



# It's time for **COSATU** To come back **HOME**

## 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress of COSATU

### **GEORGE MAVRIKOS**

**General Secretary of the World Federation of Trade Unions**

Dear comrades,

Once more from this podium we want to express our solidarity to the struggle of the South African miners. We want to express our condolences to the South African working class. As WFTU, as an organization of proletarian internationalism we stand firmly with all the workers in struggle. WFTU struggles against the capitalist brutality and the abolition of the exploitation of human by human.

Dear comrades,

Three years have already gone by since your last Congress. During these three years, the relations between the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and the trade unions of COSATU have become more strong. Together with NEHAWU, three more unions have joined the ranks of the WFTU, NUMSA, POPCRU and CEPPWAWU. Currently we have started the procedure for the affiliation of NUM to the WFTU.

### **We met in the same struggles**

We met in the same struggles. We organized common struggles in solidarity with the people of Swaziland, of Palestine, of Cuba. Trade unionists from South Africa traveled in many countries for the activities of the WFTU and exchanged experience with other comrades

around the world for the difficulties and the prospects of the struggle. We organized for example an international Conference in the Parliament of the European Union in solidarity with Swaziland. We all became more rich and more effective in our trade union struggle through this debates.

In the 16th World Trade Union Congress, Congress of the WFTU in Athens with the participation of 828 delegates from 101 countries, comrade Mike Makwayiba, President of NEHAWU was elected as a member of the WFTU Presidential Council. This historic Congress became the platform for discussions and resolutions for the class-oriented forces around the world. They discussed the contemporary acute problems of the working class and the new victorious path that the world labour movement must follow against the capitalist brutality and exploitation.

Our young comrade Lulamile Sibanda was elected in the recent Youth Conference in Cuba as a member of the WFTU Youth Secretariat.

In February 2012 the WFTU Presidential Council took place in Johannesburg of South Africa. It was the first time that the Presidential Council Meeting was convened in South-African land since the foundation of the WFTU in 1945.

Our common action and the great internationalist role of the South African unions was intensified with the opening of the



WFTU Africa Regional Office in South Africa under the coordination of comrade Lulamile Sotaka. This office operates now under the guidance and support of all the WFTU affiliates in South Africa. This office operates not only for South Africa. Its main objective is to strengthen the relations between the trade unions in Africa, their common action, their mutual support. This office is working to strengthen the struggle against the plundering of the African wealth from the foreign and local monopolies.

Comrades,  
From the 10th Congress of COSATU until today, the presence of the WFTU in South Africa and the role of the South African unions in the ranks of the class-oriented movement have been enhanced.

In this 11th historic Congress of COSATU, the affiliates of WFTU are inviting their mother-body, COSATU to collectively follow a road they have already tested. The way has been paved by them so that COSATU can find its way back home. To take the historic and important decision for the international trade

union movement and affiliate to the World Federation of Trade Unions.

### **A result of a mature debate**

Comrades,  
This discussion is not a new discussion. This debate has matured. This resolution will come after a mature, rich dialogue. A dialogue where everything has been said. At your International Policy Conference of COSATU which took place on May this year, you discussed this issue in a responsible and sober manner. Though commissions and through the plenary you proposed that COSATU must become a member of the WFTU. Today, with this long debate as a background, with the resolution of the 10th Congress of COSATU and with the suggestion of the COSATU International Policy Conference you come to collectively and democratically take a final decision.

An important conjecture for the international working class

The time when this debate takes place is not incidental. The current condition that the

international trade union movement and the international working class adds extra weight to this decision.

Today, more than ever, the globalized capitalism with its excessive profit, with its huge amounts of profit, is incapable to provide to the working people. It can't provide them with work, bread, shelter, water, clothing, books.

It shows, however, great capabilities in organizing the war against the international proletariat. It takes back all the labour rights that had been gained by the class-oriented trade union movement during the past decades. It hammers the workers with dozens of anti-labour measures in the name of the capitalist crisis. It organizes new imperialist wars, unleashes fire against the people for the control of the energy resources, for the oil. Once more the capitalists and their governments are redesigning the borders and the maps. Once more they spill the workers' blood for the interests of the multinationals.

The main difference today is that the international labour movement is "caught off guard". It is "disarmed". The class of the capitalists with its agents in social-democracy and in the trade unions has managed to divide the workers, to weaken the unions around the world. It has managed to impose reformist leaderships, to impose an opportunistic line and compromise with the class enemy and his governments.

The level of rottenness of some trade unions in Europe and the USA is such, that the workers see no difference between the unions and the companies of legal counselling. Those come to substitute the unions with a simple monthly subscription fee. Even cheaper than what the unions ask for. The workers of Europe and the USA do not see the trade unions as the militant revolutionary unification of workers that will struggle with all means for their rights, for the solidarity and the collectivity amongst the workers. The workers do not see those unions as the school of the revolutionary struggle. In the contrary they see these

unions as bureaucratic mechanisms of collaboration with the bosses. As mediators between the government and the workers. As companies or as departments of the Ministries of Labour.

And all these coincide with very bad conditions within the International Organizations (like the ILO, the UN), negative conditions that makes our own struggle more difficult, more complex.

## **Why we need powerful internationalist unions**

But, today, more than ever, the working class needs to construct powerful trade unions. Unions that will unite all the workers in the industry, in every working place irrespectively of their position in the production. Today we need trade unions that will organize the struggle in every form with determination and combativeness for the conquest of labour rights. We need a consistent and constant front against reformism, against opportunism, against corruption. We need in international level a unified militant front of the proletariat against our common bosses.

Today the trade union movement has to respond to more complex issues.

The simple trade union struggle for the increase of the salaries in one sole factory has to confront a series of hard arguments against the workers:

- The bosses threaten the workers that if they don't accept to work for peanuts they will take their factories and their investments and move to other countries. The same arguments, however, are used in every country to keep the working class in chains. The same argument is used by the bosses even in countries like Nepal of Asia where the monthly salary is about 700 Rand!
- The imperialist wars, the poverty, the hunger, the natural disasters, the unemployment. All those, force masses of workers in labour migration. Even in South Africa, there are many immigrants from Asian

countries who come to find a job although the unemployment is very high. The immigrant workers are the most terrified workers; they are the most exploited workers.

Today, we are in conditions of deep capitalist crisis. In Greece, in Spain, in Portugal, in Italy, in France, in the whole Europe, in the capitalist world.

So can the simple trade union struggle be isolated by the internationalist struggle?

Can the struggle in one country be isolated with the essential solidarity amongst the workers of the world and their struggles?

Can the struggle against one multinational be successful without the coordination between the workers in various countries who work for the same bosses?

Can the struggle of the unions be successful if they don't coordinate their action with common objectives?

Today the proletarian internationalist struggle has an increased role. The cooperation between the national and the sectoral trade union organizations around the world for the coordination and the class orientations of their struggle is vital.

Can those sell-outs, the European trade union leaders, the spineless agents of the bourgeoisie in the trade union movement, the corrupted servants of the Ministries take upon their shoulders such a heavy duty?

No way!

Can an organization which works together with the IMF, which works for the salvation of capitalism and modernization of the capitalist system, express the interests of the workers?

No way! Never!

Comrades,

The discussion that is taking place in South Africa is not a new discussion. The arguments that are used from the WFTU opponents are not new arguments. Actually, these arguments are so old that they have received their response since 1920 (!) when the trade union movement was taking its first steps. Lenin himself in 1920 gave answers to

the same arguments.

Lest remember some of those arguments:

- Some comrades use the argument that reactionary unions can change. Although for example ICFTU an organization that existed from 1949-2005 did not change all those 60 years. The opportunists around the world have always used this argument that they can transform a reactionary organization into a "left" organization. In the end, those organizations that fell for this argument, did not manage to change an inch from the central policy of the reactionary unions, on the contrary they were integrated to it.

Believing that you will transform an international organization that was created by different materials into something else, is like trying to plant a tree in the ocean. Or better, to stick you head in the mouth of a shark believing that from inside its stomach you can beat it.

Comrades,

I have been following your discussions all these period. Allow me to try and contribute to your debate.

- There are some comrades who are using Lenin to hide their true aims. They distort and use some parts of his writing while they hide the rest. There is an argument based on what Lenin wrote in 1920 in the known article to the German communist about leftism. Their argument is that communists must fight within reactionary unions.

**Firstly:** Lenin talks about the infantile period, for 1920 according to the conditions of his own era. Those who mechanically transfer the conditions of one country at a given time into another era, another country and another time for the movement, are purely dogmatists. This is a dogmatic mistake.

**Secondly:** Lenin also says "now we have the immediate task to guide the labour masses in a new position that secures the revolution". Are the reactionary unions struggling for the revolution? Do they have anything to do with socialism? None!



**Thirdly and most importantly:** It was Lenin himself invited all the unions around the world to abandon the yellow international organization of the day, the International of Amsterdam and join in masses the Red Trade Union International (RILU), who Lenin himself played a pioneer role in its foundation.

Today, in 2012 we must learn from our history in order to take a decisive step forward to the future that we must build for the working class today. To learn from our true history and not from distortions.

The contribution of WFTU to the liberation struggle

With the equal respect, we study and learn from the great history and the great struggles that the heroic SACTU and the rest of the affiliates of WFTU organized in common. Struggles against apartheid, for the rights of the black workers, for the recognition of the first non-racial unions, for the recognition of

SACTU, for the freedom of the imprisoned comrades, for the boycott of ships, communications and transactions of the inhuman apartheid regime. The WFTU was then strong and present in this long struggle. The trade union-members around the world and its millions of workers responded to every appeal of the WFTU for solidarity to the South African workers.

Moses Mabhida our leader, Vice-President of WFTU Mark Shope, John Gaitsiwe, Moses Kotane, Leslie Massina, J. B. Marks and the living legend Eric Mtshali with their alignment with WFTU they played a great role in the organization of African trade union movement, in the creation of the first trade union in Africa and the foundation of the first All-Africa Trade Union Federation (AATUF).

### **What kind of trade union movement do we need today?**

With this great history and experience in our shoulders, comrades, we have to respond to the key question of our times. What trade

union movement we need in national and international level to fight effectively for the interests of the working class against the monopolies, against the multinationals? To win battles and to improve the living conditions of the workers and the poor people. To pave a new course where the wealth will belong to those who produce it.

To respond to this question, we as WFTU, study the new conditions of the capitalist development and the capitalist crisis and as WFTU we struggle to educate our members and friends to form trade unions with specific characteristics that will be able to fill the shoes of the intense tasks of the contemporary struggle

We need trade unions that will be:

- Class oriented and revolutionary organizations of the workers struggling against the capital and against imperialism
- Democratic in operation and worker-controlled.
- Unions that will have leadership that



comes from the ranks of the working class. Leadership that respects criticism and self-criticism. Leadership with proletarian discipline that will be dedicated to the struggle against bureaucracy and corruption.

- We need unions that will struggle with determination against the discriminations of workers according to race, gender, religion etc.
- Unions that will promote the alliance between workers, farmers, labour youth and working women.
- Unions that will fulfil their internationalist duties of proletarian solidarity with the people fighting around the world.
- Unions that will educate the generations of workers with the history and the lessons of the international and national trade union movement and the struggles of the working class.
- Unions that will intervene in the International Organizations, that will demand solutions in favor of the workers, that will demand democratic and trade union freedoms and will defend any remaining positive international collective agreement.
- Unions that will not be neutral or with everybody. For example, in the Middle East we are not with Israel. We are with Palestine. We fully support the Palestinian struggle not only with words but with concrete action, day after day. In Syria, we are not with the kings, with the emirs, with the sultans, with the imperialists. They don't care for the democracy in Syria. The care about the resources. They target the oil. As WFTU we firmly say, the people of Syria are the only ones who must choose their present and future. The people of Syria are the only ones responsible to form their democracy and freedom.

With such unions we can bring closer the strategic goal of the socialist society. This kind of unions is what WFTU is struggling to build. Not compromised unions, not unions that are only legal consultants, not unions departments of the ministries of labour, not



trade unions members of the Boards of their multinational companies.

## **The role of COSATU in the international arena**

In this international arena, as WFTU, as an international class oriented organization with 82 million members in 120 countries, we don't want a COSATU spectator. We want a COSATU pioneer in the construction of the contemporary class-oriented trade union movement. We want a COSATU pioneer in the revival of the African trade union movement. We need a COSATU in the leadership of the international trade union movement on the side of the healthy forces around the world. All of us believe that capitalism cannot solve the problems of the working class. Capitalism produces poverty, unemployment, hunger, slums, privatizations, state violence, wars, diseases, environmental disaster. Capitalism produces profits for the few and misery for the many. Only socialism can liberate us. Lets build it

now!

The working class can become the giant that will sweep away the exploiters. This is our duty. We have to lead the struggle of the working class to conquer the wealth for the benefit of the whole society!

Our struggle will be victorious!  
A world without workers is impossible,  
A world without capitalists is necessary!

**A world without workers is impossible,  
A world without capitalists is necessary!**

**The wealth belongs to those who produce it!**



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