

Campaign for a Militant SACTWU

29 May 1991

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Open letter to SACTWU leaders and workers from the delegation of the Campaign for a MILITANT SACTWU.

The Campaign for a Militant SACTWU delegation consists of Karel Swart [Senior Shopsteward at TBS and Northern Suburbs Local executive member], Peter Presence [Dismissed shopsteward from Nettex], Gerard Meyer [Nettex worker], Citness [SBH worker], George [SBH worker], Johanna [Nettex worker], Tina [TBS worker] and Ferguson [Textile Printer worker].

Report of meeting to form steering committee of the Campaign for a militant Sactwu

On Sunday, May 26, the Campaign for a Militant Sactwu called a meeting to form a steering committee to lead the fight for a programme to transform Sactwu into a militant union. This meeting was attended by workers from different factories all over the Peninsula.

Comrades from the regional and national executive of Sactwu, including comrades Ebrahim Patel and Lionel October. They came to stop the Campaign for a militant Sactwu. The comrades from the Campaign did not oppose their attendance to discuss how Sactwu can be built into a fighting union. The intervention of the leadership resulted in chaos at the start of the meeting.

In the weeks before this meeting comrades from the Campaign discussed with many workers from other factories. We held meetings with shopsteward committees and workers in the factories.

With the supporters from the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC we also led the fighting against unfair dismissals at Nettex. We have discussed and campaigned among workers for Sactwu to take up the struggle for a National Minimum Wage of R250 for a 40 hour week, to fight against retrenchment and short time, and for Cosatu to build the ANC into a Workers' Party for majority rule and socialism.

The leadership came to the meeting because they oppose the Campaign for a militant Sactwu. At the start they took charge of the chair and declared the meeting an official Sactwu meeting.

They explained that they believe the comrades supporting the Campaign were "undermining the structures of the union". Comrade Patel said that the union also does not allow intervention of political organisations, such as the ANC and SACP, in the union.

A worker from Nettex responded to this: "The leadership says that the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC must not campaign in the union. When our workers were under attack the union was nowhere. Since the beginning of the year 8 workers, including Peter Presence, have been unfairly dismissed by the bosses. What has the union leaders done to stop this? It was only these comrades who fought with us to defend the union. When the Sans workers were on strike these comrades organised support from other factories."

Another worker got up and said, "This is the first time in a long time that I see the leadership. When there are problems in the factories they are nowhere to be found. Now they are coming to disrupt our meeting." The leadership conceded that up to then very little had been done to

fight for the reinstatement of the comrades.

Other supporters of the Campaign explained that we do not undermine union structures, but as workers we work through them. We campaign to strengthen these structures on a militant programme. We have fought to win back workers who have left the union at SBH and other factories.

In our discussions with workers from other factories we found that the leadership told workers to chase away comrades from the factories. One worker from Lansdowne said that she was told by Sactwu leaders not to support the Campaign because we are from the ANC. At the Sactwu Regional Congress, held on Saturday May 25, comrade Karel Swart, was taken into a special room and threatened with disciplinary action if he continued to campaign for Sactwu to become a militant union.

Seeing the determination of the workers comrade Patel was forced to accept that they could not stop comrades from campaigning for militant ideas in Sactwu.

After a long discussion the following agreement was reached between the leadership and the Campaign for a Militant Sactwu:

* That the union would immediately take up the fight for the reinstatement of comrades Bert Pitts, Peter Presence and all the other workers unfairly dismissed by the bosses.

* That the union will give the Campaign for a militant Sactwu and the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC the opportunity to explain their view on the National Minimum Wage to workers. This will first happen in the Bellville local and then throughout the union.

* That a meeting between the Sactwu leadership and supporters of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC and the Campaign for a militant Sactwu will be organised in the next two weeks.

After this meeting supporters of the Campaign for a Militant Sactwu met to elect the delegation to meet the leadership. The following comrades were unanimously elected:

Karel Swart, Peter Presence, Citness, George, Johanna, Tina, Gerard Meyer, and Ferguson.

Four supporters of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC were elected to form part of this delegation.

In our meeting with the leadership of Sactwu we propose to raise the following:

1. A campaign by Sactwu for the immediate reinstatement of comrades Bert Pitts, Peter Presence and other Sactwu workers dismissed by the bosses

The bosses have launched a fierce attack against our union and militant workers. They want to weaken our power. Since the beginning of the year comrades from Nettex, Finnitex, SBH and other factories have been victimised and dismissed.

Comrades such as Bert Pitts and Peter Presence are leading worker militants in their factories and in the whole union. They have fought consistently in the interests of the workers. This is why the bosses want to get rid of them.

We must organise a fightback against these attacks to defend our union. A successful fight against the textile and garment bosses will strengthen the struggle of all workers against attempts by the bosses and government to weaken our unions.

We propose the following Plan of Action

* A regional 24 hour general strike on June 27 organised by Sactwu if the bosses have not reinstated our comrades by June 19.

* An immediate campaign to mobilise all workers to support this demand through lunch-time demonstrations, go-slows and pickets.

* Sactwu must call on the ANC to support

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!!

2. National Minimum Wage of R250 for a 40 hour week

A national campaign for a minimum wage would strengthen the struggle of all workers for higher wages. It would undermine the attempts by the bosses to use cheap labour against strongly organised workers.

Success in the fight for R250 a week would be a platform on which garment, textile and leather workers can stand in the fight for even higher wages.

The campaign would unite workers nationally and also draw Inkatha supporters back into the struggle against the bosses and their agent Gatsha Buthelezi.

Unfortunately, the Sactwu leadership opposes the National Minimum Wage.

They have even been in the forefront within Cosatu of opposing a struggle for it. They have published an official booklet on the question: **"What are the alternatives to minimum wage laws?"**

Many workers in Sactwu want a campaign for a national minimum wage. They are unhappy that there has been no thorough debate in the union on the position that has been taken by the leadership.

We therefore welcome the Sactwu leadership's undertaking made at the meeting of May 26, to open a discussion on the National Minimum Wage throughout the union, starting in the Bellville local. They have agreed to organise shop stewards meetings through the region. This will give all workers the opportunity to put forward their viewpoint.

To assist in this discussion, we request the leadership to organise and finance the distribution through the union not only of their position, but of other points of view. We request in particular the circulation of the reply to their booklet put forward in the November 1990 edition of Congress Militant, paper of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC.

We believe that this is the best way to ensure that there can be proper debate on this question throughout the union.

3. Build Defence Committees against Inkatha

The ANC and the working class is under

grave threat. Many Sactwu workers in Natal have been killed by Gatsha's warlords. Inkatha is a counter-revolutionary killing machine of the bosses.

Gatsha and Inkatha not only want to smash the ANC but also Cosatu. Now it has opened three branches in the Western Cape.

We have the power to stop this terror against our people. The ANC NEC has called for the formation of armed self defence committees to defend our people against attacks from Inkatha and the state. Sactwu needs to support this call nationwide. We need worker defence committees in the workplaces, to link with and strengthen defence committees in the townships. The best way of ensuring that defence is organised in a disciplined way is if the organised workers take the lead.

WORKERS BUILD THE ANC FOR POWER DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM

SACTWA 220, COSATU