

South Africa: There's No Turning Back

By [Socialist Project](#)

Global Research, May 19, 2014

[Socialist Project](#)

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#), [Poverty](#)
& [Social Inequality](#)

by National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)

A. Introduction

The Central Committee (CC) of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) met from May 12 until May 15, 2014, at The Lakes Hotel and Conference, Benoni, Ekurhuleni Metropolitan, Gauteng province. The CC was attended by the National Office Bearers, elected regional representatives, key members of staff, and in this instance was extended to include a number of shopstewards who serve as Local Deputy Chairpersons on the 52 locals of the union. This was indeed a meeting of NUMSA's workers parliament.



This was the first national constitutional meeting of the union, since the watershed Special National Congress (SNC) of December 2013. The CC happened against the backdrop of [national elections](#) and the re-election of the African National Congress (ANC) with a reduced and actually minority vote.

For the first time in 20 years of this neoliberal democracy the ANC almost lost control of Gauteng, the industrial heartland of our country. This we say is the result of 20 years of our neoliberal democracy which has not decisively uprooted our colonial character of the South African economy and society, and its symptoms of mass poverty, deepening unemployment and extreme inequalities, given the ideological fog that has been spread during the electioneering campaign by various political leaders of a "good story to tell."

Still an Activist Union

The CC received reports of the current political, socio-economic, and international situation. Through the organizational report we reviewed our work over the past year, and assessed progress since the SNC. What was evident through these reports is that increasingly NUMSA remains an activist, militant, revolutionary, campaigning and Marxist-Leninist orientated trade union, rooted amongst factories and working-class communities, and continues to play a leadership role on the many popular struggles being waged by its members, workers more broadly, working-class youth, the unemployed and poor communities in every corner of our country.

The CC was emboldened by the huge support we received during our National Day of Action on the 19th of March 2014, when we swamped the streets of our country to fight against "False Solutions to Youth Unemployment." The good turnout of our members sent a clear message. Our members fully own the decisions and resolutions of our Special National Congress (SNC), and all our campaigns. The red of metalworkers on the streets silenced our

detractors. The CC agreed to honour the request of the Minister of Finance inviting NUMSA for an engagement on the Employment Tax Incentive Act (ETIA).

The CC agreed that the National Day of Action was also a correct political platform to build a United Front from below, and diminish the fictitious wall erected between community struggles and struggles on the shopfloor. It is our belief that the struggles of workers for better wages and better working conditions are inseparable from the working-class community struggles for transport, sanitation, water, electricity and shelter.

B. The Strike in the Mining Sector

The CC also took place against the backdrop of a four month strike by mineworkers in the Platinum Belt where workers are demanding nothing more than a living wage of R12,500 per month. This is happening when the CEO of Anglo Platinum and 11 other senior managers raked in bloated bonus payments. What is even more disgraceful is the fact that the ANC has after 20 years of democracy not done anything to break down the apartheid capitalist colonial economy which is based on super exploitation of Black and African labour.

The root cause of this strike is the capitalist imperialist ownership of our mineral resources and the persisting structural problem of this sector of the economy still being based on the super exploitation of migrant labour which is a continuation of apartheid in our so called democratic state by other means.

The CC strongly condemns the disturbing trends by the state in its attempt to amend the terms of reference of the Falam Commission. NUMSA is consulting its lawyers in this regard.

The CC categorically holds the mining bosses and government responsible for the impact on the economy and the deficit on GDP, for failing to concede to the demands of the mining workers.

We condemn the bosses for approaching individual miners with their offers and we further condemn Riah Piyegea for asking bosses to arrange transport for scab labour.

C. Transnet Strike

Workers in Port Elizabeth Transnet are currently on strike against labour brokers and the Central Committee expressed its support for our members, and further condemned the collusion between Transnet management and SATAWU in their attempts to undermine the right of these workers to join the union of their choice. NUMSA members are in a peaceful protected strike and the propaganda against these workers by both SATAWU and the Transnet management is about breaking the back of the striking worker and their legitimate demands.

D. Global Context

The CC was taking place within the context of the continued global crisis of Capitalism, mostly affecting the working people and poor countries of the world. This is evidenced by massive shrinkage of manufacturing, and a shift into insecure services, especially finance, retail, security and so called “knowledge production” tertiary sectors. The global shift in manufacturing, financial and trading power from the imperialist super-powers, namely United States and Europe, into China and Asia continues. Their low-cost production, based on attacking the working conditions of workers, challenges the ability of Third World

economies like South Africa to increase our productive capacity and to share the social surplus.

Further, we noted the continued military approach to 'solving' the worsening economic crises, and continued attacks on human rights and liberties. What is evident is that global capitalism has *no* solution to the problems of humanity. Neoliberalism has failed and the dominance of finance capital continues to co-opt governments and devastate the world population. The only alternative to this barbaric system of capitalism and imperialism is revolutionary socialism in which the working-class of the world will take control of society.

E. National and Domestic Situation

The African National Congress (ANC) led government continues to pursue neoliberal policies, including deregulation, inflation targeting and privatization. We have also witnessed massive de-industrialization which has led to a jobs bloodbath in the key sectors of our economy, more especially in the manufacturing sector. Between 2009 and 2012 we lost 271,000 jobs in manufacturing and between 2007 and 2010 manufacturing declined from 17% of GDP to 15%. All of this is against the backdrop of high levels of unemployment, deepening inequality and mass poverty amongst the Black and African working-class.

The results of this neoliberal trajectory are as follows:

- Widespread and now increasingly violent strikes, service delivery protests, including violent crimes of domestic and sexual violence;
- A strike by platinum mineworkers which is now in its fourth month;
- Increasingly tough responses by employers to industrial action, including suing unions for lost production during strikes;
- Racial polarization of the South African population; and
- Massive concentration of wealth in South African banks, and increasing affluence of the White population. Mass poverty concentrated among the black and African working-class population.

These massive inequalities, widespread structural unemployment and national poverty inherited from our Apartheid past legacy continue to characterize and define the South Africa of today, post-1994 neoliberal political democracy. This is witnessed through the 'real' story of South Africa's working-class and the poor. To mention a few realities:

- 26 million people in South Africa today face abject poverty, 25 million of these are African
- In 2004, 48% of South Africans were living below R524 a month, in 2011 this increased to 52.3%
- There are now more people in South Africa living in shacks as there were in 2009 (13.4% in 2009, 14.1% in 2012)
- In May 2008 there were 5.1 million unemployed people in South Africa, today there are more than 7 million
- South Africa remains the most unequal country on the planet, our [Gini Coefficient](#), which is a measure of inequality, increased from 0.66 in 1993 to 0.7 in 2008

The above ugly and scandalous reality has made our calls for the radical and full implementation of the Freedom Charter relevant, given the continued reproduction of the

colonial and apartheid economic status quo by the clearly fading ANC led government.

F. Analysis of the 2014 National and Provincial Elections and Outcomes

The CC reflected on the recently concluded national elections. An initial analysis was presented. The CC noted that while the ANC celebrates their 62% victory and lays claims that their support base has not shifted below 60%, this is both misleading and in fact completely fallacious.

While the ANC/SACP leadership will feel strengthened by this result, a deeper analysis presents something far more revealing than a short lived celebration. Indeed, the ANC received 62.15% of the valid votes cast, but 64% of South Africans *did not* vote for the ANC. Combined, out of the total potential and actually registered voters in South Africa today, analysis of election statistics confirms that the ANC has been, this year, elected into government by a mere 36 per cent of all those who were eligible to vote.

Further, the 10 per cent loss of votes in Gauteng and a mere 48.5 per cent of the vote in Nelson Mandela Bay spells a disaster for all progressive forces and demonstrates clearly that the working-class is seeking alternatives to the failed policies of the ANC.

The CC mandated the NUMSA Economic and Research Institute to do a more detailed and through scientific analysis of the election results and what this means for building the Movement for Socialism.

There is diminishing support for the ANC in the voting trends since 1994. From a high of 53.01% in 1994, the ANC has disastrously dropped to 36.39% of the share of votes in 2014. This is the true story that reflects the reality of the loss of confidence by our people in the neoliberal capitalist ANC!

G. The United Front (UF) and the Movement for Socialism (MfS)

The CC affirmed the analysis that the current NUMSA moment is not a simple knee jerk reaction or development, but that it is a product of a deep class analysis and understanding of the continuing colonial character of South African economy and society, and the profoundly worsening conditions for the working-class. The CC was unambiguously clear that there was no turning back on the resolutions taken at our Special National Congress. There is no stopping this NUMSA moment.

The CC noted that the launch and building of the United Front and the Movement for Socialism would not be simple. It reaffirmed the basic principles which would guide the United Front and amongst these are:

- The United Front is a weapon for uniting the working-class, in all walks of life;
- Ideological orientation, political affiliation, religious, gender, social or any other affiliation or orientation shall not be a condition for denying or preventing participation in the programmes of the United Front; and
- The basic guiding principle shall be “Unity in Action” against the ravages of neoliberalism and in support of the full implementation of the [Freedom Charter](#)

The CC affirmed that there are two legs on which NUMSA’s work to build the United Front would stand; gaining support for our campaigns and building our concrete support for other

struggles of the working-class and the poor wherever and whenever they take place.

As part of building a common minimum programme for the United Front, the CC agreed that we should embark on an intensive political programme to build the United Front as well as the Movement for Socialism. This programme will include building township-based United Front political discussion forums with the express aim of building the Front locally and exploring the possibilities for taking up local campaigns and issues. It will also include further political schools, engaging global left political parties and our sister unions globally, culminating in a national Conference on Socialism.

The CC was clear that building the Front and the Movement for Socialism is *not* a project to improve the ANC, to carry on doing useless Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) on the ANC and SACP, nor to resuscitate another neoliberal discourse. This engagement is about nothing else but the working-class organizing itself as a class for itself, for the war to win socialism.

H. Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Alliance

The Central Committee received a report on the current situation in COSATU. This included the outcome of the court case to have the COSATU General Secretary reinstated, update on the shopsteward status of the COSATU 2nd Deputy President, Zingiswa Losi, report of the last COSATU CEC at which the ANC intervened.

The CC confirmed that COSATU remains our fighting weapon and we must struggle to reclaim it as an independent, militant fighting federation. We shall not be leaving the federation and together with the other 8 affiliates we have served court papers to compel the COSATU president to convene the Special National Congress.

The CC is not convinced that the ANC task team intervention in the last special COSATU CEC was genuine and sees it for what it is, an election ploy, as the ANC and the SACP have themselves always been part of the problem. However in the interest of unity NUMSA did not oppose this intervention.

In addition the CC argued that the NUMSA NOB'S must urgently write to the COSATU leadership and demand the following:

1. Information on all the costs incurred by COSATU in defending the illegal suspension of the COSATU GS
2. That the COSATU President be suspended for violating the COSATU constitution, bringing the federation into disrepute and sowing divisions in the federation and amongst the affiliates
3. The response of COSATU to the detailed NUMSA report on why it should not be suspended from COSATU

We condemn the COSATU President for attempting to isolate NUMSA members from their leaders in organized companies like Toyota, Dunlop and Hulamin, and for contacting former shopstewards and current shopstewards under the guise of mobilizing for the ANC vote.

The CC is clear that the reactionary forces are determined in their campaign to expel NUMSA from our federation but we will remain resolute on our affiliation to a militant fighting COSATU in the interest of working-class unity.

NUMSA remains resolute in defense of its unity and leadership.

I. Nkandla and the Public Protector

The CC welcomed the findings by the Public Protector Advocate Thuli Madonsela in relation to the security upgrades or renovations to the private residence of President Jacob Zuma. The CC affirmed that [Nkandla](#) is nothing other than the ruling elite spending a huge amount of public money, the money of ordinary workers and the poor, on a private residence for one man and his family. Further, the CC noted the continued undermining of Chapter 9 institutions, President Jacob Zuma's blatant defiance of the Public Protector's recommendations, and the arrogant defence to this looting and dependence on political patronage by the ANC and the SACP factions.

We demand that he immediately responds to the Public Protector's Report.

The CC reaffirmed the resolution of our Special National Congress. The President must resign! Further, the CC called on the resignation of those Ministers who scandalously defended the President and who misled the public on Nkandla and calls on the defence of the Public Protector by working-class formations and all components of the working-class.

J. NUMSA a Growing Fighting Union

The CC noted that we are well on our way to meeting our target of 400,000 members before our 10th National Congress in 2016. The meeting reiterated our commitment of implementing the service charter as agreed to in the Special National Congress to improve servicing to our members.

The CC noted that over the last few months there has been an alarming number of retrenchments in the auto and component sectors. We agreed to investigate the root causes of these retrenchments because we believe that we have to continue to champion industrialization as it is the engine for economic growth.

This investigation must also explore two additional things: (a) are any of the retrenchments linked to the youth wage subsidy and (b) has the youth wage subsidy generated the number of jobs as promised.

The CC resolved to engage government on our proposals on job creation and to help dispel the notion that working-class demands diminishes investor confidence.

As part of our commitment to building a stronger NUMSA on the shopfloor we affirmed the following strategic priorities for the next period:

1. Protect members' jobs and improve their wages, conditions and benefits
2. Transform services to members through organization and representation
3. Champion political, economic and social policy and strategy in favour of the working-class and poor
4. Strengthen staff and worker leader capacity
5. Build a bigger, stronger, smarter and better organized union

Notwithstanding the success of the March 19th strike, we are determined to continue with our campaigns in relation to the strengthening of the manufacturing sector through encouraging localization using the government infrastructure project and effective

beneficiation. We will continue to engage with government to ensure that the working-class benefits from lucrative tenders such as the Transnets acquisition of locomotives.

Finally, we are currently in the midst of negotiations in our biggest sector, engineering, and by all accounts we are preparing to strike against an intransigent employer.

K. International Situation

Nigeria:

The CC condemns the vicious and inhumane abduction of the 230 young school girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria. We call for the unconditional release and safe return of the young girls so that they can be reunited with their families, including their return to school.

The Nigerian government must be held responsible for their safe return and the deafening silence of the AU is worrying. We reject the humiliating calls for the imperialist United States or Britons to help with rescue attempts. These feudal backward and savage practices cannot be resolved by appealing to imperialist forces that have killed millions of school girls through wars of invasions and drone attacks in Afghanistan, Libya, Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere. Africa must take full responsibility for the safety of all its peoples.

Swaziland

The Central Committee (CC) met at a time of some of the worst attacks on the democracy-thirsty Swazi people by the autocratic Monarch led by King Mswati. Therefore, the CC reviewed and discussed our perspective on the ongoing political and economic situation in Swaziland. NUMSA has always been a historical and reliable ally of the progressive forces in Swaziland.

The leadership of the progressive forces in Swaziland under PUDEMO has been arrested, intimidated and harassed for doing their political work by the regime. It is within this context that we call for the introduction of democratic reforms, unconditional release of all political prisoners and return of all exiles. Furthermore, we call for the economic isolation of the Swaziland's Royal family and economic sanctions until a democratically elected government is installed in Swaziland.

Ukraine and Russia

We note the maneuvers of imperialism in the regions of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which are potentially capable of leading to both civil and international wars. We are aware that led by the U.S., the imperialist powers will do everything to weaken the progressive unity of all the peoples of this region, by all means necessary in order to secure imperialist control of this part of the world.

The crisis in the former USSR is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities, for the whole world.

As a counter weight to U.S. led imperialism, we note the possibilities for progressive changes presented by the growing significance in world affairs of China, India, Russia, and Brazil, socialist oriented countries of Latin America and elsewhere on the globe.

We will study this situation further, to see how best to advance the interests of the world working-class for a socialist world.

On 27th Anniversary of NUMSA!

The CC saluted the generation of militants and radicals that formed NUMSA 27 years ago. NUMSA stature has grown in leaps and bounds over the years. We are now the biggest trade union affiliate in South Africa and Africa with a total membership of 341,568 paid-up membership. This qualitative growth of the union of John Gomomo, Jabulile Ndlovu, and Mbuyiselo Ngwenda can be attributed to our ideological and political orientation, worker-control, participatory democracy and accountability.

We are proud of the many achievements we have scored over the past 27 years of our existence. We want to recommit ourselves to continue building this revolutionary trade union to be a militant and fighting weapon of the workers in South Africa and the world. •

Statement issued by NUMSA Central Committee, May 15 2014.

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