

Towards A Powerful Value Chains Trade Union: South African NUMSA's Expanded Scope

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Abstract

This case study of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) analyses the union's efforts to transform itself into a value chain-based union with the goal of meeting the challenges of globalizing capital. Toward this end, NUMSA would have to be able to organize and service workers along value chains in targeted sectors in South Africa. Whereas the initial assumption was that NUMSA would build its value chain around its largest sector, the automotive industry, the finding is that NUMSA's strategy is to organize in sectors not necessarily interconnected to the automotive and metalworking industries, but where the exercise of structural power is likely to have the most disruptive impact in the economy. With its decision to embark on this path and its ensuing expulsion from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), internal support for this course has been manifested, testifying to a solidifying of the union's associational power. The challenge for NUMSA today is to harness this associational power along the value chains and translate it into workplace bargaining power. Equally important for NUMSA is the goal of forging institutional power especially through a strategy for newly structured collective bargaining councils.

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