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South Africa

Statement on the suspension of COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi

- IV Online magazine - 2013 - IV463 - August 2013 -

Publication date: Monday 19 August 2013

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Statement issued by the Democratic Left Front, South Africa, 15 August 2013. [1]

As expected the COSATU Central Executive Committee took a decision to suspend Vavi, its general secretary. An internal probe will now sit and in all likelihood find him guilty of bringing COSATU into disrepute and he will be permanently removed from the leadership of COSATU.

Women's abuse is a very serious offence. Abuse of power is very serious. No-one should be above the law. In this case Vavi's guilt has not been established. And it is obvious that the rapid and determined way some in the CEC went about taking up this issue is part of the bigger campaign to rid COSATU of Vavi's leadership. If Vavi, or any official is guilty of serious abuse the workers movement must act principally.

However, COSATU has for a long time left the plane of principle and the defense of working class political interests. In the 1990s the leadership of COSATU was captured by a political faction that has subordinated the independence of the labour movement to political interests of the ruling ANC. This faction has a name: the South African Communist Party. At the ANC's Mangaung conference this faction ensured the ANC clinched tighter control of COSATU by ensuring senior leaders sitting in its national leadership where now in the ANC National Executive Committee. Thus reflecting a desperation and realization that coopting worker leaders through giving them seats in parliament was not enough to ensure control. The politics of control of the SACP/ANC sacrificed working class independence for an accommodation with capital and big business with disastrous results for workers.

As could have been expected the transition from Apartheid, where working class independence was subordinated to the so-called national interest, the position of the working class and the poor has suffered. Unemployment has more than doubled, large sector of the employed has been informalised and consequently the wage share in the national income has declined as against profits. South Africa has become one of the most unequal countries in the world.

This un-principled politics took its worst form with COSATU liquidating itself into the campaign to have Jacob Zuma elected President of the ANC.

Vavi's, suspension comes after he, together with several principled leaders in COSATU and its affiliates started to reposition COSATU to fight for workers against capital and the state. Since 2010 COSATU has made the "predatory elite" and the threat of the emergence of a "predatory state" a major target. Potentially powerful campaign were launched against corruption, labour brokers, "the jobs blood baths", e-tolls. Government policies such as the New Growth Path and National Development Plan were criticised. This was not just an attack against the ANC leadership but the leadership of the SACP that had liquidated itself into the Zuma-led state and now occupying major Cabinet positions and at every level of government. The turn away from ZUMA was also a challenge to business unions inside COSATU, linked to the SACP/ANC faction trying to control COSATU, and engaging in shady BEE deals behind the backs of workers

For this reason, even before, COSATU's 2012 Congress the SACP/ANC faction in COSATU has run a campaign to get rid of Vavi. Now they may have succeeded.

However, the global crisis, the deepening crisis of unemployment, poverty and inequality will force principled leadership in COSATU, such as that of NUMSA to continue the struggle and to continue to fight for COSATU's independence and working class independence - with or without Vavi.

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The crisis of many affiliates in COSATU in the form of corruption, sweetheart relations with management, lack of servicing of its members, bureaucratisation, etc. which Vavi was trying to arrest will inevitably lead to further splits and fragmentation of the labour movement.

Vavi's suspension is not the end of the story. It will accelerate a process of re-organisation and re-alignment of the labour movement in South Africa. As the DLF we expect to play a major role in assisting the renewal of militant anti-capitalist trade unionism. We call on workers to reclaim their unions from below through worker control and we call on NUMSA to convene its long declared commitment to a Conference of the Left. Out of the wreckage will emerge a renewed labour movement capturing the spirit of principled trade unionism, namely of working class independence, solidarity and militant struggle.

Comrade Zwelinzima Vavi may very well be found playing a critical role in this renewal.

ISSUED BY THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT FRONT

[1] For more background see [Cosatus's history: Coming full circle](#) in the July issue.