

## **Saftu, Cosatu Criticize Government, March Against Social Injustice**

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On Wednesday, 24 August 2022, trade union federations Saftu (South African Federation of Trade Unions) and Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions) partook in a national shutdown as more than 600 people marched from Burgers Park to the Union Buildings in the City of Tshwane. The national shutdown was decided in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Working Class summit that took place on 5 August 2022. The march was arranged to address the socio-economic issues that the country is facing and to mobilize the community to fight against capitalism and the mismanagement of government by the ANC (African National Congress).

Cosatu members and their affiliates were also at Burgers Park but occupying a different side to Saftu. There were also a number of community-based organisations who came under the banner of Saftu while others were allied to Cosatu. This led to two separate groups in conflict to each other forming at different ends of the Union Buildings. The division was later addressed by the leaders of the different groups as they negotiated and the crowd was addressed as one, march leaders taking turns to speak about the purpose and demands of the march. Following this, the protesters were able to deliver a memorandum of grievances and demands, as one unified front.

The memorandum raised issues around the swelling costs of living, loadshedding, unemployment, and the campaigns against austerity programs, as well as against the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, crime and xenophobia. The demands made includes jobs for the unemployed, a basic income grant of R1500 to address the levels of poverty amongst the unemployed and the demand the lowering on the cost of food, fuel, electricity and interest rates. According to the unions some of these problems are a deliberate doing of the government as they only care about profits.

Professor Kate Alexander from the University of Johannesburg and activist from the Community Organizing Working group, an organisation that mobilizes community organizations and works mostly with the unemployed, said "I'm not only here as an academic but as an activist in support of the demands raised here today."

Kate said that another reason she decided to join the shutdown march was highlight the vaccination drive that they are working on as the government's policies and laws prevent the unemployed from receiving vaccinations.

"The main thing we are hoping for is to work with people with broadly similar agendas to establish a much greater unity between the employed working class and the unemployed working class," said Alexander.

Another big issue that they had been working on has been the issue of food shortages. Many people are suffering from this and there had been increase in malnutrition.

Abongile Bhevu who is part of the Assembly of the Unemployed spoke about the need to organise and close the wealth gap between the working class and the rich.

Bhevu said that he is extremely worried that after a long day of marching there has been no clear direction given as a way forward besides organising another march.

According to two sisters who live near the Union Buildings, Mhlali and Nomvula Mthimkhulu, it would have been better if Saftu and Cosatu rather met with officials from the African National Congress (ANC) and its government instead of marching to Tshwane, calling the action unproductive. One reason for their position is that they see the unions as being allied to the incumbent government. Cosatu forms part of the tripartite alliance together with the ANC – currently the ruling party – and the South African Communist Party.

Saftu issued a statement in which it gave an analysis of what it considered the successes of the march, saying it valued the raising of class consciousness more than anything else.

“The success of the shutdown cannot only be measured by the actions which occurred today. It must also be measured through an assessment of the rising class consciousness of the workers’ movement as a whole”, said the statement issued by the President of the Saftu-affiliated General Industrial Workers Unions of South Africa (Giwusa), Mametlwe Sebei.

To further support the claim, the youngest union federation in the country claimed that a majority of the workers observed a stayaway in accordance with the aims of the national protests.

“...the majority of workers, far more than the combined membership of the unions, and many more communities, observed the stayaway and stayed home.”

Saftu said the response reflected a positive sign of unity between “organised labour

Cosatu gave a general assessment of the industrial action although the federation also highlighted the need for the protests.

“Never has this need to defend the public sector been so critical than in this period we are now in. The Federation remains committed not only to defending the public sector, but also to ensuring that the public sector plays an appropriate transformative role for a radical social and economic change in favour of the workers and the poor.”

Saftu said that it was clear that the ruling class and their allies in government, will not never change society of their own will.

The two federation unions said that they will continue marching even next month in September.

*This article is an amalgam of various submissions by FAJs around Gauteng. The various articles were submitted in mid-August 2022. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online ([www.Karibu.org.za](http://www.Karibu.org.za)), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.*