

The Conference on Socialism

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

Introduction

Two decades after the fall of the apartheid the economic situation of the impoverished, overwhelmingly black, toiling masses in South Africa has not seen the relief that historical justice should have brought following decades of liberation struggle. Instead of upholding the long-sought model of social justice encapsulated in the Freedom Charter, the government of the ANC embraced neo-liberalism, leading to the decline of the little industry that existed under the apartheid, which in turn result in high rates of unemployment and exploitation. Paradoxically, South Africa today, from the economic standpoint, is even more unequal and more dependent than it was under the apartheid. The policies of the Black Economic Empowerment, as they are articulated within the framework of neo-liberalism, have in practice resulted in the generation of a black comprador elite complemented by a middle class that comprises less than 10% of the black population. Social protest has steadily evolved both quantitatively and qualitatively and in the past 10 years, leading to the realization among many disenchanted and disenfranchised that the black elite has betrayed the interest of the black majority. As the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the massacre of striking miners by the South African police at Marikana in 2012 has become a turning point in the history of South Africa, in that it captures the level of antagonism reached between the black majority and their oppressors, and in that it has become a catalyst for progressive movements to come to the fore.

The tripartite alliance, ANC-COSATU¹-SACP² that came to power in 1994 is crumbling down under the pressure of the above-mentioned contradictions. The expulsion from COSATU of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, NUMSA, the largest in the country with over 350 thousand members and of its General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, bear witness to this degenerative process.

In view of the political and economic situation in the country, NUMSA has taken it upon itself to generate a broad grass root organization, the United Front, UF, in order to advance the tasks of National Liberation, as summarized in the Freedom Charter, and to engage broad layers of the exploited masses in this process. It has also been pointed out that the UF is not a political vanguard of the working class. The need to uphold Marxism- Leninism as the core ideology of the vanguard of the working class is highlighted by NUMSA. With it comes the call by NUMSA for the creation of a workers Marxist-Leninist organization in South Africa. It is the political organization of the vanguard of the working class that provides leadership to the movement of National Liberation, and to turn these gains into preconditions for socialist construction.

Below are the transcripts of two representative speeches delivered at the Conference on Socialism organized by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, NUMSA, on April 16th and 17th 2015 in Johannesburg. These speeches were delivered by the President, Andrew Chirwa and by the General Secretary, Irvin Jim. These documents summarize well the current status of NUMSA's views with regards to National Liberation, socialist construction and the role of the working class and the broad exploiting masses in this process.

“The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat." (The Communist Manifesto, 1848.)

“The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory." (Lenin in What is To Be Done? 1902.)

On behalf of more than 360 000 members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, in the garages, foundries, construction companies, transport and security companies: in short, in all the work places we organise throughout the country, allow me to thank each one of you for positively responding to our humble invitation to come and be with us in the next two days, to discuss socialism for our country and the world.

We know, and we are confident, that the solution to the problems of the world and humanity is socialism. In this I trust we are all one, even as we may have serious theoretical, philosophical, ideological and political differences among us. In this Conference we must lay the basis for comradely engagements on how we must fight together for a socialist world and socialist South Africa. This is why we are gathered together.

My union has asked me to place before this Conference some of Numsa’s key elements of our philosophical, ideological and political perspectives. These perspectives have been developed both theoretically and experientially for more than 27 years now.

A. Background

1. The political resolutions passed in the NUMSA Special National Congress in 2013 have animated a number of social forces. From the rightwing, there is an excitement that, finally, the ANC-led National Liberation Movement is collapsing. This collapse is celebrated in a liberal sense, which falsely assumes that the existence of many political parties and the reduction of the majority votes of the ANC is good for a “healthy democracy”.

2. Incidentally on the left, the celebrations are to some extent informed by a similar false liberal view. There is a view among the left that finally, workers are beginning to move out of the “Stalinist’ monopoly influence of the South African Communist Party, with its “flawed strategy of the National Democratic Revolution’”. The left forces are on this basis then mobilized to “seize the NUMSA moment” since, according to these left forces, the NUMSA moment represents an open season for the plurality of all sorts of socialist and left ideologies.

3. As NUMSA however, we have always been consistent in articulating our ideological and theoretical perspectives. We have repeatedly maintained that we are a Marxist-Leninist inspired, revolutionary trade union. We regard the concrete and historical analysis of South African society as a colonialism of a special type founded primarily on white monopoly capitalist and imperialist super-exploitation of Black workers in general and African workers in particular, as the most advanced and scientific description of the lived reality of the vast majority of the Black and African working class.

4. The correct Marxist-Leninist response and strategic approach to the South African revolution which this analysis implies is a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) led by the working class, which culminates in the socialist transformation of society.

5. The Freedom Charter remains the basic programme of our revolution and it has been abandoned by the ANC and SACP.

6. While we are very clear that the Freedom Charter is not a socialist document, we know that as soon as the working class, having organized itself as a ruling class, implements the Freedom Charter, such implementation will necessitate further measures that will ultimately lead to the socialist transformation of society. Socialist transformation is the logical conclusion of a national democratic revolution led by the working class.

7. We are of the view that it is a matter of urgency that this strategic perspective of ours be fully articulated and understood by our friends, supporters and the broader working class.

8. We did not enter the Numsa Special National Congress as empty shells without history and ideas and we did not leave the SNC without ideas.

9. We have always disdained to conceal our Marxist-Leninist views.

B. Background to the 2013 SNC Resolution on the Alliance

1. As part of the preparations for the 2013 Special National Congress, the NUMSA Central Committee released a discussion document titled: “The Challenges Confronting NUMSA in the Alliance”. This discussion document formed the theoretical basis of discussions of the resolutions on the Alliance and the socialist political organ of the working class.

2. This document on “The Challenges” outlines political developments in the Alliance since the NUMSA 9th Congress. It also provides a summary of the positions of both the NUMSA Central Committee and National Executive Committee on these political developments.

3. The document also laid before the Special National Congress options that were available for debate and decision-making.

4. The document on “The Challenges” quotes the NUMSA 9th Congress extensively on the Alliance. It notes that, despite the many challenges faced by workers inside the Alliance, metalworkers categorically stated their continued support for the Alliance.

5. The document mentions that, in relation to the Alliance, NUMSA resolved that:
 - a. Its unity and cohesion is in the interests of the working class and the poor, and fundamental to socio-politico-economic transformation towards the attainment of the vision of the Freedom Charter.
 - b. NUMSA will campaign vigorously to establish the Alliance as the Strategic Political Centre tasked to develop a policy framework for the government.
 - c. We must strive for a vanguard and a strong SACP which is able to propagate independently a working class agenda. All unions and NUMSA in particular should contribute in building the SACP as the vanguard of the working class; every class conscious worker should join the SACP.
6. Subsequent political developments proved extremely difficult for NUMSA. Specifically, the adoption of the National Development Plan, which raised the concerns of the Central Committee and the National Executive Committee.
7. For the ANC and its alliance the National Development Plan constitutes the long-term programme for the development of the country and therefore it has far-reaching political implications:
 - a. The adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP) meant that there was not going to be any “second, more radical phase of transition”. We characterized the National Development Plan as another longer version of the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.
 - b. Policies inspired by GEAR have not led to a transfer and redistribution of wealth and land to the black majority in general and the working class in particular. The National Development Plan would likewise fail to transform the colonial character of the South African economy.
 - c. The adoption of the National Development Plan also meant that the key socio-economic demands of the Freedom Charter were not going to be implemented.
 - d. While the NUMSA 9th National Congress confirmed that the Freedom Charter is the policy document of the ANC, the NUMSA Central Committee noted with concern the elevation of the National Development Plan above the Freedom Charter. This elevation meant that the ANC would delay the execution of all aspects of the Freedom Charter.
 - e. The leadership of the Alliance, especially the leaderships of the ANC and SACP, placed the neoliberal and capitalist National Development Plan as their basic development programme.

f. Since we characterized this Plan as neoliberal and capitalist, and that it is a rightwing deviation from the Freedom Charter, we concluded that a leadership that embraces such a Plan is also neo-liberal, right wing and bourgeois.

g. While the 9th National Congress remained of the view that the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) remains relevant and is the most direct route to socialism, delegates felt that the NDR was off track as we have been unable to effectively deal with the triple crisis of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

h. The adoption of the National Development Plan, which is inspired by GEAR, meant that the NDR will continue to be further off-track.

8. These developments, which are at the base of the crisis in COSATU, go against the very core of the six elements of the NUMSA political programme for the period 2012—2016. This necessitated the call for the 2013 Special National Congress for the NUMSA leadership to seek a fresh mandate.

9. The discussion document on “The Challenged details the developments in the Alliance and puts forward strategic options for debate.

10. In the light of the state of the Alliance, one of the options read as follows:

“Option 3: NUMSA moves out of the Alliance with both the ANC and the SACP and resolves to agitate for COSATU to do the same. If other COSATU Affiliates choose to remain within the Alliance through COSATU, then NUMSA must leave COSATU.

In this option NUMSA also resolves to become a general union, since it will not be confined by COSATU rules.

If there are other COSATU affiliates who share NUMSA’s perspective, these affiliates will be engaged with a view to re-organise the trade union movement and to re-align the politics of the working class. This re-alignment will include the possible formation of a new federation to take workers’ interests forward.

Simultaneously, since metalworkers and the broader working class that shares NUMSA’s perspectives will no longer have a political organ, NUMSA will have to resolve to form a Workers’ Party as a political organ that will organise and agitate workers for state power”

11. It is impossible to fully understand the political and ideological meaning of the 2013 Special National Congress resolutions without knowledge of the background discussion documents that informed the debates and the debates that unfolded at local, regional and national structures of the union.

C. The 2013 SNC Resolution on the Alliance and the need for a revolutionary socialist political organ of the working class.

Our General Secretary of Numsa has been mandated to provide to this important Conference the resolution dealing with the need for the working class to be organised as a class for itself, 21 years into our so called “democracy”. I will not stray into that mandate.

The General Secretary of Numsa will inform us about the history of Numsa in the ANC led alliance, and how we now are embarked upon forming a United Front, a Movement for Socialism and how we must next week decide whether to start working on the ground to form a new trade union federation in South Africa.

All these processes and decisions for us are about recognizing the fact that the time and circumstances are now ripe for the working class to stand on their own, create their own revolutionary vanguard Marxist political party for the struggle for a socialist South Africa and world.

C. Two Strategic Lines

After our historic 2013 Special National Congress and its outcomes, two strategic lines seem to have crystallized within our ranks and among those on the left who support our consistent Marxist-Leninist positions.

The first strategic line misinterprets the significance and meaning of our SNC resolutions. The second strategic line articulates the NUMSA perspectives.

C. 1. The first Strategic Line

1. The first strategic line erroneously sees our resolution on the Alliance as a confirmation of its long-held incorrect and unscientific views about the trajectory of the South African revolution. This strategic line incorrectly asserts that NUMSA minimizes, or has abandoned, the historic and unparalleled contributions of the ANC-led Alliance in the struggle for national liberation.

2. The first strategic line also deliberately and sometimes unconsciously downplays the significance of NUMSA’s ideological orientation as a Marxist-Leninist inspired union. It ignores the fact that our theoretical perspectives remain deeply rooted in the historical contributions of the South African Communist Party, when the party was led by Marxist- Leninists. As a result this strategic line incorrectly reads the NUMSA SNC resolutions to constitute a fundamental departure from the historical perspectives of the ANC-led Alliance. This is very far from the truth!

3. Part of the effect of minimizing the ideological and theoretical role of Marxism-Leninism in informing our SNC resolutions is:

- a) to plant social-democratic illusions within the ranks of the working class, and
- b) to adopt a liberal and spontaneist approach to questions of organization and leadership – the rejection of the necessity of the vanguard party, support for “democracy” and “the

constitution” devoid of class analysis, and the rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat, are just a few examples.

4. Because this strategic line ignores the concrete analysis of the concrete conditions of the vast majority of the working class who are Black and African, it tends to half-heartedly, if at all, put forward strategic perspectives that inadequately address the national question.

5. For this first strategic line, capitalist exploitation, or what is sometimes called “the class question”, is conceptualized in an ahistorical, un-materialist manner, devoid of the concrete national context. The continuing experiences of colonial dispossession of the African people of South Africa, from one generation to the next, and the fact of national domination of the black masses, are in actual fact undermined in this strategic line.

C. 2 The Second Strategic Line: Numsa Strategic Line

1. It is important that we re-iterate our strategic line as NUMSA. We base ourselves on the concrete analysis of the concrete conditions of the working class as is the time honoured method of Marxism-Leninism.

2. The vast majority of the working class in South Africa is black, particularly African. This working class not only suffers under extreme capitalist exploitation, it also suffers under the yoke of national domination and colonial dispossession as an important part of the African masses.

3. In our case, national domination takes the form of racial domination: politically, culturally, economically, and so on. “Racism” to us is not simply a question of civil rights and attitudes.

4. Racism for us, is a product of colonial dispossession, extreme class exploitation and national domination.

5. Racism for us is the lived reality of the interconnectedness of national domination, colonial dispossession and particularly white monopoly capitalist exploitation which constitutes the national question in the age of imperialism.

6. Our own Marxist-Leninist analysis as NUMSA shows that the most consistent and thorough-going way to uproot these three interrelated problems is through a socialist transformation of South African society. Any other process of transformation will not fully resolve the national question.

7. In order to reach the phase of socialist transformation, the working class has to mobilize and provide political leadership to the mass of the dominated and dispossessed black and African people. The most consistent strategic approach through which this can be done is the national democratic revolution, whose basic programme remains the Freedom Charter.

8. Our own analysis informs us that the ANC-led Alliance has abandoned this correct programme. Hence the national democratic revolution is way off-track.

9. Our immediate political task is to get the national democratic revolution back on track by asserting the revolutionary and socialist working class leadership of this revolution.
10. To re-assert the Freedom Charter as the basic programme of this revolution and as a platform to unite all the class forces that suffer under the yoke of colonial dispossession and imperialist domination, we have to proceed without delay to actively build a Marxist-Leninist Vanguard Revolutionary Workers Party.
11. Only through a consistent Marxist-Leninist vanguard party can the working class guarantee its revolutionary leadership and ensure that the national democratic revolution culminates into socialist transformation.
12. We regard Marxism-Leninism as the product of, and that it provides a scientific summary of, the experiences of the international working class in its struggle against the capitalist class in the age of imperialism.
13. The most pronounced and most evident basic lesson from the twentieth century is that revolutions that have had far-reaching impact on the balance of class power on the global scale and in the countries in which they took place, have been, in one way or the other, inspired by Marxism- Leninism.
14. These revolutionary experiences of the working class consistently teach that without its own independent vanguard party, armed with the most advanced scientific tools of analysis, the working class will not be capable of providing decisive and revolutionary leadership to the anti-imperialist forces and for the struggle for socialism.
15. It is for this reason that NUMSA, as a Marxist-Leninist inspired trade union, has resolved to explore the formation of an independent political organ of the working class that is committed in theory and practice to socialism.
16. We are clear in our minds that, as a Marxist-Leninist inspired union, it will be a tragedy for NUMSA to be a fountain of a socialist political organ whose ideological orientation and theoretical perspectives are less advanced than those of the union.
17. Our own Marxist-Leninist view is that the political organ of the working class is made up of the most advanced cadres of the working class; these cadres must be trail-blazers ideologically, theoretically and in terms of political practice. They must continually cultivate themselves in the practical and theoretical mastery of the tools of Marxism-Leninism, and in the development of Marxist-Leninist thought.

D. Our Revolutionary Path

What, then, are our immediate tasks?

1. The first and pivotal task is to build a Marxist-Leninist political organ of the working class to provide leadership to the anti-imperialist forces and to the struggle for socialism. This organ will

provide leadership in the formation and consolidation of other organs of the working class. This is the first task of any Leninist inspired initiative.

2. We must now begin a process to practically engage in the politics of strategy and tactics of the revolution. The national democratic revolution and its programme, the Freedom Charter, presuppose a specific alignment of the class forces. This alignment must be clearly articulated: principal enemies must be well-defined, allies must be identified and those that must be neutralized must be clearly known.

3. We have to re-iterate and properly position the United Front in our revolutionary strategy. The United Front is not a vanguard political organ of the working class. It has no specific ideology. As we have put it in our 15 May 2014 CC statement:

“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.

"The basic guiding principle shall be “Unity in Action” against the ravages of neo-liberalism and in support of the full implementation of the Freedom Charter”.

4. It follows from this that the basic programme of the United Front is not simply against neo-liberalism, more importantly, the United Front is for the full implementation of the Freedom Charter.

5. The United Front cannot be united against something and not stand for a definite, clearly-defined alternative. In proposing the formation of the United Front, we were clear in our minds what the United Front is for: we proposed it to be an instrument in the hands of the working class to fight for the full implementation of no other programme than the Freedom Charter.

6. We are also clear that a trade union is not a vanguard political organ. Despite being Marxist-Leninist inspired, NUMSA remains a mass organ of the working whose field of operation is objectively and primarily at the point of production.

7. The political organ of the working class connects, co-ordinates, consolidates and sharpens the struggles that the working class engages in from various fronts. Its role is to lead and actively take part in these struggles, consistently point the principal enemy, to raise the property question and to develop these various guerrilla struggles of the working class into a consistent political onslaught against the capitalist class.

8. The most important character of the vanguard political organ is that it is made up of cadres that are the most theoretically and ideologically advanced in Marxism-Leninism, operating in various fronts of working class struggle, carrying a common message of revolution to the working class and the broader masses dominated by colonialism and imperialism.

We have presented above a very condensed and summarized version of the Numsa Strategic Perspectives. We have clearly defined our philosophical, ideological and political standpoint: it is Marxism- Leninism.

We have clearly articulated Numsa's perspective on the National Democratic Revolution. In doing so, we have re-iterated the Freedom Charter as the revolutionary programme of the NDR.

We have further clearly articulated the Marxist-Leninist view on revolutionary working class organization: the formation of a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Vanguard Revolutionary Party of the Working Class.

We are in a historic moment: the decisions the Numsa CC in April 2015 will take will have a decisive influence in determining whether the South African working class will make solid steps towards socialism, or will once more suffer reversals in this direction.

May I end by quoting the Communist Manifesto of 1848, a document we regard as broadly valid today, as it was more than 150 years ago, when it was published:

“The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.”

This quote best summarises our perspectives.

I thank you!

Andrew Chirwa,
Numsa President,
16th April 2015.

II

The problem of humanity and the world is well known: it is capitalism. The solution is quite simple and clear too: it is socialism. The real challenge, however, is to mobilise humanity to win the war to destroy capitalism and for socialism. Gathered here in this venue today and tomorrow, are men and women, political formations and organisations that can and must make a meaningful contribution to that struggle!

This Conference has gathered together some of the many fine and important different left and socialist political traditions and currents present in South Africa. For this, we are humbled and

are grateful to all of you for honouring our invitation to this Conference. We thank you very much.

I believe we all have the revolutionary responsibility to work to unite the South African working class, all of it, behind a revolutionary programme for a socialist South Africa.

The tough, rough and long philosophical, ideological, political, organisational, programmatic, strategy and tactics road we must travel to achieve the revolutionary unity of the working class for the struggle for a socialist South Africa and ultimately a socialist world, must be what has brought us together, in this Conference, I hope.

The President of Numsa has explained Numsa's perspectives of the South African revolution within our understanding of Marxist-Leninist political traditions. I will not bore you by repeating what he has said. My task is to explain how, organisationally, our Marxist-Leninist analysis at Numsa has led us to where we are today.

Numsa has unashamedly a proud record of participation in the Mass Democratic Movement and the ANC led alliance up to the point of our Special Congress, 16 months ago. Thousands of our members and shop stewards, across the length and breadth of our country, during and after the fall of the Apartheid government, have participated actively in the struggles to end apartheid and to retain the ANC government. Others even lost their lives, in these struggles.

This active participation and support stretches well over the 27 years of our existence. For more than 18 years after 1994, right up to our 9th Congress in Durban in June 2012, consistent with our political perspectives on the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), we urged our members to swell the ranks of the ANC and SACP. We did this consistent with our view that a working class led NDR was the shortest route to a socialist South Africa. We still hold that view.

1. Four key historical moments between Numsa 9th Congress and the Special Congress in December 2013

1. a. Adoption of the NDP

The ANC led alliance has irrevocably changed the programme of the Alliance by abandoning the Freedom Charter. The adoption of the National Development Plan – a continuation of GEAR by other means – against the overwhelming concrete evidence of the failures of GEAR and its disastrous effects of worsened unemployment, mass poverty and extreme inequalities and against the demands of the working class in the ANC led alliance left us in Numsa with no doubt that the ANC led alliance and the ANC government were completely won over to the side of neo-liberal capitalism.

The problem with the NDP is not a technical one. The NDP is the programme of our South African white monopoly capitalist class, its parasitic black and African elites and imperialism. The NDP is a programme to continue to feed profits at the expense of the working class. It is plan that promotes and defends the interests of white monopoly capital, imperialism and the comprador black capitalist class, not us, the working class.

In the order of priorities of the ANC, the NDP has replaced the Freedom Charter. A militant, popular programme which challenges the colonial property relations in South Africa has been replaced by a neo-liberal programme which entrenches existing property relations and attacks the working class.

1. b. The deliberate flouting of internal democracy in the ANC

The ANC and SACP leadership demonstrated without doubt, at Mangaung, that they will not allow anybody else to challenge their direction on key class issues. For example, the National General Council of 2010, and the Policy Conference which preceded the Mangaung Conference, had a clear majority in favour of nationalisation. That majority was transformed by the ANC leadership into majority support for a fundamentally opposed class position.

The National Development Plan focuses on entrenching a neo-liberal capitalist state.

1. c. Vicious attacks on the independence and militancy of Cosatu

Cosatu has experienced sustained, vicious attacks on its militancy and independence. It has become consumed by internal leadership battles between forces which have been won over to the neo-liberal agenda of the ANC led alliance, and those who are fighting for an independent, militant, socialist federation. In the process Numsa was continuously vilified and smeared by those opposed to its Marxist-Leninist and militant approach, in Cosatu itself, in the ANC and in the SACP.

1. d. The ANC government attacked and killed workers on behalf of capital

Both at Marikana and in the farmworkers strike in the Western Cape, the armed forces of the state intervened in support of the owners of capital against striking workers. In both instances the result was the murder of workers whose only crime was to refuse to sell their labour for less than a living wage.

In the case of Marikana, the armed forces of the state slaughtered African mine workers in the interests of global and South African white, black and African monopoly mining capital.

2. The Alliance is dysfunctional

2. a. The alliance is in a permanent crisis

It is paralysed and dominated by infighting and factionalism. Dominant rightwing forces isolate or purge those who are perceived to be against neo-liberalism or to be advocates of policies in favour of the working class and the poor.

2. b. The alliance does not lead struggles

Although there are protests everywhere and every day in the country, the Alliance is not an instrument in the hands of the black and African working class struggling masses nor does it provide leadership to these struggles, which are largely leaderless.

2. c. The Alliance is just for elections

The Alliance operates only during election periods. It is used to rubber stamp neo-liberal policies of the ANC and not as a centre of power that debates policy issues and implementation. The working class is being used by the leader of the Alliance – the African National Congress – as voting fodder.

2. d. The ANC is the leader and strategic centre of the alliance

The ANC has resisted the reconfiguration of the Alliance into a strategic political centre where issues of policy, deployments into government and programmes could be jointly decided upon by all Alliance components. Our strategy of swelling the ranks has not worked and the leaders of the Alliance have implemented no significant resolutions of COSATU congresses in relation to how the Alliance should function.

In practice the Alliance is still in the hands of one alliance partner, the ANC. The ANC is the centre and implements government programmes and policies alone, with little or no consultation with other components of the Alliance.

It has made it very clear that it has no intention of allowing this situation to change. When Cosatu raised unhappiness with sections of the NDP, an Alliance task team was rapidly created and Cosatu's unhappiness was parked there. It's still sitting there. Nothing has happened, and the ANC and SACP will make sure that nothing happens.

2. e. This is a common development in post-colonial countries

The treatment of labour as a junior partner within the Alliance is not uniquely a South African phenomenon. In many post-colonial and post-revolutionary situations, liberation and revolutionary movements have turned on labour movements that fought alongside them, suppressed them, marginalised them, split them, robbed them of their independence or denied them any meaningful role in politics and policy-making.

3. Our strategic analysis of the alliance

The working class has lost the war to lead the alliance. Therefore, a socialist NDR was no longer possible.

The Alliance has become the political wing of the comprador bourgeoisie. The material interest of this comprador bourgeoisie lies in its attachment to global and white monopoly capital. This is a parasitic layer which depends on that capital for its existence.

In South Africa its primary mechanism has been Black Economic Empowerment. It is the interests of this comprador bourgeoisie, and its master, global and white monopoly capital, which now dominate in the ANC.

The Alliance has been captured and taken over by right-wing forces.

As evidence of this, it has adopted the strategic plan of that class – the NDP. Its leadership has shown that it will not let the small issue of democracy get in the way of defending its control. Its economic strategy has caused the continued poverty of the majority of the working class. Its class alliance with capital has resulted in the slaughter of workers.

It is clear from this picture that the working class cannot any longer see the ANC or the SACP as its class allies in any meaningful sense.

4. There is no chance of winning back the Alliance or the SACP

We cannot win 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 and society, thus creating the basis for socialist transformation.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) leadership has become embedded in the state and is failing to act as the vanguard of the working class. The chance of winning it back onto the path of working class struggle for working class power is very remote.

5. Effects of post 1994 neo-liberal capitalism on the South African working class in general and Numsa in particular.

The overwhelming net effects of the post 1994 neo-liberal capitalist trajectory has been to worsen the pre-existing colonial status and conditions of the black and African working class – unemployment, mass poverty and victims of extreme inequalities – and the rapid rehabilitation of South African capitalism and restoration to higher profits.

Massive export of capital – both legally and illegally, destruction of even the underdeveloped apartheid era industrial base, deregulation, liberalization, privatization and all sorts of neo-liberal capitalist policies and practices have so worsened the already impoverished status of the black and African working class that violent crime and xenophobia have become a daily feature of black and African working class life, consistent with their continuing colonial status!

6. Numsa strategic response to the failure to secure working leadership of the alliance and NDR

6. a. The United Front

The United Front is to coordinate struggles in the workplace and in working class communities.

Its fundamental responsibility and purpose is to fight against neoliberalism and for the implementation of the Freedom Charter. It must unite working class organisations and activists on the basis of the shopfloor and grassroots struggles of the working class, not on the basis of political ideologies.

We have made significant progress on this work over the last 16 months, as delegates here will be aware, and its national launch is now scheduled for the end of June.

The United Front is not an electoral platform!

6. b. Movement for Socialism

In our Special National Congress we said clearly that the working class needs a political organization committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa.

To help us determine what type of socialist political organ we must champion, we have done the following:

1. We have done work on previous attempts to build socialism as well as current experiments to build socialism.
2. We have studied the historical formation of working class parties, including different type of parties – from mass workers parties to vanguard parties.
3. We have conducted a programme of Marxist-Leninist political schools, culminating in an international symposium in 2014.
4. We have conducted a programme of international study tours which we still have to complete.
5. We resolved that this process would lead to the union convening a Conference on Socialism. This is that Conference.
6. Next week, in another significant step, Numsa will discuss and resolve, the nature of the political organization it believes is necessary.

We look forward to learning the perspectives of all the parties gathered in this Conference.

It is our sincere hope that this Conference should begin the difficult job of laying the democratic foundation for left and socialist formations in our country to engage one another for the purpose of advancing the struggle for a socialist world and a socialist South Africa!

Irwin Jim,
Numsa General Secretary,
16th April 2015.

Endnotes:

1. Congress of South African Trade Unions, COSATU.
2. South African Communist Party.