

# Com.com

## *postcards from the strike*

### **Postcard # 1**

Dear Com,  
COSATU pulled it off again! The newspapers were saying members wouldn't join in the strike, government was saying the same, even some of our old friends on the lefter-than-thou-left were sceptical. And what happened? Hundreds of thousands joined in. That's what! I had to laugh. Watched SABC news on day 1 of the strike. Their spin was 'heavy doubts about the numbers, and the overall impact'.

e-news was completely different. They accepted COSATU's estimates of around 5-million, and didn't refer to anyone else's figures. Someone in the President's office must have been unhappy. Here's a question for those in the cabinet who doubted COSATU's capacity to mobilise: How many people could YOU get on the streets if it meant losing two days' pay? Judging by the turnout in the last local elections, not many! This was a remarkable show of strength, and if I were a cabinet member I would get down to some serious listening to the working class for a change.

*Yours, Com.com*

### **Postcard # 2**

Dear Com,  
According to reports from elsewhere, seems to have been the same story everywhere. A very good vibe on the

*A cheeky but affectionate look at events surrounding the anti-privatisation strike by the Bulletin's intrepid freelancer.*

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ground, even a little dagga going round to lighten up the load, and inject a bit of the 'carnival of the oppressed' mood into the proceedings. Could have done with some live music though. Very good to hear that NACTU threw its weight into the strike – although they weren't very visible. Also, SANCO, TAC and the student movement. Is this what they mean by social movement unionism? Looked like the old working class to me, Com!

*Yours, Com.com*

### **Postcard # 3**

Dear Com,  
Been thinking. Why didn't we hear a squeak before, during or after the strike from all those trade unionists that went into parliament? I suppose Alec and Sydney are bound by so-called collective cabinet responsibility, which is laughable because everyone knows that the cabinet isn't a collective. It's Thabo's cabinet, and if you upset the man, you are out! That's what makes Com Radebe's comments even more annoying. Saying he couldn't understand why COSATU was taking

action. Funny, the rank and file in his own party know exactly why the action had to be taken. So who is in touch, Com Radebe? I would love to ask them all a question: What has damaged the economy more, the arms fiasco or the strike?

But back to our Coms in parliament. I didn't hear anything from the former COSATU leaders. Imagine if just before the strike, they had signed an open letter stating that there was a need to look afresh at the economic strategy of government, and that they believed the unions had a good case. Furthermore, that they would be joining the strike, and forfeiting their salaries for two days. That would have sent out such a good signal to the masses and the cabinet.

Why are they silent? Do they think being mute will protect them and their careers? One way to protect yourself in parliament is to work with your constituency and build a protective base. Not to abandon your constituency for fear of upsetting the boss or Comrade Pahad. Makes me cringe.

*Yours, Com.com*

#### Postcard # 4

Dear Com,  
Just thinking about the numbers game. One thing COSATU should have made more noise about is that the strike was protected under the LRA. No one could be sacked for joining in. If that had been put across more effectively, we could have been joined by thousands more workers, especially those in vulnerable jobs, like security.

Saw a brilliant bit of mobilising on the



*'Willie Madisha is our president.'*

second day. I watched two SACCAWU women comrades go into a large store, gather up and talk to the workers. Ten minutes later, the shutters came down, and a bundle of 20 smiling workers linked arm in arm with the SACCAWU comrades joined the masses. Way to go SACCAWU! Made me feel warm inside. SABC would have called it intimidation!

*Yours, Com.com*

#### Postcard # 5

Dear Com,  
Made a point of listening to all the speeches carefully. Convinced this has been a defining moment for the movement. Especially Com Willie outside Eskom in Joburg, Com Gwede of NUM on day 1 of the strike, and Com Zweli on day 2.

I must say this lot will take some beating. This Willie Madisha is something else. He should be playing for Bafana Bafana the way he can tackle and handle a political football. Spoke about privatisation being only one part of a flawed economic strategy, and that what was needed was a comprehensive re-think. He spoke straight from the hip. He is *our* president, Com. No

wonder the ring of do-gooders in the other president's office want to silence him. Well at least we have one president who I can understand and feel attached to.

Then Com Gwede in the Library Gardens. Spoke for 30 minutes, and it was a near masterpiece. Not often you see such attention from a big crowd. Touch of the Fidels! The film of the speech should be made available for workers' education. He explained that if the government acts for the ruling class it would inevitably find itself in conflict with the working class. This would be a battle that government could not win.

Workers would remember at election time. He finished up by saying that the struggle has only just begun, and then repeated what Madiba had said: If the ANC government betrayed the workers, they must be dealt with in the same way as the apartheid government! Massive applause. Hope you were listening Com Thabo and our quiet friends in parliament.

Then Com Zweli on day 2 outside Jo'burg City Hall. Before Zweli spoke, the massive rally was told that Com Shilowa could not receive the memorandum because he was in Durban for the Racism Conference. Com Zweli was polite and said it was right for his old boss to be at the conference, but the workers knew the score. A big mistake Com Shilowa, and workers said so, very loudly. If I were you, I would have delayed my trip to Durban for a couple of hours, and listened to my old comrades.

Hey Com, am I just being naïve? Maybe all these guys were instructed not to be there. Maybe Com Shilowa was worried that he would be forced to say something significant. Either way, poor Com Trevor Fowler who took the flak for him was told in no uncertain terms what message to pass on to his boss. Serve the working class or else! In Pretoria Com Fraser-

Moleketi was given the same message! Hey no need for spin doctors, just popular democracy in action, Com!

Com Zweli made at least two important points. Firstly, that one class cannot tell another how it must fight for its rights. Did Com Zweli imply that an independent workers' movement would not take orders from those acting on behalf of another class, namely the ANC government? He went on to say that the workers' movement is not yet ready to hand over the ANC to the bourgeoisie and that workers must re-take ownership of the ANC.

Secondly, Com Zweli responded to some of the pathetic reasons coming from government as to why COSATU decided to strike, especially the line that it was a way to win seats for the COSATU leaders in parliament.

To great cheers, Zweli stated very clearly that neither himself, nor Com Willie were contemplating entering into formal politics. They wanted to stay and work in the labour movement where they belonged. Made me think how cynical workers have become about anything associated with government. Sad and dangerous. We need a healthy political culture, Com. Not one that isn't trusted because politicians get fat.

*Yours, Com.com*

### Postcard # 6

Dear Com,  
Been reflecting on the relationship between the ANC and COSATU. Apart from Com Mokaba saying out loud that the Alliance is over, (and then while praising his own courage for saying so, modifying his tune so as not to be out of step with Comrade Pahad and co) most of our Coms seem to be in a state of denial!

Doesn't everyone know that the Alliance has been reduced to a rubber



*Zwelinzima Vavi stated that he was not contemplating entering into formal politics.*

stamp for the president's office? Come to think of it, so has the ANC! COSATU comrades were not that long ago seen in almost all ANC branches, especially in the metropolitan areas. Now ANC branches struggle to get a quorum of 50, and be properly constituted. Local COSATU comrades have dropped out of ANC branches by the thousand. It's just not the place to get things done anymore. If Com Thabo wants a mass organisation to drive his 'revolution' then he should wake up. Maybe he is following on the heels of Blair's New Labour in simply seeing the 'mass' movement as an electoral machine, to be revived every four or five years to get the vote out on polling day. That isn't democracy, Com!

Hey Com, remember that funny story we heard about why cabinet ministers don't trust Com Zweli. Seems they are

upset because every time he meets them, he insists on taking minutes to report-back accurately to the federation. That's why Com Zweli is probably the most popular union leader we have had. Long may it stay that way.

*Yours, Com.com*

### **Postcard # 7**

Dear Com,

What about all that fuss from government accusing COSATU of being hypocritical because its investment arms had benefited from privatisation? Thought our side was caught a bit offside, if you know what I mean. Why didn't someone simply say 'Yes, we foolishly tried to be capitalists for a socialist cause but it doesn't work. Most of our investment arms have been useless. Unlike our government though, with its disastrous Gear policy, we have recognised

our mistakes and are busy rectifying it.' That should have closed the gap between Com Radebe's lips.

We need to learn from this, Com. If we are going to invest, let's be sure it promotes trade unionism and union membership and builds sustainable jobs, with an explicit social dimension. This will build pressure from below, not just contain it. Let's get a return on our investment, but one that is based on our values, not theirs.

*Yours, Com.com*

### Postcard # 8

Dear Com,  
Talking about Com Radebe and the other Communist Party ministers, isn't it time they were pulled back into line by the party comrades and asked 'Are you with us, or against us?' If they are with us, they should drop the anti-COSATU line, and get listening and talking to our comrades as soon as possible. If they are not, then we look forward to seeing them on the barricades - on the other side of course, the losing side!

Made me think though. How does the party expect to grow if they throw out their critical rank-and-file activists, and then be in awe of those members in the cabinet who are clearly breaking the party's mandate? Re-read Com Joe Slovo's article on coming to terms with the past, especially the parts about being tolerant of differing views. Com Joe must be turning in his grave! Come back Joe and do a little haunting. A few comrades could do with a revolutionary fright!

*Yours, Com.com*

### Postcard # 9

Dear Com,  
As Minister for Public Enterprises (read Privatisation) Com Jeff has followed a classic Thatcherite TINA (There Is No

Alternative). Pay a fortune for consultants to come in from Europe to tell all and sundry that there is no alternative, do a hatchet job on public works, ignore the sensible alternatives put forward by labour, and then say, at the end of the 'consultation', there is no alternative. Some process for a communist to be heading!

Here's a good question, Com. Is there any evidence to indicate that the consultants will get a cut if the privatisation process goes ahead? Any readers out there with the dirt?

What we need is another TINA, Com. How about This Is Not Allowed, or To hell with IMF-inspired Nonsense, Amigo. And this one goes out to all those grubby little apologists who shame-facedly argued that you could buy and sell armaments for peace and jobs. This four-barrelled TINA-TINA-TINA-TINA is for you. Trading In Nasty Arms To Ingratiate Nuclear Arms dealers Takes Incredible Nonsensical Arithmetic To Impress Non-accountable Apparatchiks. There's a prize for the wittiest worker-biased TINA entry. First prize, a night out with Com.com. Second prize, two nights out! Only joking. Send them in!

*Yours, Com.com*

### Postcard # 10

Dear Com,  
Looking forward to the Workers' Summit on the economy, and closer relations between NACTU and COSATU. Hope the FEDUSA people wake up and seize the opportunity to get on board. What we need now more than ever is a united working class, led by those accountable to it. Workers all over the world are watching closely. Hey, I feel a revolution coming on, must go to bed with my boots on, in case it happens overnight!

*Yours, Com.com*