NUMSA

The 1980s – The Turbulent years

By the end of the 1970s, MAWU, NUMARWOSA, WPMAWU, MICWU were still small. But the government could not make them go away. In 1987 they merged to form one giant – the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, NUMSA. With 130 000 members, it was the biggest metal union ever in the history of South Africa and in Africa.

But it was not easy to survive the 1980s. Many thousands of workers joined the unions. Workers became strong on the factory floor. Workers went on strike all over the country. Sometimes they won what they wanted, sometimes they lost the issue and their jobs, but they never lost their dignity.

But the country was in crisis. The majority of its people hated apartheid. The world hated apartheid. The economy was struggling to survive. Thousands of workers were retrenched and yet workers kept joining the unions.
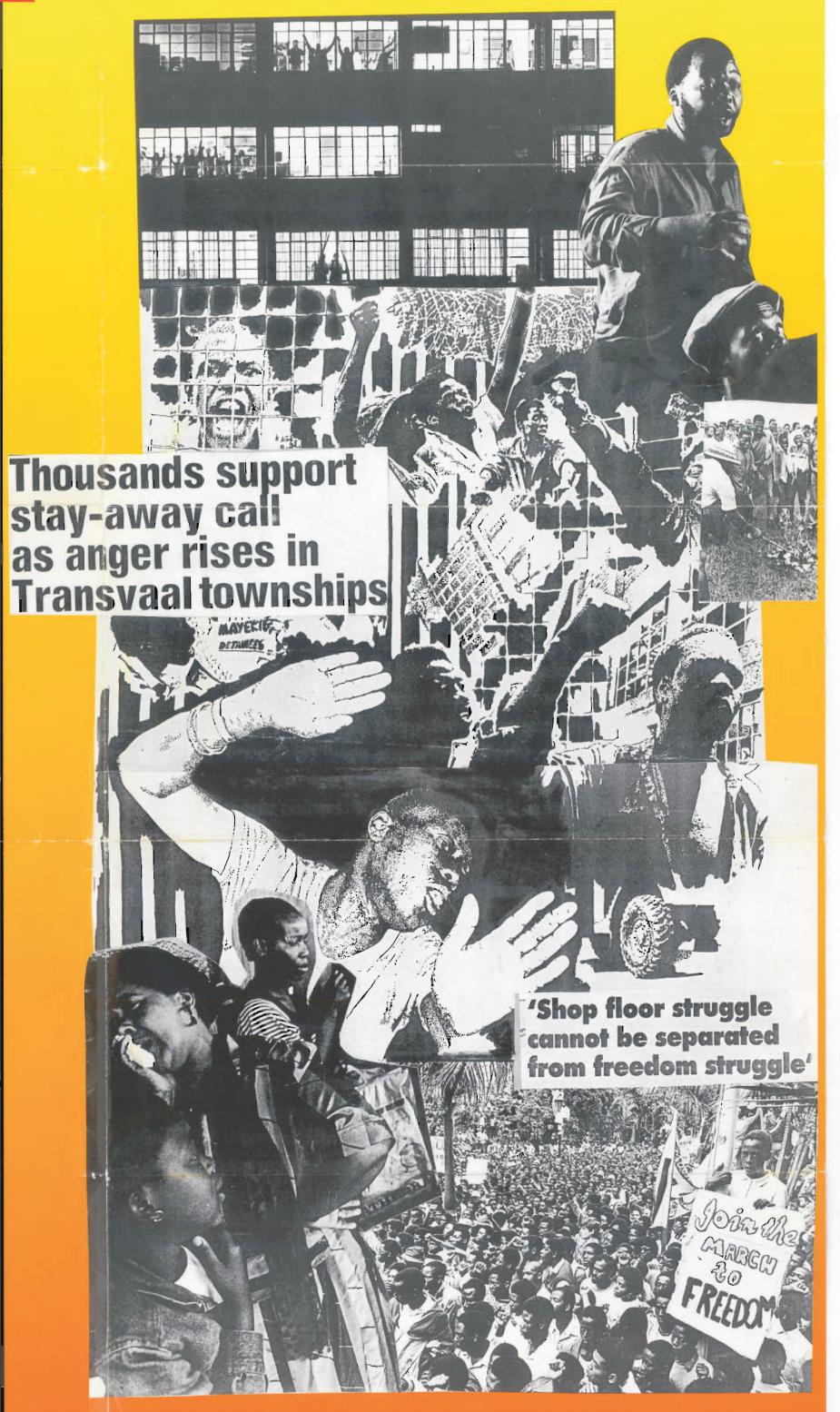
At home, workers' children were suffering under Bantu education. They came to workers for advice, for support in their struggle. Living conditions in the townships were appalling. Workers began to say "at work we are organised on the factory floor through our trade unions. We must organise in the same way in the community to improve our living conditions."

In Alexandra, in Pietermaritzburg, in Esikhawini, in Oukasie, all over the country, workers gave their support and their leadership to the fight to crush apartheid.

NUMSA members and their families suffered at the hands of government. Government harassed them, it attacked them, it detained them, it put them in jail and it killed them. We remember Cdes Jabu Ndlovu, Phineas Sibiya, Simon Ngubane, Flomenah Mnikathi, Joyce Modimoeng and many, many others.

But it could not kill workers' power. By the end of the 1980s, COSATU (with NUMSA one of its biggest affiliates) was recognised as the voice of the working people. It played its part alongside other political organisations to change the government and the laws.

Forward to Socialism!

NUMSA
INSIMBI AYIGOBI

NUMSA
NATIONAL UNION OF METALWORKERS OF SOUTH AFRICA

10
1987-1997

TEN YEAR RALLY - 24 MAY
COME AND CELEBRATE!

Thousands support stay-away call as anger rises in Transvaal townships

'Shop floor struggle cannot be separated from freedom struggle'

Join the MARCH to FREEDOM