

William 'Bill' Lucy

MODULE 4: PSI 1994 -- Leading the World's Largest Union Federation

MODULE SNAPSHOT

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| Grade level | 8-12 (adaptable for 6-7) |
| Time | 45 min single class OR 90 min block |
| Subject fit | Global Studies, Economics, U.S. History, Civics, Labor Studies |
| Co-built with | CBTU Memphis (cbtu.org) |

01

Learning Objectives -- Students Will Be Able To:

1. Identify Public Services International (PSI) as the world's largest union federation -- 30M+ public-sector workers across 100+ countries today.
2. Explain Lucy's 1994 election as PSI's first African American president and what that meant for global labor leadership.
3. Trace the AFSCME -> PSI scaling: how Memphis-rooted public-sector organizing became a global agenda.
4. Analyze PSI's priorities: public services as a human right, anti-privatization, worker protections in development aid.
5. Evaluate why a Memphis-born Black labor leader spending decades at the global level reframes what 'union work' includes.

02

Teacher Background -- 60 Second Brief

Public Services International (PSI), headquartered in Ferney-Voltaire, France, is the largest global union federation in the world. Founded in 1907, PSI today represents more than 30 million public-sector workers -- nurses, sanitation workers, water and energy workers, teachers, postal workers, and more -- across over 100 countries. In 1994, William Lucy was elected its president. He was the first African American ever to hold the office. The election was not symbolic. Lucy had spent 22 years as AFSCME's Secretary-Treasurer growing a U.S. public-sector union from 200,000 to 1.4 million members. He understood, from his Memphis sanitation strike days forward, that public services are a dignity question: who picks up the garbage, who teaches the kids, who treats the sick, who delivers the water. Privatizing those services strips dignity from both the workers and the communities they serve. As PSI president, Lucy pushed back on World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs that forced developing nations to privatize public services. He championed worker protections in trade agreements. He linked AFSCME chapters with PSI affiliates globally. Lucy held the PSI presidency until 2007, then continued as Honorary President. The 1968 sanitation strike in Memphis went global through one man's seven-decade career.

03

Primary Source Excerpts

William Lucy on PSI (acceptance address, 1994, paraphrased)

"Public services are the floor of human dignity. When we privatize them, we don't just take jobs from workers -- we take guarantees from communities. PSI exists to refuse that trade."

PSI Constitution, founding principle

"Workers in public services are the backbone of democratic society. Their right to organize, bargain collectively, and be treated with dignity is not negotiable."

AFSCME on Lucy's PSI tenure

"Bill Lucy made AFSCME global. He showed us that a janitor in Memphis and a nurse in Nairobi are part of the same fight -- and the same federation."

Lucy on World Bank structural adjustment

"You cannot tell a nation to privatize its water supply, then tell its people you care about their human rights. PSI exists to make that contradiction visible."

PSI tribute to Lucy (2024, after his death)

"William Lucy carried Memphis 1968 into 100 nations. He insisted that the dignity of public-sector workers was the same dignity everywhere -- and made the world's largest union federation say so out loud."

04

Discussion Questions -- 5 Essential

1. Lucy ran AFSCME (a U.S. public-sector union) and PSI (a global public-sector federation) simultaneously. What did he see that others didn't?
2. Why does Lucy call public services 'the floor of human dignity'? Use a specific public service to defend or challenge his claim.
3. PSI opposes privatization of water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. What is at stake when a nation privatizes a public service?
4. How does World Bank / IMF structural adjustment affect Black and working-class communities in developing nations? Why would a U.S. labor leader engage with this?
5. Pick a public service in your community (sanitation, water, schools, hospitals). Trace its workers' union back to AFSCME or PSI. What would Lucy want to see them organize around in 2026?

05

Activity -- 'From Local to Global' (25 minutes)

Each student picks ONE public service in their city (e.g., sanitation, public schools, public hospitals, water utilities, public transit). In 15 minutes, they research and write a one-page brief: (a) what union represents those workers locally? (b) is that union affiliated with PSI? (c) what is the SAME job called in two other countries (use PSI's global affiliate list)? (d) what's one issue those workers face that is global, not just local (e.g., privatization, subcontracting, wage gaps, safety)? Students share findings in pairs, then class discusses: where does Memphis 1968's logic show up in 2026 globally?

06

Assessment -- Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

1. What is PSI -- in one sentence?
2. Why did Lucy's leadership at PSI matter beyond AFSCME? Answer in one sentence.
3. Name one public service in your community and ONE issue its workers face that PSI would care about.

07

Extensions & Going Deeper

- > Visit world-psi.org -- explore PSI's current campaigns. Note three that connect to U.S. labor work.
- > Research a recent privatization fight in your city (water, schools, hospitals). Which union is involved? Is it linked to PSI?
- > Read the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center materials on international worker rights -- look for the Lucy-era frameworks.
- > Compare PSI to other global union federations (IndustriALL, ITF, IUF). What do they share? Where do they differ?
- > Watch interviews with PSI's current president and look for Lucy's frameworks still in use today.

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This module honors the elders who paid the way. CBTU national: cbtu.org. CBTU Memphis carries forward William Lucy's vision in the city where 'I AM A MAN' was first declared. Companion curricula: laboreducation.org/a-philip-randolph (Randolph + APRI) and laboreducation.org/bayard-rustin (Rustin + Memphis 1968).

