

After 25 April's massive success... Towards a 3-day general strike and mass city occupations

The overwhelmingly successful 25 April general strike marked, arguably, an historic milestone in the general ascendance of class struggle since the 2012 insurrectionary mineworkers strike and the bloody massacre of the immortal martyrs of Marikana.

It represented a massive rejection of the new minimum wage's institutionalised poverty and draconian amendments to the labour laws. More than this, it was a mass ventilation of a deep class anger stemming from the betrayals of the negotiated settlement and its capitalist post-apartheid dispensation.

The amendments to the acts – the Basic Conditions of Employment, Labour Relations, and National Minimum Wage (NMW) – are the worst attacks against the working class since 1994. They aim to emasculate the working class's industrial and political power. Whilst the NMW is a concession to the mineworkers and the courageous #OutsourcingMustFall activists, it is intended to obstruct their demands for R12,500 and R10,000, respectively.

They further aim to weaken workers' main weapons, the right to strike and picket. This ruthless anti-democratic onslaught by Ramaphosa's pro-big business administration flows from the logic of the objective situation – the now-decade long stagnation of capitalism. From a class standpoint, their strategic objectives are to impose the savage austerity required to rebalance the stagnant economy and to cripple the working class' capacity to resist. Under pressure from the capitalist class and their market police – the credit rating agencies clamouring for these changes in the labour laws – the ANC government wants to roll back all workers' defences against returning to pure colonial slavery.

The significance of 25 April

Despite co-ordinated fear mongering by police, the shameful media blackout, lies and distortions, and the three main trade union federations' (COSATU,

FEDUSA and NACTU) criminal strike breaking, the workers defiantly turned out in huge numbers. The leaderships of these federations' shameful role reached new lows. Exposing the treachery inherent in class collaboration, they wrote the employers letters condemning the strike and encouraging the victimisation of striking workers.

The success of the strike, however, is not a question of arithmetic alone. It is political. Its economic impact was exceeded by its impact on the working class's political outlook and confidence.

The centres of all the major cities, Joburg, Cape Town, Durban, Polokwane, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth came to a virtual standstill. This was despite the fact that, in solidarity with the transport workers strike, not a single bus was used to transport workers.

The success of the strike, however, is not a question of arithmetic alone. It is political. Its economic impact was exceeded by its impact on the working class's political outlook and confidence. Recognising this as class war, it raised workers' confidence in the power of their unity. It injected the SAFTU leadership with a renewed sense of purpose.

25 April represented both SAFTU's entrance as *the* new force on the trade union terrain. It also affirmed it as a critical factor for the working class as a whole, after years of complete leadership paralysis. It was the working class's thunderous reply to the ruling class's agenda to make the working class pay for their crisis. This represents an important shift in the balance of class forces. From it will flow a corresponding alteration of political relations.

Way forward

SAFTU must build on this momentum not only to take specific workplace campaigns forward, but to build broad campaigns linking struggles for land and housing, service delivery, health, jobs and education – a fighting plan with clear time lines.

Our concrete proposal is for a programme of action demanding 5 million jobs, 5 million student places and 5 million houses in 5 years. Such a programme combined with demands for scrapping the fuel levy, electricity tariff increases, sugar tax, VAT and interest rate increases and for a basic income grant for those between the ages of 18 and 60 can also attract the support of the middle class.

To find an echo with workers and the poor and maximise unity, the platform must have clear time lines and include demands for free admission to tertiary education; address the student accommodation crisis; a mass housing programme linked to demands for a living minimum wage and decent work; land and environmental justice; an end to violence against women, children and the elderly.

These demands must be underpinned by a campaign for nationalisations of the five key sectors of the economy – the mining, finance, manufacturing, construction, food and agricultural monopolies. This approach will have the greatest potential to galvanise struggles currently isolated, into a mass national campaign uniting workers with communities, students and the society's middle layers. This can lay the basis for the emergence of a mass workers party on socialist programme (see Page 11).

JOIN
WSP
Workers & Socialist Party
Call or SMS 081 366 7375