

Stalinist witch-hunt paves the way for violent repression

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the death of Joe Slovo, South African Communist Party General Secretary Blade Nzimande evoked Slovo's memory ("... a living embodiment of our Alliance!") on January 6th this year as a stick to beat political opponents in the working class movement, whom he accused of wanting "to become media heroes through unprincipled attacks on the ANC".

"The good example set by Slovo epitomises the importance of unity in the struggle for liberation, the unity of our Alliance; the unity of our broad movement; the unity of the working class; the broad unity of our people!"

(To what extent this Alliance is really "united" is described in detail in other articles in this dossier.)

Nzimande quoted from Slovo's "seminal work" *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*:

"The classes and strata which come together in a front of struggle usually have different long-term interests and, often, even contradictory expectations from the immediate phase. The search for agreement usually leads to a minimum platform which excludes some of the positions of the participating classes or strata."

(We also look in detail in another article at the way the leaders of the "Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917" saw the active and leading role of the working class in revolutions in which other oppressed labouring classes were involved, and indeed how their views on this really developed alongside their growing understanding of what was then the early decades of imperialism.)

Nzimande carefully skirted around the fact that the “classes and strata” with whom the SACP/ANC leaders made a common front at the beginning of the 1990s included the big international mining corporations and people like the billionaire participants in the Bilderberg conference. He glibly asserted: “As Slovo states ... the working class did not simply melt into the Alliance once it was created. The working class did NOT ‘abandon its independent class objectives or independent class organisation’.”

And it is true that the working class has not “abandoned its independent class objectives”, but it has had to turn to its militant trade unions to fight for them, since the SACP is not an “independent class organisation”. The SACP certainly does not fight for real “independent class objectives”, as the reply of COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi to SACP Deputy General Secretary Jeremy Cronin (also discussed in another article), for all its very diplomatic language, makes abundantly clear.

Nzimande continued: “Worker participation in the ANC is one of the important ways in which our working class plays its role in the democratic revolution. But above all, the tripartite alliance, moulded in the revolutionary underground, between the ANC, the South African Congress of Trade unions (SACTU [now Cosatu]), and our SACP, represents a framework which expresses the political interests of our working class in the broad front of struggle”.

His problem is that 20 years on from the end of the apartheid regime, and following the police killing of 34 platinum miners at Marikana, this assertion has become threadbare. No wonder many of the more thoughtful workers, even if they still think the “National Democratic Revolution” was a valid way forward, have now reached the conclusion that to say the least “the Alliance has been captured and taken over by right-wing forces”.

So where does this leave Nzimande and the SACP leadership? They can only respond as every Stalinist leadership has responded, with slander and libels, preparing the way for attempts at physical repression.

Nzomande's speech repeats Slovo's slander of "workerism" against the many workers, who actually built the mass trade union movement in the decades leading up to 1990, and who believed that "inter-class alliances lead to an abandonment of socialist perspectives and to a surrender of working-class leadership".

But "the abandonment of socialist perspectives and ... a surrender of working class leadership" by the SACP leadership is precisely what Zwelinzima Vavi describes at length in his letter (discussed elsewhere in this magazine).

And since the SACP is clearly (in deeds if not in words) completely untroubled by any "socialist perspectives" of any sort, but in practice supports an ANC government which pursues capitalist policies in alliance with major imperialist interests, the struggle between them and the workers in NUMSA is the form the class struggle in South Africa takes.

Talking to Young Communist League members on 12 December, Nzimande made an amalgam of NUMSA with a "wave of demagoguery", an "anti-majoritarian, often racist, liberal offensive whose object is regime change to dislodge the liberation movement from power".

He linked the NUMSA leadership with the "neo-fascist, demagogic and populist" Economic Freedom Fighters, "a party which only brought hooliganism to Parliament", and the "deeply divided" *Democratic Alliance (DA)* with a "white brat-pack", and "our own factory faults", i.e former members who have abandoned the SACP. At other times the leaders of NUMSA have been accused of wanting "regime change".

The amalgam is one of the fundamental methods of Stalinist

terror. Political opponents (and sometimes loyal servants who happen to be expendable) have ever since the 1930s been systematically slandered by association before being subjected to show-trials, attacked, detained or murdered.

A recent article in the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper made disturbing reading (*Mystery document alleges Numsa is bent on regime change*, by Sarah Evans, 1 December 2014).

“As the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) prepares to launch its United Front,” the article starts, “a document accusing the union and individuals associated with it of plotting against the South African government to secure regime change has surfaced.

“The document, titled *Exposed: Secret regime change plot to destabilise South Africa*, has apparently been circulating since November 20. It is supposedly written by ‘concerned members within NUMSA’ who disagree with the broader union leadership’s plans to form a United Front.

“The alleged plot” (alleged by shadowy government supporters claiming to be members of NUMSA) “is led and facilitated by key leaders within various political organisations, institutes of higher learning, international companies and civic groups, both locally and abroad.

“Some of the people named in the document as ‘plotters’ include former intelligence minister Ronnie Kasrils, Professor Chris Malekane, Professor Peter Jordi and Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of former president Thabo Mbeki. Various international “plotters” are also named, from countries including Germany, Venezuela and the Philippines.

“At least two individuals named in the document, Professor Patrick Bond of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Azwell Banda, a former Zambian trade unionist, have been the victims of crime recently, in what appears to be attempts to intimidate them.

“Banda’s car was broken into last week and Bond’s office was ransacked and his hard drive was stolen last Sunday. It appears as if a second break-in was attempted, but this time only the lock to his office was damaged.”

Fears on the part of NUMSA supporters are not fantasies or idle threats. Nzimande told the rally at Slovo’s graveside:

“The strategy to divide Cosatu, including attempts to separate it from the Alliance” (it is the SACP which sent its supporters into Cosatu to expel NUMSA, as Vavi complains!) “represents a classic imperialist strategy to defeat revolutionary movements ... The initiative led by the Numsa leadership fits perfectly into the same imperialist strategy to try and dislodge the ANC-led Alliance from power. It is therefore important that we understand the idea of a ‘united front’ and ‘workers’ party’ from this political angle.”

It will soon become urgent to build international capacity to defend NUMSA, its leaders and members and the United Front it is establishing from a state-inspired Stalinist witch hunt. Fortunately the United Front provides an excellent framework for explaining and mobilising such support and discussing the way forward. Real unity between those who struggle in a principled way for the interests of the oppressed (and not unity with the imperialist exploiters) can and must contain and accommodate real diversity as activists and organisations establish a clear understanding of their past, present and future while struggling together for that future.

Millions of trade unionists and socialists in the UK, the United States and elsewhere supported the resistance to the apartheid regime and support the aim of a socialist South Africa. It will become essential once more to inspire a great and powerful international movement in working class organisations around the world in defence of the South African working class. We in the UK have a central responsibility in this as subjects of the former colonial power.

At the same time it is essential to mobilise all possible support for the work that NUMSA is promoting, and the United Front that is developing in South Africa itself.

Beyond that it is vital to extend this work beyond the borders of South Africa, initially into neighbouring countries in Southern Africa and subsequently across the whole continent.

Bob Archer, January 2015