

Why I joined WASP

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Tshwane branch secretary

When one grows up in a poor working class family, we grow up facing many injustices including those done to us by our government and the leaders we entrusted with power. They promised to take us to a land of milk and honey but we have only found ourselves in a land filled with service delivery droughts.

The reason why me and most people concerned about change – real change! – are sick and tired of the current politicians is because they are battling for the capitalists while in a camouflage suit. They make us think they play for us while their interests lie with the capitalists. Capitalism is a scourge which brings to a healthy life all kinds of uncomfortable ailments for ordinary people.

WASP has provided me with a sense of hope that the masses organised can become a force to be reckoned with. WASP creates a home for working class and poor people to come around one table and share in the feast of ideology that is Marxism – an ideology that will



emancipate the working class and the poor and arm us to lead revolutions.

It's that sense of unity towards one purpose – the struggle for socialism – that made me join the party, linking that to the day-to-day fight for free basic services such as water, electricity, housing, food, education, employment etc. That's what makes a working class person join a party such as WASP. WASP is and continues to be a political school for me. I joined WASP because I want to fight for socialism in my life and for the future of the working class and the poor.

Interview: A burning issue – Johannesburg EMS in crisis

Following the fire on the 18 May 2015 at the Nedbank Mall in Von Weilligh Street, Johannesburg, in which two firefighters lost their lives in the line of duty. Izwi spoke to Dan Motsoeneng, the firefighters' spokesperson who represented them in negotiations with EMS (Emergency Management Services) management.

Please relate the events of 18 May 2015.
A call came in to the fire station at Kruis Street. Kruis Street is meters away from the fire, but they could not respond as there was no fire engine available. Fire engines had to be dispatched from Fairview, Malvern and Brixton. All these are a distance away. It was found that the transformer was on fire and the basement was engulfed in smoke. As time was of the essence, the firefighters went in to combat the fire. At that point there was no officer on hand. When he arrived he took two firefighters with him to inspect the situation. The officer later emerged claiming that one man was down. It was later revealed that the other fireman had called his father and the driver of the fire engine to tell them that he was still in the basement and had run out of air and was dying. Let it be known that only the officer had a flashlight and there was no safety rope.

Could these deaths have been avoided?
Yes, the officer should have been available from the onset and each firefighter should have been equipped with the basics - a flashlight, a safety rope which would enable one to find his way in poor visibility as well as face masks that are in proper working condition.

Firefighters have been involved in negotiations with management directly - are you not unionized?

Firefighters belonged to SAMWU, but they were too weak. For 14 years they did not address our grievances. We realized our fate was in our hands and an alternate union – DEMAWUSA [Democratic Municipal Workers Union of SA] was formed.

What are the grievances?

We require proper equipment. As seen in the Nedbank Mall fire incident a lack of equipment leads to the loss of lives. We

also need to be paid as per conditions of employment. Proper facilities should be provided. At present there are 50 firemen to one toilet, with no distinction between men and women. There are no proper restrooms and in winter we are forced to sit and use heaters in the motor vehicles to keep warm. Being a firefighter is a calling. For us to be effective we need effective management. In townships the fire stations double up as a sick bay. This is because the ambulance service is not functioning effectively. Often during weekends people lie dead on the floor while over-extended personnel attend to those they can help. The nature of our jobs is stressful. On a daily basis we are face to face with death and horror. So it is no surprising that suicide and alcoholism are on the increase amongst firefighters. Yet we have no psychological services available. Firefighters are constantly threatened and told not to talk to the media. We deserve the right to freedom of speech.

Your list of grievances does not include an increase in remuneration. Is this correct?

Yes. We are not demanding any increases in remuneration at all. All we want is to be paid for the hours we work.

Faced with all these difficulties does this imply that firefighter training is also inadequate?

No, the training is adequate. In fact if the management functioned as well as the training facility there would be no problem. Take Mr Kok as an example. He is a devoted trainer and a great inspiration to all – he gives 100%. So there is clearly no problem with training. The problem is the quality of people hired to management positions.

What is the way forward?

All the stakeholders should sit around one table and discuss how emergency services should be provided. The threat to keep silent and keep matters secret and the instilling of fear in the firefighters does not help the cause. It should be noted that the most important stakeholder is the community because our job is to serve the community. If the community does not win, nobody wins. Our fight is no different to the constant cry of the public – that is service delivery.



Work & Income

1. Decent jobs for all – end unemployment through a massive public works programme of socially-useful jobs including the building of houses, roads, schools and hospitals; struggle for a living wage of R12 500 per month for all full-time workers; end labour broking and make all contract workers permanent
2. For a 30 hour working week and the sharing out of work with no loss of pay to address unemployment, improve workers' quality of life and lay the basis for workers' control of the economy
3. For a basic income grant of R8 000 for all those not in work – unemployed, pensioners, disabled and struggle veterans

Service delivery

4. For free, sufficient and accessible public services for all; stop cut-offs and evictions
5. End homelessness with a mass public works programme to build decent homes for all those in need, roads and free, accessible and sufficient electricity, water, sanitation and social services for all
6. For publicly funded, free, accessible and high quality education for all from nursery to university; cancel student debt and end financial and academic exclusions
7. For publicly funded and free, accessible and high quality health care for all run under the democratic control of patients, communities and health workers; nationalise the private health providers, insurers and pharmaceutical companies
8. For an affordable, efficient and integrated public transport system; scrap e-tolls
9. For a mass public waste recycling programme linked to creating sustainable and quality jobs

Economy

10. Nationalise under democratic working class and community control the banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and big businesses.
11. A publicly owned and democratically planned socialist economy to meet the needs of all and not the profits of the capitalists.

The Land

12. Nationalise the 36 000 commercial farms that control 95% of agricultural land; support and debt cancellation for small and subsistence farmers
13. Democratically elected community committees to determine the use of non-agricultural land – home-owner occupiers and small business premises exempt
14. Rapid re-direction of energy generation toward renewable sources; redirection of polluting industries and agriculture with retraining and guaranteed jobs for all workers; no fracking or new nuclear or coal-fired power generation

Fighting for rights

15. End the racist legacy of apartheid by ending the real capitalist economic foundations upon which racism rests. Transfer genuine economic and political power to the predominantly black working class majority through nationalisation under working class control. No to the ANC's elitist capitalist Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies.
16. Joint struggle against xenophobia and racism; trade unions must organise immigrant workers
17. Women and men fight together against gender-based violence and rape and for gender equality in every sphere of society, including equal pay for equal work, access to jobs, housing, free pre-school for all to give women genuine freedom to end abusive relationships
18. United struggle and solidarity to end hate crimes against LGBTI people

United struggle for socialism

19. Campaign for democratic worker-controlled trade unions; Cosatu out of the Tripartite Alliance; for Cosatu, Nactu and independent unions to campaign for the creation of a united mass working class party
20. Build the Socialist Youth Movement as part of the struggle to create a mass, revolutionary movement of working class youth and students
21. Unite and coordinate the service delivery protests under one banner with a common programme of demands; build a nationwide socialist civic movement
22. Build the Workers and Socialist Party as a step toward the creation of a mass working class party on a socialist programme
23. For a working class state and a socialist government based on democratic working class and community committees
24. For a socialist SA, a socialist Africa and a socialist world

For elaboration and explanation please read our full manifest *Only Socialism Means Freedom* available on our website at www.workerssocialistparty.co.za

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