

The VWSA saga

NUMSA's strategy

Over the past months, speculation has reigned pertaining to NUMSA and the so-called VWSA saga in Uitenhage, which has attracted national and international interest. The VWSA debacle is the labour relations incident that resulted in the dismissal of 1 300 workers by the VWSA company

Ideologues have suddenly argued that NUMSA is shifting from its ideological orientation. Others are wrongly speculating that the union is becoming an apologist for the bosses and is prepared to sacrifice its workers to appease the employers. This cannot be further from the truth

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To set the record straight, the union has been, is still and will continue to be loyal to its members. On the ideological front, NUMSA remains fully committed to the establishment of socialism in South Africa, where workers will fully control the means of production. Our ideological commitment to socialism is clearly captured by our slogan: 'Taking the Struggle for Socialism into 21st Century'.

by Dumisa Ntuli

(NUMSA's 6th national congress, 20-24 August 2000)

To deal with these distortions, NUMSA has launched a new campaign, whose motto is 'Ears to the ground'. This campaign aims to counter this media distortion and also address additional organisational challenges. Some of these challenges include poor service, lack of accountability and members' different interests. NUMSA is not being apologetic on this matter. We recognise that we have to address these issues to avoid another VWSA debacle in the future. It is in this spirit that we carry out such an initiative. Specifically, the campaign attempts to get workers more involved in the activities of the union and to listen to their views.

This strategy flows out of NUMSA's four-year programme, which was adopted by the union's 6th national congress. The four-year programme gave the union leadership a set of specific mandates and these are to:

- improve service of union members;
- recruit more members;
- redirect the militancy of members;
- be accountable to members;
- deal with the rival unions that are currently penetrating our union.

To deal with rival and what we regard as

counter revolutionary unions, NUMSA has adopted the tactic of re-emphasising the democratic control of this union by the workers. NUMSA has always prided itself on being a union that is committed to the democracy from below, which means worker control. There is an incorrect prejudice which states that we have concentrated our attention on the workers from big companies to the detriment of those workers from small companies, ie filling stations, etc. With this campaign, we seek to deal with these misunderstandings.

The union has always held the philosophy which recognises workers from small and big companies as having equal worth, and deserving the full and equal attention from the union.

To re-emphasise our philosophical position, we are closing the gaps between the union and members.

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The campaign takes place at the time when we are busy preparing for our national bargaining conference, where we will discuss overarching issues and demands that affect the union and our members in general. These pertinent issues and demands range from wage agreements

to work place restructuring, job losses, parental rights, health and safety. As we have done before, we want to make sure that our members' rights are safeguarded at any cost, utilising all measures at our disposal. These measures include the law, political approaches and many more.

The focus area for our campaign will be the Eastern Cape followed by the other regions. The aim is to target automobile and component companies. This is being done to counter the growing presence of the rival unions in that area, whose aim, in our view, is to deceive, divide and mislead workers. More importantly, this campaign takes place within the context of globalisation, job losses, and technological changes.

Since globalisation pushes employers to restructure their industries to survive and maintain profitability, this campaign seeks to strategically address problems confronting workers that are related to the globalisation process (ie reversal of workers' rights and security). It is in this regard that an essential focus of our campaign will be to try and ascertain all the problems and views of members. We want to encourage and motivate a knowledgeable, active membership that defends its rights at all times. We also want to consolidate organisational structures and policies. There is no doubt that with a more active, mobilised membership, the unions can turn back the corporate attack and win justice and better life for working families. The campaign is also important for women and the youth because they are mainly located in atypical work in the informal sector, casual work and contract working relations.

To repeat, the drive here is to make workers identify with the union rather than the union chasing members. In so doing, we are striving to prove to our detractors that the union is not and has never been an elitist organisation. ★