



# **Numsa Special National Congress**

**December 2013**

**Discussion Document 5**

**Numsa Service Charter**

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## 1. What is a charter and why do we need one?

### 1.1. Complaints from Numsa members

- When Numsa members were interviewed by SWOP from Wits University in 2011/12, the vast majority of members said that Numsa had not disappointed them. The satisfied workers told us that as a Numsa member, they had been united with other workers, their wages had increased, they were defended at work, their grievances were taken up, discrimination was fought and that Numsa had represented them politically.
- However, it is the members that **were** disappointed that we wanted to really probe to see how we could improve our service. These are some of the things the disappointed workers said:

*“Numsa has not done anything for us workers as a collective; there has not been any service delivery or positive feedback from Numsa!”*

*“I joined NUMSA when I joined this company. I joined NUMSA because all the years it was NUMSA. I am not happy with the union, because as long as they get our money then it’s ok and they do absolutely nothing for the people. Then I resigned from NUMSA and joined another union with this other company, I was with that union for 15 years until I left that company in 2008. I was happy with that union because the moment I picked up the phone, they would come and represent me.”*

- Numsa’s organizational renewal project which started in the early 2000s proposed to the National Congress last year that Numsa should develop a service charter because of complaints like these. But what do we mean by a charter?

### 1.2. What do we mean by a Charter?

- We all know or have heard of the Freedom Charter – the document that thousands of ANC members helped put together in 1955. The Freedom Charter spelt out the kind of society that the ANC wanted to see in this country and pledged ANC members “to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.”
- Numsa’s preamble to its constitution is like Numsa’s Freedom Charter. It gives us a general guide to where we want to go.

*We, the members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, firmly commit ourselves to a united South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation.*

*We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of an organised and united working class. Our experience has taught us that to achieve this goal we must:*

- (a) fight and oppose discrimination in all its forms within the Union, the factories and in society;*
- (b) strive for maximum unity amongst organised metalworkers and organise every unorganised metalworker into our national industrial Union;*
- (c) ensure that all levels of our Union are democratically structured and controlled by the worker members themselves through elected worker committees;*
- (d) encourage democratic worker leadership and organisation in our factories and in all spheres of society;*
- (e) reinforce and encourage progressive international worker-to-worker contact so as to strengthen the worldwide society of metalworkers.*

*We call on all metalworkers that identify with these principles and aims to join us and the metalworkers we represent, as comrades in the struggle ahead. We call on all metalworkers to set aside any prejudices they may have and strive for unity under the guiding slogan of the international working class:*

***"From each according to their ability; to each according to their needs".***

- The Numsa constitution itself is our rule book – it sets out how the union must function; who is responsible for what, how meetings must be run, what are the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the union.
- The union's policies set out in more detail how the union should reach the objectives set by the preamble in the constitution.
- But Numsa realized that even though we had a Numsa constitution and policies, there was no document that set out clearly what a member could expect from Numsa and what Numsa expected from its members.

## **2. What kind of union is Numsa?**

### **2.1. Numsa's history**

- When unions like the ones which came before Numsa forerunners were formed from the 1960s and 1970s, they debated what kind of a trade union should be formed. At the time they focused on two key options:

**Option A: A benefit union:** The worker paid their dues, the official provided the service. The added attractions were the benefits that the union provided like a funeral fund, sick fund and/or bursary fund. **OR**

**Option B: A revolutionary union:** The union was 'the workers'; workers owned and controlled the union; workers would elect shop stewards and be trained by the union to lead workers; shop stewards would defend workers in disciplinary hearings at their workplace, take up workers' grievances and represent workers in meetings and negotiations with management. The official would help guide and coordinate but the leading was done by the shop stewards. Workers united were responsible for winning victories in their companies and in society. Such a union would build working class consciousness amongst the workers

so that members and shop stewards would take a much more political and revolutionary role both where they worked and lived.

- At that time the apartheid system ensured that there were few laws that favoured workers. Repression, harassment and detention of shop stewards and office bearers of the union by the police were rife. It made sense for trade unions to be strong at a factory floor level to survive the heavy hand of the state.

## **2.2. Numsa is a revolutionary union**

- If you look at Numsa's constitution and its policies, we are rooted in Option B – a revolutionary trade union. As the General Secretary said in his presentation to the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, Numsa is:

*a revolutionary formation, a red union, playing a leading role in the defeat of capitalism and the exploitation that is associated with it. In that role we are unashamedly Marxist-Leninist, rooting ourselves in the traditions of Marx and Lenin. So we defy the boundaries between nations that are set up to divide workers as we proclaim ourselves as proletarian internationalists. That tradition also gives us democratic centralism, that combination of robust, vigorous and democratic debate with the discipline of marching together when we have made a decision. That combination makes us what we are proud to be - a red union.*

## **2.3. A revolutionary union must service its members**

- But a revolutionary union must provide service to its members as much as, or even more than, a benefit union.
- In a revolutionary union, members constantly confront management as they seek to win benefits and improve wages and conditions. Management fights back, disciplining and harassing our members.
- Those members must be protected and represented by the union. The SWOP survey shows that this is what most of our members want: protection (30%), followed by representation (22%) and assistance on workplace rights (13%).

## **3. What does quality service mean to members?**

### **3.1. The problems of poor service**

- Poor service can make workers feel disempowered and uninterested in the union; they can feel that the union has failed them so they may resign or threaten to resign; they can feel that they are not being listened to/or are being taken advantage of; this increases the gap between members and the union;
- Poor service can weaken and even destroy a union. We just have to look at what happened at Marikana where an established union imploded and lost vast numbers of members, to see that it can happen to any union if it is not careful.

- The GS report to the August 2012 Central Committee, just after Marikana, said:

- Our involvement in every aspect of our work must be about members first and growing the organisation; there is no union, there are no politics, there is no ability to make resolutions unless the members come first
- All shop stewards and officials must get out of our comfort zones:
  - In small panel beaters, Numsa members must feel that Numsa is their shield, their forest, their protector, Numsa touches their lives.
  - We must always go back to the shop floor, taking up bread and butter issues that affect workers.
- We must prepare for an assault on trade unions by the bosses and the state in order to reduce union power. The result could be an attempt to reduce trade union power and promote sweetheart unions, coming down hard on militant unions like Numsa.
- Our unity, in the face of this kind of dynamic, is even more important than ever; unity can only be built on tolerance and diversity. We have a choice:
  - be diverse and united and grow, or
  - be intolerant and divided and shrink.

### 3.2. What is quality service?

- First we need to know what members think about service. During the SWOP survey members described service in this way:
  1. what the union office does for members;
  2. benefits which the union provides such as funeral schemes and bursaries for children of members;
  3. frequency of visits to factories by organisers; and
  4. Representation of members in company disciplinary hearings. ???
- Recently Numsa ran the 'Oiling the engines' workshop for local and regional office bearers and staff. They enriched the proposals above with these ideas:
  5. When a member with a problem seeks advice and s/he is heard, assisted and provided with constant feedback.
  6. When a member gets their desired result, and if this was not possible that they understand why, without being misled or being lied to.(the Constitutional Court recently awarded damages to members against the union because it had not represented them properly)
  7. Quality service starts from shop stewards, they are the first port of call, but ultimately all in the union are responsible.
  8. Providing training and capacity building to improve on the organisation and representation of members.
  9. Defending members against all forms of discrimination.
  10. Service is about building the confidence of members in their union.

### 4. How do we provide quality service?

- Over the past few years, Numsa has adopted proposals to improve the service and functioning of the organization. Some proposals are already functioning; others are still in the process of being set-up. They are summarized below and explained in more detail on the next page.
  - The annual assessment of service to members and the setting up of a call centre.
  - Discussions on the lessons from Marikana – 8-point plan of action.
  - The four year strategic plan on service.
  - The development of the shop steward reporting form.

- Motsotso wa NUMSA.
- The Oiling the Engines workshops.

#### **4.1. Annual assessment and complaints centres**

- The national congress of June 2012 proposed that there should be annual service evaluations of service plans to members, at all levels. It also proposed that complaint desks be set up from locals right up to national level, or a national call centre.

#### **4.2. Lessons from Marikana: Numsa's 6-point plan of action**

- The Numsa Central Committee of August 2012 discussed the Marikana killings and proposed these ideas to prevent a Marikana in our own companies:
  1. Be careful about preferring one section of members over another.
  2. Put members first and grow the organisation.
  3. In small establishments Numsa members must feel that Numsa is their shield and their spear.
  4. Go back to the shopfloor and take up bread and butter issues that affect workers.
  5. Prepare for an assault on trade unions by the bosses and the state in order to reduce union power.
  6. Our unity is more important than ever before. As a union we have TWO options: Be diverse, united and grow **OR** Be intolerant, divided and shrink.

#### **4.3. Tighten up monitoring**

- The NEC of May 2013 adopted a monitoring form that shop stewards must complete on an ongoing basis. The form requires shop stewards to fill in details of things like:
  1. What is the state of membership and organisation in different workplaces?
  2. Who makes up NUMSA membership in different workplaces. Is it young or old workers? Is it men or women?
  3. Are there rival unions challenging NUMSA?
  4. Are cases and issues being tackled at shopfloor level by shopstewards?
  5. Are shop stewards convening factory general meetings?
  6. Are shopfloor structures such as skills committees, youth and gender functioning?
- The answers to these questions can help the local shop steward committee understand whether the shop steward is on top of problems that they are tackling at workplace level. The local shop steward committee must monitor these forms on an ongoing basis.

#### **4.4. Build structures, improve organization and service**

- The CC of March 2013 adopted the 4-year plan of action until the next national congress in 2016. It undertakes to:
  - Build structures in the union and
  - Improve the organisation of members and the service the union offers to those members.

#### **4.5. Motsotso wa Numsa: appreciate 'the Numsa moment'**

- In March 2013, the Numsa CC agreed on a campaign of "Motsotso wa Numsa". This is a Sepedi/ Sesotho/ Setswana phrase that translates to "Numsa's time" or "Numsa's moment".
  - It is Numsa's time to lead the fighting battalions of the working class and broader society.
  - Motsotso wa Numsa demands that we provide quality service to you, our members!

#### **4.6. Develop a service charter**

- Numsa's organizational renewal project recommended to the national congress in June 2012 that a service charter be developed. The NC adopted this proposal and what you are reading now is part of the process to develop this charter.
- Given that we have identified that Numsa is a revolutionary trade union, then the kind of service charter that we would expect to see would be a combination of what a member could expect to receive as well as the responsibilities of a member.
- But the final say is up to you, the Numsa member!

#### **5. How can you take part in drafting the service charter?**

- Anyone in Numsa can contribute to drafting this service charter. Already local, regional office bearers and local coordinators and administrators have had a chance to talk about their ideas in the Oiling the Engines workshop. Each local represented in these workshops had a chance to draft a service charter.
- Recently the local education committees ran workshops on 'providing quality service to members'. Comrades were encouraged to come with their ideas.
- On October 19 there were special local shop steward councils or local general meetings. At these meetings, there were suggestion boxes for you to post your ideas into the box.
- At the RPWs and Regional Congresses leading up to the Special National Congress, Regions should put forward their proposals.
- Or you can:
  - fax your ideas to: Numsa service charter – 011 834 4320
  - Post them to Numsa service charter, PO Box 260483, Excom 2023
  - e-mail them to [edwardr@numsa.org.za](mailto:edwardr@numsa.org.za)
- All of these ideas will be put together for the Numsa special national congress that will take place from 13-16 December.
- The special national congress will further discuss these ideas and adopt a draft service charter. You will then have another chance to comment, add or amend before the service charter is finally adopted at a Numsa central committee in 2014.

## 6. Tips from Tom: how to be an effective shop steward

***Former Numsa president, Comrade Mtutuzeli Tom, was a shop steward from 1983 until he passed on in 2010. Below are his tips on how to be an effective shop steward as told to current president, Cedric Gina. Let them help guide you in deciding what the role of the shop steward should be in providing quality service to you:***

1. Take your own personal things and leave them behind. Get yourself occupied by the needs of the workers. It is a sacrifice that shop stewards have got to make. There is no other alternative to this one - issues of workers must preoccupy the shop stewards. Your own personal issues are secondary, it is a pain that you are going to endure, and it's a blow that you've got to take. Therefore as a shop steward you must have a strong chin so that you'll be able to take that punch!
2. Always put yourself in the same shoes as the workers. Don't behave as if you are the brightest and the cleverest of them all. Work with them, don't work for them. Make them feel part and parcel of what you do. Discuss the problems that you are encountering in the process of doing the work with them. Workers are going to assist you and this does not necessarily mean just meeting and raising these issues.

Talk to workers, even on a one-to-one basis. Talk to them on the train to work, talk to them in the taxi, during lunch break, talk to them on the line, and raise the problems that you are facing. Workers will always assist you as shop stewards on how to deal with issues. And if you succeed in doing that, workers see that they are directly participating in resolving problems. And that begins to create a huge amount of unity amongst the workers themselves and builds the trust of workers in their organisation, because they can see that their ideas have worked, that their ideas have provided solutions to the problem that they are facing.

And workers remember, are thinkers, they think very well. And they also read between the lines, they can easily separate the truth from the lie and on the basis of that, workers lose trust in that particular shop steward. Definitely in the next election, workers are not going to elect someone who lies to them.

3. Remember that members have got a democratic right to elect you or not to elect you, to replace you or to recall you, using the NUMSA constitution.

I think one of the reasons people sometimes fail is that they pretend to know everything. They think that if they stand in front of workers and say, 'Comrade, I don't understand this, comrade I don't know this, let me go and check further information so that I can give you a relevant answer', that it begins to show signs of a weak shop steward rather than a strong shop steward. And as a result of that, people start to lie to workers.

4. Some of us do not say things as they are to workers. We always like to appease workers. We always like to be seen as people who say things that workers want to hear every time and every day. That in itself limits the understanding of workers, or the broad understanding of workers of the complex issues that we as shop stewards are facing today.

Workers must be told everything. Because they are human beings they will be able to provide solutions to the problems we as shop stewards are facing rather than running away from issues precisely because we believe that workers are going to be angry to hear that. If it is correct, tell them so that they can be angry and in the process of being angry, workers will be able to provide solutions to the problems.

So those are some of the weaknesses that we as shop stewards always have, that of always coming to workers and bringing the things that we believe workers will be happy to hear and we don't report issues to workers that we believe will make them angry. So weaknesses of that nature really shorten our leadership capabilities.