

May Day Message from the WRP Namibia

The WRP Political Committee greets the workers of Namibia, Southern Africa, Africa and the world on this 1st day of May, Workers' Day, which symbolizes the bloody struggle for workers' rights over many, many decades. These rights included the right to organize and belong to unions, the 45 hour week, the right to withhold labour etc.

For Namibians this struggle culminated in the labour rights contained in the 1992 Labour Act.

Since 1992 however, these rights were rapidly eroded in rogue courts, new legislation drafted by corporate business and passed by the new regime, parading as the great liberator.

The Marikana Massacre on 16 August 2012 exploded the Southern African myths of the 'liberation movements' defending and furthering the rights of the working people.

NUMSA, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa, formalized the concrete fact that the regimes like SWAPO and the ANC were agents of the capitalists against the working class. They stated, **“that unless the working class organises itself as a class for itself it will remain unrepresented and forever toil behind the bourgeoisie”**.

Now that these regimes have devoured the crumbs thrown to them by finance capital, mining, and commerce to pose as states, the SADC States have declared that they are on high alert after self-manufactured evidence surfaced of imperialist tendencies to destabilize them by regime change. Their trigger fingers are itching for a few more Marikanas to earn bale-outs from their masters.

But, the peace and stability which they claim is being threatened, is threatened by the unrelenting attacks on employment, labour and union rights, which these regimes are spearheading on behalf of the capitalists.

Their paranoid and neurotic threats underline in red the NUMSA declarations and should put the regional working class on high alert.

The Namibian regime is totally bankrupt as can be seen from the abandoned construction projects one month into the new financial year; from the piecemeal payment of teachers at the end of April, etcetera, etcetera.

They wish to make their crisis, the crisis of the working class. Oh!, how they wished they could have made it a tribal conflict of the working class!

The WRP's message is, dedicate this May of the year of the Great Workers' Revolution, 1917, to the Unity of the Working Class and to stay alert to build their independent fighting organs to defend itself and the Working People from the Ruin the capitalist ruling classes wish to bring upon the people.

March forward to working class unity in the Southern African Region, Africa and the World.

It is the only way forward to redemption!

Paul Thomas
Secretary of Publicity.

WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY TO REBUILD THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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From the Archive: The Way Forward in North Africa and the Middle East

Theses by Balazs Nagy, January 2011

Workers International To Rebuild the Fourth International

Biased, fragmentary and very incomplete as the media reports are, some things are clear:

1. These movements are desperately short of revolutionary leadership. The long years of ruthless dictatorship have strangled even the more or less petty-bourgeois parties. There is no sign even of any bourgeois leadership independent of the ruling authorities, apart from groups and individuals tied to the dictators whom the workers have thrown out.

2. We offer the following considerations to Tunisian, Egyptian Libyan and other groups in Europe and by any means available to people in the countries affected. Workers in those countries are in a real state of confusion, not knowing what to do or how to do it. In general what they want is real democracy.

3. Indeed, that is not a bad place to start. But before thinking about what to do and how to do it, first a few words about the general situation. There is no doubt that this is a revolution, or rather several revolutions. Now, a revolution is a whole process, more or less long, and we are just at the start. That is the first thing we must explain to these workers who clearly believe those who tell them that it is already over. They have got rid of the dictators, but these

were merely the personification of a whole economic and social system – imperialism – as it exists in these countries. To maintain its domination almost unchanged (in a different form from the old colonial regime the workers long since rejected) imperialism has succeeded, with the help of reformists and the Stalinist bureaucracy, in turning these young independent states into military dictatorships and medieval monarchies by delegating its direct power of oppression to native political regimes. In its first phase the revolution has thrown out the dictators in two countries and started the same battle in many others (Yemen, Libya, Algeria, etc.). But in these first two countries, the revolution is now marking time. The politico-economic regime remains more or less intact and is preparing, at this moment, to demobilise, push back and repress the workers. It dare not go too far in the direction of bloody repression because it is weakened and does not yet feel strong enough. Soldiers would probably refuse to fire on the people. The army's apparent neutrality, as the fruit of this uncertainty, forces the generals in power to negotiate with the workers over their demands. The situation is a little different in Tunisia but remains essentially the same.

4. In this situation workers should push forward with their desire to achieve democracy. In continuing the revolution in that way and by concretising their demands, they can transform into facts their obvious vigilance and their distrust of the new people on power – both expressed loud and clear not least by their determination to stay put where they mobilised their movements. But all that is very fragile. If they are demobilised, it would certainly mean the first step towards a defeat and the re-installation of a new dictatorship, possibly veiled for a time.

5. We should propose to them that they continue their movement towards real democracy – a battle that is not even half won yet. Progress in this the only guarantee against a turn backwards in the situation: if you do not go forward you are

condemned to retreat. The general slogan should be the conquest and strengthening of real democracy based on winning and securing democratic rights, as well as on the organisation of the movement.

6. We can only sketch several essential points of a democratic programme which workers in those countries themselves, their political and trade union organisations, would need to work out in detail.

a. Immediately lift the state of emergency which has been in force for many years in all these countries (in Egypt, the new – military – authorities have only promised to lift it in 6 months time!)

b. Besides that it is important to demand and secure freedom of speech and of the press; freedom of assembly, freedom for workers to organise together democratically and, finally, freedom to demonstrate. At the moment the masses have spontaneously exercised these rights, but it is necessary to guarantee and codify them.

c. Complete and total separation of the church and the state (of all churches)

d. Immediate freedom for all political prisoners (already started in Egypt)

These are the immediate measures that directly flow from the current situation.

Beyond that, it is important to make progress towards complete democratic freedom for the working masses in the towns and the countryside. For this, political democracy must go hand-in-hand with economic democracy.

1. It is vitally important for the life of the country to nationalise the factories, mines and banks, particularly those owned by foreign capital.

2. One fundamental democratic measure is a radical agrarian reform, with the re-distribution of land to the poor farmers and their co-operatives without compensation to the present owners. This is the very bedrock of democracy in the countryside and at the same time it breaks the power of the big landed proprietors who are pillars of support for the dictatorship, as well as of those leaders currently in power. All the generals in Egypt, like Mubarak and his family, are big landed proprietors, and the same is true elsewhere.
3. Democratic rights for workers at their workplace, codified in progressive social legislation (collective bargaining, defined working times, the right to strike, unemployment benefits, etc.)
4. Freedom to form trade unions and trade union rights. At the same time democratisation of existing trade unions, holding fresh elections to renew them..
5. Progressive social legislation for all workers (sickness insurance, laws protecting workers' housing, etc.)
6. Confiscation of all the material goods of the cronies of dictators already fallen and yet to fall: land, factories, buildings, businesses, wealth stolen from the people and monopolised during the decades of dictatorship.

But the most urgent task of the day, and therefore the main slogan, is – organise working people

1. So that they can make progress towards real democracy, guarantee the freedom which has been won and achieve all their demands, the most determined and conscious and therefore the most active elements must set up their political party, a workers' party, a sort of Labour Party. The job of this party from the very moment it is

set up would be to work out and promote in practice the whole democratic programme, raising it in all workers' movements.

2. All of these movements in the country should unite in a political process aimed at setting up a new regime in line with the wishes and desires of workers. It would be a terrible mistake to put faith in the promise of elections. The whole country (all the countries), the whole of the working people, have rejected the dictators' bogus constitution. They need a new one, a constitution of the working people. They need to fix and codify the new order, i.e. the most highly democratic measures, rules and laws, which alone conform to the will of the people and its dynamism. They need also to prevent the possessing class, the pillars of the dictatorship, from cheating the people through a fraudulent electoral farce. Therefore workers need to prepare and hold a Constituent Assembly of the country. It is for the creation of that type of assembly that elections should be held, to select delegates drawn from candidates of the truly democratic parties, first and foremost of the workers' party.
3. Both to run the the elections – and to make sure they are run properly – and to prepare the Assembly to bring about their demands and under popular supervision, workers urgently need to form local committees of action and supervision in the workplace and in the local areas. In the countryside, one vitally important task for such committees would be to push forward agrarian reform and land re-distribution energetically. Poor farmers and agricultural labourers would form the majority of these committees in the countryside. Everywhere these committees, with the participation of housewives, should keep an eye on prices at markets and in the shops. This is all the more necessary since the international

bourgeoisie could strangle and starve the infant workers' democracy through present and future speculation in cereals and other agricultural products.

4. One extremely important political task for workers and their organisations is a radical and immediate break with national isolation. A main condition for the success of their movement is to bring about an effective and living alliance

1. with the other peoples engaged in similar movements in North Africa and the Middle East. The people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Algeria, can already form permanent contacts and synchronise their demands and activities through their movements and political parties (once the latter have been established).

2. also with the workers in the countries of Europe and their organisations, demanding their solidarity and collaboration to establish a broad united front against the forces of restoration in their countries and internationally.

5. Separately, I would like to make a particular point about the enormous importance of the following problem: Fraternisation with the army soldiers, especially in Egypt, has already born fruit fruit in the apparent neutrality of the army. But this is very fragile. It is necessary to continue and extend this fraternisation (which is a very important task in the other countries too), with the aim of forming stable contacts so that ultimately, at a stage which cannot be determined from here, soldiers' committees can be set up, especially since the soldiers are workers in uniform, or very often farmers willing to discuss a programme for the re-distribution of the land.

Here in broad terms and hastily sketched, are a a few points, hints rather, to serve as the basis of an programme for these movements. The determination and the dynamism are there. But about the aims of their struggle and the means available to them almost total confusion reigns. That is where we should at least try to help.

January 2011

Issue 6 of Die Werker out now.

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Land

NUMSA & United Front

International Inquiry

Editorial

Former Judge

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Out now! The latest issue of Namibia's Proletarian Newsletter.

In [this edition](#):

1. Fishermen

2. Miners
 3. Reparations
 4. Jeremy Corbyn
 5. Letters
 6. land
-

Appeal: Help fund our work in Southern Africa

Dear Comrades,

WE are launching an ambitious [Appeal](#) to members and supporters to raise funds for our work in Southern Africa.

It is there that the global re-awakening of the workers' socialist movement is most concentrated and advanced, and where material resources are most needed if the movement is to make the progress which it can and should make.

The Workers Revolutionary Party in Namibia has won a position where all oppressed and exploited groups in the country turn to it for help in their struggles.

This is possible because of the party's thoroughgoing understanding of the role the South-West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) government plays as a caretaker for imperialism, based on corrupt rule by a narrow tribal leadership imposed in a deal between the Soviet Union and various imperialist powers in the early 1990s. This regime is both a mockery of democracy and a copy-book example of milking public assets in collusion with imperialist financial interests.

The heart of the WRP(N)'s work is among the country's miners. The Party's leadership has worked closely over many years with the TCL miners in their campaign to get back the pensions stolen from them when the company which employed them was liquidated. It has united with the most advanced leaders of the current mine-workers with the aim of making their union (Mineworkers Union of Namibia – MUN) an effective and class-conscious weapon of the country's working class. Meanwhile, the WRP collaborates with other present and former miners and smelter workers campaigning to protect their homes threatened by financial chicanery by former mine-owners in cahoots with the government and in pursuing claims against their employers for work-related illnesses.

The WRP(N) also stands four-square with:

Railway workers trying to track down the theft of state property;

Road workers protesting against bullying, malpractice and neglect of health and safety by their foreign employers contracted to develop the country's road network;

Fishery workers on the Atlantic coast who have been on prolonged strike against diminishing wages, overwork and dangerous conditions. From being the best-paid workers in the country, they have become among the lowest-paid, while government-sponsored corruption lets foreign businesses ransack the rich fisheries around Walvis Bay;

Home-owners defending their homes against collusion between crooked lawyers and financiers who try to dispossess them;

Young people demanding access to homes;

Small farmers protecting their traditional lands against seizure by business interests;

Ethnic groups who suffered under German colonial rule seeking

access to the compensation pocketed by SWAPO ministers;

Bushmen too now have a WRP(N) member among their leaders.

Former soldiers seeking access to their pensions, also stolen by SWAPO ministers;

Former Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) fighters seeking acknowledgment of and compensation for the deaths and other sufferings inflicted on them by the SWAPO leaders during liberation.

The WRP(N) won two parliamentary seats in the 2014 elections, but is denied the official resources which should accompany this electoral success. The party has had to spend a good deal of time fighting off a state-inspired sham "breakaway" which seriously impeded its work.

Nevertheless it held a very successful second congress in 2015 and is now developing a network of branches and conducting a serious programme of theoretical education in Marxism for the new forces coming into the leadership of the Party.

And the WRP is now in touch with the United Front established by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and is preparing to collaborate in its work.

A decisive political break in South Africa

NUMSA launched the United Front initiative in connection with the decisive break with Stalinism in which it is engaged. NUMSA has correctly declared the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) to be bourgeois parties and called for a Movement for Socialism to build a Marxist workers' party.

What they have established is a genuine United Front bringing community groups together with trade unions led by the working class. Its purpose is to stand up for real working class communities in the context of extreme inequality, exploitation

of workers, unemployment (especially among young people) and mass poverty.

NUMSA's aim in building the United Front (and a Marxist workers' party) is to transform the National Democratic Revolution of 1994 (which left the working class out of the picture and maintained the imperialist exploitation of South Africa intact) into a socialist revolution led by the working class.

The United Front has appealed directly to Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International for political, practical and material assistance in standing United Front candidates in South Africa's local elections on 3 August.

We are sure these developments inspire and encourage our sympathisers and supporters as they do us. We have a target of £5,000 and very little time. Please give generously.

How you can donate

1. Use the button on the top right hand corner of the *workersinternational.info* home page marked 'donate', making clear that your donation is for the Southern Africa Appeal.

2. To transfer from your bank account, send donations to:

Unity trust Bank

Account: *The Correspondence Society*

sort: 60 – 83 – 01

account: 20059400

3. Send cheques made out to Correspondence and marked on the back "Southern Africa Appeal" to : PO Box 68375, London , E7 7DT, UK.

Yours in solidarity,

Bob Archer

Issue 16 of the Journal April 2016 out now!

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How can we build a workers' Europe? by Bronwen Handyside

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New Issue of the Journal, No. 15, Feb 2016,

Inside [this issue](#):

of Workers' International Journal we reproduce a selection of the tributes paid to our founding secretary Balazs Nagy

(Michel Varga) by present and former comrades.

Freedom for the Peoples of Africa! No to intervention!

By **Balazs Nagy** February 2013 (First published in *Workers International Journal* No. 1)

It would be very wrong to judge France's military intervention in Mali on the basis of the deafening and unanimous press and television chorus. They think this act of war was inevitable and celebrate it. It galvanised them unhesitatingly and pompously to laud President Hollande as a great leader – the very same politician they used to dismiss as flabby.

But it would be even worse to put any trust in this "leader's" own pronouncements, or those of his aides and their allies in Europe and across the world.

And yet ... you cannot actually blame Hollande and co. directly for the long-drawn-out deterioration in Mali and the region, culminating in the present utter decay. But nor can you exonerate them either, since as loyal inheritors of the whole mess they took it on entirely and without a second thought. And in that specific sense the intervention was indeed as inevitable as the – joyful but perhaps over-optimistic – claims of "victory" and a job well done.

Despite the – to say the least – simplistic presentation of the situation in the Sahara and the Sahel as goodies vs. baddies, reality turns out to be incomparably more complex. Understanding it requires a brief review of the more outstanding aspects of the historical development which prepared, shaped

and conditioned the political and social scene – and the actors – which led to the current situation.

A glance at history

For a start, the immense revolutionary wave which swept across Europe in the second half and aftermath of World War II generally speaking hit the African continent a dozen or so years later. Within Europe, the leaderships of working class parties did everything they could to channel revolutionary movements into shoring up the bourgeoisie through conventional democracies. In contrast, French (and other) imperialisms had been deeply shaken and weakened by the war and were unable to withstand the colonial peoples' irresistible independence movement. After a shaky early start, first Tunisia and Morocco (in 1956) and then the Algerian people won independence in 1962 after eight years of gruelling armed struggle. The revolutionary shock wave travelled south, and De Gaulle, more clear-sighted than other leaders of an exhausted possessing class, was forced to accept the obvious need to re-vamp old-style imperialism and grant independence to a series of countries in the region – almost all of them by 1960 (Senegal, Mauretania, Mali, Burkina-Faso, formerly Upper Volta, Niger, Chad, Ivory Coast – Guinea from 1958).

Hopes of a promising new start roused and inspired these countries. Borrowing from Algeria and even Tunisia in their search for a path towards a system leading to socialism, Guinea, Senegal and Mali all chose more or less the same route. After Bourguiba in Tunisia and Ben Bella in Algeria, Sekou Toure in Guinea and Modibo Keita in Mali and their governments carried out a series of nationalisations of property of the colonial power and its nationals. On this basis they initiated a policy of taking charge of their respective countries. Distrustful of the continually obstructive colonial power, they turned squarely towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for desperately needed support and assistance. Senegal, too, worked towards a kind of

socialism, but its president L. Senghor, whose attachment to the republican bourgeoisie in France was well-known, rejected the orientation towards the USSR, preferring a kind of panafricanism and so-called "third worldism". The national struggle, first for independence and then for this take-over by a kind of "anti-feudal" socialism by Modibo Keita in Mali was particularly powerfully nourished by young people, who had previously languished in the kind of semi-slavery affecting a quarter of the population of the Sahel.

But these initial hopes and efforts and fruitful initiatives quickly came to grief on obstacles born of these countries' extreme poverty and the cruel shortages of resources imposed on them by the former colonial power. On the other hand, the inadequacies and material shortages in the so-called "socialist" countries, trapped in the impoverishing constraints of "socialism in one country" and hampered by an oppressive Stalinism increasingly in debt to its capitalist creditors, meant that they could not provide the necessary assistance even if they had wanted to. Far from it. And so, disappointed and discouraged, most of these Arab and African "socialist reformers" turned back to the former coloniser and towards a policy of oppression. This was all the easier since their origins and education separated them from the working masses, and in any case they could model themselves on how it was done in Eastern Europe. Not everybody can boast the strength of character or consistency of view of a Keita, a Lumumba or a Sangare. Nor is it a co-incidence that these three were all assassinated.

As for the leaders of the powerful workers' movement of the day in Europe, they did everything they could to bog these movements down in the swamp of deepening degradation, particularly since they everywhere resolutely drew this entire workers movement into the false and fatal path of "parliamentary cretinism" and collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

But from the outset, this bourgeoisie went in completely the opposite direction, determined to maintain and even reinforce its prerogatives and arrangements as a class. Forced to abandon the colonial methods of its imperial system, it adapted to the new situation through the bonapartist rule of De Gaulle. Run in secrecy by his secretary, Jacques Foccart, the General's shadow organisations worked feverishly to re-organise France's political, administrative and military networks and adapt them to the new political configuration. And so the wild beast of colonial imperialism clothed itself in the post-colonial lamb's skin of "co-operation". And that is how a whole system was forged, the sadly famous "Françafrique" which (under all Presidents!) continued the old imperialist practices under the cover of close collaboration with the African countries and lightly disguised within the forms required by the "independence" of the respective states.

A whole series of military coups very quickly expressed and made manifest the limits of "independence" in most of the African countries concerned. Even in countries which had been better prepared by a long struggle, the dissident colonels Ben Ali and Boumediene resolutely put an end to the democratic scruples of Bourguiba and Ben Bella. Everywhere the military putschists installed a dictatorship resting on an oversized army and a single party, African regimes corresponding to the "Françafrique" system and symmetrically replicating it. Almost everywhere, independent regimes of the older generation of more radical bourgeois fighters gave way to corrupt regimes of dictators. Where the old guard did stay in power, their degeneration became inevitable.

This series of African countries was independent but had been impoverished and systematically, mercilessly, plundered in the course of the long preceding period of colonial rule. In the way of things, "co-operation" between them and a highly-developed great power like France simply maintained and exacerbated the monstrous economic and social inequality

between such “partners”. A hungry wolf in a sheep-fold comes to mind. It is very characteristic that from the end of World War II onwards the straitjacket that was the Franc zone tied the African countries to close dependence on France. On 25 December 1945, a special Franc of the African Financial Community (CFA) was created for use in these countries (including some further south) and its value was set outrageously low by the French government: 1 CFA Franc was only worth 0.02 metropolitan Francs. (N.B. following Sekou Touré of Guinea, Keita of Mali also took his country out of this Franc zone system in 1963. But faced with economic difficulties, he had to re-join it, shortly before he was overthrown).

These decisions to leave were fully justified, since the CFA Franc embodied the crying inequality between these economies – often kept excessively backward – and bourgeois France, one of the most highly-developed countries. Trade imposed by this “benevolent” France provided the latter with agricultural products and raw materials of all kinds at derisory prices, even below world prices which themselves are traditionally low. Conversely, her own industrial products were sold off virtually risk-free at guaranteed high prices on these markets. So this system not only maintained flagrant inequality, but intensified it intolerably. Need we add that this imposed and legalised inequality has continued right up to the present? To be more accurate, it was pushed by the Balladur government (under President Mitterrand in 1994) to the point of an explosion when the CFA Franc was devalued by 50%! The French bourgeoisie carefully retained this shamefully super-exploitative rate when the euro was introduced: in 2011, 1 euro equalled 655.957 Francs CFA. And they insult our ears with fairly stories about the end of imperialism!

In this re-vamped framework of imperialism, these countries were put under pressure – both directly and through successive dictatorships – to abandon dreams of progress. But worse was

to come. Within the modified political configuration of the imperialist system, they still had to maintain their traditional role as providers of very cheap agricultural products and raw materials. Open, violent force had been replaced with sly economic constraint. In this sense, these countries objectively contributed, kicking and screaming, to the ability of a thus reinvigorated world bourgeoisie to take on and sustain its "thirty glorious years". And so the relative "social peace" that prevailed in the course of that expansion secured by that same bourgeoisie's pact with powerful (reformist and Stalinist) bureaucracies, which kept the workers movement under lock and key, was largely paid for by super-exploitation of the former colonies. It led inevitably to colossal indebtedness on the part of these poor "independent" countries, over which even the bourgeoisie's various nerve centres shed copious crocodile tears.

Economic, social and political deterioration

The situation got even worse when the bourgeoisie set its neo-liberal agents to work to reduce these debts overall. Starting in the early 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank forced all the countries concerned to adopt massive "structural adjustments" in the form of drastic budget and expenditure cuts and extensive privatisations in return for "aid" in reducing these debt levels. French (and other) firms bought up a great number of local enterprises for peanuts, while huge companies like Total, Areva and a multitude of others made themselves at home. Catastrophic results quickly followed. (It is a remarkable fact that what is going on in Europe at present is not some novelty arising out of the crisis; the Latin Americans had painful experience of it even before the Africans).

In Africa, too, the first victims were the education and health systems, whose often remarkable initial achievements had been a source of legitimate pride to these young nations. Ever tighter budgetary constraints laid waste to these

promising beginnings.

Merciless cuts in expenditure also deprived agriculture – bankrupt state farms as much as independent farmers ruined by lack of access to credit – of all aid. Across Africa, already low rural wages saw a general fall of 30% in those years. Mali's agriculture, for example, which at the end of the 1980s contributed 67% of the country's exports through cotton production, saw the latter smashed up and the peasantry crushed. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards a series of terrible droughts hit the whole region, resulting in a regular desert encroachments. The funds needed for big irrigation networks and effective water supplies were cruelly lacking, as were the cheap credits essential for small farmers.

These calamities led on the one hand to the terrible famines which periodically descend on the region and on the other to the massive rural exodus which drives tens and hundreds of thousands of people into the terribly overpopulated slums in the cities. The inhabitants of Nouakchott in Mauretania, extremely poor as they are, describe the slums in "their" shanty-town as "rubbish dumps". As for famines, the hypocrisy of successive food-aid campaigns launched and supported by the bourgeoisie and beloved of right-thinking petit-bourgeois barely masks neither the formers' direct responsibility for these disasters and their organic inability to do much about them, nor the latters' deferential complicity. Having said that, no one would want to prevent good souls from helping the starving, but reality puts us on guard against this rather unreliable substitute which in no way attacks the root of the problem.

Chronic unemployment also affects the whole population, which has undergone geometrical growth in the period in question. By 1989 it exceeded 22% of the active population, including more than half of young people in Algeria, for all that this country is better off than Mali or other countries in the Sahara or the Sahel. A significant proportion of the

population has persistently sought a way out of this social catastrophe in emigration. This explains the very high number of Malians (2 million) living in France around 1990, as many as a quarter of the whole population of the country! But vigilant France kept a close watch on the situation, and Charles Pasqua – a worthy successor to “Françafrique’s” organiser Foccart – started forcibly repatriating hundreds of thousands of Africans. His successors, also under all Presidents, have virtually institutionalised this into a regular procedure. Following the regular expulsions organised by Guéant, Manuel Valls has most recently filled an aeroplane with several dozen immigrants. A veil is drawn over how they carry this out. Be that as it may, journalists estimate that there are currently still 120,000 Malians living in France. But who knows exactly how many of these working class pariahs there are who have escaped utter poverty over there only to be hounded and persecuted here for the lack of an all-important piece of paper?

While the people – especially the young – are fleeing the country, businesses large and small, French and other, are settling in there as a kind of Eldorado to exploit the natural wealth of the country and its cheap labour. Apart from the odd kick-back, these businesses *repatriate the whole of their profits* and operate above the law. According to studies by comrades at *Survie* (a French NGO founded in 1984 to fight hunger and corruption in the “third world”), France’s trade surplus with Mali was over 300 million euros in 2010-2012, five times more than the derisory public “aid” she grants to that country!

Alongside these destructive activities went a long drawn-out process of reducing these states to subservience, adapting them more and more to the needs of capitalists in the French “protector”. Metropolitan agents of “Françafrique” carefully guided this convulsive change by remote-control. Enriched local cliques devoured each other in order to establish, in an

endless series of coups, which one would seize control of a state which itself was reduced little by little to its repressive apparatus. Having laid its hands on the manna from the “co-operation” community and other so-called “development” loans, the winning group would set out to fulfil its role as a substitute for the former colonial power. As poverty grew in these states, their role was more and more reduced to one essential: securing, preserving and reinforcing power in order to consolidate France’s economic and political position and influence while maintaining a repressive regime against working people. Those currently holding power, such as the puppets Deby (Chad), Compoaré (Burkina Faso) and Touré (Mali) have nothing in common with the independent figures of the first generation of leaders. They are even the opposite of someone like Keita, for example. The most important, if not the only, means they use to achieve their objectives has been and is the army. Now, the rapid overall worsening of the situation has provoked a series of coups in which the impoverished masses’ role of detonator has become increasingly visible, reflecting the economic and social deterioration that has been eating away.

Unpicking the tangled politics of North Africa

Above all we must reject the simplistic way the interventionist power presents the context and conditions in this part of Africa. Even if – and this goes without saying – it is so constantly and noisily parroted in the media that certain political tendencies and individuals, while uttering reservations about “neo-colonial ulterior motives”, nevertheless give this military action guarded support as a necessary “pre-requisite”. These include the French Communist Party parliamentary deputy François Asensi (*L’Humanité* newspaper 18 January 2013) who swallows the intervention whole but hastens to add: “...France must state clearly her aim to rebuild a democratic state”. He actually seems to think that is possible on the basis of this intervention!

Despite all the resounding statements and those who are taken in by them, there is no way that trends and programmes in this region of Africa, or the political formations and groupings to which they give rise, can be reduced to isolated groups of Islamic fanatics on the one hand and loyal government supporters on the other. Reality is much richer and more complicated. Before even attempting to sketch a few lines, with no claim at all to presenting the whole picture, it is enough to describe the interventionists and their accomplices as the famous bull in a china shop, especially given the brutal military aggression and lack of concern for "details" that are innate and natural characteristics of so-called "neo-colonial" imperialism.

As described above, after a very short period of national awakening in the aftermath of World War II, successive economic setbacks in the newly independent countries turned into a sustained social regression. The vast majority of the popular classes (workers, farmers, stock-breeders, pastoralists, etc.) have become considerably poorer, particularly the many peoples and ethnic groups at the bottom of society. Their degradation provided the ground for the astonishing explosion of a whole series of programmes and the most varied social and national movements. It is impossible to list them all here, but in general they rested on previous currents and movements, some of them going back to the nineteenth century. Several great traditions of thought and social movements have remained alive to this very day. In the majority of cases, social and national demands have overlapped inextricably. The roots of some movements are to be found in the distant past.

The European workers' movement of the twentieth century in particular inspired by example a powerful trade-unionism among workers in these countries, as well as the appearance of labour and communist parties. The present-day UGTT union confederation in Tunisia, which opposes the Salafists, is one

of the fruits of this co-operation whose powerful resurgence can be considered as an important opposition factor to the government of religious people, but also of a positive political change. We also know that Sekou Touré of Guinea (secretary of the CGT federation of black Africa in 1948!) rested on the Guinean trade unions for support in the national independence movement and spiced up his conceptions with socialism of a kind. The Algerian independence movement was also in large part influenced by the French workers' movement.

It would therefore be unforgivable to look down on the movements for the social and national liberation of these countries from the heights of some imagined European supremacy. Often centuries-old traditions and a wealth of ancient experience also nourish the struggles of workers and people in Africa and its northern part. These movements exist, despite the extremely difficult situation they are in because they pay the price of the backwardness imposed upon their countries, suffering from isolation and repression which are bound to mark the immediate future of the region.

This social and national situation was essentially what we had in mind when we published the press release from the comrades at "Survie" in issue no. 1 of our journal, expressing the desire to "look at certain important aspects of the rebellion in a different light". Of course the comrades from "Survie" not only bravely condemn the intervention, but are also well-known for having brought together a mass of precious facts in relation to this part of Africa. But in the indignation which informs their timely and correct condemnation of the intervention, we believe they erred in losing sight, behind the inflated bubble of religious fanatics, of precisely these movements and their national and social base. But that is precisely the direction in which to look for the key to the situation, and a way out, and not at all the "armies" of corrupt regimes or their UN protectors. The "Survie" comrades talk about French intervention as "significant pressure on the

Malian authorities” as if the latter actually existed independently of the former. They also say France “must respect UN resolutions as soon as possible”.

But in the first place, rather than acting as “pressure”, French intervention is **necessary to save** these “authorities”. And not only the Malian authorities, but all the rest in the region, too! The comrades should not just see French (state) authorities, but also those of these countries, these African states, as the agents and representatives of a quite definite social class – the bourgeoisie. With the significant difference that the latter do not exist and act on behalf of their own bourgeoisie, since even the feeble shreds of that native class are merely a subaltern appendix of the metropolitan (and world) bourgeoisie. These states, therefore, exist and act as the local organ of the latter, even though they are endowed with the fig-leaf of independence.

From the 1980s onwards, when the capitalist-imperialist system started moving over to so-called ultra-liberalism, this remarkably intensified the exploitation of these countries and revived all the traditions of struggle, and their direct and indirect heirs started moving. The great liberating risings of 2011 which journalists called “Arab revolutions” are also manifestations of these struggles, at the same time acting as a significant precursor to the European and world revolution that is gestating. The outstanding role of the UGTT union in the Tunisian revolution and the overthrow of the regime – even though it was itself contaminated by the latter – is well known. Less well known, perhaps, is the decisive action the Egyptian working class developed in its revolution, organising strikes and renewing its unions. Today its sporadic but incessant struggles constitute a significant element in defending and advancing that revolution. As for the UGTT, we can all see its decisive participation in the current mobilisation.

While the “Arab spring” is an integral component of the

European revolution currently gestating and undeniably contributed to the still stuttering awakening of young people in Europe, it also lived on in the convulsive but still disorganised movements of the despoiled and deracinated masses of that region, of which islamist movements form a large but unfortunately distorted and adulterated part. Be that as it may, certain ancient and modern political movements and organisations have raised their heads again, often inspired by the European workers' movement of former days, but also by their own old traditions, and – closer to home – by the revolutionary overturns of 2011.

“A people which oppresses another cannot emancipate itself” (Engels)

For centuries the immense Sahara and the Sahel regions of north and west Africa have constantly been disturbed by movements and rebellions of this or that nation or ethnic group living there. Its artificial division into separate countries by colonial powers only served, in the majority of cases, to reinforce national oppression by devastating and wrenching apart ethnic or national units. During independence, some of these peoples, like the Kabyles in Algeria and their Berber relatives, the Touareg in Mali (and more or less everywhere) hoped to achieve national recognition in return for their participation in the anti-colonial struggle. But right from the outset, all of the newly independent states, based on the primacy of the dominant ethnic group (or tribe), refused to allow any concessions at all, still less any form of autonomy, to ethnic or national minorities. This serious defect left a profound scar on the democratic awakening of the bourgeois revolutions which shook these countries, even those who ventured furthest into a kind of proto-socialism. We do not have the space here to examine all these national movements in detail. Nevertheless the most important ones must be mentioned.

Categorically turned down by the new Algerian government, the

Kabyle people started a prolonged struggle for autonomy. Not only was this refused from the very start, but the Kabyle people suffered repeated bloody repressions and a national oppression which continues to this very day.

Far away from there, in another region steeped in prolonged national-ethnic struggle, Casamance in Senegal has battled against oppression. The region has been demanding autonomy ever since Senegal achieved independence. However, despite L.Senghor's evasive promises, it has not been forthcoming. The region went into open armed struggle in the early 1980s, when Senegal was trying to ward off a massive debt crisis (almost 2 million dollars). The cultivation of ground nuts appeared to offer a way out, but when the government assigned land to colonists from the north for this, the inhabitants of Casamance, traditionally rice-growers, revolted. Ever since, cease-fires have alternated with fresh confrontations and the conflict has persisted, particularly since the Senegalese state, exactly like all the others also in its constantly growing poverty, has shown itself less and less able to resolve the situation and has even imposed further burdens on the region.

When one considers the vast Sahara and Sahel territory from the point of view of the many different peoples inhabiting it, what becomes evident is a profound interweaving of the social degradation of the peoples – often linked to sudden changes in their mode of life also imposed by the neglect of nature – and the subordinate or even oppressed character of their ethnic or national lives. History teaches us that those who try to separate them from social difficulties, or with more reason to oppose them, have paid a high price.

For a long time now the nomadic Saharoui of the western Sahara have undergone a veritable calvary. While they struggled for autonomy, Franco's Spain would not allow them any rights. In 1975, following a call by King Hassan of Morocco, hundreds of thousands joined a "green march" to invade what they thought

was "Moroccan Sahara". In reaction to this the Polisario Front, founded in 1973 by young Saharoui students, proclaimed the "Democratic Arab Saharoui Republic" under Algerian protection. The Algerian and Moroccan armies have confronted each other in a rivalry that has nothing to do with the interests of any peoples whatsoever. Algeria has protected the new Saharoui republic since Spain left in 1976, whereas she has never allowed Kabylia or the Touareg movement the slightest degree of autonomy.

Following a cease-fire in 1991, Morocco has controlled 80% of this territory, leaving 20% to the Polisario Front. But despotic King Hassan has installed a 2,500km (!) security belt called the "Moroccan Wall". (This is the nth "wall" built to contain some people to disfigure the world and bring the powerful into disrepute!) As for the new Saharoui Republic, what with recognition by a few countries and rejection by the majority of others – including the UN! – it has no legal existence at all.

The Touregs' problem is even more complex. Because of the arbitrary and fantastic division of this great region by the great colonial powers, the almost 2 million Touareg find themselves artificially split up between five different countries. They are just one of many peoples who, carved up between several countries, have no right to a legal existence and are often persecuted. When discussing them, one inevitably thinks of the Kurds or the Palestinians in the Middle East. If you want a shameful image of imperialist reality dragged down to the level of simple banality, then look no further. The Basques divided up between the north of Spain and the south of France might have a thing or two to say about this, or the Irish, with the north of their country still under the iron heel of Britain.

On the other hand, the break-up of several multi-national countries and the revival of virulent national feelings also testify to the growing contradiction between capitalism-

imperialism and the facts of national existence. (To say nothing of the inability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to solve this problem in the former USSR and its criminal role in the break-up of several multi-national states it used to govern, like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia).

Be that as it may, the Touareg people were among the losers in the post-war anti-imperialist wave of liberation. In a way, their fate contains just about all the problems of the national question in this part of the world in compressed form: – the capitalist nature of the states in which they live and the role played in this by religion, particularly Islam.

It is really remarkable that even the leaders of the first wave of bourgeois-democratic revolution just could not grasp this problem at all. And so as early as 1963 Modibo Keita severely repressed and Touareg revolt in Mali. He was helped by his Algerian colleague Ben Bella, who handed over to him the Touareg leaders who had fled to Algeria. One Touareg author wrote: “The thousands of deaths caused by repression were met with general indifference”.

But we lack the space here to tell the full story of the many rebellions by this people, their lengthy negotiations with this or that state in the region, and the massacres and flights of thousands of their members which punctuate the life of these states which have degenerated into vassals of imperialism.

As a result of general economic decline and collapse and the consequent successive setbacks to the Touaregs' national struggles, they toughened up their behaviour and adopted a more radical attitude. All states in the area felt the effects of imperialist super-exploitation, but the Touareg people suffered it twice over (and they were not alone in that). Besides the dismantlement of services, there was no investment to assuage sufferings which were made greater by massive unemployment exacerbated as the introduction of lorries and

the severity and frequency of drought put an end to caravans. Hundreds of thousands of them fled Mali and lived under extremely precarious conditions in Niger, Mauretania, Algeria, Burkin-Faso, etc.

As we know, after the overthrow of Ghadaffi, who enlisted many of them among his "protectors", a significant number of these armed men returned to Mali. But this detachment did not start the armed struggle of the already strongly-radicalised Touregs. All they did was to contribute a considerable force to a movement which had been present for a long time but, hardened by serial disappointments, was only waiting for the right opportunity. The extreme fragility of the Malian state, made worse army Captain Sanogo's attempted coup fell apart, furnished the signal and the opportunity for attack. The "Azawad Liberation Movement", formed some months previously, allied itself with armed islamist groups to bulk out its numbers. And so they were able quite rapidly to pulverise the Malian army and occupy the north of the country as far as the River Niger.

Of course this was a mistake, but a very understandable one, as the Touareg movement was very contaminated by its own islamist faction. Mistake though it is, this movement as a whole should not be confused with its islamist faction "Ansar Eddine", even if the latter has undoubtedly pushed the movement a long way in a radical direction. But it should never under any circumstances be identified with it, as French imperialism and its lackeys strive to do.

Contrary to all the claims of the propaganda machine, political islam – even the most radical kind – is not a recent foreign import to Africa. Even in the nineteenth century, locally-based islamists inspired great anti-colonial struggles. Exploited peoples sought refuge and consolation against all kinds of oppression in religion. Since Engels wrote *The Peasant War in Germany* we have known that religion serves to encourage and stimulate the resistance and struggle

of oppressed classes when they are still insufficiently developed or – we may add – when their elder sister, the world working class, is on the back foot constantly.

If Islamism has in recent years – sometimes aggressively–taken the place of secular leaderships of social and national movements, it is a consequence of the considerable weakening and retreat of the international workers' movement. Over the last fifty years or so, the emphatic way social democratic parties have gone over from being supporters of the bourgeoisie to being its direct and settled political representatives has been one of the most outstanding features of this historic collapse. The other is the destruction of the Soviet Union and the dominant role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy played within it, followed by workers massively deserting communist parties and their inevitable retreat. A whole series of communist and non-communist parties and groups which used to lead social and national struggles have been marginalised across the world as a result. In their place, religious islamist movements have emerged from Afghanistan to Morocco, by way of Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, etc.

Obviously this “opium of the people” works like any other drug. While bringing temporary consolation and relief, it cannot cure the ailment but poisons the organism even further. The muslim religion (like any other) brings no improvements but on the contrary preserves the backward and desperate situation working people are in, as we see very clearly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Tunisia, too. Moreover, this religion contain within itself, as the cloud carries the thunderstorm, its radical Salafist wing with its medieval customs. The people of Tunisia have recently started to struggle even more powerfully against this “opium”, as have the people of Egypt. We should also note that there has recently been a significant internal split in the Touareg salafist group “Ansar Eddine”.

The situation is bound to get worse

Only recently forced to accept cuts in its material resources, the French army has become trapped in an inextricable tangle of intertwined difficulties which it cannot overcome. It is no coincidence that Hollande's European and American allies have very parsimoniously calibrated their own symbolic rather than real "contributions". They obviously have a better grasp of the implications and extent of their devastating setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are more than happy to let the French bourgeoisie and its puppet Hollande have the more than dubious glory of pulling their shared chestnuts out of the fire. In fact the French "Socialist" Party has suddenly revealed itself to be the advance-guard not just of its "own" bourgeoisie but of world imperialism as a whole. Only recently the US vice-president conferred a metaphorical knighthood on Hollande, confirming him in this role with a lordly "well done!"

Obviously the forward patrols of world imperialism didn't have a clue what they were getting into. Incredible but true: neither the army nor its political bosses had any idea of what a simmering cauldron they were involving themselves in. Hollande kept saying they only wanted to stay in Mali a few days, then various unpleasant experiences made them change that to "... an indefinite period". It was brought home to these ardent interventionists that they would have to re-make the state and army, not just in Mali, but more or less across the whole region – a massive task far beyond the capacity of the French state.

The colossal expenditure such an undertaking entails massively exceeds the meagre resources of a French bourgeoisie mired in persistent crisis. There will be a growing contradiction between the no-doubt long-term financial cost of these involvements and their categorical refusal to allow even the slightest relief of the ever-increasing burdens placed on working people. Obviously, the latter will not tolerate the government making them bear not just the cost of the crisis,

but also of the considerable expense of patching up the system oppressing their African brothers. If you believe the French Ministry of Defense (and their figures are almost certainly an under-estimate) the cost of the army alone up to 5 February 2013 is 60 million euros.

This will hardly scratch the monumental cost required by a situation of total breakdown. Everything has had to be re-created: all the machinery of administration, not to mention the health and education systems – all far beyond the reach of a French exchequer swamped and riddled by debt.

As for the army itself, it is quite unable to tackle even such priorities as safeguarding the civilian population. Journalists report several massive lynchings perpetrated by the depraved Malian army, protected by its French army “big brother”.

These facts demonstrate not only the hatred and lust for revenge the country's ruling strata cherish for all Arabo-Berber peoples, but also the appalling values and moral standards of the French army, which must have looked demurely away while these lynchings were being committed, as it did a few years earlier in Rwanda, so as not to notice the massacre of the Tutsi people. And as the Dutch UN Battalion did in former Yugoslavia, which let General Mladic's soldiers execute 7000 Bosnians in the town of Srebrenica without lifting a finger. Such are the execrable political and ethical standards of both these armies and the UN, swathed in hypocritical high-flown phrases.

There is not the slightest doubt that this intervention will get even more catastrophically bogged down than that in Afghanistan. The inevitable consequence will be that the situation in Europe and internationally will get even worse, with the recrudescence of an even fiercer international class struggle. For what is happening in and around Mali and concretely also in the mobilisation of working people in

Tunisia and Egypt prefigures not only a considerable deterioration in their conditions of life but also, and above all, the mobilisation and emergence on the scene of masses of working people, broadening their activity and toughening up their struggle.

But when one reads the statements of those groups and parties which oppose French intervention, one is struck by their purely declamatory character. Of course given the massive number of dupes, the very fact that they condemn it at all is commendable, and we stand with them. But even when they resolutely condemn the military intervention, they confine themselves to verbal protest. To put it another way, almost all of these organisations (Communist Party, Left Party, Left Front, New Anti-Capitalist Party, etc.) adopt a position more or less clearly *opposed* to military intervention but steer well clear of stating the orientation or outcome they are *for*. I.e., these political formations adopt the profoundly negative attitude of rejection. At most, these comrades add a generalisation devoid of meaning, i.e. that what is needed is to solve the (economic, social, national) problems these countries face. This great general truth is hardly brilliant in its originality, so much so that even the government has given up repeating it.

We need a clear orientation!

To tell the truth, most of these organisations and groups do point to what they think is a way forward. They say – indeed, often demand – that military intervention must be left to African states – Mali and her neighbours, under UN patronage. It is quite obvious that they think this would be a suitable solution since (and this is how shallow their thinking is) it would be a better fit with the African ethnic image and the sacrosanct authority of the UN. They are completely unperturbed by the fact that Hollande and his government have spent long months trying to achieve precisely that arrangement.

Such a “solution” amounts more or less to re-establishing the status-quo, i.e. the situation preceding the debacle of the Malian state and army. But trying to apply it without the French army is simply a bad joke, since the preceding state of affairs was precisely what brought about that debacle and ended up with the present disastrous situation. The French army intervened precisely in order to save the apparatus of the Malian state from complete collapse. Despite appearances, it was not directed against those Islamic terrorists. That pretext was blown up by propaganda to keep everybody happy. In truth they did it to shore up a native administrative apparatus in mortal danger – as it happened, from the islamist attack. The delight the population of Mali showed and which was obligingly filmed by French TV was less at the arrival of a foreign French army than at getting rid of a cruel medieval dictatorship. To present it as enthusiasm for the arrival of a foreign army is to indulge in the same degree of mystification as the attempt to interpret the vote *against* Sarkozy as support *for* the plans of the Socialist Party.

So the French army stands there nakedly exposed as the only cement that can hold this feeble state together, or any of the others that share the same congenital weaknesses. In that sense it is not only the chief factor in that African Union, but also the only one that can put up any opposition and organise any resistance to its ineluctable decomposition. It is high time for the parties and groups and their leaders who speak in the name of the working class to break with the backward and grotesque way of thinking which takes African states as if they were an emanation of their peoples and formed a group by its nature independent of imperialism. Whereas in reality they form a quite specific – subaltern but essential – part of the mechanism of imperialism’s world system, officially run by the omni-substitute, the UN.

The clear regression in these states in relation to fundamental problems of African society is the logical

consequence and obvious indication of the manifest setback to the attempt by the bourgeoisie – even what were at first its most radical elements – to solve elementary tasks of the bourgeois revolution. The way these regimes are currently decomposing is a striking proof from the negative side of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution; specifically, that in our imperialist epoch the bourgeoisie of any country at all – even a backward one – is organically incapable of solving the tasks posed by such a revolution. Every orientation towards a so-called popular front, every policy of alliance with a wing of the bourgeoisie, has led to setbacks. That is the cruel lesson of events.

Thus, in the absence of a clear orientation towards the theory of permanent revolution and its application in order to mobilise the workers of the whole region, a catastrophic situation has got even worse even quicker. Indeed the choice put forward in the past by Rosa Luxemburg and taken up later by Trotsky: Either the working class succeeds in overthrowing capitalism and opening the road to socialism, or humanity will fall back into barbarism – is today an immediate practical question.

In this respect, this part of Africa at least (like the Middle East) is a little ahead of Europe. That continent, too, is from now on confronted with the same direct choice. It is only the many and various reserves at her disposal which still retard the explosive maturing of the same historical dilemma, as well as the general lack of preparedness on the part of the workers' movement.

The working class in the region of Africa under discussion already has several political organisations, even if they are still weak and enjoy only minority support. But that can change quickly, not to mention the unions which, like the UGTT in Tunisia and in the big cities in the region, are sometimes powerful.

Without going into detail, there are a fair number and variety of organisations which described themselves as Marxist and/or working-class, and they have the capacity to work together for a united struggle in the region. The first pre-condition for such a struggle and for their own development is undoubtedly their ability to take fully into account the orientation offered by the permanent revolution and on that basis work out and apply democratic slogans for revolutionary change.

Revolutionary and working class organisations in Europe can and should do everything they can to help clarify this essential issue. That way they will be able to find their way back to their proper role, making the link with their history and tradition of supporting brothers and sisters in Africa. A precious contribution to this would be to adapt and develop the Fourth International's Transitional Programme, the only one to express concretely the orientation of permanent revolution. Although it needs changing in places, as a whole it remains valid. It is the one and only path to solving weighty problems which can at the same time correct wrong orientations and go beyond passive contemplation of events when African activists need clear and active support.

[Urgent Financial Appeal](#)

[The Workers' Revolutionary Party \(WRP\) in Namibia](#) is a section of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.

It will hold its Congress in Windhoek on 1, 2 and 3 October 2015.

We appeal to socialists internationally to contribute to the [fund for this Congress.](#)

The WRP participated in the November 2014 elections and achieved a real breakthrough, winning two seats in the National Assembly after only four weeks of campaigning, travelling many hundreds of miles into the different regions of the country.

The working class in Namibia has responded through the WRP to the fact that they must fight for political power with a programme independent from the bourgeoisie, including the bourgeois nationalists who dominate the workers' movement.

[Workers International Journal](#) has published details of the way the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) – dominated state has responded to the election result. They have connived in setting up a fake “Workers Revolutionary Party” and used this as a pretext to block the funding to which the party is legally entitled. This is despite a ruling by their own Ombudsman which recognises our Party's legitimacy. In fact SWAPO acts as representatives of the interests of the bourgeoisie in Namibia, desperate to stop any demands of working people from being heard in parliament.

So this cannot be a “normal” congress. We need to bring together the new forces that have emerged – often hundreds and hundreds of miles away – to discuss the problems facing various sections of workers and landless people and what kind of leadership and programme is now required.

It is on this basis that we seek your urgent financial support.

To those supporters who have already responded we give our heartfelt thanks.

The WRP estimates it could cost up to 300,000 Namibian dollars (= rand) in order to hold this Congress. That is approximately £14,000, or \$22,000 US.

That is a very tall order indeed, but they assure us that

however much we can raise, the Congress will, despite all difficulties, be held and carry out its business.

Bob Archer,

Secretary,

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

If you can send a sterling-denominated cheque, please mail it to:

P0 Box 68375, London E7 7DT, UK

If you are remitting by other means, please email us at info@workersinternational.info discuss how to transfer the money.

[The Theses of Pułacayo \(1946\)](#)

*The revolutionary programme of Trotskyism in South America:
The Theses of Pułacayo*

As the leading elements in the South African working class struggle over key points in the revolutionary programme of Marxism, such as the role of the working class in the revolution, how they relate to other classes, how they should work in government and politics, how to organise at the workplace and in the community, how to plan to develop the national economy and industry, how to organise politically as a party and in a United Front, the Pułacayo Theses provide an essential guide for a way forward.

In 1946 the Bolivian Miners' Federal Trade Union (FSTMB) was a centre of a profound debate between political tendencies which culminated in the Pulacayo Theses submitted by the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (POR). Now nearly 70 years old, these Theses stand up astonishingly well as a practical and theoretical guide to action.

Workers International Journal strongly recommends a study of these theses to all those who strive to build the movement demanded by the NUMSA special congress of December 2013

I. Basic principles

1. The proletariat, in Bolivia as in other countries, constitutes the revolutionary social class par excellence. The mineworkers, the most advanced and the most combative section of this country's proletariat, determine the direction of the FSTMB's struggle.

2. Bolivia is a backward capitalist country; within its economy different stages of development and different modes of production coexist, but the capitalist mode is qualitatively dominant, the other socio-economic forms being a heritage from our historic past. The prominence of the proletariat in national politics flows from this state of affairs.

3. Bolivia, even though a backward country, is only one link in the world capitalist chain. National peculiarities are themselves, a combination of the essential features of the world economy.

4. The distinctive characteristic of Bolivia resides in the fact there has not appeared on the political scene a bourgeoisie capable of liquidating the latifundia system and other pre-capitalist economic forms, of achieving national unification and liberation from the imperialist yoke.

These unfulfilled bourgeois tasks are the bourgeois

democratic objectives that must unavoidably be realised. The central problems facing the semi-colonial countries are: the agrarian revolution, that is, the elimination of the feudal heritage, and national independence, namely, shaking off the imperialist yoke. These two tasks are closely inter-linked.

5. "The specific characteristics of the national economy, important as they may be, are more and more becoming an integral part of a higher reality known as the world economy. This is the basis for proletarian internationalism." Capitalist development is characterised by a growing interlinking of international relations, expressed in the growing volume of foreign trade.

6. The backward countries are subjected to imperialist pressure. Their development is of a combined character. These countries simultaneously combine the most primitive economic forms and the last word in capitalist technology and civilisation. The proletariat of the backward countries is obliged to combine the struggle for bourgeois democratic tasks with the struggle for socialist demands. These two stages—democratic and socialist—are not separated in struggle by historic stages; they flow immediately from one another."

7. The feudal landowners have linked their interests with those of world imperialism and have become unconditionally its lackeys.

From this it follows that the ruling class is a veritable feudal bourgeoisie. Given the primitive level of technology, the running of the latifundia would be inconceivable if imperialism did not support them artificially with scraps from its table. Imperialist domination is inconceivable without the aid of the national governments of the elite. There is a high degree of capitalist concentration in, **Bolivia**; three firms control mining production, the heart of the country's economic life. The class in power is puny and

incapable of achieving its own historic objectives, and so finds itself tied to the interests of the latifundists as well as those of the imperialists. The feudal-bourgeois state is an organ of violence destined to uphold the privileges of the landowners and the capitalists. The state, in the hands of the dominant class, is a powerful instrument for crushing its enemies. Only traitors or imbeciles could continue to maintain that the state can rise above the classes and paternally decide what is due to each of them.

8. The middle class or petit bourgeoisie is the most numerous class, and yet its weight in the national economy is insignificant. The small traders and property owners, the technicians, the bureaucrats, the artisans and the peasantry have been unable up to now to develop an independent class policy and will be even more unable to do so in the future.

The country follows the town and there the leading force is the proletariat. The petit bourgeoisie follow the capitalists in times of "class peace" and when parliamentary activity flourishes. They line up behind the proletariat in moments of acute class struggle (for example during a revolution) and when they become convinced that it alone can show the way to their own emancipation. In both these widely differing circumstances, the independence of the petit bourgeoisie proves to be a myth. Wide layers of the middle class obviously do possess an enormous revolutionary potential—it is enough to recall the aims of the bourgeois democratic revolution—but it is equally clear that they cannot achieve these aims on their own.

9. What characterises the proletariat is that it is the only class possessing sufficient strength to achieve not only its own aims but also those of other classes. Its enormous specific weight in political life is determined by the position it occupies in the production process and not by its numerical weakness. The economic axis of national life will also be the political axis of the future revolution.

The miners' movement in Bolivia is one of the most advanced workers' movements in Latin America. The reformists argue that it is impossible for this country to have a more advanced social movement than in the technically more developed countries. Such a mechanical conception of the relation between the development of industry and the political consciousness of the masses has been refuted countless times by history.

If the Bolivian proletariat has become one of the most radical proletariats, it is because of its extreme youth and its incomparable vigour, it is because it has remained practically virgin in politics, it is because it does not have the traditions of parliamentarism or class collaboration, and lastly, because it is struggling in a country where the class struggle has taken on an extremely war-like character. We reply to the reformists and to those in the pay of La Rosca that a proletariat of such quality requires revolutionary demands and the most extreme boldness in struggle.

II. The type of revolution that must take place

1. We mineworkers do not suggest we can leap over the bourgeois democratic tasks, the struggle for elementary democratic rights and for an anti-imperialist agrarian revolution. Neither do we ignore the existence of the petit bourgeoisie, especially peasants and artisans. We point out that if you do not want to see the bourgeois democratic revolution strangled then it must become only one phase of the proletarian revolution. Those who point to us as proponents of an immediate socialist revolution in Bolivia are lying. We know very well that the objective conditions do not exist for it. We say clearly that the revolution will be bourgeois democratic in its objectives and that it will be only one episode in the proletarian revolution for the class that is to lead it.

2. The proletarian revolution in Bolivia does not imply the exclusion of the other exploited layers of the nation; on the contrary, it means the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat with the peasants, the artisans and other sectors of the urban petit bourgeoisie.

3. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the expression at state level of this alliance. The slogan of proletarian revolution and dictatorship shows clearly the fact that it is the working class who will be the leading force of this transformation and of this state. On the contrary, to maintain that the bourgeois democratic revolution, as such, will be brought about by the "progressive" sectors of the bourgeoisie, and that the future state will be a government of national unity and concord, shows a determination to strangle the revolutionary movement within the framework of bourgeois democracy. The workers, once in power, will not be able to confine themselves indefinitely to bourgeois democratic limits; they will find themselves obliged—and more so with every day—to making greater and greater inroads into the regime of private property, in such a way that the revolution will take on a permanent character.

Before the exploited, we, the mineworkers, denounce those who attempt to substitute for the proletarian revolution, palace revolutions fomented by various sections of the feudal bourgeoisie.

III. The struggle against class collaboration

1. The class struggle is, in the last analysis, the struggle for the appropriation of surplus value. The proletariat that sells its labor power struggles to do this on the best terms it can and the owners of the means of production (capitalists) struggle to seize the product of unpaid labour; both pursue opposite aims, which makes their interests irreconcilable.

We must not close our eyes to the fact that the struggle against the bosses is a fight to the death, for in this struggle the fate of private property is at stake.

Unlike our enemies, we recognise no truce in the class struggle. .

The present historical stage, a period of shame for humanity, can only be overcome when social classes have disappeared and there no longer exist exploiter and exploited. Those who practice class collaboration are playing a stupid game of words when they maintain that it is not a question of destroying the rich but of making the poor rich. Our goal is the expropriation of the expropriators.

2. Every attempt to collaborate with our executioners, every attempt to make concessions to the enemy in the course of the struggle, means abandoning the workers to the bourgeoisie. Class collaboration means renouncing our own objectives. Every conquest by the workers, even the most minimal, is obtained only at the price of a bitter struggle against the capitalist system. We cannot think about reaching an understanding with our oppressors because, for us, the program of transitional demands serves the goal of proletarian revolution.

We are not reformists, even when putting before the workers the most advanced platform of demands; we are above all revolutionaries, for we aim to transform the very structure of society.

3. We reject the petit bourgeois illusion according to which the state or some other institution, placing itself above the social classes in struggle, can solve the problems of workers. Such a solution, as the history of the workers' movement, nationally and internationally, teaches us, has always meant a solution in accord with the interests of capitalism at the expense of the impoverishment and

oppression of the proletariat.

Compulsory arbitration and legal limitations of workers' means of struggle, in most cases mark the onset of defeat. As far as is possible, we fight to destroy compulsory arbitration.

Social conflicts should be resolved under the leadership of the workers and by them alone!

4. The realisation of our program of transitional demands, which must lead to proletarian revolution, is always subject to the class struggle. We are proud of being the most intransigent when there is talk of making compromises with the bosses. That is why it is a key task to struggle against and defeat the reformists who advocate class collaboration, as well as those who tell us to tighten our belts in the name of so-called national salvation. There can be no talk of national grandeur in a country where the workers suffer hunger and oppression; rather we should really talk of national destitution and decay. We will abolish capitalist exploitation.

War to the death against capitalism! War to the death against the reformist collaboration! Follow the path of class struggle towards the destruction of capitalist society!

IV The struggle against imperialism

1. For the mineworkers, the class struggle means above all the struggle against the big mining trusts, against a sector of Yankee imperialism that is oppressing us. The liberation of the exploited is tied to the struggle against imperialism.

Since we are struggling against international capitalism we represent the interests of the whole of society and our aims are shared by the exploited the world over. The destruction of imperialism is a pre-condition to the introduction of technology into agriculture and the creation of light and

heavy industry.

We are an integral part of the international proletariat because we are engaged in the destruction of an international force— imperialism.

2. We denounce as declared enemies of the proletariat the “leftists” who have sold out to Yankee imperialism, who talk to us of the greatness of the “democracy” of the north and its worldwide domination. You cannot talk of democracy in the United States of North America where the sixty families dominate the economy, sucking the blood from semi-colonial countries, ours amongst them. Yankee dominance throws up a vast accumulation and sharpening of the antagonisms and contradictions of the capitalist system. The United States is a powder keg, waiting for just one spark to explode it. We declare our solidarity with the North American proletariat and our irreconcilable enmity towards its bourgeoisie who live off plunder and oppression on a world scale.

3. The policies of the imperialists, which dictate Bolivian politics, are determined by the monopoly stage of capitalism. For this reason, imperialist policy can mean only oppression and plunder, the continued transformation of the state to make it a docile instrument in the hands of exploiters. “Good neighbourly relations,” “pan Americanism” and so on, are just a cover which the Yankee imperialists and the Criollo feudal bourgeoisie use to dupe the Latin American peoples.

The system of mutual diplomatic consultation, the creation of international banking institutions with the money of the oppressed countries, the concession to the Yankees of strategic military bases, the one sided contracts for the sale of raw materials etc, are so many devices used by those who govern the Latin American countries to shamefully divert the riches of these countries for the profit of voracious imperialism. To struggle against this embezzlement and to denounce all attempts at imperialist plunder is a fundamental

duty of the proletariat.

The Yankees won't just stop at dictating the composition of cabinets; they will go much further: they have taken on board the task of directing the police activity of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie. The announcement of the struggle against anti-imperialist revolutionaries means nothing less than that.

Workers of Bolivia! Strengthen your cadres in order to fight Yankee imperialist plunder!

V. The struggle against fascism

1. Our struggle against imperialism must run parallel to our struggle against the embezzling feudal bourgeoisie. Anti-fascism, in practice, becomes one aspect of this struggle: defence and attainment of democratic rights and the destruction of the armed bands maintained by the bourgeoisie.

2. Fascism is a product of international capitalism. It is the final stage of the decomposition of imperialism but, in spite of everything, it does not cease to be an imperialist phase. When state violence is organised to defend capitalist privileges and to physically destroy the workers' movement, we find ourselves in a regime of a fascist type. Bourgeois democracy is a costly luxury that can only be afforded by those countries that have accumulated a great deal of fat at the expense of other countries where famine rages. In poor countries, such as ours, the worker will at one time or another will find himself looking down the barrel of a rifle.

No matter which party has to resort to fascistic methods the better to serve the interests of imperialism, one thing is sure: if capitalist oppression continues to exist, it is inevitable that those governments will be characterised by violence against the workers.

3. The struggle against the fascist bands is subordinated to

the struggle against imperialism and the feudal bourgeoisie. Those who, under the pretext of fighting fascism, peddle confidence in equally 'democratic' imperialism and the 'democratic' feudal-bourgeoisie are only preparing the ground for the inevitable advent of a fascistic regime. To eliminate the fascist peril once and for all, we have to destroy capitalism as a system.

In the fight against fascism, far from artificially dulling class contradictions, we must sharpen the class struggle.

Workers and all the exploited let us destroy capitalism in order to definitively destroy the fascist peril and the fascistic bands! It is only by the methods of proletarian revolution and within the framework of the class struggle that we can smash fascism.

VI. The FSTMB and the present situation

1. The revolutionary situation brought about on July 21 [the overthrow of Villarroel] by the irruption onto the streets of the exploited, deprived of bread and liberty, and by the combative defensive action of the miners forced to defend the social gains and to extract further gains, has allowed the representatives of the mine owners to construct their state apparatus thanks to the treachery and collusion of the reformists who have made a pact with the feudal bourgeoisie. The blood spilled by the people aided its executioner to consolidate its position in power. The fact that the governmental Junta was a provisional institution did not in anyway modify this situation. The mineworkers were right to adopt an attitude of distrust vis-à-vis those in power and to demand from them that they oblige the companies to comply with the law. We cannot and must not solidarise with any government which is not our own, that is, a workers' government. We cannot take this step because we know that the state represents the interests of the dominant social class.

2. "Worker" ministers do not change the nature of bourgeois governments. As long as the state is the defender of capitalist society, "worker" ministers become common pimps in the service of the bourgeoisie. The worker who is weak enough to swap his battle station in the revolutionary ranks for a bourgeois ministerial portfolio, joins the ranks of the traitors. The bourgeoisie has created "worker" ministers the better to dupe workers and so that the exploited will abandon their own methods of struggle, giving themselves over heart and soul to the guardianship of the "worker" minister.

The FSTMB will never enter a bourgeois government, because this would mean the most bare-faced betrayal of the exploited and the abandonment of our revolutionary class struggle line.

3. The next elections will install a government in the service of the big mining companies, because there is nothing democratic about these elections. The majority of the population, the indigenous [Indian] people and an enormous percentage of the proletariat are, by means of obstacles created by the Electoral Laws and because they are illiterate, refused the right to take part in elections. Sectors of the petit bourgeoisie, corrupted by the dominant class, have the decisive weight in the outcome of elections.

We harbour no illusions about the electoral struggle, we workers will not come to power by stuffing a ballot paper in a ballot box, and we will get there by social revolution. That is why we can assert that our behaviour towards the future government will be the same as towards the present Junta in power. If the laws are complied with, so much the better; that is what governments are supposed to do. If they are not, the government will find itself up against our most strenuous protest.

VII. Transitional demands

Each union, each mining region has its particular problems and the trade unionists in each of these must adapt their day-to-day struggle to these particularities. But, there are also problems which affect worker militants throughout the country and create the possibility of uniting them: growing poverty and the bosses' boycott, which are becoming more menacing each day. Against these threats the FSTMB proposes radical measures.

1. The establishment of a basic minimum wage and a sliding scale of wages

The suppression of the pulperia barata [company shops] system and the enormous gap between standard of living and real wages, demands the fixing of a minimum wage.

A scientific study of a working class family's living needs must serve as the basis of indexation for the minimum wage, i.e. of a wage that would allow that family to live a human existence.

In line with the decision of the Third Miners' Congress (Catavi-Llallagua, March 1946), this wage must be complemented by a sliding scale of wages. In this way we can ensure that the periodic adjustment of wages is not nullified by rising prices.

We will put an end to the ceaseless manoeuvres that consist of swallowing up wage rises through devaluation and the hiking—almost always artificial—of the cost of living. The unions must take charge of the checking of the cost of living and must demand from the companies the automatic increase of wages in line with this cost. The basic wage, far from being static, must rise in line with the increase in the price of basic necessities.

2. The forty-hour week and a sliding scale of working hours

The introduction of machinery into the mines has resulted in

the intensification of the work rate. The nature of work underground itself means that the eight-hour day is in fact longer and that it destroys the workers' vitality in an inhuman way. The very struggle for a better world demands that we free, however little, man from the slavery of the mine. That is why the FSTMB will fight to win the forty-hour week, complete with the introduction of the sliding scale of working hours.

The only way to struggle effectively against the constant danger of a bosses' boycott is to win the sliding scale of working hours that will reduce the working day in line with the number of unemployed. Such a reduction must not mean a cut in wages, since the latter is considered to be the minimum living wage.

This alone will allow us to avoid the situation where worker militants are crushed by poverty and where the bosses boycott artificially creates an army of unemployed.

3. Occupation of the mines

The capitalists attempt to contain the rise of the workers' movement with the argument that they are obliged to close unprofitable mines: they attempt to put a rope round the necks of the unions by invoking the spectre of lay-offs. Moreover, temporary suspension of extraction, as experience shows, has only served to make a mockery of the real potential of the social laws and to re-employ workers under the pressure of hunger in truly shameful conditions.

The big companies use a double accounting system. One is intended for the consumption of the workers and for when it comes to paying taxes to the state; the other is used to establish the rate of dividends. For that reason, the figures of the accounts books will not make us give up our legitimate aspirations.

The workers who have sacrificed their lives on the altar of

the companies' prosperity have a right to demand that they are not denied the right to work, even in periods where this is not profitable for the capitalists.

The right to work is not a demand aimed against such and such a capitalist in particular, but against the system as a whole; that is why we cannot let ourselves be stopped by the lamenting of certain bankrupt small manufacturers.

If the bosses find they cannot give their slaves one more piece of bread, if capitalism, in order to survive, must attack the wages and gains won, if the capitalists immediately reply to all demands with the threat of a lock-out, the workers no longer have any other option than to occupy the mines and to take in hand, on their own account, the management of production.

The occupation of the mines, in itself, goes beyond the framework of capitalism, since it poses the question of who is the true master of the mines: the capitalists or the workers? Occupation should not be confused with the socialisation of the mines: it is only a question of avoiding the situation where the success of the bosses' boycott, condemns the workers to die of starvation. Strikes with mine occupations are becoming one of the central aims of the FSTMB.

From this point of view, it is obvious that the occupation of the mines can only be considered illegal. It couldn't be otherwise.

An action that, from all points of view, goes beyond the limits of capitalism cannot be catered for by already existing legislation. We know that in occupying the mines we are breaking bourgeois law and we are on the way to creating a new situation. We know that from now, the legislators in the service of the exploiters will give themselves the task of codifying this situation and will try to smother it by

means of regulations.

The Supreme Decrees of the junta in power forbidding the seizure of the mines by the workers does not affect our position. We knew in advance that it is impossible in such cases to count on government support, and we are aware that we are not operating under the protection of the law. Therefore, no other perspective remains to us but the occupation of the mines without conceding the slightest compensation to the capitalists.

In the course of the occupation of the mines there must emerge mine committees formed with the agreement of all the workers, including those who are not unionised. The mine committees will have to decide the future of the mine and of the workers involved in production

Mineworkers: to thwart the bosses' boycott—OCCUPY THE MINES.

4. Collective agreements

The law of the land states that the employers are free to choose between individual and collective contracts. Up till now, because it suits the companies, it has not been possible to win collective agreements. We must fight for the implementation of only one type of work contract: the collective contract.

We cannot allow the individual worker to let himself be crushed by the power of capitalism. In fact, he is unable to give his free consent since such a thing cannot exist while domestic poverty forces the acceptance of the most ignominious work contracts.

To the organised capitalists, who pull together to rob the worker through individual contracts, we oppose collective contracts of the workers organised in trade unions.

a) The collective work contract must above all be revocable

at any time by the wish of the unions alone.

b) It must be obligatory for all, including non-union members; the worker who is going to sign a contract will find suitable conditions already established.

c) It must not exclude the most favourable of the conditions that may have been won from individual contracts.

d) Its implementation and the contract itself must be under union control.

e) The collective contract must be built upon our platform of transitional demands. Against capitalist extortion:
COLLECTIVE WORK CONTRACTS!

5. Workers' control of the mines

The FSTMB supports every measure that takes the unions on the path towards the achievement of real workers' control over all aspects of mine work. We must disclose the bosses' business secrets, their secret accounting, their technological secrets, the processing of minerals, etc, in order to organise direct intervention into these secret plans by the workers themselves. Because our objective is the occupation of the mines, we must turn our attention to throwing the light of day onto the bosses' secrets.

The workers must control the technical management of the mines, the accounts books, must intervene in the assignment of the different categories of work and, especially, they must make known publicly the profits drawn by the big mining companies and the fraud they perpetrate when it comes to paying taxes or contributions to the workers' Insurance and Savings Fund.

To the reformists who talk of the sacred rights of the bosses, we oppose the slogan of WORKERS' CONTROL OF THE MINES.

6. Trade union independence

The realisation of our aspirations will only be possible if we are able to free ourselves from the influence of all sectors of the bourgeoisie and its "left" agents. "Managed" trade unions are a cancer in the workers movement. When trade unions become appendages of government, they lose their freedom of action and lead the masses on the road to defeat.

We denounce the CSTB as an agent of government in the ranks of the workers. We can have no confidence in organisations which have their permanent secretariat in the Ministry of Labor and who send their members out to propagandise for the government.

The FSTMB is absolutely independent from the different sectors of the bourgeoisie, from left reformism and from the government. It practices a revolutionary trade union policy and denounces as treason any accommodation with the bourgeoisie or government.

WAR TO THE DEATH AGAINST GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED TRADE UNIONISM!

7. Arming the workers

We have said that, as long as capitalism exists, the workers will be constantly threatened with violent repression. If we want to avoid a repetition of the Catavi massacre we must arm the workers. To repulse the fascist bands and the strike breakers, let us forge suitably armed workers' strike pickets. Where are we going to get the arms? The fundamental task is to convince rank and file workers that they must arm themselves against the bourgeoisie, which is itself armed to the teeth; once that conviction is driven home, the material means will be found. Have we perhaps forgotten that we work every day with powerful explosives?

Every strike is the potential beginning of civil war and we

must approach it with arms adequate to the task. Our objective is victory and for that we must never forget that the bourgeoisie can count on its army, police and its fascist bands. It falls to us, then, to organise the first cells of the proletarian army. All the unions must form armed pickets from the younger and most combative members.

The trade union strike pickets must organise themselves militarily and as soon as possible.

8. A strike fund

The pulperías baratas [mining company stores] and low wages are the companies' means of keeping in check the workers, whose daily wage is their only resource. Hunger is the worst enemy of the striker. So that the strike can come to a successful end, we must relieve the striker of the burden of a starving family. The unions must reserve part of their income to build up strike funds, so that they may grant, as the case arises, the necessary aid to the workers.

Break the burden of hunger that the bosses impose on strikers; organise strike funds right away!

9. Control of the abolition of the pulpería barata system

We have already seen that the pulpería barata system made possible the unwarranted enrichment of the bosses at the expense of workers' wages. However, simply doing away with these shops is only worsening the situation of the workers and is turning into a measure contrary to their interests.

So that the elimination of the pulperías baratas fulfils its function, we must demand that this measure is accompanied by a sliding scale of wages and recognition of the basic minimum wage.

10. The elimination of "a contrato" work

In order to get round the legal daily maximum hours of work

and to exploit the workers even

further, the companies have dreamed up different methods of work called "a contrato." We are obliged to thwart this new capitalist manoeuvre aimed at increasing their spoils. Let us establish a single system of daily wages.

VIII. Direct mass action and the parliamentary struggle

1. Amongst the methods of struggle of the proletariat, direct mass action occupies a central position for us. We know only too well that our liberation will be first and foremost our own work and that to win it we cannot count on the help of any forces other than our own. That is why, at this stage of upturn in the workers' movement, our preferred method of struggle is the direct action of the masses, that is to say the strike and the occupation of the mines. As much as possible we must avoid striking for insignificant reasons in order to avoid squandering our strength. We must go beyond the stage of localised strikes. Indeed, isolated strikes allow the bourgeoisie to concentrate its forces and attention on a single point. Every strike must start off with the aim of becoming generalised. What is more, a strike by the miners must spread itself to other sectors of workers and to the middle class. Strikes with occupation of the mines are on the agenda. The strikers, from the outset, must control all key points of the mines and, above all, the explosives depots.

We declare that in putting the direct action of the masses to the forefront, we are not denying the importance of other forms of struggle.

Revolutionaries must be everywhere where social life throws the classes into struggle.

2. The parliamentary struggle is important, but in periods of upturn in the revolutionary movement, it takes on a secondary character. In order to play an effective role, parliamentarism must be subordinated to the direct action of

the masses. In times of retreat when the masses abandon struggle and the bourgeoisie takes back the positions it has abandoned, parliamentarism can play a prominent role. In general, bourgeois parliaments do not resolve the essential problem of our epoch: the fate of private property. This question will be resolved by the workers in the streets. Although we do not renounce parliamentary struggle, we subject it to definite conditions. We must send to parliament tried and tested revolutionary militants who are in full agreement with our trade union activity. Parliament must become a revolutionary tribune: we know that our representatives will be in a minority, but we also know that they will undertake to expose, from inside the assembly itself, the manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie. But above all, the parliamentary struggle must be tied to the direct action of the masses. Worker deputies and mineworkers must act according to one line only: the principles of these theses.

In the course of the next electoral struggle, our task will consist of sending to parliament the strongest possible workers' bloc. We stress that, while we are anti parliamentarists, we cannot, however, leave the field free to our class enemies. Our voice will be heard in the parliamentary arena as elsewhere.

To the electoral manoeuvres of the left traitors, we counter pose the formation of the PARLIAMENTARY BLOC OF MINERS!

IX. To the bourgeois demand for national unity, we oppose the workers' united front

1. We are soldiers of the class struggle. We have said that the war against the exploiters is a war to the death. That is why we will destroy every attempt at collaboration within the workers' ranks. The door to betrayal opened with the famous popular fronts, which, drawing away from the class struggle united the proletariat with the petit bourgeoisie and even with certain sectors of the bourgeoisie.

The policy of popular fronts has cost the international proletariat many defeats. So called "national unity" is the most cynical expression of the negation of class struggle, the abandonment of the oppressed to their executioners, and is the end point of the degeneration which the popular front constitutes. This bourgeois demand has been launched by the reformists. "National unity" means the unity of the bourgeoisie and their lackeys with the aim of muzzling the workers. "National unity" means the defeat of the exploited and the victory of La Rosca. It is impossible to talk of "national unity" when the nation is divided into social classes engaged in a fight to the death. As long as private property reigns, only traitors or paid agents of imperialism can dare to speak of "national unity."

2. To the bourgeois demand for "national unity" we oppose that of the Proletarian United Front. The uniting of the exploited and the revolutionary elements in one unbreakable bloc is imperative in order to destroy capitalism which is, itself, united in a single bloc. Because we use the methods of proletarian revolution and because we do not step outside the framework of class struggle, we will forge the Proletarian United Front.

3. To counteract bourgeois influences, to achieve our ambitions, to mobilise the masses towards proletarian revolution, we need the Proletarian United Front. Revolutionary elements that identify with our declarations and proletarian organisations (factory workers, railway workers, printers, lorry drivers, etc) all have their place in the Proletarian United Front. Lately, the CSTB has been calling for a Left Front. Even now, we do not know for what purpose such a front is to be formed. If it is only a pre-electoral manoeuvre and if they seek to impose a petit bourgeois leadership on it—the CSTB is petit bourgeois—we declare that we will have nothing to do with such a Left Front. But if it will allow proletarian ideas to be dominant

and if its aims are those of these theses, we would rally all our forces to this front which, in the last analysis, would be nothing other than a proletarian front with minor differences and under a different name. Against the united front of La Rosca, against the fronts which the petit bourgeois reformists think up almost daily:

Let us forge the Proletarian United Front!

X. Union confederation

The struggle of the proletariat requires a single command structure. It is necessary to forge a powerful UNION CONFEDERATION [Central Obrera]. The history of the CSTB shows us the way in which we must proceed if we are to succeed in our task. When federations turn themselves into docile instruments of the petit bourgeois political parties, when they begin to make pacts with the bourgeoisie, they cease to be the representatives of the exploited. It is our duty to avoid the manoeuvres of the trade union bureaucrats and sections of craft workers corrupted by the bourgeoisie:

The Confederation of Bolivian Workers must be organised on a truly democratic basis. We are tired of fiddled majorities. We will not stand for an organisation made up of about a hundred craft workers being able to have as much weight in the electoral balance as the FSTMB which numbers about 70,000 workers. The decisions of majority organisations cannot be overturned by the vote of almost non-existent groupings.

The proportional influence of the various federations must be worked out on the basis of the number of members.

PROLETARIAN, NOT PETIT BOURGEOIS, IDEAS MUST TAKE PRIME PLACE IN THE UNION CONFEDERATION.

Moreover, our task is to furnish it with a truly revolutionary program that must take its inspiration from what we put forward in this document.

XI. Agreements and compromises

1. With the bourgeoisie we must make neither bloc nor agreement.

2. We can form blocs and sign agreements with the petit bourgeoisie as a class, but not with its political parties. The Left Front, and the Union Confederation are examples of this type of bloc, but we must take care to fight to put the proletariat at its head. Faced with attempts to make us follow the petit bourgeoisie, we must refuse and break these blocs.

3. It is possible that many pacts or compromises with different sectors will not come to fruition; nevertheless, they are a powerful instrument in our hands. These compromises, if they are undertaken in a revolutionary spirit, allow us to unmask the betrayals of the petit bourgeois leadership and draw their base towards our positions. The July pact between workers and university staff is an example of the way in which a broken agreement can become a formidable weapon against our enemies. When certain academics without any standing launched an attack on our organisation in Oruro, the workers and revolutionary elements from the University attacked them and so gained some influence amongst the students. The declarations made in this document must form the starting point of any alliance.

The success of a pact depends on us, the miners, initiating the attack against the bourgeoisie; we cannot expect petit bourgeois sectors to take such a step.

The leader of the revolution will be the proletariat. The revolutionary collaboration between miners and peasants is a central task of the FSTMB; such collaboration is the key to the coming revolution. The workers must organise peasant unions and must work with the Indian communities.

For this the miners must support the peasants' struggle

against the latifundia and back up their revolutionary activity.

It is our duty to bring about unity with other sectors of workers as well as with the exploited sectors of artisans: journeymen and apprentices.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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NB. the numbering of section Vii parts 5 and 6 has been corrected from the version appearing Wirfi Journal No.13 july 2015