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South Africa:

The Democratic Left Front Salutes the Numsa Special National Congress

- News from around the world -

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There is a spectre haunting the ruling class and government in South Africa: it is the radical anti-capitalist movement that the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has given birth to at its historic Special National Congress held last week. The Democratic Left Front (DLF) congratulates NUMSA for this, Congress that united metalworkers in spite of the sustained attempts to divide NUMSA.

As the most highly organised section of the working class, NUMSA has taken a decisive step. It has responded in an unequivocal manner to the role of the ANC and its government in sustaining capitalist exploitation in South Africa. NUMSA has decisively rejected the cold-blooded murder of workers in Marikana. As the DLF, we were inspired by the moving and concrete solidarity expressed by NUMSA Congress delegates as each of them donated R100 to the Marikana solidarity fund and as they collectively embraced the Marikana representatives who addressed the Congress. NUMSA is picking up the baton from the strike wave that followed in the mining, farming and other sectors. By insisting on the need for political and organisational independence, it has shown its commitment to the continued struggle of the working class to chart its own destiny.

South Africa can never be the same again. The historic decisions made by the NUMSA Special Congress reverberate through the length and breadth of South Africa's organised and unorganised working class. These decisions inspire hope and confidence in the imminent possibility of a transformed South Africa, where people come before profits and where democracy becomes a daily-lived experience.

This NUMSA Congress marks a decisive end to the era of national liberation politics. NUMSA has broken new ground and has thereby opened space for a genuine mass-based political alternative to emerge, led and controlled by workers and their communities. Only the self-emancipation of the working class can decisively undo the inherited structures and systems of neo-apartheid, ecological destruction, capitalism, and the limited liberal democracy presently being eroded by the ANC government.

The NUMSA Congress resolved to i) explore the building of a socialist workers' party, ii) to mobilise for both a United Front and a Movement for Socialism, iii) to reclaim COSATU from below, iv) to actively unite worker and community struggles through coordinated mass mobilisation on socio-economic demands, and v) to consolidate NUMSA as a worker-controlled union that organises along entire value chains and that provides the best service to its members. At this moment there can be no stronger foundation to radically transform South Africa.

Delegates at the NUMSA congress have rejected the claims of the South African Communist Party (SACP) that it is the vanguard of the working class. It has rightly argued that such titles are only earned through the process of struggle. The first and most important duty of anyone who claims to be a socialist is to work towards the maximum unity of the working class. The SACP leadership has failed dismally in this regard and has made a conscious decision to side with the state, government and the ruling party against our class at every turn over the past few years.

We call on genuine socialists still inside the SACP to leave the party and embrace the NUMSA-led initiative. We appeal to others that seek to present themselves as the political vanguard of the working class to put aside such misplaced arrogance and join the United Front of workers and communities and work towards building the Movement for Socialism.

The NUMSA Congress have stated in no uncertain terms the future must rest in the organised and class conscious

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power of the working class, working poor, and the dispossessed, united in action to challenge capitalism by building the struggle for the socialist alternative in the here and now.

The DLF believes that the post-Congress process must build on the bottom-up worker driven process and tradition of democratic debate, solidarity and mass struggle that NUMSA followed. This would lay a strong foundation for bottom-up, democratic left renewal. Important in this regard is the need to recognise and integrate struggles against multiple oppressions reinforced by capitalism: racial oppression and reproduced white supremacy, gender oppression, oppressive rule by the tribal elites, the social oppression of people with non-heterosexual sexual orientations, cultural alienation, 'new imperialism', ecological destruction, and so on.

As the social movements, independent trade unions and left groups that constitute the Democratic Left Front, we will engage in this process humbly, genuinely and with modesty, conscious that sustained, united, non-sectarian and principled political action from below is the only solid rock upon which to find mutual, shared and collective socialist alternatives to the complex challenges facing South Africa and indeed wider humanity. We will contribute to this process a perspective for the socialist transformation of South Africa on the basis of deep participatory democracy.

All this requires the maximum unity of the working class and those who are open and willing to side with it. The Democratic Left Front calls on mass movements, workers, the unemployed, women, youth, shack dwellers, backyarders, the landless, other rural dwellers, independent trade unions, trade unions affiliated to COSATU, NACTU and FEDUSA, the broad left, progressive civil society and individuals committed to a people-driven transformation of South Africa to all embrace the NUMSA moment through democratic political debate, sustained mass action, solidarity and the building of a socialist working class alternative.

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