



Breaking the Paralysis of COSATU
Why the Attacks on Comrade Zwelinzima Vavi and NUMSA will fail!
Our Call for a Special National Congress

A Workers Guide to the Current Crisis in COSATU

How Was the COSATU Giant Born?

Almost twenty-nine years at the height of mass struggles by workers, youth, women, students and communities, despite repression, detention without trial, a State of Emergency, killings and assassinations of activists and leaders, the workers of South Africa declared; “A Giant Is Born”. And so COSATU by the blood, sacrifices and sweat of many generations before it was launched.

How Did the Giant Help to Defeat Apartheid?

The message that was passed down by generations of worker activists, from the earliest days of worker organisation in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and again echoed in the strike movement of the 1973 strike wave in Durban rang out loudly when COSATU was born. It echoed clearly throughout the country and for the entire world to hear; “What we have to make clear is that a giant has risen and it will confront all that stands in its way.”

It openly challenged the Apartheid regime and within in six months the hated pass laws were scrapped. By 1988 and 1989, COSATU had called the biggest General Strikes in the history of the South African working class. It challenged the racist and anti-worker labour relations laws. It even forced organised business to meet with labour to begin carving out a new labour relations regime on which the current LRA is based. This is the COSATU we know and should be proud of. This is the tradition we demand COSATU should return to when we call for a Special National Congress.

What contribution did COSATU make to Democracy?

Since the advent of democracy and usually in collaboration with the Alliance we have made many other advances,, though this was seldom achieved without using the collective power of organised workers and taking actions. COSATU played a central leading role in the drafting and shaping of the RDP and that effectively became the first election manifesto of the ANC.

When the Constitution was being developed, COSATU was the driving force to include worker, trade union and socio-economic rights. COSATU actively helped shape a pro-worker labour market, pro-worker LRA, BCEA, Employment Equity, Skills Development and many other measures often considered to be at that time amongst the most progressive in the world.

What did COSATU do when Neo-liberalism raised its Ugly head?

In 1996, the ANC government shifted its macro-economic policy towards being openly neo-liberal, starting with GEAR and today following through with the NDP. Though workers gave their loyalty to the government in the early years, they have been at the receiving end of one set of anti worker policies after another, and especially moves towards subjecting the lives of workers to the forces of the market and unbridled capitalist competition. We expected people before profits, but got profits before people! COSATU refused to stay quiet. It challenged the thinking of alliance partners and became the defender of the working class and the poor even when our alliance partners were more cautious in their approach. This is when so-called progressive forces started making accusations about the positions of COSATU and tried to exert control on it, but failed to do so.

When did this crisis come to a head?

At the COSATU 11th National Congress there was a behind the scenes move to remove Comrade Zwelinzima Vavi, without proper consultation or mandates, and through manipulation of the agenda. However, the vast majority of workers at the Congress, from all unions, could see what was happening and rose to defend Comrade Vavi and the plotters were forced to retreat. The Congress went on to demand a radical change from neo-liberalism, and many other bold measures to address poverty and corruption.

The COSATU Collective Bargaining Conference also provided a space for possible attacks on the General Secretary, but once again, workplace activists knew what was happening, and endorsed radical approaches to the challenges our class faces. Today, despite the Call to Action in the 11th Congress Declaration and in its resolutions, and the Declaration and resolutions of the Bargaining Conference, the current COSATU leadership faction has focused only on weakening COSATU by suspending the General Secretary, and attacking affiliates instead of implementing the mandate it was overwhelmingly given by our Federations highest authority, the 11th Congress.

Who Deliberately Undermined the Decisions of the 11th Congress?

Immediately after the Congress, when the spotlight was taken away from them, the plotters retreated to the shadows and recommenced their campaign to rid COSATU of who they considered to be Public Enemy No 1, Comrade Vavi. Their campaign of leaks, smears, innuendos and unattributed quotes to a press ready for digging up dirt was relentless. Their only problem was that nothing they could throw at Comrade Zweli would stick! They needed something else.

That opportunity came with the revelation that Comrade Vavi had been involved with a fellow member of staff in COSATU. In the words of Comrade Vavi, this was like handing a loaded gun to the faction that was running COSATU.

The press went ballistic, and encouraged by the unattributed statements, made all manner of additional accusations, all of which have fallen by the wayside once disproved. Despite the fact that Comrade Vavi has apologised, to his family and the movement, and has been ready to face an internal process, the matter has been deliberately delayed, and further changes have been added along the way. Those who had been plotting against Comrade Vavi since the 11th Congress have now taken the opportunity to suspend him, and try once again to wreck his reputation. But they will fail. The charges against Comrade Vavi are not worth the paper they are written on.

At the time of writing, it is eight months since Comrade Vavi was suspended, and in that time the issues of labour brokers, e-tolls, the youth subsidy, the neo-liberal NDP and the non-socialist manifesto of the ANC have been pushed through. We wait to see what the current leadership faction will say about the upcoming Nkandla report from the Public Protector's Office! It is clear, without Comrade Vavi in office, COSATU is paralysed, and reduced to being a lap dog.

20 Years of Progress?

Today, unemployment, poverty and inequality are continuing to impoverish our people as if nothing has significantly changed over the last 20 years. There may be more houses, but look how many are already in disrepair because they were built by tenderpreneurs? And why is a family restricted to a two room dwelling as if we still lived under apartheid, in areas with transport and services? There may be more electricity connections, but who can afford to pay their electricity bills? There may be more kids in schools, but why are class sizes still over fifty in some areas, and how can whole provinces not access school books for over a year? Why are there on average 34 community protests every day? Why do we even have to pay now to use our roads?

We now have a situation where the richest 10% of the population consume more than 50% of the wealth of South Africa, while the poorest 10% consume just 1.2% of all goods and services in the country. Like so many of the other COSATU radical resolutions, the campaign for a National Minimum Wages remains on paper while the income of the poorest 20% amounts to less than 2% of our wealth while the richest 20% have incomes that exceed 70% of the country's wealth. South Africa now has the dubious title of being the country having the largest gap between the rich and the poor. Unless these issues are directly addressed by challenging Capital and neo-liberalism nothing of significance will change.

How do things stand today?

The current leadership faction in COSATU has signally failed to galvanise and mobilise workers in the struggle against E-tolls, labour brokers, Youth Subsidy and the Neo Liberal NDP. Workers are entitled to ask, whose mandate are they taking if not the one from the working class?

What we have seen? Instead of leading workers in the great traditions of COSATU in struggle, COSATU is in a chronic state of paralysis that has failed to implement any of the resolutions, campaigns and policies agreed upon at the COSATU Congress and Collective Bargaining Conference. Instead, the current leadership faction have reduced COSATU to a space for abandoning the best politics, traditions and leadership, and for purging those forces it considers to

be against the Alliance. In COSATU today, there is no room for dissent or discussion. You either follow orders from above or be isolated, ridiculed and victimised.

What are current COSATU leadership trying to do?

The current COSATU leadership have been reduced to a faction aimed at keeping the General Secretary, Comrade Vavi out of COSATU and to marginalise NUMSA and all those affiliates supporting the call for a Special National Congress. But they are failing. The demand for a Special National Congress is being taken up in every province! Why? Because it is a profoundly democratic demand and workers know that democracy is the only way to defeat factionalism.

It has become clear to all that the current leadership at COSATU with the support of elements claiming to be pro-working class in the Alliance, have set themselves the task of turning COSATU, with its noble tradition of struggle, from being a fighting Federation leading workers and defending the interests of workers into a Federation that is simply a conveyor belt. A conveyor belt that goes up and down. It delivers factional decisions downwards to the grass roots, and it delivers selected leaders upwards into Parliament! Down with the conveyor belt approach to workers democracy!

Today more than 2 million COSATU members and millions more outside COSATU are waiting for working class leadership, not conveyor belt politics! We intend to make sure that workers get the COSATU and the leadership they deserve. Dont wait for others! Join us now!

What Our Our Demands?

Our Call Is Clear! Return COSATU to her custodians, return COSATU to the workers!

We demand a Special National Conference as defined by the COSATU Constitution!

We demand the return of Comrade Vavi to the office of General Secretary of COSATU.

We demand hands of NUMSA! We demand hands of the Nine Affiliates!

We demand an end to factional politics hostile to the COSATU decisions, policies and resolutions

We demand the return of Workers Control of COSATU!

We call on workers to return to the organisational traditions of democracy from below to call meetings in workplaces, in locals, in regions to campaign for the calling of a Special National Congress. It is through such a process that we will return to the traditions of COSATU, a tradition of defending and extending the interests of the working class towards total emancipation, to a socialist society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression.

TOWARDS A SPECIAL NATIONAL CONGRESS OF COSATU!! HANDS OFF OUR LEADERS!!

Please Note : This is a shortened version of a much longer and detailed analysis of the current state of COSATU which is available free of charge from any of the Nine Affiliates.

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