

South African Communist Party and COSATU hold emergency national congresses

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The tripartite alliance partners of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP), held emergency national congresses this month in an attempt to overcome the social crisis which threatens to engulf them.

Among the usual blather and infighting, the key resolutions of the twin congresses was that neither COSATU nor the SACP would break out of the alliance and contest elections independently of the ANC.

At present, among others, SACP General-Secretary Blade Nzimande, his deputy Jeremy Cronin, Deputy Chairperson Thulas Nxesi and Central Committee members Rob Davies, Yunus Carrim and Buti Manamela serve as ministers or deputy ministers in the Cabinet of President Jacob Zuma. ANC Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe is also an SACP Central Committee member, while multimillionaire Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa first came to prominence as a bureaucrat of the COSATU-affiliated National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

This is the social layer which at both congresses voted to strangle the independent mobilisation of the working class against the bourgeois nationalist ANC government.

Expelled COSATU leader Zwelinzima Vavi did not attend the labour federation's special congress. There had been hopes among his supporters that delegates would reverse both his expulsion and that of the dissident National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), which has aligned its cause with his.

In a formal vote two years ago, the NUMSA rank and file forced its leadership to break with the ANC in response to the anti-working class policies of the ruling

party. NUMSA had to stop paying lip service to the ANC, and even withdrew its financial support and electoral organising on the party's platform.

During years of intense battles in COSATU, Vavi was the target of several trumped-up investigations, a disciplinary procedure and eventual expulsion. He found to his cost, contrary to the claims of various middle-class radicals, he could no longer criticise the movement from inside it.

Vavi's pseudo-left rhetoric was at odds with the determination of big capital to use the entire tripartite alliance, starting with the ANC, as the vehicle with which to ram through austerity measures including deep austerity in the wake of the 2008 global crisis.

Against the manoeuvres of the Stalinists and other imperialist agents, Vavi and NUMSA leader Irvin Jim could muster nothing but a pathetic response. Terrified of the implications of an independent bid for power, NUMSA and eight other unions went to court to have a special congress convened, fighting tooth and nail to be readmitted back into the federation their membership has grown to despise.

This was rejected by the COSATU congress, with conference proceedings rigged to deny delegates credentials and speaking rights to supporters of Vavi and the SACP in the Group of 9+ unions.

Capitalist society in South Africa was never homogeneous, not under white supremacist rule nor under the ANC. The fault lines in this, as in all capitalist societies, run along class and not racial lines. This is increasingly obvious in metrics like the inequality between poor and wealthy blacks, which is greater than that between blacks and whites. The SACP and COSATU have no answer to this crisis except to redouble the exploitation of workers, preferably by driving them further into the arms of the ANC.

Their prostration before the ANC found its most grotesque reflection in the invite extended to ANC Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa to address the SACP delegates assembled at the University of Johannesburg.

The single most significant, indeed catalytic event in underscoring the alienation of the most advanced workers and youth from the ANC was the August 2012 Marikana massacre when 34 striking Lonmin platinum miners were killed by police and dozens more were wounded. What followed was a massive strike wave hitting South Africa's platinum, gold, diamond and coal industries during which hundreds were arrested, beaten and sacked.

Ramaphosa, a key ally of Zuma and a major Lonmin shareholder earning around US\$18 million a year, had called for police to take "action" against the "plainly dastardly criminal acts" of strikers. Four months later he was voted in as Deputy Leader of the ANC, at a congress that ended the ANC's formal commitment to nationalisation with the blessing of COSATU. "The alliance is safe," Vavi proclaimed.

This year, Ramaphosa expressed his appreciation to the SACP, declaring, "The ANC draws great strength from an incisive, activist, independent and supportive Communist Party... dialogue with our social partners to introduce a national minimum wage... provides us with a valuable opportunity to significantly advance the interests of workers."

These words came from a man who could soon be up on murder charges for his role in the Marikana massacre. Yet there was not a word of protest from the audience.

Together with Nzimande and other ministers, the deputy president wound up an official trip to China on July 17. Ramaphosa was there to "explore how state-owned enterprises could be utilised to promote economic growth while addressing challenges of poverty and unemployment," according to spokesperson Ronnie Mamoepa.

The butcher of Marikana would have felt at home among his Stalinist Chinese Communist Party hosts, the organisers of the Tiananmen Square massacre 26 years ago. As with the Marikana killings, the slaughter of some 6,000 workers and youth at Tiananmen was intended as a signal to the global capitalist elite that the Chinese rulers would brook no challenge to the super-

exploitation of workers which was enriching multinationals with a manufacturing base in the country.

In the aftermath of the COSATU congress, NUMSA and Vavi have indicated that they may finally move to make the break with the union federation permanent in an attempt to preserve their own grip over the working class. This will be decided when NUMSA's executive committee meets next month.

Deputy General Secretary Karl Cloete stated, "The NEC concluded that NUMSA, together with other affiliates in the Group of 9+ unions, has done everything in its power to reclaim COSATU through its legal and organisational endeavours."

The Group of 9+ spokesman Patrick Craven said that the July 13-14 special congress "was rigged by the federation's leadership in order to crush workers' right to express their views and to force through decisions... [the] federation is now dead, murdered by a leadership which has reduced it into a paralysed, disunited and feeble shadow of its former self."

Announcing a Workers Summit to "rebuild the movement that COSATU once was, only much bigger and more effective," Craven piled on the leftist rhetoric, adding that, "Workers are itching to fight back against the super-exploitation they are facing, the intolerable 36.1 percent level of unemployment, 54 percent of people suffering from poverty and 14 million of our people going to bed every night without food."

Vavi's group will hold preparatory marches against corruption on August 19, he said, "when thousands of South Africans will be flooding the streets of Pretoria and other cities in protest against the epidemic of corruption, which is spreading like a plague in both the public and private sectors."

However, there is already an indication that Vavi's coalition is far from stable and homogenous. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) has pulled out of the Group of 9+, after declaring that it does not want to be seen as "entrenching division."



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