NUMSA WORKERS OPPOSITION

FOR WORKERS CONTROL DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM

A Platform for the Opposition — Numsa 2nd Edition

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Numsa, the country's biggest union, with a history as one of the most ideologically advanced and politically militant is facing its most serious crisis since it was formed in 1987. This crisis poses the possible break-up of the union. The consequences of a collapse would reverberate across the entire labour movement deepening the division and fragmentation as well as its ideological and political disorientation. New organisational practices have been imposed that represent a complete repudiation of the union's founding principles of workers unity, workers control and democracy as well as its role as the working-class movement's socialist torch bearers.

Under the present leadership of comrade Ivin Jim these practices include but are not limited to:

SUBVERSION OF WORKER CONTROL AND DEMOCRACY

Illegally and unconstitutionally postponing the national congress

Threatening unconstitutionally and for factional reasons to guarantee his re-election to place the Ekurhuleni region under administration

Protecting his supporters like the KZN regional secretary and Botshabelo LOBs from disciplinary action overriding regional and local structures

Failing to provide a secretariat and financial report and to circulate these in advance of meetings of constitutional structures like the Central Committee, National Executive Committee, Regional Executive Committees meetings and congresses, and until now, even the coming national congress, depriving members of the right and duty to democratically discuss these, in blatant contravention of the union constitution and the right of the members to hold the leadership accountable

Amongst others the leadership failing to account for the loss of:

monthly R12m in agency fees

majority representation in various bargaining councils

The failure to provide a full report from the Numsa Investment Company

The subversion of union democracy by arbitrary suspensions of office bearers, officials and shop stewards in regions and locals

The bussing-in of members not-in good-standing as voting delegates in regional congresses

The collapsing of regional congresses by hired thugs

The condonation of their actions unilaterally using union funds for bail

Death threats to the second deputy president and the Eastern Cape regional chairperson forcing both to go into hiding

FINANCIAL CORRUPTION

The Numsa Investment Company operates in blatant contravention of the terms under which it was established but also in violation of bourgeois law. It is not subject to worker control. The Secretary General's aiding, abetting of, and collusion with the NIC's CEO, Khandani Msibi' direct interference in the union's internal affairs. The head of an entity that is required to operate at arm's length from the union and subject to the control of the union's worker representative structure, has instead usurped control of the union's financial affairs and presenting the bill for their incompetence, maladministration and corruption to the union's members by:

the writing of insulting letters to members of staff

enabling the NIC to act as a conduit for siphoning off millions from worker subscriptions and has brazenly defied demands to repay the union over R12m, unilaterally reclassified a loan as a grant

failing to ensure the NIC/3SixtyLife abides by minimum capital reserve requirements, pay members' funeral claims timeously or at all, the proposed removal of members' funeral coverage housed under member's subscription thus varying subscription benefits downwards and effectively unilaterally increasing both funeral policy premiums and membership subscriptions

the SA Reserve Bank's Prudential Authority's placement of the NIC subsidiary, 3SixtyLife under curatorship and exposed it to possible liquidation, loss of staff jobs and incalculable financial risk to the union

revelations in court papers that NIC funds have been used to:

purchase a laptop for the secretary general Ivin Jim's daughter at a cost of R15 000

pay R40 000 for a birthday party for the secretary general

finance a so-called marketing event at a cost of R200 000

pay R200 000 monthly to an unknown account

ABUSE OF UNION FUNDS FOR SELF-ENRICHMENT

The unmandated and undeclared allocation of funds to certain office bearers to purchase farms and luxury homes worth millions

The corporate benchmarking

national and regional union leader salaries and perks reportedly amounting to from R50 000 to R100 000 a month

Abuse of union funds to support reactionary capitalist political parties as revealed by the Independent Electoral Commission under the political party funding legislation

R800 000 to the ANC

R600 000 to the EFF in cash and further contributions of tens of thousands in kind

R300 000 to the African Transformation Movement

R200 000 each to the Patriotic Alliance and Good parties

STRIKE BREAKING

Sowing divisions in the SA Federation of Trade Unions by:

Defying the Saftu Campaigns Committee united front-based decision to provide critical support to Cosatu's October 2020 general strike

Undermining the Saftu general strike in February 2021

Conspiring with four Saftu National Office Bearers to unconstitutionally attempt to remove comrade Vavi as secretary general

Attempting to undermine the Political and Ideological Commission democratically established by Saftu's founding congress in 2018

Attempting to collapse the 2018 Working Class Summit convened in terms of the decisions of Saftu's founding congress

Attempting to impose the SRWP on Saftu in defiance of the 2018 Saftu Special Central Committee decision to endorse the Saftu-initiated 2018 WCS Declaration for a mass workers party on a socialist programme

Political strike breaking by supporting pro-capitalist, xenophobic political parties

Defending the corrupt ANC RET faction by regular statements on Twitter

Condoning, as revealed by the Independent Electoral Commission report on Political Party Funding, donations by the NIC to the ANC (R800 000) without a mandate and defiance of the 2013 Special National Congress resolution to discontinue support for the ANC

Subversion of Numsa's proud traditions of worker control, workers democracy and socialism

Although the crisis in Numsa and Saftu is spearheaded by comrade Ivin Jim, these developments cannot be explained by his personal ambitions and ideological degeneration alone. They are occurring against the background of the deepest economic crisis that global capitalism has faced since at least the Great Depression of the 1930s which has endured now for fourteen years since the global financial crisis of 2008. This crisis has been aggravated by the Covid19 pandemic and the conflicting imperialist ambitions of the war mongering US-led NATO on the one side and those of the corrupt capitalist oligarchy led by Putin on the other resulting in the war on Ukraine.

This crisis has been accelerated and deepened in the neo-colonial world in general and SA in particular. This in turn has plunged SA into the worst economic, social and political crisis that post-apartheid capitalism has faced. It has sharpened the class contradictions and intensified the conflict between the classes. Super-imposed upon and consequent to it is a political crisis for the ruling class whose main instrument for the maintenance of capitalism, the ANC, is threatened with being torn apart by the factional civil war between the two corrupt pro-capitalist factions. Equally committed to the preservation of capitalism, the RET and Reform factions differ from each other only over how to perpetuate the exploitation of the working class and to enrich themselves and the class interests they represent.

The capitalist post-apartheid dispensation could not have been constructed without the political neutering of the leadership of the organised working class in particular and their entrapment in class collaboration in the 1980s culminating in the formation of the Tripartite Alliance in 1990. That the Tripartite Alliance was placed under the leadership of the pro-capitalist ANC was not accidental. It required the subordination of Cosatu's socialist aspirations to the ANC's pro-capitalist programme. The SACP leadership provided the ideological cover for this by

arguing that the revolution needed to be divided into two stages: democracy first and socialism postponed into the indefinite future.

This Stalinist perversion of Marxism was the application in SA of the same policy, strategy and tactics first imposed on the Chinese Communist Party in 1925 by the Stalinist-controlled Communist International. Defined as the Bloc of 4 classes, it required the Chinese Communist Party to enter into an alliance with the Kuomintang (KMT), the party of the native Chinese capitalist class in the “Bloc of 4 classes” (national bourgeoisie, petty bourgeois liberals, peasants and the working class) and to subordinate its socialist programme to the “national democratic” programme of the KMT. The 1927 attempt by the Chinese working class to emulate the seizure of power by the Russian working class in the October Revolution in Shanghai was crushed in blood by the KMT.

In SA, as in China, the National Democratic Revolution revealed itself as a programme for the preservation of capitalism under bourgeois democracy and thus the perpetuation of the slavery of the working class. This was a repudiation of the October revolution that proceeded from the overthrow of a Tsarism in February 1917 to the conquest of power by the working class in October. This delay of a mere nine months between the equivalent of conception and birth of the greatest event in human history to date, was to afford the Bolsheviks time to gain a majority in the soviets – the alternative organs of power the working class had first created in the dress rehearsal of the 1905 revolution and re-created as the revolution reignited when conditions ripened for revolution after a period of reaction following the defeat of 1905. The October Revolution was fought on the programme of the permanent revolution first set out by Marx and Engels in their address to the Communist League in 1950.

The abandonment of the socialist aspirations of the working class by principally the Cosatu leaders and their consent for the preservation of capitalism led to their absorption into senior positions in the government, the corporate world and the state itself. From this followed inevitably the importation into the unions of alien class practices and the infection of the corruption that oils the machinery of capitalism.

Drafted into the class war as the lieutenants of capital in the labour movement, the leadership was compelled by the pressures of the capitalist class to whose system they had switched allegiance, to mimic the outlook, habits and practices of the capitalist class. Workers control and democracy were of necessity trampled upon as union investment companies, self-enrichment and corruption proliferated. This has simultaneously torn a number of unions apart and provided the platform for the absorption into the ranks of the top echelons of the capitalist ruling political and economic elite.

Former union leaders like Marcel Golding and Johnny Copelyn have developed their worker-funded investment company into a multi-million rand entity directly colluding in plundering the environment like the multinational Shell. The Reserve Bank has now placed Ubank, established with the NUM’s Mineworkers Investment Company and jointly owned with the mining bosses into curatorship for the same reason as NIC/3SixtyLife. With mineworkers as the Ubank’s primary clientele, the NUM leadership had a vested interest in its members’ slave wages, opposed their demands for a minimum wage of R12 500 in 2012, to compel them to borrow from it to turn a profit.

Into this class war others have been drafted into cabinet as ministers. These include former NUM leader Gwede Mantashe and Numsa leader Enoch Godongwana, the former at the forefront of the energy crisis committed to the plundering of the environment.

As Finance Minister, Godongwana occupies a post that is central to the ANC government’s offensive against the working class that has intensified since former NUM secretary general Ramaphosa’s accession to the presidency. Ramaphosa came to office armed legislatively with the most vicious attacks on collective bargaining and the right to strike. He needed this also to defend the two decade-long austerity policies that have plunged millions into mass unemployment and poverty consolidating SA’s position as the most unequal society on the planet.

To the extent that comrade Jim's repugnant conduct is fuelled by his personal ambitions, it coincides with the interests of the capitalist class for alternative points of social and political support and the dividing and weakening of the working class through eg sponsoring reactionary xenophobic formations like ActionSA. The capitalist class' political party representatives in parliament are in various states of crisis reflected in falling electoral support of especially their main instrument – the ANC, as well as the withdrawal of support from voting, confirming a growing alienation of the masses from the post-apartheid bourgeois democratic political dispensation.

The conduct of the Ivin Jim cabal is but the toxic effluent of the ideological and political degeneration of the leadership, the worst expression of a process that stretches back decades. Whilst this degeneration accelerated after the birth of the post-apartheid dispensation, in fact it has its roots in the political and ideological capture of the unions and their entrapment in the class collaborationist prison of the of the capitalist ANC-led Tripartite Alliance. The political preparations that created the foundations for it began in 1985 – the year of the birth of the Congress of SA Trade Unions, (Cosatu) – but formally proclaimed in 1990..

Numsa's traditions of workers democracy, worker control and socialism were forged in the furnace of the struggle against the capitalist class on the shop floor and the struggle for national liberation on the political plane under apartheid. Mawu was born out of the historic Durban strikes in 1973. The 1973 strikes marked the beginning of the working class' entry into and leadership of the broader working class struggle against apartheid and capitalism.

Metal workers played a leading role in shaping the ideological and political course of the working class struggle at each critical point over nearly half a century. Mawu played a leading role in the formation of the Federation of SA Trade Unions (Fosatu) in 1979. In the insurrectionary 1984-86 period that shook the apartheid regime, Mawu led the historic September 1984 Transvaal general strike uniting youth and communities under the leadership of the organised working class in one of the most significant political milestones on the road to working class unity. This fired the momentum for the defiance of the 1985 and 1986 States of Emergency and Cosatu's birth in between.

The understanding that the struggle against apartheid and capitalism was inextricably bound up with each other was expressed in then secretary general Moses Mayekiso's statement at Cosatu's founding congress that the struggle was for a socialist South Africa. This reflected the predominant outlook of the leading layers of the working class at the time. It was reaffirmed in the words of the 1987 Cosatu congress banner "socialism means freedom".

It is no accident that Numsa was the first to recognise the ANC's class character and the betrayal of working class interests that would follow. At its 1993 congress Numsa (the link can be found here…) adopted a resolution calling for support for the ANC only for the 1994 elections and to proceed immediately thereafter with the establishment of a workers party to fight for socialism.

It is thus no accident that Numsa was again at the forefront of attempting to reclaim the working class' ideological and political independence just under a decade after the defeat of apartheid and the advent of the post-apartheid dispensation. After the 2012 Marikana massacre had laid bare the ANC's capitalist class character in the blood of the martyrs of the Marikana massacre, the Numsa members pressured its leadership to call a special national congress to emancipate itself from the Tripartite Alliance, break with the SACP and put the formation of a workers party and socialism back onto the agenda.

By 2013, however, the political and ideological degeneration of the current leadership had undergone a qualitative transformation resulting in conscious support for the capitalist class and its political representatives. It was first publicly demonstrated in the workplace by its betrayal, in collusion with ANC president Mbeki, of the Uitenhage auto workers. This was followed on the political plane by its campaign for Zuma as ANC president. That the class-captured current leadership placed itself into direct political opposition to its own membership was inevitable.

Its conduct, outlined above, in Saftu towards the Political and Ideological Commission and the Working Class Summit followed logically. Unbeknown to the many genuine SRWP members, it was formed not as a road towards

a workers party but as a roadblock to obstruct the building a mass workers party. The present leadership had become committed to the SACPs first stage, the National Democratic Revolution – the programme for the development of a black capitalist class - and therefore the indefinite postponement of the second socialist stage, ensuring the continued social and political subjugation of the working class under capitalism.

The rebellion of the rank-and-file against this Stalinist dictatorship is therefore an expression of the sharpening conflict between the classes across society. What is at stake is not only Numsa's fate but that of the new federation, Saftu. Ultimately it is a question of the capacity of the working class to mount a counter-offensive against the united forces of the capitalist ANC government, the bosses and their judicial wing from the High Court to the Concourt itself.

It is clear that comrade Ivin Jim's preparedness to resort to criminal methods shows his preparedness to split the union. Any split would be entirely the responsibility of the Ivin Jim cabal and serve the interests of the capitalist class and their political management, the ANC government.

The MWP has through public statements and informal engagements with workers shop stewards and officials consistently thrown our weigh behind efforts to avert a split and to prevent Numsa from collapsing under the weight of corruption and mismanagement by the criminal cabal that has captured it. But we have always argued that Numsa's unity can be secured only be reclaiming its class independence and the preservation of its traditions of workers control, democracy and socialism.

PLATFORM OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST WORKERS OPPOSITION

The immediate suspension of secretary general Ivin Jim

The suspension of the responsibility to convene the national congress from the current NOBs and the transfer of responsibility for this to a Special National Worker Commission (SNWC) elected by members and shop stewards in locals

The assumption of responsibility by the SNWC for the drawing up of the secretary general's and treasurer's reports

The SNWC to have the right to initiate an independent forensic investigation in the union's financial affairs

The SNWC, in consultation with locals and regions, to organise fresh regional congresses where this is requested

The establishment of a worker-led commission of inquiry of shop stewards from all regions into:

Misconduct by the secretary general the full scope of which must be based on grievances of workers from all locals across the country

Misconduct by national, regional and local office bearers, administrators and officials at all levels

A review of the wages and benefits of all officials with the view to replacing current remuneration policy with one based on the principle of a worker's representative on a worker's wage

Election of all officials and office bearers subject to the right of immediate recall

The SNWC to conduct a thorough review of the constitution to re-evaluate the powers of the secretary general and empower the membership, as well as all financial policies

The SNWC to review the role, powers and functions of the NIC with the view to establishing worker control over it. The SNWC must be mandate to:

Immediately suspend the NIC CEO

Ensure that all money unaccounted for be repaid by the NIC CEO and the secretary general

A review of the NIC with the view to the disposal of all investments not only into the metal and engineering industry but all industry limiting investment only into interest bearing fixed deposit bank accounts

Evaluating NIC subsidiaries employee benefits and preserving their jobs

The reconstruction of the NIC funds into a strike fund

The immediate cessation of processes to paralyse Saftu, the payment of subscriptions based on actual membership

The commitment to support all Saftu programmes of action including the building of locals uniting workers across industries with communities

Give full support to the public sector workers in their struggle for the repayment of the 2020 wages stolen with the support of the LAC and ConCourt

Give full support to mineworkers including through secondary action

Placing the question of a general strike to commence the counter-offensive against the bosses and the government on the Saftu agenda

Full participation in the Saftu PIC and the election of a delegation to attend the reconvened Working Class Summit

Full support for the implementation of the Saftu 2018 Special Central Committee to endorse the 2018 Saftu-initiated Working Class Summit (WCS) Declaration

For the setting of a date for the launch of a workers party and development of transitional demands and programme of action towards it.

The cessation of attempts to impose the SRWP upon Saftu

Call upon SRWP members to reject sectarianism, build unity, collaborate with left forces, support Saftu’s WCS process by building community, workplace structures and locals

These developments are taking place as world capitalism’s 18-year crisis is now aggravated by the proxy wars in Africa, the war on Ukraine, West Asia and the ongoing genocide by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza and the Westbank . SA’s post-apartheid capitalism is headed towards even greater disaster. The bosses, the ANC government and the judiciary are united to make the working class pay through intensified austerity, attacking the right to strike, collective bargaining and xenophobia to divide and rule, and preparing a capitalist coalition government established after 2024 national elections. Working class unity is now paramount.

The metal workers have played the role of the vanguard of the working class since the formation first of Mawu followed by the launch of Numsa in 1987. The struggle to reclaim the union is a struggle to reclaim its traditions of worker control, democracy and socialism, to retie the historical knot with the generation of its founders.

TOWARDS WORKERS UNITY, FOR A MASS WORKERS PARTY TO FIGHT FOR SOCIALSM IN AFRICA AND THE WORLD

JOHANNESBURG

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