

Solidarity message of the Public Services International (PSI) to the 33rd Federal Congress of CFDT Santé Sociaux on 21-24 November 2017 at Vannes, France

Bonjour à toutes et à tous, dear sisters and brothers, chers camarades, it is a pleasure and honour to be here with you today, as you hold the 33rd Federal Congress of the CFDT Santé Sociaux.

I extend greetings from Rosa Pavanelli, the PSI General Secretary. Public Services International is a global trade union federation that unites more than 20 million workers, represented by over 700 unions in 154 countries and territories, dedicated to defending the rights and interests of its members, and to promoting quality public services in every part of the world.

We are proud to have CFDT as an affiliate in these crucial fights.

Your 33rd Congress comes at a critical moment in history. For ten years, the world has been embroiled in what is the most severe economic crisis in almost a century.

From the 1980s, neoliberal policies that put profit over people became the norm, rolling back earlier gains made by workers and trade unions in pursuit of decent work and social progress. These state policies rested on the tripod of; privatisation, deregulation, and cuts in taxes and in the funding of social services. The dynamics of over 30 years of neoliberal anti-people policies led to the global economic crisis.

The “remedy” of governments to this socio-economic catastrophe has been to apply even more doses of the “medicine” that brought us to this impasse. Big businesses owned by the rich and powerful 1% of the population who benefit from the rigged for-profit system, continue to be favoured while attacks on working-class people’s rights and living conditions have continued with a vengeance. The aim of the bosses is to make us bear the burden of an ever-elusive economic recovery.

At the PSI’s 30th World Congress, from 31 October to 3 November 2017, we reiterated our stance for **People Over Profit**. A better world based on inclusive development and social justice can be built only by putting the interests of the people at the centre of policy formulation. This requires the universal provision of quality public services and the fullest respect of democratic rights

PSI was formed on 25-27 August 1907. This was at an earlier period of rampant economic liberalism. *Laissez-faire* economic policies were the norm. Working conditions were terrible, and living conditions were no better. But, there was an expansion of public services. City administrations across Europe, which were run by liberal politicians, were forced to take, first utilities, and then infrastructure, into common ownership because of the inefficiencies of private ownership and delivery of services.

Work was accorded some level of dignity and security of employment was considered a worthwhile aim by policy-makers. Workers and trade union rights were respected within a context of social dialogue. Social protection was institutionalised. Quality public services were pivotal to establishing this milieu of relative economic and social justice which prevailed for three decades after World War II.

Public health in particular was given the priority it deserved, with the setting up of the World Health Organization immediately after the war, to coordinate and direct international public health. In its constitution, it declared "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health" a fundamental human right. States and governments across the world upheld the realisation of the right to health as a cardinal point. And they recognised the health workforce was the backbone for achieving this aim.

While inequalities did not disappear, the lives of working-class people stopped being simply "short, brutal and brutish", not the least in the more developed countries of the world. More people from poor working-class homes could not only access better health and social care services, they could also dare to aspire for a better place in the world, so to speak. The doors of educational institutions, up to the tertiary level were open to many. And a more humane world appeared ensured for humankind.

The situation today is a far cry from that earlier era of optimism, which the British film-maker Ken Loach described as *The Spirit of '45*. More than 1 billion people live in poverty and have no access to drinking water, while 2.6 billion have no access to sanitation. Wars, internal conflicts and climate change continue to claim tens of thousands of lives, leaving millions more in utter misery. Health workers pay with their lives for being at the forefront of the fight against

natural, man-made, and epidemiological disasters, often working without adequate protection or remuneration as the Ebola, Zika and MERS outbreaks have recently demonstrated. Overworked, with shortages of staff in proportion to populations, contracting work-related illnesses as hazards, health workers' sacrifices continue – and are taken for granted.

Even in the richest of countries, like France, health workers are called on to sacrifice their well-being while caring for others. The pressures on national health systems are huge, and, regrettably, too often, health workers are made to suffer. And, when health workers suffer, patients don't get the level of care they deserve.

But, there is still cause for hope. The current state of the world is not ordained. We, as human beings make the world we live in. It is true that the 1% who have remoulded the world in the image of their profit-driven monstrosity have power. But ultimately, power belongs to the people. As trade unions, we are the most representative organs of working-class people. We give our members voice and visibility, when we wield our collective power together with demands and ceaseless organising. And as unions of workers delivering public services, we are a veritable bridge between the workplace and our communities.

More than ever before, we are duty-bound to argue for the primacy of people and our planet earth, over and above the ephemeral lucre of profit. And we must utilise every opportunity to do this, with the armour of facts and figures, and an unquenching spirit of commitment to social justice. We are glad that this perspective which informs PSI's practice, is self-evident in the work of the CFDT-Santé Sociaux.

PSI served as the voice of workers and in defence of public services on the United Nations' Secretary General's *Commission sur l'Emploi en Santé et la Croissance Economique*, last year. Rosa Pavanelli, the PSI General Secretary was a member of this Commission, which was co-chaired by President François Hollande of France and President Jacob Zuma of South Africa. With inputs from our affiliates across the world, including the CFDT, she played a significant role in winning the argument that expenditure on the health workforce is an investment and not merely burdensome costs, as liberal economists have posited to justify inhumane cuts in state funding of health and social services.

CFDT has equally backed up the call for enhanced funding of human resources for the health and social services sector, with the presentation of its safe and effective staffing for health on 2 October this year.

The major task before us now is to build a momentum of public opinion around our campaign for people over profit, that will ensure "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health" for all. It will entail our building the membership base of our unions. We are many and the bosses are few. And in the unity of our numbers we find strength. It will also require our forging alliances and coalitions were necessary with civil society organisations and the communities we serve. The solidarity thus unfurled would provide the sails of our struggle with winds that take it forward. We need to build and maintain the political will, at local, national and global levels. This political pressure must start in our workplaces and extend throughout our communities. And, we must guard against the false promises of privatisation, which only serve to drain funding into the pockets of the planet's élite.

The PSI Right to Health global campaign helps to bring us together, as health workers in different countries. We stand together for a better world with health for all. From Australia to Argentina, South Korea to South Africa, Brazil to Botswana, Germany to Guyana we are united, learning from each other's specific struggles and promoting common demands to: curb the might of multinational corporations, re-municipalise privatised public services, enthrone tax justice, promote gender equality, improve funding and democratic governance of social services delivery and for universal quality public health care.

In conclusion, I invite you to subscribe to the [Right to Health](#) newsletter for regular updates on the PSI Human Right to Health campaign with CFDT as a leading union in this struggle of working-class people in France and globally, for a better world that we can bequeath to coming generations. And permit me to say, as a member of this union, I look forward to this as I wish the Congress-in-session fruitful deliberations.

Baba AYE

Policy Officer

Health and Social Services

Postscript

Thank you so much for the resounding reception of this address. I am deeply touched. With non-simultaneous translation, I was not expecting such rapt attention and acceptance of the speech, which thus took at least twice the time it should have taken. If I have the honour of addressing your next Congress, I assure you that it will be presented in French.

More importantly at this juncture, it is with a heavy heart that I must inform you of the death of 7 members of the Medical and Health Workers' Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) in a car accident a few hours ago.

They were on their way to attend a meeting of the union's tertiary health institutions trade group, in the country where I hail from, where 50 persons had also been killed in a bomb blast by *Boko Haram* insurgents just yesterday. Three other MHWUN officials are in intensive care unit.

May I crave your indulgence for a moment of silence to pay our last respects to these fallen colleagues, and other sisters and brothers in the movement whom we have lost in the line of duty as union activists.

... thank you.