

# South African Workers Mobilize to Challenge Neoliberal Policies

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*The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) Special National Congress in December 2013 resolved: "There is no chance of winning back the [Alliance](#) to what it was originally formed for, which was to drive a revolutionary programme for fundamental transformation of the country, with the [Freedom Charter](#) as the minimum platform to transform the South African economy."*

Recent events have fully vindicated this view. The global capitalist system is in terminal crisis and continues to inflict great human and environmental stress, pain and destruction. The world working class is under attack; unemployment, poverty and inequality are on the rise, in the biggest global crisis of capitalism since the 1930s.

In South Africa this simply makes worse the already existing crisis of our racist and colonial economy and society, which is based on the racist and inhuman super-exploitation of black and African labour.

Jobs are being slaughtered daily. Whole industries are in danger of disappearing. Unemployment at 36 per cent is among the highest in the world. Employers are on the offensive. They are seeking to exploit workers' desperation to find or keep jobs at any cost in order to drive down wages and working conditions by outsourcing and casualizing work, using labour brokers and sabotaging collective bargaining structures.

## South Africa Today

All this has become clearer in the wage negotiations we are currently engaged in. Although we are pleased to have reached a negotiated agreement with employers in the auto sector, these recent negotiations have exposed a concerted strategy by employers to block even the most minimal concessions to our demands as agreed by our National Bargaining Conference in April 2016. But we are determined not to buckle under pressure and stand firmly on our demands.

South Africa is the most unequal place on earth today. This inequality is blatantly racial, as the gulf widens between the white, wealthy capitalist elite and the black working-class majority. This crisis continues to confirm the continuing racist and colonial nature of South African economy and society, 22 years after [1994](#).

Numsa places the blame squarely on the ANC/SACP/Cosatu government for failing to uproot colonialism and racism in post-1994 South Africa and their capitulation to imperialism and South African white monopoly capital by implementing first Gear and then the National

Development Plan (NDP), which give practical expression to the repugnant neoliberal capitalist policies of the IMF, the World Bank and global credit ratings agencies.

This is how the alliance has aborted the South African Revolution and betrayed the majority of the people – the black and African working class (more than 83 per cent of the population!). This betrayal is at the heart of the terminal and irreversible decline and eventual death of the ANC/SACP/Cosatu alliance and its formations. It is this painful betrayal of the majority which explains the loss of electoral power of the ANC.

The ANC government is now proceeding to limit workers' constitutional right to strike as contained in their NDP and which measure has increasingly been demanded by the Free Market Foundation (FMF), big business and their shop stewards in the DA.

### The Stench of Corruption and Rot in Society and Government

The ongoing corruption and rot in South African society and government did not start with the Jacob Zuma administration. Its foundations were laid in the negotiated settlement under which imperialism and white South African capitalism won a corrupt and rotten capitalist transition for post-apartheid South Africa, complete with all the now smelly corruption and rot in government and society. The real negotiated deal was that imperialism and white South African capital would retain their wealth and the ANC would be allowed the use of the budget and government in a post-apartheid South Africa to create and grow a black and African capitalist class.

There is absolutely no moral or any practical difference between the way white capital made rings around the leadership of the ANC immediately before, during and after the so-called negotiations and how the Guptas are playing the same ANC leadership today, apart from the racial complexions of the corrupting capitalists!

The abandonment of the struggle to defeat imperialism and destroy the racist colonial economy and society of South Africa in favour of a neoliberal capitalist transition was the death knell in the coffin of the ANC and its alliance. Zuma and the Guptas are just a symptom of the latest versions of the economic and social relations between the ANC and imperialism and South African racist and colonial capitalism which were laid in the negotiated settlement.

There is nothing wrong with ordinary and good members of the working class being disgusted by the crony capitalism of Zuma and the Guptas, and their manipulation of the state-owned enterprises for their personal gain. It is wrong, however, and dangerously myopic, for anyone to pretend to forget that the negotiated settlement and the post-apartheid South African Constitution firmly guarantees the stranglehold of imperialism and white monopoly of South African capital over National Treasury and the South African Reserve Bank.

All the post-apartheid South African Ministers of Finance – without exception, including Pravin Gordhan – have been consistent defenders of imperialism and white monopoly capital, open enemies of the class interests of the South African working class.

Numsa has consistently, in its 29 years of history, condemned the economic policies and strategies of the National Treasury, which defends the neoliberal agenda, protects the interests of white monopoly capital, in particular finance capital, champions austerity

measures, and seeks to appease global ratings agencies.

The whole capitalist system is immoral and corrupt. Reports appear regularly of systematic tax evasion, money laundering and price fixing by big business. Millions of rand are leaving the country as investors put their cash where they will make the quickest and biggest profits, with no regard for the welfare of the people, the environment and least of all the conditions of their workers who produce the wealth in the first place. Big business is immorally sitting on more than R1.5-trillion in the banks and refusing to invest it in the economy.

More than 18,000 South Africans (roughly 50 per day, every day!) are murdered every year. The majority of these horrendous deaths are a direct product of the inhuman racist super-exploitation of black and African workers which creates massive swathes of impoverished working class communities in which burglaries, rape, murders, domestic violence, brutal and violent child abuse, and all sorts of other inhumanities are a product of the poverty, unemployment and inequalities on which South African white monopoly capital and imperialism feast. South African capitalism cares nothing about all this.

### Local Government Elections

Numsa consistently warned the ANC-led Alliance about the consequences of abandoning the South African revolution in favour of imperialism and white monopoly capital, and that the ANC's failure to fully implement the Freedom Charter, to address the fundamentals of ownership and control of the economy, to affirm blacks and Africans in the economy, and to uproot the apartheid colonial wage among many other things would destroy the ANC and its alliance.

They never listened to us. They booted us out of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and inevitably from the alliance. Jacob Zuma is completely contemptuous of the black and African working class who are the backbone of the ANC and its alliance and continues to assert that the ANC will rule until the day Jesus would come. Well, Jesus appears to have decided to come rather too early, for Jacob Zuma at least!

The [August 2016 Local Government elections](#) have again confirmed the correctness of Numsa's view. The ANC's betrayal of the South African Revolution and its abandonment of the Freedom Charter are matters millions of South African black and African working class do not take lightly – they have withdrawn their votes from the ANC!

In South Africa's industrial heartlands the ANC suffered massive humiliation, failing to win a majority in one big city after another. Working-class voters registered their anger at the levels of poverty, unemployment, inequality and corruption – all direct results of the continuing racist and colonial economy and society of South Africa post-1994 – by voting for the EFF and some, unfortunately, for their worst class enemies in the DA, or by refusing to vote at all.

In the short term this is leading to coalitions. These are not being formed on the basis of political principles but on struggles by the leaders of minority parties to get their hands on official positions and public resources. Numsa holds out no hope that this will lead to any real improvement in the lives of the working class and the poor. The DA in particular has proved in Cape Town that it is still the party of big business and the white upper middle class and its municipal leaders are already talking about privatization of council services.

## The New Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party

One powerful and positive outcome of these elections is that they proved that Numsa was right in its 2013 SNC when it asserted the need for a revolutionary socialist party of the working class. The South African black and African working class have shown that there is a loud and angry cry for revolutionary change, but also that currently no party is capable of bringing this about. The ANC, DA and the majority of all the other parties are basically the same, because of their continued insistence on operating within the confines of white monopoly capitalism.

The black South African working class will always remember Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Gwede Mantashe, Blade Nzimande, Jeremy Cronin, Cyril Ramaphosa and Sdumo Dlamini as being prominent among the leaders of the alliance who presided over the death of the ANC and all its alliance formations.

This creates the opportunity to build the genuine revolutionary socialist political party, rooted in the working class and committed to Numsa's Marxist programme, which was agreed to at the union's 2013 SNC, whose view of the degeneration of the ANC, SACP and Cosatu has been vindicated by subsequent events. Capital has spawned right-wing leaders who have become representatives of the class which exploits workers. All the ANC leaders are now steeped in neoliberalism.

It is more urgent than ever to move swiftly, and more visibly, to build this new party and to start campaigning on the demands in the programme. The new party must be a democratically controlled, mass-based workers' vanguard party, with a programme based on Marxism-Leninism, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the abolition of capitalism, so that workers have an alternative party to represent their interests.

Numsa reaffirms the continued relevance of the Freedom Charter, whose demands have not been implemented. Although not a specifically socialist document, it contains many calls which the new party must incorporate as transitional demands into its socialist programme, alongside our central demand for democratic nationalization of monopoly industries, mineral wealth and banks.

### Build Numsa and Reach the Target of 400,000 Members by December 2016

Our Central Committee (CC) in August agreed that to meet the target of 400,000 members by December 2016, at a time when jobs are disappearing, we require more aggressive recruiting of all workers regardless of where they work, and to focus on the unorganized 76 per cent of workers and employees of labour brokers. In line with the 2013 SNC on the extension of our scope and the formation of a new federation, the CC stressed that no worker must be turned away.

We are committed to providing quality leadership and better service for members, while defending and strengthening our democracy and unity. We are determined to ensure that all Numsa's Regional Congresses and the December 10th National Congress are a huge success in the best interest of Numsa members and the broader working class.

### Build the New Federation

Workers are impatient to replace the now totally discredited and ideologically bankrupt Cosatu with a new anti-imperialist, socialist, democratic, independent, militant workers'

federation. Numsa called on both Cosatu and the SACP to review the alliance with the ANC as it was benefiting the property-owning class and a parasitic and corrupt bourgeois elite. Opportunistically, however, because Numsa took the side of the workers and the poor, they expelled us.

But today Cosatu and the alliance have crumbled. The SACP and the ANC are at each other's throats. The SACP has lost its hegemony. There is no revolutionary agenda. Slowly but surely they are withering away. In all this, what is painfully bad for the working class is that the DA, a counter-revolutionary, clearly reactionary party, is being made to appear victorious today.

Numerous new breakaway unions have been formed and we are working with them in a Steering Committee for a New Federation. We have warmly welcomed Fawu's historic decision to leave Cosatu. The CC agreed that we must continue to discuss with larger unions like Amcu, some other Nactu affiliates, and some Cosatu affiliates who were part of 'The Nine' which have not yet committed to the new federation.

It was agreed to aim to launch the New Federation on 1 May 2017 and reaffirmed that it must be independent of any political party but should never be apolitical, and agreed that it should have youth and gender structures.

### Build the United Front

The United Front (UF) remains a priority and must reach out to working class communities, more and more of which are moving into struggle against deplorable living conditions and service delivery. Numsa will continue to build and to play a very active role in the UF and ensure that its revolutionary policies are adopted and adhered to.

While the CC maintained its policy that the UF is not a political party and should not be contesting elections, it endorsed the decision to back those UF members who stood as independents and/or UF candidates on 3 August 2016. We are studying the lessons from this experience.

### Black Youth Revolt Against Racism and Colonialism

Numsa continues to be appalled by the fact that a supposed Communist Minister of Higher Education has consistently maintained that free education is not possible for the South African working class, in a country in which criminal repatriation of massive quantities of South African wealth is freely tolerated by the government.

We demand free education, as contained in the Freedom Charter, the abolition of all content and forms of education in the entire education system which are racist, promote colonialism, patriarchy and oppression and domination of the black and African person.

However, fully cognisant of the fact that any education system reproduces the dominant cultural and psychological paradigms of its ruling class, we do not expect that South African untransformed racist, colonial and apartheid economy and society can suddenly produce a progressive, humane and emancipating education.

The crisis of the continuing racist, colonial and apartheid education system in South Africa post-1994 is a class matter; it is central to the class struggles in South Africa today, which largely affects the working class and their children.

We condemn the arguments of both Blade Nzimande and Pravin Gordhan that free education is unaffordable, particularly the latter, who is planning an amnesty for rich tax evaders who have stolen millions of rand from the public, which could have been used for education.

We also salute the school learners who have taken a stand against attempts by racist schools to perpetuate colonial cultural traditions.

### International Issues

Our CC condemned the Zimbabwean government's repression of its own citizens and the blocking of food imports. The union will discuss the popular call for Mugabe to fall in the context of the role of imperialist forces that would be happy to take over the popular revolt, which it appears is largely led by the middle class.

The CC condemned in the strongest possible terms the arrest and violence meted out against the Zambian Rainbow Party leadership and the banning of *The Post* newspaper in Zambia. We urge all Zambians to resist the temptation to slide into civil war, following the August 2016 National Elections in Zambia.

We have agreed in Numsa that the reversal of popular struggles in Latin America requires a deep and detailed analysis of the mistakes committed and the subsequent setback for the working class and revolutionary forces. We condemn the coup committed by the racist right wing in Brazil by the removal of President Dilma Rousseff from office.

In the United States of America, we welcome some of the positive pro-poor and pro-working class energies Senator Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign has generated.

In Europe, we are pleased with the resurgence of socialist energies in the British Labour Party, in Greece, in Spain, in Italy, in Portugal and many other European countries. We can only encourage these comrades in the womb of the beast to soldier on!

We shall work with our allied trade union and social movements to chart a way forward, in our global struggles against imperialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism and all injustices.

We condemn the ill-treatment and hatred of immigrants wherever these appear!

We are determined to move forward to a powerful fighting Numsa with 400,000 members! We will forge ahead and create a new democratic and militant union federation! We will not be defeated in our work to form, create and grow a strong community and worker-based United Front! Most important, we are determined to give birth to a revolutionary socialist workers party! •

*Irvin Jim is General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). This article first published by [Daily Maverick](#).*

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