

Former Numsa leader says split is necessary

by [Natasha Marrian](#), for Business Day

FORMER National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) general secretary Moses Mayekiso this week looked on as the trade union contemplated a step he had advocated 20 years ago — a split from the alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP).

Mr Mayekiso, a Congress of the People MPL in Gauteng who can be described as having had a chequered political history, told Business Day he believes his former union is coming "full circle".

Numsa on last 19 december put the final touches on its resolutions, likely to be far-reaching, after four days of discussion on the state of the alliance, support for the ANC in next year's elections, and the crisis in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

Mr Mayekiso, sitting unassumingly at the back of the hall during the union's special national conference, hailed metal workers for "going back to the basics".

"The working class is rising against what is happening in our country," he said. Cosatu was "imploding" and it was necessary to extricate workers from the crisis. The federation no longer had the clout to compel Numsa to "toe the line".

"This is a revival of our spirit to say that we can go somewhere. There are organisations that say enough is enough, so it's a revival of the spirit of the working class."

In 1993, Mr Mayekiso argued that the union had realised "something was wrong" with the configuration of the alliance. The union felt workers had to be "equal partners" if it was going to gain from being part of it.

"As Numsa, we have always been clear that the working class must take leadership ... we said if the alliance is led by one party, it would be a mistake." But Numsa's view then was defeated in Cosatu.

Now, Cosatu has been weakened by infighting, making it easier for Numsa to forge ahead with radical decisions, even if these are rejected by the federation itself.

"Cosatu is in crisis, it is imploding. You can see that they are not going to be able to influence Numsa to toe the line any more so that is the beginning of the end of a strong Cosatu," Mr Mayekiso said.

"Cosatu cannot be the federation of yesterday which had represented workers. They are now happy

to play second fiddle to the ANC and the SACP," he said.

He blamed interference by the SACP for much of what had gone wrong in Cosatu. The ANC's failure to implement the Freedom Charter was a clear sign the status quo had to be challenged, he said.

"What you see now is the looting of resources of the state instead of transforming society ... and therefore this conference represents a situation where we are saying everything is gone, we are going nowhere. This is a revival of our spirit to say that we can go somewhere."

But a more recent leader of the union, former president Cedric Gina, who chose to extricate himself from it because of his unhappiness over its current trajectory, disagreed that the union is coming full circle and returning to its roots of putting workers' interests first. Mr Gina, who resigned from Numsa last month, said that in 1993 South Africa did not have the constitution, which was adopted in 1996. Back then, it was easier to call for a split, though it was destined for failure.

Mr Gina said anger within Numsa's current leaders over what is happening in Cosatu is clouding their judgment — making it impossible to realise any of the "radical" reforms it wishes to see in the economy.

"For any radical change to be effected by the ruling party, like nationalisation, it needs a two-thirds majority in order to change the constitution.

"Now which party has the ability to achieve a two-thirds majority? If workers go to another party, they reduce the electoral majority of the ANC. This will postpone the radical transformation that Numsa is demanding," Mr Gina said.

The constitution hampers the implementation of any of the resolutions Numsa is calling for, such as nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, he said.

But Mr Mayekiso said Numsa's trajectory was exactly what the country needed to radically challenge the status quo and bring about true transformation.

"Elsewhere on the continent the working class has been used as voting fodder and, once the liberation movement is in power, the elite consumes all that is produced in the country and brutalises the working class. That is coming now. Marikana is that," he said.

Numsa is set to announce the outcome of its conference on Friday.