

Interested in finding out more?

If you are interested in finding out more, why not contact the **Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF)**? The ZACF is not a trade union, nor is it a political party that runs in elections.

The ZACF is an organisation of revolutionary anarchists which promotes the ideas of anarchism and syndicalism within the working class, and aims to unite anarchist workers into an organised cadre that can fight the battle of ideas within the class and win as many workers as possible to anarchism and syndicalism. We believe that it is only through the implementation of anarchist ideas, including syndicalism, that socialism and freedom can be brought about.



- Contact for more information -

Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front

+27 72 442 1256 | www.zabalaza.net | zacf@riseup.net

Postnet Suite 47, Private Bag X1, Fordsburg, South Africa, 2033

REVOLUTIONARY TRADE UNIONISM

The Road to Workers' Freedom



★ Introduction

The trade unions are the combat organisations of the working class. They were built to defend and advance workers' interests against the bosses.

BUT the unions can be MUCH more. The unions have the potential not only to fight the bosses in the here and now. They can ALSO organise the workers for a REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE. This means that the workers take the land, mines and factories from the bosses and politicians. It means we run them in the interests of the workers and the poor.

Real democratic socialism and real working class freedom and power will *never* come through getting new political parties into parliament. This is an illusion. Parliament is the graveyard of struggles. It is the place where the radicals of yesterday become the crooked politicians of today.

Socialism, freedom and power can only come through *class struggle*. This means organising in communities AND building strong worker organisations.

Worker organisations must be built to defeat the bosses, and their ally, the state... and replace them with direct workers control of production. Free of the politicians. Free of the bosses. This is the REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE.

And this can only come through revolutionary industrial unionism (anarchist syndicalism).

Revolutionary unions are vital for replacing the bosses and politicians with a grassroots working class democracy. This can only take place if our unions are

- ▶ STRONG
- ▶ INDEPENDENT OF PARTIES
- ▶ FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE
- ▶ DEMOCRATIC
- ▶ INDEPENDENT OF POLITICIANS AND BOSSES

★ Why do we need Trade Unions?

Trade unions are built because workers need to unite against the bosses. The bosses exploit the workers. The workers are many, the bosses are few. But the workers do all the work, and the bosses get all the money.

Workers build trade unions to fight back against the bosses.

The unions give workers power, because they unite many workers into one strong organisation. The unions give workers power, because they can organise workers to hit the boss where it hurts most – in the pocket. This is because the unions can disrupt production (the source of the bosses' wealth) through mass action.

Only through this revolutionary general strike can we end capitalist exploitation, government domination and the legacy of apartheid oppression. We can use the wealth of the country and build the schools, clinics, houses and everything we need. The wealth is there, *we made it; let us take it back!*

This is what we mean by revolutionary industrial unionism (anarchist syndicalism).

★ Building Tomorrow Today

To sum up, we believe that we must:

- ▶ rebuild workers' control of the unions;
- ▶ win the unions to revolutionary industrial unionism;
- ▶ win the unions to the revolutionary general strike; and
- ▶ unite all unions into one big union.

In the short-term, this is what we should fight for:

- ▶ the independence of the unions from all alliances with political parties;
- ▶ the ending of all laws that restrict the right to strike or interfere in internal union affairs;
- ▶ the ending of attempts at union bashing by the bosses.
- ▶ a national minimum wage;
- ▶ the creation of well-paid and socially useful jobs;
- ▶ the ending of all productivity deals that bring job losses;
- ▶ the organising of the unemployed;
- ▶ the abolition of workplace apartheid;
- ▶ equal rights for women in the unions and in the workplace;
- ▶ six months paid maternity leave with no job loss;
- ▶ all strikes being automatically made official by the unions so long as they do not contradict trade union principles;
- ▶ the merger of the unions to form one union for one-industry, and a super-federation embracing all the trade unions.
- ▶ withdrawal of unions from all "worker participation" and "joint decision-making" schemes including NEDLAC – these are bosses' tricks

ONLY THE WORKERS CAN FREE THE WORKERS!

FIGHT THE BOSSES! PHAMBILI BASABENZI!

★ One Big Union

We need to keep the unions independent of all political parties. Political parties cannot deliver freedom – only the workers can free the workers.

Political parties are one of the main reasons that unions are divided.

It makes sense to unite all workers into ONE BIG UNION. But today the unions are divided between those who support this party, those who support that. This weakens the workers struggle. We should unite all the unions: one industry, one union; one country, one federation; and ultimately, one big federation of all the workers of the world.

Let us merge all progressive unions together, and unite all workers regardless of race or belief. Let us unite men and women workers, workers of all colours, South African and immigrant workers.

ONE BIG UNION means strength, the power to smash the bosses' control and take the factories, mines and land.

★ Occupy, Manage, Produce

The road to workers' power, socialism and working class democracy is mass action. Not through elections. Every day we must fight the bosses – strikes, go-slows and occupations are the weapons of the workers.

And one day, when we are united enough, we must call the REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE. Instead of staying home, or marching in town, or believing in the hoax of elections, we must go to the workplaces and we must put them under workers' self-management, THROUGH OUR UNIONS, and kick the bosses out. We can run the factories, the mines and the farms – we do all the work anyway!

Working alongside working class community structures and poor rural people, the revolutionary trade unions will end this capitalist system. *No more fat cats!*

★ Socialism from Below

Instead of taking orders from the bosses, we can run the workplaces democratically, through our unions. We can link with other workers and worker communities across the country and across the world.

We can plan production to meet workers' *need* not bosses' *greed*. Instead of capitalism, we will have socialism and working class democracy. Instead of a world of bosses, we will have a workers' world, defended by a workers' militia [army].

The unions unite workers – they promote strength and the confidence to organise and fight back against the bosses.

So long as the unions fight, all bosses hate the unions. As soon as the union leaders join the bosses, the workers leave the unions and form new ones. This we can see with the rise of AMCU on the mines, and the crisis in NUM.

The example of the NUM, where the union leadership betrays their members, the union's collapse.

★ Politicians married to Bosses

But socialism will never come about through government. The government is an ally of the bosses. Both groups need the other. The bosses need the politicians to enforce bosses control and exploitation of us workers and poor. The politicians need our exploitation by the bosses to pay the taxes that buy guns for the state. And mansions for the politicians.

And these guns that are used to kill workers, as at Marikana.

Politicians and top officials can never be our friends. They need the capitalists. They need to rule us. They have a built-in interest in dominating the working class. The big parties are liars who have been corrupted by the system.

Together the bosses and politicians oppress and exploit the workers. The government will never arrest the bosses in a strike – they always arrest us. It will never kill bosses in a strike – they always kill us.

★ Don't Vote - Organise!

So, whose interests do they serve?

Real power lies in the company boardrooms and the upper levels of the state structures, including the Cabinet, police and military. These are the power bases of the ruling class that exploits and dominates us. The politicians live the sweet life that workers only dream about.

Right now, the whole country is being squeezed of its last drops of blood by a fat cat ruling class ... *our blood* ...

★ Revolutionary General Strike

Real socialism can *only* come about if the workers ourselves, through our trade unions, act to seize and manage the land, mines and factories. AND replace the state with a grassroots working class democracy based on unions and community structures. This is the REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE.

This can only happen if the workers agree that this is the way forward. In other words, we must convince all workers of this truth. Then we can make our unions accept this policy.

★ Bringing back Workers' Control

Are there problems in the unions? Yes, there are some important problems. Workers need to take these problems seriously.

First, too many unions are becoming run by full-time officials and OBs. These people get paid more than the workers, and many see the union as “just another job”.

These sorts of leaders become conservative. They do not want too much union militancy. These leaders are not on the shopfloor anymore. They forget what it is like. Instead they prefer to spend their time negotiating.

Sometimes this means that they do not support the workers struggles. Sometimes they make undemocratic decisions. Some even use union money to get rich.

They would prefer to use the unions as a springboard to get into business or government later and become bosses and politicians themselves.

The reaction of the COSATU central structures to the recent upsurge in militancy in NUMSA demonstrates this. The leadership in the CEC is not interested in socialism. It is more interested in taking orders from the politicians.

But this can be challenged. NUMSA shows that when unions are built on assemblies, accountable shop stewards, open debate and solid anti-capitalist politics, the unions advance. It is essential to fight the CEC group, to build a movement for socialism, and to do this by fighting for the programme of a REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE.

Not elections. Not parties in elections! Not another ANC! Not another copy of the ANC!

★ Fixing up our Unions

We need to get our house in order. All the unions have to be made into real fighting organisations which are run and controlled by shopfloor workers.

This cannot be done through changing the full-time officials and OBs. It can only be done by concretely implementing a programme of shopfloor democracy, with as few full-timers as possible. All final decision-making power must be exercised by mass meetings that elect workplace-based shop-steward councils to implement their decisions.

We do not need a leadership of paid officials. Union work should be done by ordinary workers and shop-stewards.

To make sure this happens, militant workers and shop-stewards should form opposition groups inside the corrupt or undemocratic unions. These opposition groups would try to make sure that the unions are democratic; that we, the workers, exercise control over our own organisations. They would oppose the trend of power accumulating in the layer of union officials.

These opposition groups would encourage worker unity, class independence and resistance to the bosses. These opposition groups would fight for equal rights for women.

And they will fight for the reform of the union federations: the actions of the COSATU CEC in refusing to obey the COSATU constitution and call a Special Congress shows how far the rot has gone.

Take back the unions!

★ Political Education

Second, there needs to be an open and honest debate on politics. Those who fight for the REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE need to work together and promote this idea.

Too many people have illusions in the dead-end of elections. Too many people think the problem is not the system. They think the problem is bad leaders and bad parties. But the system creates bad leaders and bad parties. It rots, corrupts and co-opts every radical who enters the rubbish heap of parliament.

Parliament cannot be captured. Cannot be reformed. Cannot be used. 400 people do not have the right to decide for 50 million. And the 400 are part of the enemy class, the bosses and politicians.

They must be swept away by a REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE that creates a grassroots working class democracy and socialism.

★ Can the Unions build Real Socialism?

Yes, the unions can.

But only if three things happen:

1. The unions are democratically controlled by the workers from the shopfloor;
2. The unions change their policies to accept the idea that the unions must seize the land, mines and factories and place them under workers' self-management;
3. All unions are combined federally into ONE BIG UNION of the whole working class, nationally and internationally.