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South Africa

Jay Naidoo speaks at launch of new trade union federation

- News from around the world -

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Jay Naidoo, the first General Secretary of COSATU spoke at the launch of the new trade union federation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) in late April. Below we print his speech.

When forming COSATU in the 1980's, there were different elephants in the room, these different elephants had to learn to talk to each other in order to establish the launch of COSATU at the time.

In 2017, as the standard of living of poor and working class people in South Africa continues to decline, we have a new challenge and responsibility to the generations who came before us, as well as to the generations to come. Today's challenge extends beyond more than just building a federation, it requires the building of a mass based movement.

Thirty years ago, COSATU was formed as an attempt to build worker unity. They have not been able to fulfill their historical task and mission. SAFTU must learn the lessons and know that to be strong is to build a united federation.

SAFTU is launching in a different context in comparison to COSATU more than three decades ago. When COSATU formed it had no money, no office, no one employed and it was launched during the height of apartheid.

At the crossroads that South Africa finds itself, it is critical that we build organs of mass struggle, representing not only workers but rural people, women and the unemployed. With a primary endeavor to bring humanity back into our lives and bring humanity back into our politics.

Capitalism is in crisis but it is not dying; the new still has to be created. In creating the new we will develop the response to the question, what will replace capitalism. The crises we face is not only economic and social, but ecological. It is essential that the new federation responds to the seriousness of the ecological crisis – because a dead planet has no jobs.

In this regard, nuclear has nothing to do with jobs, nor does it have anything to do with energy security. If the priority for the new federation is jobs, then it must promote and fight for the intensified development of the renewable energy industry in South Africa. There are many more jobs in the renewable energy industry, the renewable energy sector should be placed at the centre of a radical economic transformation project.

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