (he has more traveling assignments now), he has also plans to rejuvenate and revamp PSI's policies and programmes through an intensive organisational review. As a start, he has posed a challenge to all his regional offices and staff to look into specific areas of concern and work on them. His immediate targets are to develop strong secretariat teams proficient at working out measurable objectives.

Why is he passionate about trade union work? "The trade union has been very much a part of my life. Also justice and honesty plays a major role in my life. I react to injustice when I see it. You need

lots of courage to do trade union work, but on the other hand it can also be fun. I try to find joy in what I am doing." Being a person who embraces life as it comes and who loves taking up challenges, he first joined the municipal trade union as a member since most of his counterparts did so. However, as fate has it, he participated in an orientation workshop for young members and was elected barely four months as the youth rep for a Danish trade union soon after. He has never looked back since and was soon promoted first as a head of secretariat then as a President of a Danish trade union. He attributes his career success in the trade union field to his previous bosses and mentors who he felt gave him lots of encouragement and inspiration.

On PSI's future, he said, "We need to be more visible so as to get the influence we deserve. The future of PSI is very much related to membership and PSI Staff together with all affiliates should work to increase the membership strength." He mentioned that we need to concentrate our efforts in the Asia Pacific region as although this region is rich in both natural and human resources, it is also ironically where half the poor in the world dwells.