

SAPSU

Media Statement

04 December 2014

Today we have gathered here within a continuing process to form a gigantic workers' controlled union, that is a dynamic, independent and non-aligned organization of public service workers and related fields.

This development has been necessitated by a chain of events, which we all know, which represents the single most trying time, and most historic moment and turning point in the labour movement, since the dawn of our democracy.

At this time, workers gains have been set back by the selfish interests of a few, whilst the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The salaries of workers continue to be eroded by inflation which outstrips the increases they receive, so that the capitalists bosses can take larger profits out of our country as a result of Neo-liberal policies.

We reject that workers unions must be turned into a labour desk of the employer. The independence of worker unions is paramount in the fight against exploitation of labour.

Unfortunately, we are confronted by the critical and difficult questions which have not confronted our forbearers, a question of whether to honour and respect our liberation brands and symbols even if they have been robbed of their content and substance, the historic mission, the mission of fighting for mankind, the mission of fighting for better life for all, the mission that we won't rest until all of us are free. We are confronted with the question of whether a possibility exists to be truly liberated without us first liberating ourselves from the liberation movement.

Unfortunately we have to choose sides, to be with the oppressed, the working class who are the kings of the country's wealth, though they are not enjoying it, or you are on the side of the oppressor, the capitalists.

We are called to choose a side of empty symbols or brands, robbed of their content and substance, or a historic mission in which they were established for.

After many smaller meetings held countrywide, on the 29th November 2014 we held a first broad National Consultative Meeting at Bobbiespark, Bloemfontein. This historic meeting was attended by representatives from various provinces of the Republic of South Africa. Not only that, but delegates drawn from various sectors of the public service. Present in this meeting were workers from the Correctional Services, the South African Police Services, Education, Health, Social Development, the National Prosecuting Authority, and the broader public service administration.

When it was convened, the National Consultative Meeting marked a moment of truth and defined an unprecedented epoch in the lives of the workers in the public service in particular and the working class in general. It is uncontested that since the founding of COSATU the current situation remains unbelievable, as the masses of workers in the public

service had been finding their voices suppressed in a shadow of dictatorship by both the leadership of trade unions and the employers, acting together in unholy alliances.

The National Consultative Meeting noted that the moment we find ourselves in today, as workers has never been predicted before, or could imagine, that the unity of the workers in particular and the working class in general could be sold to the highest bidders in our land in exchange for personal recognition and comfort of leaders.

We have now resolved to put aside the historical symbols but not the historical mission.

In this regard, the National Consultative Meeting acknowledged the fact that the unity of workers is more paramount more than it was when COSATU was founded with a clear goal to unite all workers under one umbrella and a resounding slogan of "One Industry, one union – One country one federation", together with a commitment and principle that "an injury to one is an injury to all".

The meeting affirmed the following;

1. We are now returning back to basics, to the original reason for the formation of trade unions, which is to service the common interest of workers, ensuring that workers' rights are protected and their interests defended, abuse is counteracted and dealt with decisively.

2. Service delivery to members is a dying need amongst workers and is therefore our most important focal point. In so doing, we must ensure the most efficient and effective administrative machinery, dedicated, reliable and strong leadership which is worker controlled.

3. In all regards, the meeting concluded that there has never been such an embarrassing and senseless period in the trade union movement like the current one, whereby the open and day light murder of trade union unity is carried out to sustain individual leaders and promote their personal interests, if not the interests of the ruling elite or state. Any union leader who dares criticize the state or any of its leaders or leading forces gets the boot or is expelled to oblivion or doldrums of logic.

4. We must ensure effective negotiations and bargaining to improve the lives of workers, increase their salaries and working environments, and the lives of their families and loved ones, pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

5. We must fight corruption, mal administration and nepotism, thereby ensuring that dedicated staff and managers are appointed and are in the right place to render quality service to members of the public, that they are happy and welcoming clients to their well equipped and clean work places where they render service.

When union leaders are more interested in their selves they forget the needs of workers. In order to sustain this quest they simply silence those who have independent thoughts through suspensions and expulsions. The entire working class must be worried and must question the motives.

Many terms, names and labels have been thrown around to wrongly define or characterize those who have been removed from leadership positions, but the truth is far from being told.

Let's get back to basics, serve members interests, and not the interests of a few leaders.

The National Consultative Meeting was convened to:-

1. Clarify our position in the trade union movement after many of the workers' leaders have since been suspended and expelled in the past two years for raising a voice against some practice which is undesirable or non-beneficial to the workers,
2. To seek a common voice and correct the notion placed in the public domain that the pioneers of the initiative to form a new trade union are renegades, counter-revolutionaries and vigilantes whose interest is to destroy the so called progressive trade unions and COSATU,
3. To ensure that no worker is found wanting and without a home after their unconstitutional and political purging from the unions to open elective space for those who are channelled and forced to support selfish interests of the employers at the expense of the workers.

We have noted, discussed and appreciated the fact that workers are unhappy about the situation in the public service where limited progress has been made in many years of collective bargaining, lots of collective agreements are not conclusive on workers' interests and many are subjected to never ending processes.

It is an open fact that for some many years now, the leading voices in the various public service bargaining councils have not fought for the conclusion of outstanding matters such as the issues pertaining to universal housing benefit, equalization of medical benefits, closure of the wage gap and many other issues.

Workers are unhappy about the implementation of the Skills development initiatives, Employment Equity, poor GEMS Medical Aid with escalating premiums, unequal salaries and pay progressions, inadequate conditions of service and health and safety issues.

The failure of Departments to fill posts means that they are stretched to the core and unappreciated in their work.

Corruption which takes place around them, especially preferential treatment and nepotism, demotivates public service workers. The buying of posts, especially teaching posts is disgusting to say the least. We appreciate the decision to investigate this matter.

The general view of the National Consultative Conference was further that the majority of public service workers, particularly in the Social Services and Population Development department, the National Prosecuting Authority, the Justice Cluster and some in the state security services as well as the defence are suppressed and their rights eroded in the name of service delivery.

The professionals and academics had been given an impression that they have limited or no rights of other ordinary workers. They have been

given the impression that theirs is a given task to pursue the policies of the suppressor without question and that should they dare question they would have committed a serious act of disservice or a crime in the eyes of their masters.

In the majority of the state departments the following are glaring yet not spoken about:-

- The state departments do not conduct skills audits and lack skills development plans and programs,
- There is general absence or lack of career pathing models with clearly defined steps and processes,
- There is general patronage and corruption in the processes of filling posts or in the recruitment processes where those in close proximity of managers and political heads in the various departments, are favoured.

The above are just few examples of issues that are worrying, and the union must be able to address such if it is to become relevant to the workers, because these are issues that seem to have been pushed under the rugs by leaders, leading workers to turn away from unions.

It is clear to us that people will be unimpressed because these are issues that must not be raised. Anyone who dares raise these matters is attacked to an extent of suspension and worse, expulsion.

We are further unanimous that the moment requires of our generation to see through and openly clarify the country on the actual reasons for the uncontrollable expulsions that are a clear attempt to silence those who may not agree with wrongdoing in the trade union movement or in the country as a whole.

But these expulsions are intended to ensure that members of trade unions are fearful of the leadership collectives and remain silent only for purposes of belonging.

The independence of trade unions is absolutely necessary. We all can see very clearly, the enormous problems which are created when unions are not separated from the employer or the Government of the day. Workers mandates are diluted.

We are being divided in order to reduce our strength. In view of the urgent need to unify all workers in the public service we resolved to immediately start talks between and amongst the various trade unions in the public service with a view to creating a conducive atmosphere to negotiate mergers and possible unification processes through concerted efforts governed by mutual interests and respect for one another. Many unions are at risk of decline of membership and face closure as they have been denied bargaining rights and or limited participation at the bargaining table. We are calling all to unite around and join us in unity and in building a strong radical force that will challenge the employer without fear or favour and demand change in the public service.

/ Workers of the world unite, you have only your chains to lose./

We invite all public service workers to join us regardless of race, colour or creed, regardless of which political party you support. From

the Department of Social Development, Health, Education, Home Affairs, Public Works and all departments, you are invited. Whether you are a doctor or a cleaner in a school somewhere, a teacher or administration worker, now is the time to make a change and capture this historic moment in your work life.

SAPSU intends to accelerate the following;

- Play a meaningful and decisive role in negotiations for better working conditions and benefits for all public service workers,
- Eliminate opportunities for domination and suppression of smaller unions in the public service bargaining councils through increase of the vote weights or thresholds,
- Eliminate chances and destroy opportunities for disunity of the public service workers by gaining a majority representation in the bargaining councils for purposes of ensuring that we fight for conclusion of long standing process of closing income gaps in the public service,
- Fight for the support of a notion to build an independent, united, cohesive, worker controlled and militant trade union federation in South Africa, and
- Ensure that all workers have access to internal democracy within the trade union and trade union federation by supporting a move to initiate talks between and amongst the various trade union federations in South Africa with the view to form a single federation.

We as SAPSU therefore declare that without fear or favour, we remain committed to ensuring that the voices of workers and the working class, which have been silenced, are heard, and that the people are placed first before the interests of leaders.

We are confident that we have come this far and that nothing will stand in the way of a forward movement to pursue our historic mission.

To ensure the above, we have an interim national structure, provincial task teams and participation of union leadership countrywide assisting the building of this radical force by listening to the needs of workers. Workers must say what do you want out of SAPSU, the South Africa Public Service Union. What do you want out of your loyalty and commitment to the union? Let us hear from you.

The South African Public Service Union is committed to be a militant, radical and worker driven union. We are inspired by the radical and militant posture of Numsa. We will work with likeminded formations to drive this radical change we as workers, sorely need.

Please contact Comrade Thobile Ntola, National Convenor: 074 088 1726 or Lawrence Tsajwa, National Coordinator: 0716470618.

Thank You!

Issued by the National Coordinating Committee

South African Public Service Union



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