



**NUMSA press statement on Womens Day under the GNU
9 August 2024
Press statement**

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) salutes all women as we prepare to commemorate and remember the bravery of the women who stood up against the brutal Apartheid system, on the 9th of August 1956. More than 20 000 women gathered at the Union Buildings in Pretoria to reject the Dompas system, which was a dehumanizing form of identification, which the Apartheid government had invented, to control the lives of Black and African people. The march was led by militant women like Rahima Moosa, Lillian Ngoyi, Sophia Williams De-Bruyn and Helen Joseph.

The historic march was sparked by the decision taken by the Apartheid government to extend the Dompas document to black and African women in 1952. Before then, it was only issued to African men. The Dompas was used to control the number of Black people in urban places and to keep them out of spaces dominated by Whites. Hundreds of thousands of men were arrested every day on minor pass law violations and this was used as a way to deepen the misery of the African working class. This march was significant because women organised themselves, to go and confront the oppressor. They marched, some even walked for hours to the union buildings, with babies on their backs. It was during this march that the phrase,

“Wathint’ abafazi wathint’ imbokodo! Which means if your strike a woman, you strike a rock”. These women demonstrated real power and resilience, hence they were compared to a rock.

It has been 68 years since that historic march and there have been a lot of changes since that day. In 1994 South Africa had its first democratic elections where for the first time Africans were allowed to vote. It is unfortunate that since Apartheid was removed from the statute books, today South Africa is the most unequal society in the world with staggering levels of poverty and unemployment.

Capitalism is the new Apartheid. Under Apartheid being black was a barrier to quality education, quality healthcare and a life of dignity. Now, you need to be wealthy to experience the benefits of freedom. Without a decent income, the working class is blocked from achieving a life of dignity and genuine equality. Democratic South Africa gave birth to a society where a handful of people own the entire wealth of the country, whilst the majority of people languish in extreme suffering caused by the failure of the capitalist system to transform the lives of the majority of people. According to [Daily Investor](#) these seven men, Johann Rupert, Nicky Oppenheimer, Patrice Motsepe, Koos Bekker, Micheil Le Roux, and Christo Wiese are the richest in the country. They are content to live in the lap of luxury, whilst surrounded by a sea of poverty. Their wealth makes them immune to the difficulties faced by ordinary people. This is why the capitalist elite are deaf and blind to the suffering of the poorest of the poor.

More recently, the Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed following the May 2024 elections where the governing ANC lost a significant majority. We were told that a GNU where the ANC goes into a right-wing coalition dominated by the DA, would be good for democracy,

but more specifically for the markets. The 'markets' are responsible for the extreme inequality that we experience on a daily basis in South Africa. The markets are controlled by the very same handful of billionaires that own and control South Africa's economy, and what the markets want, is for the inequality and poverty to continue.

If South Africa has extremely high levels of unemployment, then it makes it easier for capital and corporations to pay workers peanuts so that they can get richer and richer. The markets do not want our society to attain genuine equality because higher salaries and improved living and working conditions, would affect their profits. The markets do not care that a woman in the Eastern Cape was so desperately poor, that she killed her children and committed suicide because they were starving and could not afford to feed themselves.

The markets are not interested in ensuring that every child has a plate of food to eat, and has access to quality education and healthcare which is freely accessible. The markets want the freedom to dictate to government on policy, in order to ensure that economic policies are implemented to benefit those who are already wealthy.

There will be no change in the lives of the working class and the poor as long as the markets are in control and this is why the lives of the masses will never change under this GNU, in fact the suffering is likely to worsen.

The work to free the masses is incomplete and it will require the unity of the working class to end their suffering. The generation of 1956 showed us all what is possible when women unite and fight against injustice. Their actions and the actions of many brave women of the struggle show us that it is our responsibility to come together as women, and chart a part for freedom, for all of us, so that we can attain genuine liberation, equality and freedom for the society as a whole and for our collective benefit, not just to enrich a tiny wealthy minority.

ENDS

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