



## NUMSA Workers: Don't Be Fooled By "New" Class-Collaborationist Tricks Break With the Bourgeois Tripartite Alliance! Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Party to Fight for a Black-Centred Workers Government!

From all sides, the Special National Congress of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) on 13-16 December (now postponed to 17-20 December) has become the focus of intense interest. In particular, the congress is supposed to decide on a proposal that NUMSA not support the ANC in the 2014 elections (including refusing to pay a R2 million "political levy" to the ANC), and another proposal to investigate "alternatives" to the ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance. These decisions could have a significant impact on politics and the labour movement in neo-apartheid South Africa. Recognising this, the leaders of the bourgeois ANC—together with their cronies in the leaderships of the SACP and COSATU—have been working overtime to intimidate the NUMSA delegates and either force them to back down or isolate them. The congress is also supposed to discuss a campaign of political strikes beginning in February 2014 to protest the National Development Plan (NDP) and other government attacks.

Many militants in NUMSA (and other COSATU-affiliated unions) have great expectations that the congress will be a step toward ending the union's subordination to the ANC and the capitalist government, and seriously fighting for the working class and poor. The likes of NUMSA general secretary Irvin Jim and COSATU's suspended general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi have been using a lot of left rhetoric to build support among these workers, including acknowledging that "the post-apartheid state is a capitalist state" (Vavi), that the ANC is "bourgeois", and suggesting that their opponents in the Alliance play the role, under neo-apartheid, of "receptionists of white monopoly capital and imperialism" (Jim and NUMSA deputy general secretary Karl Cloete). This is cynical hypocrisy on the part of the NUMSA leaders and Vavi, given that they themselves have been very reliable "receptionists" over the last 20 years of neo-apartheid rule, strangling strikes on behalf of the bosses and repeatedly herding the working class as voting cattle for the bourgeois ANC.

The anger and disgust of many workers toward COSATU president Sdumo Dlamini and others in the "anti-Vavi" faction of COSATU is understandable. Dlamini and Co. are open, craven apologists for every atrocity committed by the Zuma-led government—most despicably for the bloody massacre of 34 striking mineworkers in Marikana last year. But the role of Vavi, Jim and Co. has fundamentally been no different—they just spout some "critical" phrases and adopt an "independent" posture while pushing through the same class-collaborationist betrayals. Last year they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Dlamini and the National Union of Mineworkers tops against the Marikana strikers, including supporting Zuma for a second term just a few months after the massacre. Earlier that year, Irvin Jim and other NUMSA leaders visited Zuma at his lavish Nkandla homestead, where they reportedly discussed the possibility of Vavi being promoted to Zuma's deputy among other measures to smooth over tensions in the Alliance. And don't think for a minute that they have "learned their lesson": Vavi and the NUMSA tops are currently suing COSATU in the courts of the very same state—a *capitalist* state, as even Vavi now admits—to have Vavi's suspension lifted. This is yet another betrayal of elementary working class principles.

What's urgently needed is a policy of complete political and organisational independence from the bourgeoisie, its parties and its state. A decision to not vote for the ANC in the elections would be significant, but on its own this is not enough for working class political independence. The NUMSA leadership's proposals are not based on

any principled opposition to political support for bourgeois parties, but on the hopes of *pressuring* the ANC and the government to change some of their policies. This is clear from the NUMSA National Office Bearers' (NOB) notes distributed to delegates of the NUMSA Regional Congresses on 23 November. Everything is blamed on "the neo-liberal NDP"—as if the capitalist Tripartite Alliance government hadn't been carrying out constant attacks on workers, immigrants and unemployed people in the townships and rural areas for some 19 years before the adoption of the NDP, whether under the RDP, GEAR or some other label!

The point of the NUMSA tops' focus on particular policies is to *cover up their own role* in propping up neo-apartheid capitalism all these years, and to channel the anger of the working class and poor into the reformist dead-end of tinkering with the system of capitalist exploitation and oppression—to "transform the state" or "fundamentally change the current socio-economic strategy of the government", as the NUMSA NOB notes put it. The capitalist government, and the state it administers, can never "fundamentally change" to represent the interests of the workers and oppressed. As comrade Lenin explained in *State and Revolution* (1917), the capitalist state can never be used to serve the interests of the oppressed and exploited classes; it must be *smashed, broken* through a workers revolution, and replaced with the dictatorship of the proletariat to suppress the capitalist exploiters and begin socialist reconstruction of society. In South Africa, where the unresolved task of national liberation for the non-white majority is strategic, this means a *black-centred workers government*, which would include full democratic rights and an important role for the coloured and Indian toilers, as well as for those whites who would accept a government based centrally on the black working people.

As a possible alternative to the Tripartite Alliance, the NUMSA National Office Bearers propose something they call a "United Front", which they say would be "similar to the UDF [United Democratic Front] of the 1980s" and based centrally on the "full implementation of the Freedom Charter". The formation envisioned by the NOB proposal, like the UDF of the 1980s, is a *popular front* and has nothing at all in common with the united front tactic as employed by the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky and the early Communist International. The united front is an agreement reached between two or more parties or organisations, which have *different programmes*, for joint action on specific demands. Each organisation retains intact its entire programme as well as the right to put it forward and criticise the other organisations in the united front.

The popular front, on the other hand, is not about agreement for joint action on specific demands, but agreement on a *common programme* between working class and bourgeois organisations—and inevitably, that common programme is *bourgeois*. The popular front is not a tactic to advance the interests of the working class, but a class-collaborationist betrayal of those interests. The history of bloody defeats suffered by the working class as a result of the popular front is long—from strangling the Spanish Revolution in the 1930s and paving the way for the Franco dictatorship, to subordinating the working class in Chile to Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular and opening the way for Pinochet's bloody coup in 1973, to the Marikana massacre in 2012.

Despite the myths preached by Jim, Vavi and the like, there is nothing "socialist" or "working-class" about the Freedom Charter—it is a *bourgeois-populist* programme. The ANC leaders have always been quite honest about its bourgeois nature, including the recently

deceased ANC icon Nelson Mandela, who emphasised in his 1956 article "In Our Lifetime" that the Charter was "by no means a blueprint for a socialist state", but rather aimed at making possible "the development of a prosperous Non-European bourgeois class". The Freedom Charter's rhetoric about "the people" sharing the wealth, etc., is nothing but a populist smokescreen intended to obscure the class divisions among the black majority and keep the black proletariat shackled by nationalism—the mistaken belief that all who were oppressed under white minority rule have common class interests. The reality of the neo-apartheid system that resulted from the negotiated settlement with the white rulers has been a layer of mainly politically-connected blacks enriching themselves in partnership with the same Randlords and monopoly capitalists who dominated under apartheid. The superexploitation of mainly black labour and grinding oppression of the masses remain unchanged. To try to foist the bourgeois Freedom Charter on the working class now means ignoring the experience from the past 20 years of continued suffering under this system and preparing the way for more betrayals and defeats.

Another alternative proposed by the NUMSA NOB document concerns the kind of party required by the working class: "Given that the SACP has become embedded in the state, we must explore the establishment of a Movement for Socialism." Just what this means is supposed to be determined by investigating "different types of parties—from mass workers parties to vanguard parties" and studying "the lessons we can learn from such countries as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and Greece". This could include everything from some kind of reformist workers party that would seek to administer capitalism on its own or in coalition with openly bourgeois forces—like Lula's Workers Party (PT) in Brazil—to outright bourgeois populist parties like those led by the late Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. None of these alternatives offer a solution to the burning problems faced by the working class and the poor, and they can't because they are all premised on maintaining capitalism.

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) has produced a bulletin for the NUMSA Special Congress with the title, "Sikhokhele NUMSA!" [Lead us, NUMSA]. In it, WASP "congratulates the NUMSA leadership for recognising the changed political situation post-Marikana" and "for tabling an agenda that addresses the key issues facing the working class" while writing *not a single word* of criticism of the betrayals by the NUMSA leaders and Vavi. This is not surprising, because the "mass workers party" that WASP seeks to create is really no different from the reformist party the NUMSA tops are contemplating—based on touching faith in the bourgeois state, narrow trade-union economism, ignoring questions of special oppression, and tailing bourgeois nationalism. The main force behind WASP, the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), and their international cothinkers have a long, rotten history of supporting "strikes" by cops, security guards and prison guards—who they grotesquely embrace as "workers in uniform". The DSM's predecessors were buried in the ANC up to the mid-1990s, loyally campaigning for it in elections and *opposing* the call for a workers party. Like Irvin Jim and Co., their beef with the ANC today is not based on principled opposition to bourgeois parties, but on the ANC's adoption of certain unpopular, "neo-liberal", policies like GEAR and the NDP, which they complain are a "betrayal" of the Freedom Charter. Thus, WASP recently tried (unsuccessfully) to negotiate an electoral bloc with the bourgeois populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Julius Malema.

As a matter of fact, there already is a mass reformist working class party in South Africa—the reformist, Stalinist-derived SACP. While the SACP tops are widely reviled by many workers in NUMSA and other unions (and by militants in the SACP itself) for their wretched betrayals, the reformist, anti-revolutionary *programme* of the SACP is fundamentally what Jim, Vavi and others are offering up today as an "alternative"—from recycling the Freedom Charter, UDF and other treacherous popular fronts, to promoting "Two-Stage Revolution" and alliance with a mythical, "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie under the label of "National Democratic Revolution". It is crucial that advanced workers learn to consciously reject this reformist programme in favour of the genuine communism practiced by the Bolshevik Party

under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky—the revolutionary internationalist programme that was trampled under-foot by the Stalinists and replaced by its opposite.

We urge workers to study the true programme and history of the Bolsheviks, who were able to lead the only successful workers revolution to date in October 1917. That party was built on the basis of an uncompromising struggle for the independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie and for proletarian leadership of the toiling masses, acting as a revolutionary tribune of the people to oppose every manifestation of capitalist oppression. This is the kind of party that Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), is trying to build. We have consistently opposed, on principle, any political support to the ANC or any other bourgeois parties and from the beginning denounced the post-1994 neo-apartheid system, administered by the Tripartite Alliance government, as a betrayal of the struggle for black freedom. Today, it is necessary to assimilate the lessons of the history of international class struggle—including the last 20 years under neo-apartheid South Africa—to begin the work of building the revolutionary vanguard party needed to get rid of this racist system of capitalist exploitation. Toward that end, we raise the following:

1. Break with the bourgeois Tripartite Alliance! For political independence of the proletariat from *all* bourgeois parties—ANC, EFF, PAC, AZAPO, DA, Agang, etc.

2. No reliance on the state that massacred the Marikana strikers. Cops and security guards out of the unions! The capitalist courts have no place in disputes of the workers movement. Labour must clean its own house!

3. Down with labour brokers! The unions must fight for full, permanent jobs for all contract and temporary workers and for equal pay for equal work. Organise the unorganised!

4. For integrated, multi-ethnic defence guards based on the trade unions to fight against anti-immigrant attacks and defend working-class communities against vigilantism. Labour must fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants and oppose deportations.

5. Down with the Traditional Courts Bill! This and other attacks hit particularly black women, who are triply oppressed under neo-apartheid. For access to free, safe abortion and birth control on demand, as part of free, high-quality health care for all. Oppose oppressive, backward traditional practices like polygamy, *lobola* and *ukuthwala*.

6. For a massive public works programme, at union wages and conditions, to maintain and expand roads, build hospitals, schools, housing, etc. For free, quality health care for all! For free education, open admissions, and a state-paid living stipend through to the university level! Smash "e-tolls"—for free, safe, mass transport!

7. For a 30-hour workweek with no loss in pay to distribute the available jobs among all who need work and combat unemployment at the expense of the capitalists. For massive wage increases to close the apartheid wage gap, and a sliding scale of wages to keep pace with the skyrocketing costs of living. For a class-struggle leadership in the unions!

8. New October Revolutions—not the Freedom Charter—are the only way forward to national liberation of the black majority. For a black-centred workers government, part of a socialist federation of Southern Africa, that fights for international workers rule and an international planned socialist economy. Expropriate the bourgeoisie—from Joburg, to London, to Wall Street!

9. Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party as a section of a reformed Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution.

—11 December 2013

**To contact us, subscribe to *Spartacist South Africa and Workers Vanguard*, or order literature:**

Post: Spartacist, P.O. Box 61574, Marshalltown, Johannesburg 2107

Voicemail: 088-130-1035

Email: spartacist\_sa@yahoo.com