

The workers party we need

The SA Federation of Trade Unions' 25 April national strike potentially signals a decisive shift in working class struggle. The estimated 100,000 workers silenced Saftu's critics. Millions now look to Saftu as an alternative to Cosatu and as a point of reference.

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Executive Committee

This was in fact the first conscious political general strike against the ANC government post-apartheid. The Cosatu-led general strikes against Gear and privatization, as well as the public sector strikes of 2007 and 2010, were against *particular policies* of its alliance partner - the ANC government. Whilst the 25 April strike was called to oppose the new poverty-level minimum wage and attacks on the right to strike, there is no doubt that for the workers taking part, this strike was a rejection of both the ousted Zuma-led -ANC and the "new" Ramaphosa one. This poses the question of a workers' party.

The ANC leadership under Ramaphosa remains firmly committed to neo-liberalism. The ground continues to be prepared for a social explosion. In anticipation, the strategists of capital are preparing for a possible coalition government from some combination of the DA, ANC and even the EFF. The working class is lagging behind.

SACP's treachery

The political vacuum on the left has been magnified by the degeneration of the SACP-led Cosatu. In reality the early Cosatu was a quasi-workers party in the struggle against apartheid and capitalism. Saftu's challenge now is to complete the retying of the knot of history politically and ideologically. In 1982, Joe Foster, general secretary of Cosatu's predecessor, Fosatu, warned prophetically that the lesson of independent Africa was that unions should protect their independence against capture by post-colonial governments.

However, Foster did not draw the conclusion of the need for a workers' party that his position implied. Recognising that this was the logic of his argument, the SACP denounced Foster for not recognising it as the "vanguard" of the working class.

The SACP "vanguard" barred the way to the development of an independent

workers party, captured Cosatu and trapped it in the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance. Acting as the shock troops of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) – the first stage of the bankrupt two-stage theory – they engineered the derailment of a potential socialist revolution. Confused by the SACP, the Cosatu leadership was absorbed into the capitalist state.

Marikana exposed the ANC as the party of capital like nothing before. But even before the massacre, a survey of shop stewards showed support for Cosatu to form a workers party had reached 65%. The mineworkers' support for the launch of WASP, NUMSA's 2013 Special National Congress resolutions and the significant increase in the number of communities standing independently in elections confirmed this. The working class was yearning for its own party. Unfortunately, despite all of this, Saftu's "independent but not apolitical" policy goes no further than Foster in 1982. But unlike Foster, Saftu has the benefit of the experience of 24-years of ANC rule.

Cosatu, Nactu and Fedusa's collaboration on the national minimum wage and attacks on the right to strike shows that abstention from party politics does not guarantee independence. Independence is a class question. Political parties represent the interests of classes or fractions of them. Cosatu's betrayal was caused by collaborating with a capitalist party – the ANC. Saftu must form an alliance with a political party with a programme based on the interests of the working class. By concluding from the experience of the struggle against corruption that it will be necessary to remove the ANC government in the North West Saftu is reinforcing the need for a workers party.

Party of struggle

The SACP imposed itself on the working class as a pre-fabricated "vanguard" with a programme manufactured behind the backs of the working class, shielding itself from accountability. A genuine workers party must answer the question: "how do we take our struggles forward?" Therefore it must become the furnace that forges the fighting unity of the working class; it must be a party of struggle.

What must be the party's guiding political principle? In our view a socialist programme is the only possible one – the aim of a society run by and for the working class.



Saftu members reject Ramaphosa.

The foundation for this is the call for the nationalisation under democratic working class control of the banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and other big businesses. A new workers party must be based on a programme of action that links the immediate issues faced by the working class to the need to fundamentally transform society on a socialist basis. As an example, we propose that the struggle for a living wage be championed by the new party through a demand like this:

Organise the workplaces to win R12,500! Build industry- and sector-wide action-committees that unite workers in a campaign of rolling mass action. Lock-out the bosses in non-complying industries through workplace occupations that demand nationalisation under workers control. Mass defiance of laws that stop workers defending themselves.

We propose the new party works out similar demands for the struggles (1) to end unemployment, (2) win service delivery and houses, (3) high quality free health care, and (4) genuinely free and decolonised education.

A new party must allow for open and free debate, maximum democracy, collective development of a manifesto and programme of action. As well as individual membership, the party must have a federal component allowing for the fighting unity of existing working class organisations. The party's leadership must be elected on the principles of the right of recall and that a workers' representative must earn only a workers wage.

The Working Class Summit initiated by Saftu for 21-22 July must place on its agenda the question of consciously filling the political vacuum with a new party – a vacuum Saftu's own 25 April strike again underlined.