

# Defend the metalworkers- end the lies!



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The bosses, the capitalist politicians of the ANC and the DA, and the media are howling at metalworkers and denouncing them for going on strike. They want to blame metalworkers for the problems of the capitalist economy. The media is full of 'experts' who in reality are just spokespersons for capitalism. These 'experts' are all saying that the metalworkers strike will "cripple the economy" and bring ruin to South Africa.

Is this true? No! It is all nonsense and lies to try and turn people against the strike and against metalworkers and their unions. In reality it is the bosses who are sabotaging the economy.

## Strike 'violence'?

To soften people up to hear these lies the strike is portrayed in the media as 'violent'. The 'experts' like to talk about the 'right to work', by which they mean the right to scab and undermine the strike! The Democratic Alliance even wants to pass legislation saying that if a strike is "excessively" violent it will be declared unprotected which would allow the bosses to sack striking workers.

The DA's proposal is a charter for the use of *agents provocateurs* by the bosses and the capitalist politicians. If such legislation passed, to end a strike, all they need to do is send in hired thugs to cause trouble so they can declare the strike unprotected and force workers back to the job with the threat of sacking. The 'Democratic' Alliance is only interested in the rights of the bosses.

## Who creates the wealth of society?

But, where does any of the wealth in the economy come from? Fundamentally, it comes from the new value added by workers in the process of working - especially in industries like manufacturing. The 'experts' say that this strike will be so damaging because manufacturing accounts for 15% of the economy. That means that an entire 15% of economic output is generated by just 230 000 metalworkers in a country of 52 million!

Why do the 'experts' not thank and praise this enormous contribution of such a small number of workers to the total wealth of the country and the profits of the bosses? Metalworkers must be the most generous people in all the land to create 15% of the economy but receive such low wages! In reality, this just shows the super-exploitation of metalworkers by the bosses who are so greedy that they are fighting tooth and nail against a modest 12-15% pay rise!

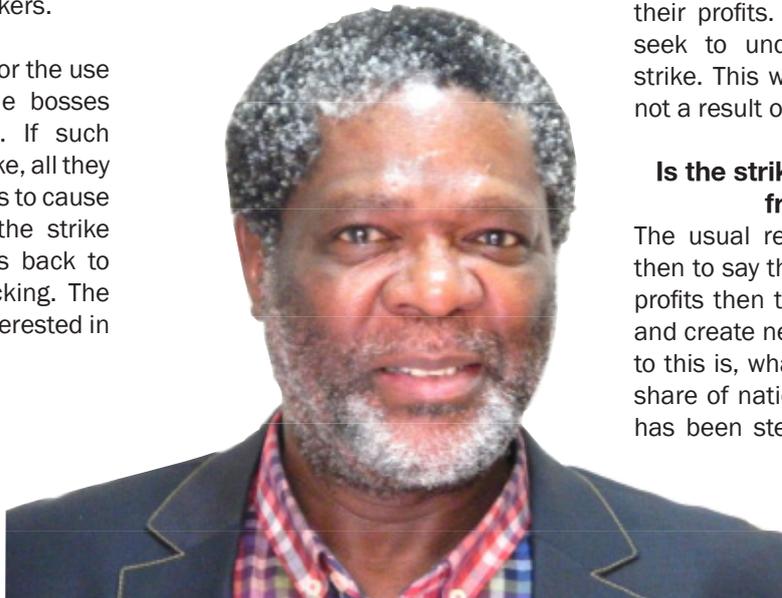
## What do they mean by 'the economy'?

As part of the bosses fight against the workers, they try and confuse us with their economic 'experts'. The 'experts' love to talk about 'the economy'. But whenever they use this phrase, workers must hear an alarm bell! The 'experts' are not really talking about 'the economy' but rather the bosses' interests within the economy. The bosses' interests are not the same as the workers' interests.

Manufacturing accounts for 15% of the economy. After the strike, even if metalworkers win their wage and other demands, manufacturing will still account for 15% of the economy. All that will change is that the share of that 15% going to manufacturing bosses' as profits will be lower and the share going to metalworkers' wages will be higher. The only reason that the manufacturing sector would shrink as a result of higher wages for metalworkers would be because of sabotage by the bosses. The bosses might decide to retrench workers or close factories so that they can restore their profits. In other words they would seek to undermine the gains of the strike. This would be the bosses' doing, not a result of the strike.

## Is the strike stopping the bosses from investing?

The usual response of the 'experts' is then to say that if the bosses have lower profits then they won't be able to invest and create new jobs. Well, all we can say to this is, what are they waiting for? The share of national wealth going to wages has been steadily decreasing for years.



*WASP president Moses Mayekiso  
(Mayekiso was the first general secretary of NUMSA)*

SA businesses have R500 billion of cash stockpiled. They have more money than they know what to do with! That money could be invested today to create jobs. But for the capitalists it is more profitable to speculate with that money on the financial markets. And all they care about is profits.

Why is it that the metalworkers' strike, which started last week, is now the reason that the capitalists can't invest? This argument is obviously nonsense. In reality the capitalists have been on an investment strike for years – business investment in South Africa in 2014 is 3% lower than it was in 2008! Is this the doing of metalworkers? No, all this time the bosses have been sabotaging the economy.

### **Will the strike make SA 'uncompetitive'?**

The 'experts' will then say that higher wages for South African metalworkers will make South Africa 'uncompetitive'. They say that manufacturing will move to parts of the world where wages are lower. The 'experts' present this outcome as inevitable as the sun rising in the East. But this is a lie. Again, the bosses are threatening to sabotage any gains from the strike. What they are really saying is

that they will close their businesses in South Africa and move them abroad in order to get higher profits for themselves rather than pay metalworkers a fair wage.

But the capitalists want it both ways. The ANC, supported by SA big business, has gone along with the dominant neo-liberal ideas of world capitalism that say trade barriers must be removed, services and the state sector privatised, markets opened and competition allowed to rule supreme. Globally this has been the strategy of the big capitalists of America and Europe to shift power and wealth away from the working class to themselves. When it suits them the SA bosses support this; when it doesn't they blame the workers. For workers, neo-liberalism creates a race to the bottom in wages. For example, the factories moved to China because wages were lower there are now moving to even lower wage countries in South-East Asia!

### **Socialism can answer the lies**

These are all problems of the capitalist system. That is why workers must be armed with socialist ideas. The capitalists' problems do not need to be our problems if we have a clear understanding of the socialist alternative. Workers must demand the opening of the

books of South African companies that claim they cannot compete with foreign importers. Workers' committees should then scrutinise their profits, senior pay levels, input costs, the wages they pay their workers and the prices they charge for their goods or services.

But even in those cases where companies can prove they can't compete, workers should not support capitalist profits by asking the working class to pay high prices for goods and services or by holding down wages on the capitalist classes' behalf. If companies genuinely cannot compete, in the first instance we will demand their nationalisation under workers' control. This must be the principle demand of the trade union movement struggling to defend jobs from foreign competition.

But ultimately, a socialist society is needed to end the race to the bottom and give jobs and high living standards to all workers and their families. As well as being organised in trade unions workers need to be organised politically in parties like the Workers and Socialist Party to complement the struggle in the workplaces with the united struggle of the working class for a socialist society.

# **Join the Workers and Socialist Party today! Contact us.**

## **WASP's manifesto**

- **ECONOMY.** Nationalise under democratic worker and community control the banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and big business. A publicly owned and democratically planned socialist economy to meet the needs of all and not the profits of the capitalists. For a working class state and a socialist government.
- **THE MINES.** Struggle for 100% nationalisation of the mining industry immediately and placed under democratic workers' control; united struggle for a living minimum wage of R 12 500; end all retrenchments and re-employ retrenched mineworkers; end labour broking and make all contract workers permanent; massive investment in mining communities.
- **THE LAND.** Nationalise the 36 000 commercial farms that control 95% of agricultural land; support for small and subsistence farmers; cancel the debts of the small farmers; democratic community committees to determine the use of non-agricultural land – home-owner occupiers and small business premises exempt.
- **WORK.** Decent jobs for all – end unemployment; struggle for a living wage of R12 500 per month for all full-time workers; create employment and socially-useful jobs through a mass public works programme including the building of houses, roads, schools and hospitals; for a 35 hour working week without loss of pay and the sharing out of work to address unemployment, workers' quality of life and as the basis for workers control of the economy; for a basic income grant of R8 000 for all those not in work – unemployed, pensioners, disabled and war veterans.
- **SERVICE DELIVERY.** For free, sufficient and accessible public services for all; stop cut-offs and evictions; end homelessness with a mass public works programme to build decent homes for all those in need, roads and to provide free, accessible and sufficient electricity, water, sanitation, public transport and social services for all; scrap e-tolls.
- **EDUCATION.** For publicly funded, free, accessible and high quality education for all from nursery to university; education to benefit society not just the individual; cancel student debt.
- **HEALTH.** For publicly funded free, accessible and high quality health care for all run under the democratic control of patients, communities and health workers; nationalise the private health providers, insurers and pharmaceutical companies.