

# The challenge that SRWP launch poses to sectarian propagandists:

Show Us What You've Got!

Bob Archer replies on behalf of WIRFI to *The Socialist Revolutionary Workers' Party: A major distraction*, by John Appolis.

[\(available in pamphlet form\)](#)

The forthcoming Launch Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party in South Africa throws down a significant challenge to intellectual Marxists.

Here is an embryo party which assembled over 1,000 activists in a pre-launch congress in December 2018, proclaims that its aim is to lead the fight of the working class against the bourgeoisie and their political allies, and proudly inscribes on its banner adherence to the revolutionary thought of Marx and Lenin.

To show they mean what they say, the forces in the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), which initiated this work, have spent 5 years systematically preparing the ground to launch this party.

It was the state-sponsored murder of striking miners at Marikana in July 2012 which dramatically laid bare the reality

of society and politics in post-apartheid South Africa. Up to that point the alliance of South African Communist Party (SACP), African National Congress (ANC) and Confederation of South African Trades Unions (Cosatu) had justified and dominated a liberation (in the early 1990s) which has worked less and less for the benefit of the South African masses and more and more in the interests of a small group of black bourgeois and global capital.

At the end of apartheid in 1990-94, the leadership of Numsa lined the union membership up with SACP policy and the new Alliance regime. They blurred over a significant issue for the union members: many Numsa members supported a Workers' Charter for socialism rather than the ANC Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter, carrying on the line of the Stalinist rulers in the Soviet Union and the various Communist Parties around the world, dictated that liberation must be under the control of the black bourgeoisie and tribal leaders, and that capitalist property relations must remain intact. Militant socialist workers in Numsa were at this point persuaded by their leadership and figures in the ANC that the Freedom Charter could be adjusted to accommodate workers' demands, and that idea carried the day.

However, the Alliance government continued on a capitalist road which left no room for what workers needed and wanted. Adherence to bourgeois politics in the 1990s inevitably led to continuing the neo-liberal reforms which had already been started under the Nationalist regime. The consequences of these policies brought growing resistance from union members and the masses.

For a long time, leaders of Numsa and some other unions tried to shift government policies from within the Alliance. Under

pressure from their members, they fought to align Cosatu on policies that defended workers' rights and conditions. This set them on a course which eventually led to an inevitable collision with the SACP and ANC and within Cosatu itself.

The mineworkers' revolt at Marikana, the state's massacre of the strikers and the ensuing wave of militant struggle were the signal that the collision had matured to a point of qualitative change. The leadership of Numsa grasped what others could not articulate, that a new stage had been reached in class relations in South Africa which demanded a political step forward involving the whole working class. This led to the union's Special Congress of December 2013 and the adoption of a plan to work for a new political party.

Faced with bureaucratic chicanery in Cosatu, Numsa's leadership stood their ground and fought back, sought allies, and tested every possible way to oppose being expelled. Contrast this with the "up and out" tactics common in petty-bourgeois academic political circles.

The result was that, when they could no longer retain their membership of Cosatu, they were able to take a number of other trade unions with them. That led to the formation of a new and independent union federation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu).

### **Dynamics of class struggle**

Quite a few commentators on the left are unable to grasp the class dynamics involved here. How they misconceive the relationship between the Alliance government (whose current

President appears to have green-lighted the police attack at Marikana – he certainly publicly excused it), the massacre itself, and the workers' movement and its leaders is quite instructive.

“The Re-Awakening of a People” is a Situation Paper put out by the Eastern Cape branches of the New Unity Movement in October 2017. The authors put the split in Cosatu and the establishment of Saftu on the same level as previous splits in the ANC which led to the formation of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and The Congress of the People (Cope):

“ANC splits have spawned Cope and the EFF; COSATU splits have spawned NUMSA and SAFTU. This has resulted in a weakened Labour Movement, not supportive of worker and community interest, but seeking political footholds to gain parliamentary privileges and patronage.”

But the facts speak against this view. Although it claims adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Communism, everything about the EFF shrieks aloud that it is a second-hand version of the ANC, demagogically denouncing its parent organisation on behalf of a disaffected claimant to a cut of the spoils, Julius Malema.

Cope was formed by supporters of President Thabo Mbeki after his nakedly pro-bourgeois policies, and his obscurantist backwardness over dealing with the aids epidemic allowed Jacob Zuma to force him out of office and replace him. Cope was led by Mosiuoa Lekota, who informed *The Sunday Times* that the ideology of his party would be one that embraces multiracial and multicultural participation in governance and promoting the free market. He denied any connection to Marxism and

indicated that Cope was willing to ally itself with the (bourgeois) Democratic Alliance.

The comparison the New Unity Movement makes is purely abstract: a split = a split; all splits are the same; in their twilight, all splits are grey. The working class is left completely out of the picture in this comparison, along with any examination of the actual content of the split!

What the move by Numsa actually represents is a development in the long-drawn-out death agony of Stalinist politics and political formations and a step forward in the development of the working class.

However, the New Unity Movement cannot deal with this because they themselves have never systematically broken from the SACP's subservience to the black petty bourgeoisie and tribal leaders.

### **Abstract and concrete unity**

This Situation Paper even says somewhat later:

"What is especially troubling about the confusing NUMSA situation was that it could not have happened at a more difficult time for the working class. In 2012, workers had been butchered on a notable occasion the Wonderkop koppie near Marikana ... At that moment, union organisation stood at a premium. It was imperative that all the union federations should stand together like one man and organise a worker fight back of historic proportions. This was not to be. Neither

COSATU nor NUMSA were equal to the task.”

What chance in Hell was there that a Labour Movement led by that actual Cosatu would “stand together like one man and organise a worker fight back of historic proportions”? It was precisely for demanding a “fight back” of any proportions at all that Numsa came under the hammer in Cosatu.

One is inevitably reminded of the situation in 1914, when one after another the socialist parties of Europe voted to support their “own” governments’ war efforts and workers in different uniforms and different flags were led into slaughtering each other. At that point, a line was drawn between these socialists in name only and the real socialists who went on to split away and found the Communist International. **Which side does the New Unity Movement support, looking back?**

May it be remembered that officials of a major Cosatu union – the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) – were swapping bullets and blows with the Marikana strike organisers. The former NUM Secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, was in cahoots with the mining company and the police who carried out the massacre. You have to doubt the political acumen of anyone who can stand aside under those circumstances wringing their hands over “unity”. That ship had sailed!

Establishing working class unity requires concrete steps, action, and sometimes splits with the ones who are trying to hold the movement back. Abstract calls for “unity” only help those leaders and tendencies who betray workers and leave them victim to employer/state violence as at Marikana.

The fact is that no significant working-class leadership or organisation at the time was “equal” to the challenge laid down by the Marikana strikers and the mass upsurge of militancy which followed the massacre. One group of workers after another went into action over a period of weeks. All the unions were riding a storm, which of course eventually subsided.

Many political activists, independently or in small left groups, acted bravely and selflessly too, but the effective organised response to Marikana came precisely via Numsa, who fought through a necessary break with the ANC, the SACP and the Cosatu leadership.

Some who were initially enthusiastic about the “Numsa Moment” (the Special Congress in December 2013 and the decisions taken there) have lost hope in the five years that followed. They wanted immediate positive results. When these remained elusive, they started to look elsewhere for a quick fix.

The thing about planned and systematic work is that the struggle takes spontaneous forms: the developments which might be expected often come in an unexpected shape. But without a plan and a strategy around which a cohesive group of activists can work and learn together, there can be no adequate flexibility in dealing with sudden changes and breaks.

Middle-class radicals can change their political affiliations “at the drop of a hat”, as often as they change their shirt. Serious organisations of workers cannot afford such luxuries. They size up the job soberly, calculate the time and materials needed, roll up their sleeves and get to work. Only in this way can they prepare themselves and their organisations

flourish and grow in unexpected turns in the situation

So, step by step the Numsa leadership worked through the split in Cosatu, assisted the coming together of Saftu, saw the establishment of the United Front social movement and now anticipates the launch of the new party next March.

Last year a general strike which Numsa organised brought thousands out onto the street in a display of working-class strength.

Nothing about this looks like **playing** at politics or engaging in empty rhetoric.

Every Marxist intellectual worth her or his salt should be queuing up to assist this party by ensuring that its leaders and members have every opportunity genuinely to get to grips with the actual thought of Karl Marx and other great revolutionary leaders, study it and critically make it their own.

Together with a serious study of the history of the workers' revolutionary movement and grappling with the current state of the imperialist world we live in, such work will steel the new party's ranks and arm it theoretically, politically and in terms of its human assets to guide and lead the working class and the masses.

**"No regard to history, context and working-class experience"?**



But there are still groups who are sceptical of this development. One South African long-term activist writes:

“It is my contention that the formation of the SWRP is a distraction and not the appropriate call in the present conjuncture. Also the SRWP is being formed with no regard to history, context and working class experience”: (in *The Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP): A major distraction* by John Appolis.)

He decries the lack of a “position paper that outlines the perspectives of the SRWP”. He points out that the new party’s manifesto and constitution lack any “outline of the nature of the present period, the balance of forces, the state of the working class and its formations”. He believes that the statements in the Manifesto about capitalism, socialism, the working class” etc. are “generalities, that could have been written at any stage of the development of the working-class movement”.

We will return later to Appolis’ attitude to working-class political parties in general. The point here is: does Appolis himself grasp the character of the period?

Let us here just mention briefly a few aspects of the current situation (the “conjuncture” or “context”):

- we live in the consequences of the decay and collapse of the Soviet Union, which is (wrongly) felt and understood by millions of working-class people to demonstrate the collapse of all hope of socialist proletarian revolution. All working-class organisations – political parties and trade unions –

have suffered from crisis and decay, and this has led to widespread disillusionment with these organisational forms;

- therefore, there is enormous confusion among all the masses all over the world; basic conceptions of class struggle which our forefathers would have taken for granted have withered;

- all that nevertheless intersects with a further catastrophic deepening of the crisis of imperialism which brings down poverty, misery, oppression and the threat of war upon the masses, including workers, together with a frustration of democratic aspirations, forcing them to organise resistance despite and amid the confusion;

- Signs of a political recovery start to emerge among the confusion wherever class issues start to predominate. For example, in the “yellow vest” movement in France, very broad swathes of the masses react angrily to the shift of tax burden away from big-business and the super-rich onto the shoulders of workers and other “petit peuple” – “small folk”. (They also have a keen class appreciation of President Macron’s arrogant posturing). This is a small but significant step further than the “Occupy”, “Indignados”, “Squares” protests of the last ten years. Similarly, in Hungary, an authoritarian “populist” government tried to give employers the right to exact overtime from workers to an even greater degree than they already can, fanning the flames of a genuinely “popular” revolt over a class issue:

- The working class has held on to its trade unions (in some places and by the skin of their teeth). Those trade unions which have resisted class-collaboration (social partnership) and retained their class-consciousness are now a vital source

of strength in the regeneration of working- class politics. Numsa is one example, but Unite the Union in the UK, together with the civil and public servants in PCS, are another. And in the US, many teacher unions are spearheading class struggles in defence of education in their “social movement” campaigns.

- The negative aspects of all the above are all too real and tangible, but the class struggle continues, and leaders emerge in the working class who are fighting to change circumstances.

The conditions described above are something to be reckoned with, but Appolis accepts them as something fixed and above all intractable. Indeed. He misses the real significance of the events at Marikana: out of all the confusion, **the class struggle emerged as the key issue**. Whoever else spotted the importance of the event, it was the Numsa leadership which was able to do something constructive to take the struggle forward.

Appolis sees Marikana as a “difficult time” for the working class, a “notable occasion”. What Marikana means more profoundly is that the fulfilment of the liberation of South Africa (and elsewhere) must be led by the working class under a genuinely revolutionary programme. For Marxists, that is the significance of the launch of the SRWP.

The December 2013 Numsa Special Congress clearly sided with the working class in class struggle against the bourgeoisie and recognised that the working class needed a special organisation – a party – to wage that struggle successfully.

**A distraction?**

John Appolis sees this as a distraction. He says: "The establishment of SRWP takes militants, especially NUMSA militants, away from building existing fighting battalions of the working class and poor".

But trade unions are big organisations with (relatively) mass memberships. A properly-conducted trade union is always seeking to extend and develop its circle of active members beyond a core of officials and shop stewards. A great range of issues can engage trade union members, once they realise the union offers a field of activity and an outlet for their hopes. Moving into the political field will have its difficulties. Political party practises are different from trade union practices in various ways; there will be a learning curve. But the launch of SRWP will ultimately strengthen the trade union movement and bolster the consciousness and confidence of its members.

### **What political parties can do**

John Appolis goes on: "... what will the SRWP do which other organisations / movements of the working class cannot do?"

Well, at the very most basic level, if it grows properly, the SRWP can and must enter parliament and other elected bodies, push aside the corrupt ANC politicians, the DA etc. and fight to enact policies in the interests of the working people in economy, justice, housing, health, education, power supply, utilities, public ownership and workers' rights for a start. Single-issue or localised campaigns cannot do this; Trade unions as such cannot do this, but Numsa has decided, as a trade union, to launch a party to unite all the struggles of the South African working class at a political level.

And when it becomes clear that the bourgeoisie will resort to every violent, underhand and anti-democratic trick to maintain its system and its rule, then the Party will have trained a body of vigilant worker-activists who will know how to foil their attacks and what to do next. Unlike the anarchists, we do not think the question of workers' power can be settled without a workers' party.

Appolis accuses the Numsa leadership of adhering to an "obsolete schema": "workers' parties are for the fight for socialism while mass formations like trade unions are for defensive struggles". John Appolis refers to Trotsky saying in the 1930s that "in the period of imperialist decay, to fulfil their ameliorative tasks mass organisations that were established for reforms have to take a revolutionary approach to their tasks."

But does anybody believe Trotsky was saying that specifically revolutionary parties were no longer needed? He was explaining (80 years ago!) that trade union organisations (like Numsa!), despite the appearance of being "only defensive" were going to have to play a role in building political parties, and in their own properly trade union activities be a school of revolutionary struggle. Numsa turns to set up SRWP. Militants trade unionists in Unite the Union in Britain blow on the apparently dead embers of radical socialism in the British Labour party – and what once looked nearly moribund has come back to life!

In both cases, it becomes evident that there is more to being in a political party than there is to being in a trade union. For Numsa, the wall (between a trade union and a party) is something to be crossed. And they are learning how to cross it.

The dynamics of this period mean that less than ever can the rebirth of the workers' socialist movement happen in obedience to purely academic positions. Class relations are utterly explosive. Marikana and the spontaneous wave of struggle that followed are surely a case in point. This struggle did not start with an academic person sitting at a desk and studying the situation. That's not to say that knowledge and study are unimportant – far from it. Knowledge of the history of the movement, the history of socialist ideas and the Marxist method are decisive. Indeed, the founders of the SRWP went out of their way to request assistance in all these matters.

And they are not wrong to do so. It is clear from statements the “party leadership” have made that they have by no means broken with, or even fully grasped, the Stalinist roots of the disastrous politics of the SACP and the Alliance. It is perfectly true that the SRWP, both leaders and activists, have taken on a daunting theoretical and political job as they seek to revive “socialism, as espoused by Karl Marx” as a living force in the working class and masses. **But the fact that the work is underway provides the only hope that it might be successful. Those who claim any mastery of theoretical Marxism should put their shoulders to the wheel and help them.**

The Numsa leaders started their explanations by contrasting what the ANC government has actually done and how it has acted with the promises made before (cf. Irvin Jim's Ruth First Memorial lecture in 2014). They still bought into the whole Stalinist programme, which dictated that South Africa must first have a “bourgeois” revolution so that the country could develop as a modern capitalist state, and that only after a period of organic evolution would the conditions ripen for a proletarian revolution. Where else could they start? **But start they did**, and this opened up a process in which they invited all and sundry to come and make their contribution. **Why hold**

**back?**

Abstractly “theoretical” comrades are left floundering, because it is trade unionists who, in relation to fundamental class-consciousness, for the moment are to the fore in the regeneration of the political movement. Bookish comrades fret over the lack of “any outline of the nature of the present period, the balance of forces, the state of the working class and its formations” (Appolis). They believe the development of the political movement must wait for them to carry out all the necessary study and resolved the debatable questions. But it will not wait. It is needed now! “History, context and working-class experience” imperiously demand it!

**Who is the propagandist?**

Appolis accuses those launching the SRWP of “propagandism”, which he describes as: “a type of politics where a group believes that through calls, it can make the rest of the working class leap from where it is politically to the groups ‘profound and more advanced’ understanding ... although conditions for the SRWP are non-existent, it is believed that forming the party now would allow the masses to jump from where they are in terms of consciousness to where the party leadership is”.

This mixes up the relationship between the masses and the “party leadership” in this specific situation. The masses have for a long time been putting pressure on “their” leadership in the unions and the alliance government. The working-class revolt in 2012 burst the abscess that the Alliance was. People were forced to take sides. But not everybody involved was able to take a political initiative, map a road forward. The

Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) certainly was not at the time able to do so.

Appolis' definition of "propagandism" is in any case a little off-target. He emphasises one aspect of propagandism – belief in the power of the word to solve all problems of the movement. But it is more generally recognised in our traditions that very useful political speakers and writers often fall into two categories.

Propagandists make detailed explanations of general issues. Organisations like the New Unity Movement (c.f. "The Re-Awakening of a People" – October 2017) ask a question like "What are the watchwords of our political movement during this period", and the average reading might well expect just that – a set of pithy watchwords. But no! This is simply the opening for a disquisition upon the inhumanity of capitalism and the social consequences in terms of growing crime and depravity based on a series of examples drawn from media reports. "What barbarism!", the authors complain ("What barbarism!" and "Kangakanani?" seem to be the only concrete "watchwords" at the end of the article). But: "We are comforted by the superior social values contained in the socialist system. Here the antitheses to the vulgarities and decay of old social systems have given way to a world in which science, knowledge and kindness take precedents (sic) in all the affairs of human kind".

This is pure (and frankly rather mawkish) propagandism, but there are situations where detailed explanations of theoretical points are useful.

"A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons;



an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people," as the Russian Marxist, Plekhanov, explained.

Surely a revolutionary movement needs people with both talents! However, a third talent, the ability to organise, is a key element which can have a mighty impact within the working class. The very systematic way in which the foundation of SRWP has been approached means Appolis' accusation is misplaced. Yes, the party has been formed before its theoretical underpinning have been determined beyond a few generalities, but its foundation has been very carefully organised by a workers' organisation. It will have an impact on mass consciousness. It has already had a very considerable impact through last year's general strike.

### **Parties and class consciousness**

"... it is believed that forming the party now would allow the masses to jump from where they are in terms of consciousness to where the party leadership is," writes John Appolis.

What does he say about "where they are now in terms of consciousness"? Well, he believes that "conditions for the SRWP are non-existent" and for good measure, he accuses the proposal to found the party as having "something elitist" about it. Why? Because, for one thing, "We have not yet arrived at the point where the question of power is on the agenda". For John Appolis, building a working-class party will have to wait until, after "much effort and struggle", "the proletariat has begun to replace the ruling class plans with its own".

This formal understanding of working-class consciousness imposes a rigid strait-jacket upon the way it develops. The great mass of people, which includes the working class, always have "plans of their own". They may involve the very smallest acts of individual resistance, groups getting together for the purposes of "building and strengthening the defensive organisations" – not only of the working class at the moment, but also of the broader masses left high and dry by the crisis of imperialism, and like the "yellow vests" now in France or some years ago the Poll Tax rioters in the UK. Here in the UK we have groups opposing cuts to welfare, housing and disability benefits, groups opposing the government-led attacks on the National Health Service and on state education.

The huge obstacle to achieving their goals is that government is everywhere in the hands of political parties convinced that the domination of the bourgeois class is inevitable. Many previously socialist or communist forces have abandoned any hope of a socialist future and at best propose palliative measures to soften the blows which fall upon workers. They justify this by explaining in various ways that the class struggle is over and other issues are more important.

The Marikana miners' struggle, taken forward by the Numsa Special Congress decisions, gives the lie to all that and kicks open the gate to nationwide (and beyond!) united class action. Propaganda as just words does not build class movements, but when the words take on an organisational form, they become mighty indeed.

**Conception of workers' power**

Stalinism corrupted the politics of the Communist International (CI) as it undermined soviet democracy in the Soviet Union. It was the political outlook of a relatively small caste of bureaucrats who ended up in charge of the fledgling workers' state. The conditions and ways in which this happened are matters which will need to be discussed in the process of defining the SRWP's political stance.

The point to grasp here is that Stalinism was a caricature of Lenin's revolutionary Marxism, the policy and practices of the Bolsheviks.

But the thrust of bourgeois propaganda (eagerly peddled also by many erstwhile "Marxists") is that Lenin and Leninism are to blame for the degeneration and decay of the Soviet Union etc. John Appolis is one of those who says this. He notes (not quite accurately) that Lenin's view of a workers' party was "... not only for political representation but also as an instrument for co-ordination of workers' struggles. He also saw the vanguard party as vital for two other reasons. *Firstly*, Lenin saw a vanguard party as important for synthesising of workers' experiences – i.e. theorisation of struggles. *Secondly*, he saw it as a repository of the class' historical memory".

He continues: "It is common cause that despite the existence of mass communist parties, many of revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> degenerated". In his view, the cause of this degeneration was that it was easy for "revolutions to degenerate when all three historical tasks ... (co-ordination of struggle, theorization and ensuring historical memory and continuity) were concentrated in one working class organ".

But there is no evidence that Lenin thought “one working class organ” could adequately embody the political life of the working class. Naturally, following Engels, he emphasised the significance for the revolutionary party of the theoretical struggle. This was far beyond “synthesising of workers’ struggles”. Lenin knew how essential it is to combat the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie, who control the main educational facilities and mass media, and understood that overcoming the influence of the bourgeoisie involved critically mastering the achievements of bourgeois science and intellectual life. Lenin is painted by his enemies and false friends as a dogmatist, but that is far from the truth.

He did understand, however, that the revolutionary party is irreplaceable. And he understood that possession of their own party helped workers to raise their political horizon, intervene in the legislative process, get measures adopted which ameliorated their situation, freed the hands of their other fighting bodies (trades unions, tenants’ organisations and other campaigns) to organise effectively.

John Appolis needs to stop equivocating and state: does he agree with the preceding paragraph, or has he abandoned Lenin’s views on the party completely? There is a good argument to be had about Leninist parties, because his (Lenin’s) views on the matter were systematically falsified in the later Communist International, in particular in one-sided interpretations of the book “What Is To Be Done?”. This book is presented as if it proposes a hierarchical, top-down and bureaucratic party structure. All this will have to be clarified in discussion. What is not acceptable at all is the view that the working class can exercise its historical interests without its own, revolutionary, party.

## **Only in revolutionary situations?**

“We have not yet arrived at the point where question of power is on the agenda”, says John Appolis, under the heading “(4) Conditions are not yet ripe for the SRWP”.

Since the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, we have seen endless spontaneous protest movements of resistance in many parts of the world, particularly USA, Europe and the Middle East/North Africa. “Occupy”. The “Indignados”, the occupation of the Squares in Greece, were all responses to the impact of the crisis on working people, but they were all marked by an extremely low level of class consciousness and political clarity. The Arab Spring brought examples of breathtaking courage as the masses challenged authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, the Gulf states and most recently Syria. However, the best political demand they could come up with was a general thirst for “democracy” and rage at oppression and corruption.

Almost everywhere, these movements have either subsided or (in the Middle East) mainly been smashed up. News from the Sudan indicates that a second round is very likely underway.

Why is the “question of power not on the agenda”? Because none of these movements has yet been equipped with an adequate consciousness of the social and economic motive forces of the crisis which has engulfed them. All have been suspicious of parties and trade unions which came to them with explanations, and indeed prejudiced (because of negative experiences) against Marxist politics. What becomes clear is that (however explicable) this suspicion and prejudice is obstructing the forging of forms of consciousness and organisation which might

equip the movement to struggle successfully.

**The objective situation of imperialism is truly not just “ripe” for revolution, but “over-ripe”. The subjective factor – the political consciousness and level of organisation of the masses, working class leadership – lags far, far behind.**

### **The WRP (Namibia) and the trades union movement**

In 1974 working class members of the SWANU Youth, SWAPO Youth League and the VolksParty Youth met in Rehoboth in a clandestine meeting convened by Hewat Beukes. They formed the Socialist Youth movement, recognizing that the tribal and bourgeois nationalist leaderships in Namibia were politically bankrupt and could only lead the country to a new capitalist state under more or less the same colonial and imperialist ruling classes.

This meeting was the almost natural outcome of the working class struggles which exploded in 1971/72 with the General Strike of contract labour nationally in various industries, agriculture and commercial businesses. The reciprocated infusion of the struggle for trade unionism in the massive struggles of the working class in South Africa since 1973 caused not only a pulsation in Namibia but accentuated the political division between the objectives of the workers' struggles on the one hand and the tribalist bourgeois nationalism of the petit bourgeoisie and the tribal royalties and chiefs on the other.

The socialist group was founded to advance a socialist programme in support of the struggles of the working class and

to counteract the bourgeois programme (lack of programme) of the nationalists. They recognized that the country would become independent under a bourgeois nationalist leadership, given the imperialist and Stalinist edifice behind them and the massive disadvantages facing the socialists. They resolved therefore to work tirelessly to prepare the working class for a speedy response to the inevitable merger of the imperialists and the tribalist bourgeois nationalists.

The socialist youth defended the working-class leaders in the great miners' strikes and struggles after 1978 against the tribal onslaughts of in particular the SWAPO, but they were unable to prevent that leadership succumbing under slander, attacks, using their international connections and co-option of union leaderships. The socialists were now thrust into a new direction of struggle. By 1984. The SWAPO had totally dismantled and neutralized the union leadership, whose top leader it had coaxed into exile, forced to write a constitution for the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), and then jailed. It replaced the leadership with SWAPO nationalists who drove the union movement into a reckless direction of impromptu wildcat strikes on such demands as the implementation of Resolution 435, which had as its cornerstone the protection of bourgeois private property. Hundreds and thousands of workers lost their jobs.

In 1984, the socialists clandestinely founded the Workers Revolutionary Party: they supported the Namibia Trade Union, a socialist union, wrote its newspaper, and counteracted the *agent provocateur* methods of the NUNW. It fought the tribalization of the workers' movement by the SWAPO and the NUNW.

In 1988 the WRP was able successfully to call out national

protests against the illegal occupation of Namibia. The SWAPO leadership and the SWANU leader (who is now a SWAPO member) declined the invitation to make the call.

The foundation and work of the WRP were closely connected to the struggle for union rights and working-class organization.

Now Numsa, too, has boldly raised the banner of Marxism. The South African working class has reminded the world that this is everywhere the class which can guarantee a future for humanity.

Would-be intellectual Marxist can use their talents to the best effect by striving to make good any defects they perceive in the new venture. The problems of the SRWP are not that it is unnecessary; far from it! It is profoundly necessary! The problems with the fledgling party arise from the dismal effects of the political degeneration of Stalinism. But the foundation of the new party offers the best guarantee that these problems can be overcome.

*Bob Archer,  
on behalf of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth  
International,  
January 2019*

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# **WIRFI Message at Miroslav Vodslon's funeral, Berlin, December 2018**

Mirek was a comrade in the truest sense of the word; a fighter side by side with us for a socialist future for the human race.

He was a convinced and profoundly thoughtful Marxist. His theoretical stature towered above that of others because he was highly intelligent, very thorough and took Marxism very seriously indeed. He was never satisfied with superficial or half-baked formulations of it.

Mirek also possessed a wry, dry and self-deprecating sense of humour which showed deep appreciation of the contradictions that arise in life and which moreover enabled him to reveal defects in another person's reasoning without massaging his own ego. This is something that we will especially miss.

Mirek came into contact with us UK Trotskyists as a militant of the Group of Opposition and Continuity of the Fourth International (GOCQI), in the late 1980s. Having just dealt with an abusive leadership in the Workers' Revolutionary Party, we were looking for contacts with activists around the world who had gone through experiences parallel to ours and who had similar ideas to ours about the way ahead.

Comrades like Balazs Nagy, Miroslav, Radoslav Pavlovic and Janos Borovi had paid the price of resisting Stalinist rule in their home countries. They had been forced to leave behind families and comrades and go into exile or face death or imprisonment. Based on their own experiences and difficulties in the Trotskyist movement, they joined with the insurgent Workers Revolutionary Party members and contacts in Namibia, South Africa and Latin America to set up the Workers'

International to Rebuild the Fourth International in 1990.

The GOCQI, including Mirek, quickly showed their theoretical mettle, contributing powerfully to the theoretical publications which prepared for the new foundation.

But the development of the new international collided with the collapse of the workers' states in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the Thatcher-Regan onslaught on all the things workers had gained in the class struggle. This was also a development which sought – where it could – to drive back the movements against imperialist oppression around the world and to corrupt them where it could not.

The workers' movement in western Europe and North America was undermined by de-industrialisation and re-location of industries, automation and the introduction of new technologies and the political collapse of Communist and Socialist parties.

Significant numbers of our already small group left, in some cases abandoning the very idea of an organised Marxist International, in others abandoning political activity completely.

Mirek stood out against the quitters, but for a while was unable to contribute personally to the struggle of the Workers' International.

Nevertheless, physically isolated as he was from other comrades, Mirek instinctively sought out footholds in the revolutionary Marxist movement and in the struggles of industrial workers. He worked within these circles to encourage the study of fundamental questions of Marxism, in particular political economy, and he deliberately participated in the shop-floor organisation of Daimler-Benz trade unionists.

The international situation for Marxists became extremely

gloomy. The first big break in the clouds was the determined struggle of the platinum miners at Marikana in South Africa, followed by a widespread mass-movement of workers in a large number of industries and trades for a big increase in wages. Twenty years after the end of apartheid and the rise to power of the African National Congress in South Africa, the deliberate murder of 35 strikers at Marikana by the South African Police acting under the instructions of the mine-owners with the collusion of ANC ministers marked the outbreak of a political crisis which faced revolutionary Marxists with a serious challenge.

It also brought Mirek back into activity in the Workers International. Together, we fought for the understanding that the way forward after Marikana is work towards the establishment of a socialist party of the country's working class, and that this could not be achieved by isolated sectarian groups, however courageous and devoted. The decisions and resolutions of the December 2013 Special Congress of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) sketched the plans for the re-foundation of the country's working-class movement, and Workers International pledged its support for this process.

Meanwhile the leading comrades of the Workers' Revolutionary Party of Namibia, founded in 1989, had been working for years through the Workers Advice Centre in Windhoek providing legal advice and representation to individuals and groups suffering abuses at the hands of employers and government. They had placed themselves in an excellent position to take forward new (or newly-resumed) mass struggles, such as:

- the campaign of former TCL miners for their stolen pensions
- various ethnic groups defending their land
- the matter of wholesale miss-appropriation of the assets of the former TLC in the course of official bankruptcy of the company.

- the question of whether German compensation for imperialist oppression, land-theft and atrocities during the occupation of “South-West Africa” would go to the victims’ communities or be stolen by government ministers,
- the campaign for a real reckoning over the crimes of South West Africa Peoples’ Organisation (SWAPO) during the liberation struggle,
- against the theft of people’s homes through legal chicanery
- Stood in the 2014 election and won two Assembly seats
- new industrial struggles such as that of the fishery workers.
- This meant that by late 2015, the WRP of Namibia was able to convene a conference with over 100 delegates to re-launch the party

Mirek devoted himself to assisting the development of the WRP of Namibia, spending considerable time in the country and brimming with advice to assist its development, both practical and theoretical.

Mirek did all he could to bring a lifetime’s experience of political struggle to bear fruitfully in the training of a new generation of political leaders in the continent of Africa. In the process, he designed a series of lectures to try to explain Marxism and the Fourth International to members of a party which contained representatives of pretty well all the ethnic groupings in the country, from bushmen to descendants of German settlers, and certainly all the oppressed groups, rural or urban.

The precious outcome is a pamphlet: [Why we must rebuild the Fourth International](#), which will undoubtedly play a major role in the political training of new generations. It is written in a very straightforward style, using everyday language in a way that makes complex questions easier to understand and does not set up the author as some sort of ivory-tower intellectual.

In a movement which has no lack of flamboyant, even abrasive, characters, Mirek was exceptional for his gentleness (not without firmness!) towards all and for the modesty and simplicity with which he wrote and spoke.

Back in Europe, Mirek keenly followed political event in online discussions. Topics included how Marxists should react to the discussion around mass migration and a sharp intervention on the outcome of the UK referendum on leaving the EU.

Mirek engaged in a lengthy online discussion earlier this year on the question of Catalonian independence.

He was keen to write-up his own experiences of the development of events in Czechoslovakia before and during the “Prague Spring” of 1968, and we were hoping to provide him with an opportunity to talk about this at an event in the UK on the fiftieth anniversary.

Sadly, things turned out otherwise. We were utterly shocked by news of Mirek’s death.

We pass on our condolences to Adrien and the rest of the family – Mirek was enormously proud of his son and his grandson – and also to Senta, who has been his companion and bedrock for so many years and whose companionship clearly meant so much to him.

We join with many rank-and-file IG Metall trade unionists, activists in the political movement in the Trotskyist left in Germany, the UK and elsewhere, and above all many Namibians in treasuring what he was worth and mourn his loss.

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# Why we must rebuild the Fourth International by Mirek Vodslon 14/09/15

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### 1. The question posed

The Namibian working class – all the active elements in it – is now creating its own party. This party will represent workers and other exploited people in the parliament and soon also in the local authorities. This is already an important step. It will make workers more confident to fight for their demands.

Several movements of working class resistance against

capitalist exploitation now converge under the banner of the Workers Revolutionary Party in order to fight together and achieve important partial improvements.

For instance, banks in cahoots with SWAPO officials have stolen the pensions of former press-ganged SWATF recruits and of miners who worked for the now bankrupt TCL corporation. The thieves must be forced to give back what they stole and be punished! The Southern Peoples have long been oppressed. Their legitimate demands which will enable a real development for them must be satisfied. These are just two examples, but there are many. In fact every oppressed section of society has legitimate demands and for each one there is only one party with which they can hope to achieve their satisfaction: the WRP.

However, a lasting improvement of the material situation of the working class requires a fundamental change in the whole society. All the groups and individuals who are now becoming part of the WRP have already understood that. And they expect the WRP as their party to arm itself with a programme that will allow them to achieve such a fundamental change.

All over the world we live under a regime, capitalism, where a tiny minority appropriates and accumulates the lion's share of the wealth that the vast majority, the toiling classes, produce. But that is not all. The capitalists only allow the toilers to produce anything at all if the products can generate private profit for capitalists. This puts a straitjacket on production of wealth. That straitjacket is becoming ever tighter, as can be seen from the growing number of unemployed.

All these unemployed workers and young could be producing useful things for their own needs and those of others. But not under capitalism. Modern means of production could assure that the vital needs of everybody in the world are satisfied and his or her individual personality can develop freely and

fully. Instead, we live in a world where a tiny minority swims in abundance and the vast majority lives in ever-worsening poverty.

Capitalism has entered a phase of final decline, its death throes, where capitalists find it ever more difficult to serve their purpose in life, the core principle of capital: making profit in order to increase capital. And since production of useful things for the needs of working people is allowed only under the condition that such production serves to increase capital, those needs are ever less satisfied.

The systematic theft of public money and resources, the theft of pensions and other assets of the working class is not limited to Namibia, it is endemic in all of Africa and common also in other parts of the world. A feature of capitalism since its beginning is that its ruling class is composed of an increasing number of criminals who do not respect their own stated sacred principle of private property. In the death agony of their regime they are pushed ever more to open theft and fraud as their opportunities to make legal (according to their own laws) profit diminish.

So the real, historic task is not just to correct the worst abuses of capitalism, the corruption, the oppression of nations or races, the oppression of women. It is not just to stop the ever-worsening wars and the deterioration of the environment which threatens to destroy the conditions of life itself. It is not even just to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.

All these can be achieved only if the working class is able to produce wealth directly both for its collective needs (like, for instance, railroads, hospitals and schools) and for its individual needs (like bread and medicine). Workers themselves must achieve that situation, nobody can do it in their place. They need to seize the private property of the capitalists, take over factories and other facilities, machines, and raw



materials. Workers need to become the collective owner of all these means of production. Then they need to use them to organise production for their own needs as a class and for the needs of all other working people. To accomplish that, the corrupt SWAPO state in this country, like all other capitalist states, must be replaced with a state that belongs to the working class and is fully under its command. Only a radically new state composed of organised workers themselves from bottom to top can be fully a workers' state.

Only such a workers' state can start cleaning up the material and moral mess created by capitalism and building a new society: socialism and communism.

We build the Workers Revolutionary Party under a red flag with an emblem that consists of a hammer, a sickle and the number four. All the elements of that symbol express the foundations of our programme.

Before I get to the main question – why the number four – I need to mention the meanings of the other elements of our flag. Each of them needs to be examined in greater depth than we will be able to do this time. In fact everything we will talk about in this short pamphlet needs deeper consideration. So I hope that there will be many more education initiatives and that every present or future member of the WRP will get a chance to deepen his or her understanding of all of our programme.

## **2. Productive forces and modes of production**

Humans are very special beings. Other life forms just adapt to the conditions that nature offers for their life. Humans produce the conditions of their own life by working in cooperation. They possess productive forces: the tools and the collective knowledge needed to produce all they need, food, shelter, medicine and nowadays also roads, books, bibles, aeroplanes and computers. Workers themselves are of course the

main productive force. People beg the heavenly Father to give us this day our daily bread, but everybody knows that there would be no daily bread without the work and the cooperation of farmers, millers and bakers.

Humanity went through several stages of development of its productive forces. At the beginning, producers lived in small groups that owned their means of production and shared the products. This was the time when the community had just enough tools and knowledge to survive, but only if everybody worked for it all day. Such communities still live in some regions of Namibia. Anybody who wants to talk to such a community must bring enough food to feed everybody while they are talking, because during that time they can't be searching for food, as they would do normally.

But people invent ever better tools and eventually, starting with some areas of the world like the Middle East, they were able to produce more than they needed to survive. This is when the big separation became possible. Some could stop working and have leisure to think and rule. The others worked to maintain both themselves and the rulers. Society became divided into classes, and the first "class society" was born. Each class had a very different position in production than the other. Some classes ruled and organised production, others were the actual producers. Human society was turned around completely. The result of this first social revolution was that the original equality of all people was replaced by inequality. At the same time, the division of work between man and woman developed into a domination of woman by man.

Further developments brought several successive types of class society. For instance, the mode of production of the ancient Roman republic and later the Roman empire divided society fundamentally into slaves and slave owners. This was replaced with the feudal mode of production, where the ruling class were the feudal lords, the owners of land. With the land, they also owned the peasant population settled on that land. Each

type of society corresponded to a specific degree of development of the productive forces, each was based on a distinct mode of production, and each was brought about by a social revolution that had to destroy the previous society.

### **3. Capitalism and democracy**

Finally, the development of industry and the democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th century brought a type of society whose members are all traders, people who buy and sell goods for money. Those who have no money are not fully members of human society. The only way to cooperate in this society is by buying and selling privately produced goods. Where this type of society is fully realised, all its members are equal (as traders) and therefore also have equal rights in the eyes of the law. This equality in the eyes of the law is, as we know, a democratic ideal. Its highest expression is political democracy in which the people, by means of individual votes, choose their government. In most countries this ideal is not fully realised and in countries like Namibia it is mostly an empty pretence.

But for all its formal equality, even where it does exist, this society generates profound and increasing social, that is real, inequality. The reason is that it separates producers from their means of production. The baker, for instance, no longer owns his kneading trough. He or she works in a huge bread-producing factory that belongs to somebody else, the capitalist. While the worker works, he or she has no freedom at all. In exchange for a wage, every worker must surrender his or her freedom for the whole working day and must follow orders given by the capitalist or usually a lieutenant of the capitalist. In summary, the worker becomes a slave under the dictatorship of the capitalist for the duration of every working day.

The capitalist starts with some money. With that money he buys means of production and labour power. Having bought them, he

becomes the owner of both. The product of labour – bread in our example – therefore also belongs to the capitalist, although he did not make it – and this is what he sells. As a result, he gets more money than he had at start. The difference is called the profit. Then he uses most of the money he now has to buy more means of production and more labour power, in order to produce even more products and sell those, again with a profit. So the capitalist accumulates enormous wealth. This seemingly self-increasing wealth is called capital.

Of course it is the workers who produce capital, all of it. The capitalists only owns and therefore commands it. But he cannot do with it as he pleases. In fact, any capitalist who does not do his best to increase his capital, will be overtaken by other capitalists. So in fact it is the capital that commands the capitalist, telling him what to do in order to increase the capital. So, in effect, workers are being bossed around by the accumulated results of their own work!

Being owners of the whole product of the society, capitalists form the upper class. This type of society is therefore called capitalism. Capitalists are often called “bourgeois”. That is a word borrowed from the French. Originally, it meant simply inhabitant of a town. That is where the capitalists developed. Accordingly, the class of capitalists is often called the “bourgeoisie”.

Capitalism with rule of law equal for all and with democratic rights and freedoms is much better for the working class than capitalist rule without them. In a democracy, the working class can organise openly in trade unions and parties. Without it, working class organisations become illegal and have to go underground.

But among all its rights and freedoms, the only one which this regime enforces ruthlessly is the right of capitalists to own the means of production, that is the right to exploit the

working class. This right of the capitalists takes precedence over all other rights and freedoms. This democracy is therefore not just “democracy” for all people. It is limited, bourgeois democracy. Its essence is the dictatorship of the capitalists. So this democracy is only the best form of a bad thing: the dictatorship of the capitalists.

#### **4. The red flag and the hammer**

The hammer symbolises our class, the working class.

But what exactly is the working class? It is not all toilers. It is the class of those who need to buy their means of subsistence – food, shelter, education, health care – for money, in order to live and raise children, but own nothing that they could sell – except one thing: their own capacity to work, their labour power! This class is also called the proletariat and wage-workers are called proletarians. That word is very old and meant originally people whose only wealth consisted of their children.

Labour power (the capacity to work) is a very special commodity. The worker goes to the factory and surrenders eight hours or more of his daily life to the capitalist. The capitalist pays the value of that labour power as a daily wage to the worker. That value is determined by that of all the products needed to sustain workers’ life and reproduce their labour power, not only for the next day or month, but also to enable them to have children, the next generation of workers.

The capitalist consumes the worker’s labour power by employing him or her to do actual work – and there something strange happens: that work produces much more value than that of the worker’s wage. This is why the owner of the bakery can sell the bread produced by the bakers at a higher price than the sum of the prices of the flour needed to make the dough, the electricity needed to bake it, the amortisation of all the machines and buildings and the wages of the bakers. The profit

of the capitalist comes from this difference. This is the basis of capitalist exploitation. We owe this discovery to Karl Marx.

There is much more to learn about this. Marx lived in the 19th century at the time when capitalism developed. He lived mostly in the country that pioneered that development, England. Marx wrote several books about capital. The main one is called simply: Capital. I hope that we can have more discussions that make clear to every member of the WRP how exactly capitalist exploitation comes about in this organisation of society which is called the capitalist mode of production – the society we live in.

Wage workers form the principal lower class in society. That class has existed for over 180 years in Europe and for at least 100 years in every country of the world. The capitalist organisation of society constantly produces both classes, the capitalist and the working class. Formal equality of rights cannot hide this increasing social inequality.

As long as it has existed, the working class had to fight against the capitalist class for such conditions of exploitation as allow it to survive. The capitalist's interest is to increase its profit by paying ever-lower wages, making workers work ever longer hours and always speeding up the pace of work. So capitalists and workers have fundamentally opposed interests. Each class must fight the other. Therefore, never believe a capitalist who pretends that he and his workers "are in the same boat", as capitalists often say. On the contrary, workers must unite against their own employer and against all capitalists.

If workers don't unite, each worker remains just an individual trader who trades their labour power. All those worker-traders compete against each other and, even worse than that, they compete against an army of unemployed workers ready to take up any work in any conditions. Disunited workers undercut one

another on wages and other working conditions.

So workers must unite, form trade unions and fight collectively for their working conditions simply to prevent capitalists from starving them and from working them to premature death.

In the past and in some countries like Germany, where I live, workers' organisations were quite successful in this everyday struggle, so there are well-off workers who may possess a house or a car and have enough money to be able to send children to university to let them become skilled workers. But even a house, a car or university education are still only means of reproduction of labour power, be it at a much higher standard than the means available to the inhabitants of the shanties of Windhoek. Even a well-off German worker is therefore still just a wage-worker. He does not belong to the middle classes as some people pretend. He belongs to the same class as a super-exploited Namibian miner because he has the same fundamental interest in defending his working and living conditions against the capitalist class and in replacing the whole capitalist regime by a society without exploitation of human beings by other human beings. Being wage-workers is the solid foundation of workers' solidarity; regardless of important differences in living standard and even regardless of whether they actually have work at the moment. It does not matter where they live, what skin colour they have, whether they are men or women, which beliefs or faith they hold or which local customs they follow.

Moreover, the capitalist class all over the world has started a huge attack on the living standards, working conditions and rights of the working class with the objective of aligning them with the worst of existing conditions, those of super-exploited workers without rights in many countries of Asia and Africa.

Even in Germany, the past conquests of the working class are

threatened and a growing part of the working class sinks into the uncertain existence of contract labour and unemployment. Most unions traditionally unite only the fully employed in the fight for their wages and conditions. They are losing this battle everywhere because of the downward pressure of competition from the growing crowd of defenceless precarious and unemployed workers.

So unions must change in order to unite all layers of the working class. Some unions are becoming conscious of this necessity and as they try to realise it, they also start to realise that they cannot defend the working and living conditions of the working class with any prospect of a lasting success – and keep capitalism. So they must support the struggle to overcome capitalism itself. Workers must unite to defend themselves and fight off the multiform divisions constantly introduced by capitalists. But all experience shows that it is a losing fight unless the unity has the goal of uprooting the whole system of exploitation of humans by humans. This is a political goal which requires workers to form their own political party.

The workers' party cannot replace unions, which are vital for the everyday struggle. But neither can there be a tight barrier between trade unions and the workers party. The political struggle must be rooted in everyday struggles and many everyday struggles can only be won on the political level. For instance, capitalists more and more often break the resistance of their workforce to a worsening of its conditions by forcing large sections of that workforce out of the enterprise and into a new one, where they do the same work and produce the same things under much worse conditions. Unions have to fight against this so-called "outsourcing". In some cases they manage to fight off an "outsourcing" attack. But "outsourcing" is a right of capitalists, flowing from the fundamental right to private ownership of enterprises which is guaranteed by all capitalist constitutions. So without a



political change, any particular success against “outsourcing” is short-lived.

Since its origins, the most far-sighted elements of the working class have seen beyond the never-ending elementary struggle for survival. They have understood that a definitive liberation of their class was necessary and also possible by overthrowing the capitalist class and its state and making the modern, large-scale means of production the property of all those who work. They have also understood that the only way for workers to become owners of today’s means of production is to own them in common, as the working class. These workers have therefore called themselves “communists” and for a very long time they have organised in international communist associations and parties. Their only difference from the rest of the working class is the clear understanding of this overall aim and that the international unity of the whole working class must take precedence over national or particular interests. In all struggles of their class they have promoted these principles.

The red colour of our flag symbolises the workers’ blood which has been shed in all those struggles over many decades.

## **5. The sickle**

As indicated before, besides the working class, there are other toilers. Some belong to intermediate layers. Some work for a wage but all they do is manage production on behalf of some capitalist. Top level managers have very large “wages” that are in reality parts of the capitalist profit, bribes. Moreover, they own large shares of capital, so they are capitalists. Others administer the top level of the capitalist state on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole in order to maintain the overall conditions for the capitalist regime to persist. All these belong to the capitalist class.

Still other toilers do produce commodities, or work in the

distribution of commodities, but not as wage workers. They work, but are different from wage workers in that they possess their means of production or of other work. They are craftsmen and small retailers in cities who still possess their workshops or shops.

Yet others, most important in a country like Namibia, are peasants in the countryside who possess their plot of land.

All these latter classes are often lumped together and called "petty-bourgeois". That means simply that they may be owners of some means of production or just wish to become owners of some means of production, but those means are so small that they do not constitute capital.

Most of these classes are being squeezed out by large capitalist production. The peasants especially, all over Africa, are being starved, forced off their land and obliged to look for a living in the cities, usually as the lowest layer of the working class.

New urban layers that are intermediary between the capitalist and the working class are still created. Many are self-employed but their social condition differs from that of the working class only in their imagination, where they deem themselves superior to the working class.

The peasantry still exists. Like the working class, the peasantry too must struggle for its living and working conditions.

Some peasants' land doesn't provide enough for them to live, or they may have no land any more. They have to work for a wage for richer farmers or in factories. In fact they are already part of the working class. They have the same demands as we have, such as higher wages and better working conditions. Of course we support these demands.

Poor peasants usually want to get enough land to sustain

themselves and their families. The working class supports the demand for the expropriation of landlords possessing large amounts of land – and sometimes not even exploiting it. Such land must be distributed especially to landless peasants. They themselves should decide if they want to use these lands collectively as a cooperative or individually.

The life of the poorest layers of peasantry mostly lacks even the one relative freedom which capitalism affords to the urban worker, that of choosing his or her master. Instead, a poor peasant often depends on a powerful, irremovable master, a landlord, a capitalist or, mostly, both. That master appears irremovable because he is supported by a corrupt, autocratic state. This is true even in countries like Namibia, which is formally a republic and a democracy, but its state is not a normal capitalist state. It is a corrupt autocracy like the old kingdoms were, except that the role of the autocrat at the top is taken by anonymous, foreign representatives of imperialist powers, like the bureaucrats of the International Monetary Fund. It is they who make sure that peasants and other poor classes at the bottom of society are forever imprisoned in rotten dependency relations. The whole SWAPO state, including its “parliament”, its president and its “Father of the Nation”, are the local executive apparatus of imperialist (international capitalist) powers that loot the country.

Capitalists exploit peasants by forcing them to sell their products too cheap and by selling the necessary machines and tools to the peasants at too high a price. Banks deny them the necessary credit. This can change only if the “commanding heights” of the economy – big industry and all credit institutions – belong to the working class.

But to the peasantry the question often appears as that of gaining a true democracy, of removing their immediate masters and becoming full citizens equal to others. This is not limited to the peasantry. The working class, especially its

lowest layers, are also deprived of their elementary democratic rights by a regime like that of SWAPO in Namibia.

Imperialism foisted a capitalist constitution on Namibia. It made sure that it guarantees the irremovable principle of private ownership of the means of production. This made the constitution undemocratic as it creates a barrier to making land available to those who work on it or need it to live on it and so it maintains peasants and poor people in towns and cities in dependency. By instituting the principle of a "unitarian state" it violates the democratic right of peoples of Namibia, such as, Caprivians, Herreros, Basters and Namas, to self-determination. For example, Caprivians who tried to practice that right have been in prison for 15 years. A real unity can be only voluntary but the peoples concerned were not asked. The whole constitution was concocted by capitalists using a ready-made template elaborated by imperialist powers, acting behind the backs of the people of Namibia. Therefore the immediate demands in any revolution must include that of a Constituent Assembly to install a democracy in a truly independent Namibia.

Since peasants live in small communities disseminated over large distances, it is very difficult for them to organise as a class on their own. Sometimes they do succeed in that. They form a party or an army to push their demands. But very soon they find out that they cannot formulate a programme for the whole of society. So they have to ally themselves with one of the two main urban classes, either with the working class if the working class is able to organise itself and become strong, or with the bourgeoisie.

The latter alliance was the only possibility in the epoch of the great bourgeois revolutions in England and France in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the modern working class had not yet been developed by capitalism. During the French revolution of 1789, activists of the bourgeoisie visited peasants in their villages and helped to write up their demands for

independence from aristocratic and ecclesiastic landlords, for equality before the law and for a Constituent Assembly to realise those demands. The bourgeoisie of that epoch had genuinely common interests with the peasantry.

This is nowhere the case today, and has not been for a long time. The bourgeoisie cannot be a genuine ally of the peasantry and where it lures the peasantry into such an alliance, it will betray them. Only the working class can help the peasantry to realise its social and political demands. Only the working class, if it takes power, will be able to offer peasants acceptable conditions for the sale of their products, and credit for the purchase of their tools and machinery. Only the working class can help realise full democracy but the only way to do so is not to stop at formal, limited, bourgeois democracy, which leaves the capitalists in control of society and still running things in their own interests. The working class must carry on to expropriate the capitalists and install a workers' state. So the Constituent Assembly of all classes in society will necessarily and rapidly give way to the rule of councils of workers and poor peasants.

The hammer and sickle in our emblem symbolises the alliance of the working class with the peasantry in struggle against the capitalist class and against the remnants of old oppressive relations that flourished before capitalism.

But alliance does not mean fusion! We build a party of one class, the working class. This does not mean only that we aim for a party composed mainly of workers. It means above all that its programme is the programme of the working class and any person, worker, peasant or intellectual, who wants to become member, has to accept all of that programme. Moreover this programme stipulates which of the two classes must lead the alliance. That leading class is the working class.

## **6. The number four: the International**

This number stands for the international character of our party. It may seem strange at first that the International can be symbolised by a particular number. There is a powerful reason for it but it can be understood only in connection with the history of all the efforts to build the International. So I am forced to make yet another long detour.

The working class has, since its origins, understood that it is fundamentally an international class. Its fight starts on a national level but can be won only if it becomes international.

It is impossible to achieve socialism in one country. Especially in a small (by population), entirely dependent country, like Namibia. Greece in Europe is another obvious example. But it is in the long run impossible even for a large country or a group of countries. The experience of the USSR shows it.

Because socialism and communism are possible only on the world scale, the social revolution of the working class must be a world revolution. This does not mean that the revolution can happen at the same time everywhere. But the working class itself is international; therefore so must be its party.

What we call the International is not a corrupt club that exists only to concoct or cover hideous plots against the working class and oppressed peoples, like the so called Socialist International to which SWAPO and ANC belong. Neither is it a federation of national groups which pursue their own independent, often conflicting policies and meet only to proclaim a token unity from time to time. There are many of these but often they hide their true nature quite well.

The International the working class needs is one international party. Of course it must have national sections able to decide how to tackle quickly national and local issues as they arise.

As the Communist Manifesto puts it: "Though not in substance,

yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.”

The International must have an international life involving all members directly, a unified internal discussion process on the most important issues of strategy and tactics, both on international and on national issues.

## **7. The Manifesto**

The efforts of the international working class to organise as such, that is as an international party, have a long history full of rich lessons. The first thing to understand about it is that it was determined by the development of capitalism itself. Capitalism, as I said, produces the working class. During the nineteenth century the capitalist mode of production went from strength to strength and it produced a mighty working class, above all in Europe.

This working class was from the start a danger for the capitalists. In 1848 several revolutions shook Europe. They were all democratic revolutions led by the bourgeoisie. Through them, the bourgeoisie wished to exert political power in the name of the people, instead of leaving it in the hands of emperors, kings and lords. But in the most important country of that time, France, the revolution was, at its highest point, already a workers' revolution. In all countries of Europe, the working class existed already and threatened not only the kings and aristocrats but also the bourgeoisie. Therefore the bourgeoisie preferred to stop and betray all these revolutions, and renounce political power, rather than risk that this power be contested from below by the working class.

Just before that revolution, in 1847, German workers who had emigrated from the oppressive regimes of that country formed

an international association, the League of the Communists. Two young German intellectuals, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were members of the League and were charged with writing its Manifesto. It was published in February 1848, just before the revolution started.

It was not the first programme of the working class. Previous programmes had already established the goal: a society without exploitation, a society where the means of production are common property of the workers. But these programmes were not scientific. They were projects based on the clever ideas of some inventor who thought out in his head a proposal how society might be organised better. Then he usually submitted his project to influential people of the ruling class, appealing to their supposed benevolence. Such projects go by the Greek name "Utopia", meaning an imagined organisation of society that exists in "no place".

Marx's and Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party was the first programme with a scientific underpinning. It made clear that this new form of society, communism, was the necessary next step for humanity not because it was a better idea than the existing society, but because it was a step required by the material productive forces developed by capitalism itself. It made also clear that capitalism was creating a whole class of people, the working class, who had to lead a new social revolution in order to make communism happen. Capitalism itself started a process which would enable this class, through its own movement and education, to rise to this historic task. So everybody should read the Manifesto, it is still our programme! There is no better, more forceful or more beautiful explanation of our overall aims.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

But of course capitalism has developed further. The situation has changed a lot in the 167 years since the publication of the Manifesto. Our programme has had to be adapted and



specified further. Our programme is a living thing that has to evolve.

The League of Communists was only a precursor of the International. The working class itself was not yet fully developed and accordingly the League consisted not of industrial workers as we know them but mostly of skilled craftsmen.

## **8. The first and the second Internationals**

### **8.1. First International**

In 1864, the first real international party of the working class was constituted in London: the International Workingmen's Association. The police of every state kept them under close surveillance and estimated that they had five million members. But the International itself counted eight million. Many of them were already industrial workers in big factories.

This International played a leading role in the most important revolution of the 19th century, the Paris Commune of 1871 which for the first time in history brought the working class to power, although only in one city. The Commune was defeated and the International did not survive that defeat for long. It split, became weak, and in 1876 it dissolved itself.

But the First International left a legacy on which we build today. Marx and Engels were part of it and they were able to persuade the majority of the other members of their programme and of the scientific foundations of it. It was not easy, they had to have many discussions especially with the anarchists who at the outset had had the majority in the International. Anarchists were communists who thought that it was possible to install communism immediately, without having to build it first. This is because their idea of communism was in fact a return to some long forgotten age of small communes that would function in completely autonomous ways, without the need for

any centralisation. This backward-orientated idea ignored the centralised nature of modern industry. Consequently, they saw no problem in replacing the capitalist state immediately by a regime of no government at all. Such a regime is known by the Greek name "anarchy" and that is why this current in the working class are called "anarchists".

But we know that the working class will have to do the opposite of anarchist notions. It will have to redirect existing industry towards production for human needs and develop it further. That means, among other goals, that the working class will have to establish democratically a plan of development and correct it frequently and democratically according to an honest evaluation of its results. Only through this path of development can real, modern Communism be achieved, an organisation of society where everybody is entitled to the satisfaction of his or her needs and everybody contributes to production according to his or her ability. This presupposes that the productive forces of humanity are so developed that lack of basic means of subsistence will be replaced by their abundance. Only then will the need for the state as the guardian over scarce means of subsistence gradually disappear. The final result will be that there will be no rule of humans over other humans. In this final goal, Marxists and anarchists agree.

Marxism prevailed but anarchism persisted, especially in Italy and in Spain. Much later, during the workers revolution in Spain, in 1936-1937, it got an opportunity to make political proposals to the working class in order to defeat fascism and overthrow capitalism. Anarchists saw that their conceptions were not workable, and they had then no better idea than to become part of a government of the capitalists in Barcelona in 1937 and so to help protect the capitalist state against the insurrection of the workers, whom they helped to disarm and demobilise. This final lesson about anarchism can and should be studied in the works of Leon Trotsky and other Marxists who

participated in that revolution.

Through its participation in the Paris Commune of 1871 the International gained a very important insight: the revolution of the working class cannot use the old state of the capitalists and just fill its parliament, its government and other organs with workers. To that extent, the International agreed with the anarchists. But the International under Marx's guidance drew a positive lesson completely opposite to the notions of the anarchists. Namely, the working class must install an entirely new, workers' state in order to start building communism.

Dutifully, Marx and Engels acknowledged this lesson. They did not change the Communist Manifesto which by that time had become a historic document, but all subsequent programmes of the working class had to include that lesson.

This example of Marx and Engels teaches us another important lesson. Their teaching cannot be considered as finished. We must develop it on the basis of experiences of the working class. We must acknowledge inaccuracies and errors, in order to be able to correct them, like Marx and Engels did in their lifetimes.

## **8.2. Second International**

In 1889 the Second International was founded. This was an immense advance because it was based on mass revolutionary workers parties in Germany, in France, the Austrian empire and in many other countries. They were called socialist or social-democratic parties. But they were revolutionary parties, quite unlike most of the parties that use the same names today.

These parties were linked to trade unions. In most cases the parties promoted or founded the unions, like in Germany and France. In Great Britain, it was the unions who came, a bit later, to the conclusion that they needed a political wing and so they founded a Labour Party. The Second International led

great, victorious struggles, for instance for the eight hour working day or for the universal right to vote. It gave its support to the struggle of working class women for equal rights with men and so contributed mightily to the first advances in that field. Among other conquests, it established the First of May as the international day of struggle of the working class.

These material conquests of millions of workers in the developed countries could never have been achieved if the working class had limited itself to purely "economic", day-to-day struggle.

What made them possible was that the Second International allowed them to understand and adopt the programme of scientific socialism and communism.

In other words it was a Marxist International which educated millions of workers as Marxists.

But there were flaws.

Its leading members tended to forget the most important lesson from the experience of the First International – the one about the state! The Marxism of the majority of the leaders of the Second International was not quite the original teaching of Marx and Engels. It was distorted in that its revolutionary consequences seemed far away and abstract.

### **8.3. Imperialism and its impact on the Second International**

During this period of rise of capitalism in Europe and also in the United States of America, the whole world was increasingly subjected to capitalist conditions of exploitation. Capitalist exploitation was introduced into huge countries, like Russia, India and China and to whole continents like Africa, through colonisation.

Most people in the Second International saw the enormous

exploitation of the colonies by their colonial masters and protested against it. But they also expected progress to come out of it. Many thought that colonies and other latecomers to capitalism would soon follow a similar path of glorious capitalist development as Great Britain, France, Germany, the USA and Japan had done.

In fact world capitalism entered a new stage: imperialism. This is the highest stage of capitalist development. In it, a new entity emerged: finance capital. This results from the merger of financial institutions (such as banks and other money lenders and money makers) and industrial capital under the leadership of the money lenders. Finance capital dominates over all smaller capitals, limits them or squeezes them out. Imperialist countries export goods and capital and exploit natural resources, including cheap labour, from the rest of the world. This is called the imperialist relationship. For instance, Great Britain had an imperialist relationship with India and later also with South Africa, among others. Germany was able to establish an imperialist relationship with South-West Africa. Around the beginning of the twentieth century it became apparent that the imperialist relationship in general did not allow the dependent countries to develop. This is still the case, even though most colonies liberated themselves politically. The imperialist relationship persists. Under it, Africa's natural resources are being plundered as savagely as in previous periods. Its masses are descending into horrible poverty, and are subjected to barbaric dictatorships and barbaric wars. Capitalism itself has become an absolute barrier to the development of humanity, which means to the development of its productive forces. Therefore the imperialist stage is the last stage of capitalism.

All humanity is faced with the choice between passing to a new, socialist and communist mode of production, or a long descent into ever more barbaric conditions of life. This alternative was already formulated by Friedrich Engels in 1878

and then again in the middle of the first world war by the Polish comrade Rosa Luxemburg who wrote: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism". All subsequent history has confirmed this prediction. Both world wars and fascism represented huge outbreaks of barbarism.

After the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991, which (especially in its beginning) had represented the hope for a socialist future, we are already experiencing an acceleration of the worldwide descent into ever-deeper barbarism. For over a hundred years the working class has been trying to make the transition to socialism. In the present period of a new rise of the working class we have perhaps the last opportunity to do it. But already some revolutions in the Middle-East, and in northern Africa have been defeated. This has favoured yet another big slide into barbarism not just there, but also, in Central Africa for example. Europe is also sliding rapidly into mass poverty, authoritarian rule and wars. So we do not have much time. The working class must now learn quickly and act, or perish.

In the late 19th century, capitalism was still in its ascending phase. A thin layer of relatively well off workers developed at that time in the leading capitalist countries of Europe and a little later also in the USA. They had won relatively high wages and good working conditions. The capitalists of these countries were able to afford these conditions to some of "their" workers due to the extra profits they were making by exploiting the rest of the world, especially colonies. This thin layer is called the "labour aristocracy". The labour aristocracy had an enormous influence on the parties of the Second International. A bureaucracy expressing the contentedness of the labour aristocracy developed inside these parties and in the unions. This was (and still is) a layer of leaders who did not object to others talking about the social revolution in some far future.

Sometimes they themselves made such Sunday speeches. The socialist revolution was the so called "maximum" programme of social-democracy. Words are cheap. But in everyday life they were content with what they had and wanted to keep capitalism, with some improvements. Such improvements, like the eight-hour working day, were called "reforms" and they were the contents of the so called "minimum" programme. The people who limited the movement to the minimum programme were (and still are) called reformists.

But there was a strong left wing in the Second International around such people as Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and the Russian Vladimir Ulyanov. Ulyanov had to hide from the police of his country and therefore adopted another name: Nikolai Lenin. Later he became known as Vladimir Lenin.

Unfortunately, the left wing was not well organised. That was a big mistake because the reformists held the leadership of most of the parties of the International. Only in one country did the left wing organise strongly. That was Russia. The left there called themselves "Bolsheviks". Bolsheviks organised themselves into a faction and shortly before the world war that faction became in fact a party independent of the reformists who were called "Mensheviks". I omit the explanation of those strange names because the origin of the names is rather accidental. The origin of the Russian factions themselves is not accidental. I'll come back to it.

## **9. The failure of the Second International**

In 1914 the first world war started. The world as prey of imperialist powers had become too small for their expansion. The main imperialist powers of that time: Great Britain, France, Japan, Russia and the United States allied themselves on one side, Germany, Austria and the Ottoman empire (Turkey) on the other side. Each alliance tried to win a greater share of colonies as markets for its goods, sources for its raw materials and targets for profitable investment.

During the war, in 1916, Lenin published a pamphlet to explain to workers what imperialism is and why it is the highest and last stage of capitalism. The title of the pamphlet declares this insight. It is called: "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism". Members of the WRP should study this pamphlet, too, it is still valid.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>

Millions of workers killed each other in this war in the interests of "their" capitalists. The international working class could have prevented this. That would have required defying the marching orders, calling a general strike and taking power in every country. Before the war, congresses of the Second International had decided to call a general strike in the event of a war. But its reformist leadership had not prepared it at all for such an eventuality. When it came to doing it, they did the contrary: each national party took the side of its own capitalists. The Second International collapsed. Its leaders went over to the capitalist enemy.

The left had to do under terrible war conditions what it had failed to do in peacetime: organise. It started to propagate the idea of a new, Third International.

## **10. Russian Revolution and Bolshevism**

Then, after three years of terrible suffering during the war, the Russian working class overthrew the old rotten imperial state of the Tsar in February 1917. Unfortunately, the Russian bourgeoisie was able to take power. In only a few months it completely revealed its reactionary character by refusing to stop the war or to distribute land to the peasant masses. In October, the working class led the masses to get rid of the bourgeoisie and install a completely new, workers' state. It was based on workers' councils in the cities and on councils of poor peasants in the countryside. These councils decided everything in Russia. One of the first thing they did was to stop the war unilaterally, nationalise all the land, hand it



to poor peasants for long-term use, and expropriate the whole capitalist class. Because the Russian word for "council" is "soviet", the new state was called the "soviet state". The Soviets immediately held a congress, and appointed a new government. Lenin became the head of the new state, and another well-known revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, was charged with forming a completely new army, the Red Army. The capitalist governments of 14 countries sent armies to destroy the republic of workers' councils in Russia and reintroduce a dictatorship of the capitalists. They fomented a civil war. But all these enemies were defeated by the new revolutionary army.

We speak of the Russian revolution but in fact it was victorious in a much larger area than Russia. It included most of the countries of the old Empire of the Tsars; for instance, Ukraine, several large countries of central Asia and smaller countries in the Caucasus region. All these countries soon federated to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR. When it was founded, this Union was not strong because of coercion exerted by its largest member, Soviet Russia on the other republics, but precisely because it was a free Union. The Bolshevik Party and the Third International under Lenin's leadership made the right of self-determination of all peoples, up to and including their right to separation, into a principle.

For the first time in history, the working class of a whole country, and a very large one at that, was able to get rid of the rule of the capitalists, install its own state and start with the practical realisation of the socialist programme. The imperialist war, the intervention of the 14 states and the civil war left the country exhausted. Almost all industry, railways and other infrastructure were destroyed. As in other countries, it was the working class – who else? – which had to rebuild the country. But in Russia it could do it on a completely different basis. It no longer worked for capitalist

profit. It worked for its own needs. That was the main achievement of the revolution in Russia. This conquest brought social advances, like a free health service, free access to education and many others. Superficially, these social conquests resemble some partial conquests later achieved by the working class of some capitalist countries, like Great Britain. But in reality they were socialist conquests because they set the whole working class of a huge country on the path to build socialism. That path could not be followed to its end without an international revolution. There can be no socialism in one country. But the international working class was encouraged to follow the Russian example. Rightly, the international working class considered the Russian revolution and its socialist conquests as its own and the Russian working class considered its state as just the first success of the world revolution.

In 1991, after 74 years, the October Revolution was finally defeated. The USSR collapsed under the pressure of imperialism, because of its isolation. That was due to an enormous delay in the world revolution, itself due to a series of defeats and betrayals over many years. Capitalists, their politicians, their press, their historians and other ideologists heap slanders on the achievements of the October Revolution. But these achievements will never be forgotten. The working class will always learn from them.

Many books have been written about the October revolution. Leon Trotsky himself wrote one, "The History of the Russian Revolution". Everybody should read that book and we should discuss all the rich lessons of the Russian revolution as part of the building of the WRP and formation of its members.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/>

Here just a few of the main points about the Russian Revolution.

The victory of the Russian October revolution was only

possible because there was a well organised party of dedicated and well educated workers who understood what Capitalism-Imperialism is, the concrete situation of the masses in Russia and were able to act in unity to propose the socialist revolution to the masses as the way out of their plight. In other words, the Bolshevik party was a genuine Marxist workers party.

Here is where I have to come back to its origin in 1903, because such a party is the necessary condition for the working class to be able to take power even today. So we must look carefully at the only example of such a party in history.

The Russian social-democratic party really formed only at its second congress which had to be held outside Russia in Brussels, then in London, because of police repression. At the congress, suddenly there appeared a difference about the conditions of membership. Mensheviks thought that party members should be those who accepted the party programme and supported it by regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party's organisations. Bolsheviks, with Lenin, demanded that members "recognise the Party Programme and support it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party's organisations". So Lenin and his followers in the party required a much more serious engagement of party members than the others, but was that so important? Everybody, including Lenin, was surprised that the two factions could not unite because of such a seemingly small detail. After all, both factions were followers of Marx's school of scientific socialism/communism. But later history proved that the difference was indeed fundamental. In fact, the laxness of the Mensheviks in this question was just the beginning of the influence of petty-bourgeois ideas. Later, this became apparent, as the Mensheviks became a particular kind of reformist. In 1917 the socialist revolution became an immediate task and the Mensheviks refused to accomplish it.

We are against petty-bourgeois laxness. The conditions of

membership in the Workers International and in its Namibian section, the Workers Revolutionary party, are those written down by Lenin: "recognise the Party Programme and support it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party's organisations". We want to build a fighting organisation with a clear shape, not a soft cloud. There is much more to be learnt from the history of the Bolshevik party and members of the WRP should study that history.

Another point: the October Revolution was only the first victory of the international, world revolution. The Bolsheviks understood that, the masses in Russia understood that; and what is more, very soon the majority of the working class of the world understood that! Old parties of the Second International began to break up because workers, their members, wanted to imitate Russia. Outright revolutions broke out in Germany and Hungary. In several other countries, there were revolutionary movements.

During most of the war, the Third International was the proclaimed aim of a small minority of courageous opponents to that war. After the October Revolution, in 1919, the Third International was actually founded. In several important countries, big chunks of the old social democratic parties demanded to be part of the new International. In Germany, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia it was even the majority in those parties!

## **11. Third International**

The Third International had a huge task on its hands. In the epoch of imperialism, the world revolution has become the immediate task. But the leaders of the working class were not up to that task. Even the leadership of those parties who were sincerely in favour of the revolution were not up to it.

Some of them continued to preach socialism in Sunday speeches but in everyday life they remained reformists. They remained

prisoners of the distorted version of Marx's teachings that was current in the Second International. Already in 1917, Lenin published a pamphlet to correct that, above all to refresh and develop the lesson drawn by Marx from the Paris Commune, that the working class cannot take over the bourgeois state but must sweep it away and install a new, workers' state. The title of the pamphlet is "The State and Revolution". It should be read and understood by every member of the WRP.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>

In order to make clear how different it was from its predecessor, the Second International (which called itself socialist), the Third returned to the old name used in Marx's and Engels' time: "communist". It called itself the Communist International. Russians at that time liked abbreviations a lot and called it simply the "Comintern".

Other factions of the Comintern ignored the fact that the socialist revolution must be an act of the whole working class. They were so impatient that they started minority actions all of which ended in disaster. They called themselves "left-wing communists". They wrote up whole theories that communists need not bother to go into bourgeois parliaments or work with workers in trade unions because of their rotten leadership.

In fact, both factions operated with the old notions of a minimum programme and a maximum programme. For both there was no connection, no bridge between the two programmes and so some stuck to the minimum programme and ignored the maximum programme, while others did the opposite.

The true task of the communists is to raise the level of comprehension of the whole of the working class until that class becomes capable of taking power into its hands. That requires a programme that combines both the minimum (reforms) and the maximum (revolution). It must contain intermediate,

transitional demands that lead from reform to revolution and in the process help the masses to acquire experiences with struggle and draw the right lessons from them.

In 1920, Comrade Lenin published a whole book to explain that and to criticise the “left-wing communists”. It is called ‘“Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder’, and is yet another very important book that every member should read. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/>

So the situation was that the new, imperialist epoch required a completely new approach to struggle. But none of the new communist parties was prepared for it. Despite their best intentions, all were still fraught with conceptions and habits acquired in the calmer previous epoch of rising capitalism. All parties except one: the Russian party of the Bolsheviks. That party, because of the peculiar conditions of Russia, had understood what was required for a revolution to succeed. Indeed, it was the party that had led the October Revolution to victory. But it is important to know that even that party had followed a line of supporting its own bourgeoisie at the beginning of the year 1917. Fortunately it had a very good leader, Lenin. Lenin had formed the party and the party had formed him and many other thoughtful revolutionaries. The party listened to Lenin and so was able to rearm itself to become the leading party of the revolutionary process that was already taking place.

In effect, the whole Third International needed to start a political formation of millions of socialists (who now called themselves communists) to rearm them theoretically and politically. Only in this way could they become really fit for the period of imperialism and of world revolution. They could not simply learn what to do by reading books and taking classes, they had to learn by doing. During the process many mistakes were made which had to be theoretically understood and practically corrected.

The necessity of a transitional programme was one major difference between the Second and the Third International. The other was a concrete understanding of the world revolution as a living process. The majority of the Second International had assumed that socialist revolution would be victorious first in one of the countries where the working class was most numerous and powerful because their capitalism was most mature: Great Britain, France or Germany. But the Russian Revolution proved them all wrong. It was victorious in a backward country which had not attained full capitalist development, whose immense majority of toilers were peasants and whose working class was a tiny minority. A country which had not even arrived at the stage of a bourgeois democracy. In the history of Europe, the class "normally" responsible for leading the democratic revolution to overthrow kings and other tyrants, was the bourgeoisie. Yet in Russia the bourgeoisie proved completely incapable of accomplishing that task. The working class had to take power in order to achieve bourgeois democratic rights and freedoms. Then it would not and could not stop at this. It went directly on to expropriate the capitalists and advance towards socialism.

The imperialist relationship between advanced capitalist countries and dependent, backward countries produces this situation where the capitalist class proves incapable of realising its task of installing democracy. So the working class has to take up both the democratic and socialist tasks in one and the same revolution. Leon Trotsky recognised this necessity well before the October Revolution of 1917. For this process of advancing from democratic to socialist revolution in one movement he used the term "permanent revolution" which had already been used by Marx.

Permanent revolution characterises the whole process of the world revolution in our epoch of imperialist relationships. At the time of the growth and enthusiasm of the Third International, Trotsky's theory was known as such, under this

name, only to a minority. But the International was aware of the fact of permanent revolution, if not of the term. It turned towards the dependent, oppressed countries which had been almost completely neglected by the Second International. Communist parties were set up in backward countries such as China.

Unfortunately, all the promising developments of the Third International were stopped after the Comintern's Fourth Congress in November 1922. Our comrade Balázs Nagy of the Workers International wrote an article which shows the limits of the work of both of the Third International and the Fourth International and how we, Workers International, must take up these unavoidable tasks. The article's title is "Some Problems of the Fourth International – and the tasks involved in rebuilding it". I suggest that we read and discuss it in one or more training sessions dedicated to these problems. <http://workersinternational.info/2014/08/some-problems-of-the-fourth-international-and-the-tasks-involved-in-rebuilding-it/>

The reason the Third International's work could not be completed is that the Russian revolution remained isolated. The process of German revolution of 1918-1923 ended in a defeat. That happened because the leadership of the German communist party felt uncertain, became indecisive, hesitated and that hesitation of the leadership weakened the whole party of a million members. After that, Capitalism was able to stabilise for several years. It had been shaken by the war and the revolutionary uprisings after the war. But since none of these uprisings had led to the working class taking power in one of the advanced countries, the capitalists prevailed globally.

## **12. Stalinist bureaucracy**

The Russian working class, though victorious, was exhausted by years of war, revolution and civil war. Its international isolation led to the development of an uncontrolled caste of



parasites that came to rule the country in the name of the working class. It first appeared through an alliance between the party apparatus of the Bolshevik party and the well-off peasants and other smaller capitalists that the Bolsheviks had to allow because of the international isolation of the revolution. Then the caste consolidated into a real monster that ruled not only in the name of the working class but more and more over the working class and against the working class.

The foundations of the workers' state installed by the October Revolution still persisted. There was still no capitalist ruling class. Workers still produced for human needs instead of producing for profit, as they must in capitalist countries. But the ruling caste controlled both production and distribution and directed both to satisfy above all its own needs. The whole apparatus of the state no longer consisted of councils (soviets) of workers. Its organs were still called soviets, but they were entirely in the hands of the ruling caste. So it was still a workers' state but a deeply damaged, degenerated workers' state.

This ruling caste is known as the Kremlin bureaucracy after the old imperial palace in Moscow from where its leaders ruled the whole country. More frequently, it is called the Stalinist bureaucracy because its leader was an old Bolshevik named Stalin. He was not a remarkable man except that he was an outstanding schemer and able to rule with an iron fist. But the new caste needed no great leader and educator of the working class like Lenin had been (he died in 1924). It needed an unscrupulous dictator and Stalin exactly fitted the job description.

Soon, after 1933, this caste became great friends with the bourgeoisie of France and Great Britain. Then with that of Hitler's Germany. Then again with that of France, Great Britain and the USA. Stalin and his caste became sworn enemies of the working class of the world. They did not allow the working class of any country to take power. After the 2nd

world war, the working classes of Yugoslavia and of China were able accomplish social revolutions in their countries only against the will of the Kremlin.

But at the same time, though this reactionary bureaucracy wanted to be friends with the capitalists abroad, the capitalist were never friends of the workers state, the USSR. Soon after the war, the British and American capitalist "friends" of the Kremlin put so much pressure on the USSR that the Stalinist bureaucracy felt it had to allow the communist parties to carry out social revolutions in several countries of central and eastern Europe. Because of this, some people started to think that this bureaucracy could not be entirely reactionary. They were completely wrong.

In fact, it was the beginning of a period of systematic worldwide collaboration between the Kremlin and the leading imperialist power, the USA. This collaboration had two names, "peaceful coexistence" and "cold war", but both are wrong. The coexistence was not peaceful, nor was the war always "cold". The aim was to maintain the rule of imperialism globally. Therefore, all movements of the working class, of other oppressed classes and of oppressed peoples against imperialism had to be terminated and their leaders either corrupted or killed. The real, comprehensive history of this horrible collaboration has yet to be written.

It is of great importance also for southern Africa. It was Henry Kissinger, an envoy of the USA-Imperialism, who orchestrated the reining in of all the bourgeois liberation movements, such as those led by the ANC, SWAPO, MPLA and FRELIMO in the 1970s. This entailed the massacre of leaders and militants whose democratic and socialist goals were incompatible with the continued rule of imperialism in this region. But Kissinger was able to do his bloody work only with the collaboration of the Kremlin bureaucracy. It was all part of the functioning "peaceful coexistence" or "cold war".

At the time it formed, in the 1920s, the Stalinist bureaucracy took advantage of the great prestige of the USSR among the workers of the world to take over the leadership of the Third International. From 1929 onward, all leaders of the communist parties were hand-picked by Stalin for their obedience to all his directives, sudden turns and whims. Neither Stalin nor these local lieutenants of his were able or willing to get on with the great historic task of the Third International. Instead, they used it as an instrument of pressure in the service of their diplomacy. In 1943 they dissolved it but by then it had been dead for ten years as a workers' organisation.

With some exceptions, Stalinist parties remained workers' parties. Apparently, these parties remained "communist", continued to propagate Marxism as the scientific theory of the working class and above all, defended the heritage of the October Revolution. So millions of workers remained their enthusiastic members because they thought these parties still represented the interests of the working class. But this appearance of Stalinist parties did not agree with their true nature at all. This "Marxism" of the Stalinist bureaucracy propagated "socialism in one country" (the USSR). That was in complete contradiction to the real scientific insights of Marx and Lenin. It was however very suitable for the purposes of the Stalinist bureaucracy whose very existence was based on the isolation of the USSR. But critique and discussion was not allowed in any of these parties and so the real nature of Stalinism has remained undiscovered for the majority of members of the Stalinist parties to this day.

### **13. Left opposition and Fourth International**

The decisive point of no return in this negative development of the Third International was the year 1933. Hitler came to power in Germany. The Stalinist party in Germany had helped to divide the working class and prevent its resistance to Hitler's fascism. Even after the defeat, the Stalinist

Communist International drew no lessons from it. This International, completely dominated by the Stalinist bureaucracy and its international apparatus, was dead for the purposes of the working class.

So the Third International degenerated, was later even formally dissolved and left behind a reactionary international apparatus with its centre in the Kremlin. But this did not happen without resistance. Almost immediately after the Stalinist bureaucracy began its rise in 1923, a Left Opposition arose against this bureaucracy, first in Russia, then internationally, in most parties of the Communist International. Lenin himself gave the first impulse to resist Stalin's takeover of the Bolshevik party. After his death, it was the other most prominent leader of the October revolution who led the Left Opposition: Leon Trotsky.

The Left Opposition recognised after 1933 that it had to build a new International, the Fourth International. It was proclaimed in 1938 in France on the eve of the second world war. It inherited all the positive experiences and insights of the Third International before its capture and destruction by the Stalinist bureaucracy. These experiences and insights are gathered in the Programme of the Fourth international. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/>

It was written by Leon Trotsky after many discussions with other members of the Fourth International. Trotsky conceived it consciously as the programme of the imminent revolution which he predicted to come after the second world war. Its main idea is that capitalism-imperialism attacks the very existence of the working class – the only class in this society capable of opening a positive outcome to the crisis of the whole humanity. But to do so, this class needs a programme of demands leading to this revolution, a programme of transition.

For instance, ever-growing unemployment throws whole layers of

the working class, especially the youth, out of the production process, with no hope of ever becoming part of it again. This divides the working class and puts pressure on all working conditions, both wages and working hours, of those who still have work. So on the one side, there are those who are not allowed to work at all, on the other side those who work must work ever longer hours and ever more quickly.

The Programme of the Fourth International seeks the unity of both parts of the working class by demanding the distribution of all available work among all capable hands without loss of wages. On the one hand, this demand must be satisfied in order to stop the destruction of the working class. On the other hand it runs dead against the need of capitalists to make a profit. So it is both indispensable and not realisable under capitalism. It is in fact a demand to overthrow capitalism and start building socialism, but it makes this theoretical necessity accessible as a result of the experience of millions of workers in their practical struggles for their very existence. The programme of transition is a whole system of such demands both economic and political, leading up to the socialist revolution. Those demands cannot be just thought up by a clever person at his or her desk. They originate from the deeply felt needs of the masses, and often are formulated by the masses themselves.

This is the programme of the Workers International adopted at its founding conference in Budapest, 1990. Its full title is "Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Mobilisation of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power."

Every member of the WRP must read and understand our programme.

So this is how the number four in our emblem represents the International. It does not represent an abstract appeal or desire for an International but the engagement to rebuild the

Fourth International.

Now the question arises: where is this Fourth International, 77 years after its foundation? Why must it be rebuilt?

#### **14. The fate of the Fourth International**

The Fourth International was proclaimed and founded on the eve of the Second World War out of a historic necessity. The Fourth International predicted that this world war would be even more terrible than the first one and that it would be followed by mighty revolutions. The task the International set itself was to build the parties that would lead these workers revolutions to victory over capitalism. These revolutions did take place but it turned out that the International was not ready to lead them.

Sections of the International were part of the resistance against fascism in occupied Europe and promoted the internationalist line in it against the dominant nationalism propagated by all Stalinist parties. But the International ceased to function as a world party. The Stalinists and Fascists assassinated many of its leaders during the war.

The most experienced section of the Fourth International was the soviet section. All of its members knew and used Marx's scientific method and many had learnt how to apply it in practice in the Russian October Revolution of 1917. So it was mainly this section and its leader, Leon Trotsky, that could teach the other sections all the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired by the Russian communists before and during the October revolution of 1917.

Unfortunately, in the the 30s almost all members of this party were incarcerated in Stalin's prisons and concentration camps. They organised clandestinely inside the camps, but around 1940 Stalin ordered their physical liquidation and that of Leon Trotsky himself, who lived in exile, in Mexico. Only a few survived and were not liberated until 1953. By this action and

by lies and slander, physical violence and murder, Stalin's international apparatus deliberately isolated the Fourth International from the workers' movement. This damage inflicted by Stalinism on the Fourth international led to an unhealthy isolation and lack of growth and ultimately led to the emergence of sects acting in the name of the Fourth International but unable to learn the lessons of Leon Trotsky.

So it came about that after the war, the International did not understand its task – which was to lead the revolution. Its leaders had not understood the main lesson of Marxism: that there can be no revolution without the leadership of a revolutionary party. Instead they observed how the revolutionary movements that took place in Italy and in France at the end of the war were led to their defeat by completely counter-revolutionary Stalinist parties. After that, a majority of these leaders declared that the prediction of revolutions was proven wrong and turned their backs completely on the task of building revolutionary parties. They themselves fell under the influence of Stalinism.

However, as a result, there have also been continual efforts by the most conscious elements of the class to resist Stalinism's dead end diversions of the march towards socialism. That resistance organised itself in 1953 to rebuild the Fourth International. But even inside this resistance the influence of Stalinism was strong and all the stronger for not being conscious. As a result, the movement is now in a state of dispersion with a myriad of sects all claiming the "tradition" of the Fourth International for themselves and all pretending to grow at the expense of other such sects and, most importantly, at the expense of the living movement of the working class, whom they all consider as just building material for their own sect, just like the Stalinist parties did. Most of them have undemocratic internal regimes and this is another aspect of the unconscious influence of Stalinism on them. Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky never favoured such

attitudes and behaviour which do not belong in the working class movement. Our organisation, Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, was founded in 1990 as the continuation of the ongoing organised effort to overcome these problems. Some of us have been part of it for decades.

To learn more about the crisis of the Fourth International, comrades should study Balázs Nagy's book "Marxist considerations on the crisis" and his already mentioned article "Some problems..."

<http://workersinternational.info/2014/08/some-problems-of-the-fourth-international-and-the-tasks-involved-in-rebuilding-it/>

## **15. The defeat of 1989-1991**

In 1991, the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union. In each of its constituent republics, the national branches of the Stalinist bureaucracy stole most of the state's assets, in fact anything that could be transformed into capital. The current capitalist classes in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the other republics formed on the ruins of the USSR originate from this theft. The state founded by Lenin, Trotsky and by millions of revolutionary workers and peasants in 1917 was lost. So were the workers' states in Central and Eastern Europe, with the same methods (theft) and results. The worst aspect of this bare-faced theft was that the working class was unable to oppose it, because it no longer recognised that these states belonged to the working class. Generations lived under the oppression of the Stalinist bureaucracy in a degenerated workers' state in the USSR. Similar states in Central and Eastern Europe even came into existence with that oppression and with the deformation of the state. The social revolutions that installed them in 1948-49 were themselves deformed by their Stalinist leadership. In the end, the workers' nature of these states became unrecognisable even to their rightful owners – the working class. But when these states disappeared, all the other, more palpable socialist conquests also disappeared! Suddenly, state enterprises went



bankrupt and stopped paying workers. Unemployment and humiliating poverty appeared, access to health care and education became difficult and so on. Workers fought against some of these consequences but they lacked a party that would unify all these struggles in a mass resistance to the cause – the restoration of capitalism.

This defeat was not only that of the working class of the USSR. The working class of the whole world suffered a historic defeat. Everywhere the capitalist classes were encouraged to deepen their so called neo-liberal “reforms” whose meaning is to increase exploitation in order to save their profits. At the same time, they were able to restrict the rights of the working class to resist through its unions and politically through its parties. Social democratic and Stalinist parties were thrown into disarray and most responded by becoming bourgeois parties and striving to resemble other bourgeois parties as closely as possible, officially renouncing their working class origin. So the working class of most countries was deprived of its own political expression: representation on the political arena and leadership in political struggles.

Imperialism felt triumphant. Its leaders proclaimed socialism dead and the leader of these leaders, George Bush senior, the president of the USA, even proclaimed a capitalist “new world order”. But it became apparent very quickly that capitalism-imperialism had reached a degree of decomposition where the only “order” it had to offer was in fact chaos and increasing barbarism.

In South Africa this negative turn was represented by the transformation of the South African Communist Party into an openly bourgeois party, although recent events there show that sincere communists will resist these reactionary developments.

## **16. Turn to new workers' parties**

Some of these sincere communists have now recognised the

nature of the SACP and were initiators of the turn of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) in December 2013 to start exploring ways to build a new socialist party of the working class and to constitute its true programme. NUMSA is the largest union of South Africa and perhaps of the whole continent. It sets an example to be followed by the working class in the whole world. There is now a new uprising of the working class of the world. There were revolutions in North Africa and the Middle-East, led by inexperienced and unorganised youth. They stalled or were defeated. But the working class in several countries now tries to rebuild its unions and re-found its political parties. NUMSA's turn in this direction is not isolated, it is only the most decisive part of a worldwide turn.

In Namibia, the working class must participate in NUMSA's turn but the situation here is different in two ways: there has never been a workers' party in Namibia and the Namibian working class is now seizing the opportunity to build the Workers Revolutionary Party, section of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, as that much needed and overdue workers' party.

So the working class of Namibia can make an original contribution to the world turn towards new socialist parties of the working class initiated by NUMSA. The main contribution is that these parties must be built as revolutionary parties in the process of rebuilding a world party, the Fourth International. This is a very important contribution not only for Africa, but also for countries at the other end of the imperialist relationship. Especially in Europe, where several of the new parties of the working class that have formed during the last decade are now arriving at a crossroads. Recent events in Ukraine and the Balkans tested their reformist conceptions and proved them wrong. A large international debate has started as working class activists are looking for alternatives.

## **17. The International that must be built**

The defeat of 1991 created a very new situation for the international working class. Its oldest and most experienced section, the European working class, has lost its leading role. It was weakened by deindustrialisation in the old imperialist countries of Great Britain, France and Italy. Its long domination by Stalinist and reformist ideas produced a limited and unsuccessful resistance to the capitalists when they moved industries and diverted investments to countries providing cheap labour on other continents.

Everywhere in the world, the working class became divided into the unemployed, precarious contract workers and the dwindling section still in permanent employment. These sections have been pitted against each other and against workers of foreign origin. Workers became less conscious of their immediate interests as unions (with a few exceptions like Unite in the UK) failed in their task to unite all these parts of the working class. The political consciousness of being one international class with the historical mission to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism declined even more.

So, to a large extent, the educational work of the four Internationals (First, Second, Third and Fourth) was undone and has to be recommenced. To some extent, we are back in 1864 when the First International was formed. As then, the working class now needs to form an International with all genuinely working class currents, and Marxists have to do as Marx did: patiently argue for the scientific method and programme.

Some people draw from this the conclusion that we must really build a new edition of the long defunct First International, as if the history of the working class of the last 151 years had not taken place.

Others express the same desire to erase history by wishing to build a Fifth International without even bothering to draw a

serious balance-sheet of the so far unsuccessful efforts to build the Fourth International. A prominent representative of these was the late President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who even called an international conference to debate this idea a few years ago.

Still others go as far as proclaiming that the working class has to build an International without a number. By saying that numbers and labels do not matter, they express the most radical negation not just of the necessity to learn from history, but even of the fact that the working class has a living history. We know that there is no other way than to continue that history by learning its lessons so we can overcome our weaknesses. The number 4 in our emblem symbolises the responsibility we take towards our own history as the working class!

Concretely, all those who reject this approach have in common that they propose some "International" that will – permanently or for the time being – ignore the main theoretical achievements of the Third and Fourth Internationals: the theory of permanent revolution, the need for a programme of transitional demands and the knowledge of the nature of imperialism as the latest stage of capitalism which is the theoretical basis of the first two. By running away from history such people immediately fall into the traps of reformism and Stalinism. They prove the truth of the saying: those who have no past, have no future.

The number 4 in our emblem stands concretely for all these theoretical achievements. These achievements are precisely the main subjects of the great and very positive discussion about the way forward which is now taking place among worker activists in this country, in South Africa, in the USA, in Greece and in many other countries. We would be great fools to drop these achievements by dropping our goal to rebuild the Fourth International.

Even more profoundly, without the political and theoretical achievements of the Third and Fourth Internationals, there would be no material conquests of the working class. All these conquests were, in the last analysis, only won as products or by-products of the struggle for the proletarian revolution. If many of these material conquests have now been destroyed, this has been possible only because the theoretical achievements have been forgotten or falsified by organisations of the working class in a retrograde movement on both fronts, theoretical and practical. But the working class now defends itself. We are part of this resistance. Our task is to inform it with Marx's, Lenin's and Trotsky's school of thought and of workers' politics.

In conclusion: To fully understand all the symbols of the flag, we have to understand our programme. The programme is not just a collection of demands plus an overall aim. That would just reproduce the old division between a maximum and a minimum programme. Our programme is the summary of what the working class is and how it fights. It summarises the aim of our class, the conclusions it has drawn from its dearly bought experiences, its disappointments in the past and its hopes for the future. This is why the programme cannot be declared finished once and for all. The conditions of working class struggle have changed a lot since 1990 and we need a programme taking into account all those changes. It will be based on the old programme of 1938 but at the same time it will be a new programme. The programme that the WRP of Namibia will elaborate in preparation for and during its special congress will be an important contribution to this new international programme of the Fourth International.

## **18. References to literature mentioned in the talk**

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<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>

**Vladimir Lenin**, ““Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder’

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**Leon Trotsky**, Programme of the Fourth International, “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Mobilization of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power.”

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## **May Day Message from the WRP Namibia**

The WRP Political Committee greets the workers of Namibia, Southern Africa, Africa and the world on this 1<sup>st</sup> 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**

**P.O. Box 24064 Windhoek Tel: 061-260647 [namab737@gmail.com](mailto:namab737@gmail.com)**

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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 ruthess 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 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

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## **Solidarity Statement with The**

# Socialist Party of Zambia and Comrade Fred M'membe

We have heard from our comrades in NUMSA that a warrant of arrest has been issued for Comrade Fred M'membe of the Socialist Party of Zambia and that his wife and several workers connected to The Zambian Post Newspaper have been arrested in a violent raid on his house by scores of armed police.

This is the result of the Lungu government's determination to shut down an independent voice of opposition criticizing President Edgar Lungu, his Patriotic Front party and their followers.

It is an attack on freedom of the press, which is the cornerstone of any democratic society.

We agree completely with NUMSA, that as a working class party, "We have a responsibility to defend and advance democracy, human rights and full human freedom. We have a duty to defend and advance the interests of justice".

We wholeheartedly support the NUMSA call for workers internationally to show solidarity with workers fighting against tyranny and for democracy throughout Africa, and to boycott trade with Zambia.

Like NUMSA, we pledge our solidarity with all the working class and socialist forces in Zambia in general, and to the Socialist Party of Zambia in particular and to comrade Fred and The Post newspaper.

We support NUMSA in demanding the following from President Lungu of Zambia:

1. Stop, forthwith, the harassment of Comrade Fred, his wife

and workers of The Post.

2. Fred M'membe's wife and all those detained must be released, immediately and unconditionally.

3. The warrant of arrest for Fred M'membe must be withdrawn immediately.

4. Ensure that Zambian tax authorities comply with the order to have The Post opened and operating normally, and to allow for the normal resolutions of the tax matters between the two parties.

5. The Mast must operate normally, without hindrance or harassment.

Bob Archer

Secretary WIRFI

20 February

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## **A reply to Martin Jensen: The Numsa Moment – Has it lost Momentum?**

A reply to Martin Jensen: *The Numsa Moment – Has it lost Momentum?*

By Bob Archer, Jan 2017

Since the end of Apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa has officially been ruled by a Triple Alliance of the African



National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and Confederation of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). At its Special National Congress in December 2013, the South African metalworkers' union, Numsa, called for an historic break with the Alliance and adopted a series of initiatives. What they proposed – and how these initiatives have fared – deserves serious and sustained discussion, not just in South Africa and the region, but right around the world. To that extent, Comrade Jensen's article raises important questions which deserve a response.

The decisions of Numsa's Special National Congress (summarised alongside this article in *What Numsa decided*) should be studied carefully by all who wish and hope to see a renewal and re-awakening of the workers' and socialist movement internationally and are seriously considering what methods of political work this involves. Numsa's initiative urgently requires critical thought about the habits and working methods of working-class and socialist activists, in the prosperous nations of the "West" as much as in Africa and elsewhere.

Martin Jensen hails the Numsa turn but is critical about how Numsa has selected its practical proposals and taken them forward. He also criticises those of us who welcomed and forthrightly promulgated these initiatives.

Workers' International responded very positively to the Numsa Special National Congress and its decisions. No doubt Cde. Jensen includes us among those guilty of "impressionism":

"While many socialists correctly supported Numsa's important watershed political decisions and got directly involved in their realisation, they failed at the same time to recognise the historical and current weaknesses of the union and assist in overcoming them. A combination of impressionism and overzealousness saw many socialists jumping in without critically appreciating the challenges of the period and limitations of Numsa and its leadership", he says.

What should Numsa have done? Cde. Jensen thinks above all that Numsa should have opened the door to collaboration with the dissident former youth wing of the ANC, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). He also criticises Numsa for failing to get involved in the widespread student unrest this year.

(Just a thought: One group of people identifies the Numsa turn as a politically and strategically essential break and decides to encourage that political development in every way possible, undeterred by difficulties and without setting themselves up to lecture the comrades involved about supposed shortcomings identified from outside. A second group compares the numbers whom the EFF can mobilise for a rally or demonstration with the numbers Numsa can turn out and sets aside the – quite important – question of the class nature of the forces involved in order to give priority to the EFF. Which group best deserves to be described as “impressionist”?)

Cde. Jensen has other criticisms of the action programme which Numsa developed in December 2013, describing it as “hardly the issues that could have captured the imagination and concerns of other workers” and taking Numsa to task for failing to co-ordinate a campaign for a living wage with Cosatu and above all for not timing strike action to coincide with AMCU, the break-away from the South African mineworkers’ union.

Cde. Jensen outlines an alternative set of actions saying: “The 6-phase rolling mass action should have been changed to ensure that issues more important to the working class, with a greater preparedness on their part to struggle around, such as for decent housing and service delivery, jobs for the unemployed, free quality education, etc.”

So Cde. Jensen proposes that Numsa’s carefully-planned campaign to organise and guide workers into becoming the backbone of a defence of their class interests (and of the common interests of the wider masses) should be liquidated into precisely the kind of demagogic generality which EFF

practises.

The 1 September 2016 Numsa Press Release (reporting a well-attended meeting of the Steering Committee to form a new Trade Union Federation) soberly explains: "Our country is the headquarters of service delivery protests and sadly the media is no longer reporting these protests. They have been relegated to traffic reports when they disrupt motorists' travel plans! Sadly despite the occurrence and breadth of these protests they remain fragmented and isolated to the shame of all of us on the left. This is a challenge we hope to address through the creation of the new federation".

But instead of prioritising the strategic move to create a new federation, Cde. Jensen would prefer the Numsa leaders simply to tail end the demagogues of EEF. Impatiently he waves aside (and distorts) the careful and systematic re-construction of the unity of the workers' movement which Numsa and its allies have been carrying out, complaining that:

"the Numsa leaders, its allies and former Cosatu General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi ... focused on confining the political battle to the Cosatu CEC, the mainstream media and the courts. It meant that the outset in 2011, the workers of the majority of unions in Cosatu were excluded from the important political battle, isolated and disempowered. As mere spectators they did not grow politically and lacked the confidence to challenge and replace their corrupt leaders. Numsa's call for a united front and a 'movement for socialism' should therefore have fallen on fertile ground if serious and consistent leadership was offered", Cde. Jensen continues, but: "Alas, this was not to be".

"Our trade unions are still bureaucratic and conservative lifeless shells, not prepared to fight and participate in broader struggles of the working class", Cde. Jensen asserts, throwing in for good measure "bureaucratisation... , union chauvinism and not connecting with other trade unions ...

conservative collective bargaining arrangements ... participation in the capitalist economy through its investment company” and “the social distance of the union leadership from its members...”

And yet it is within and through this “bureaucratic and conservative lifeless shell” that working-class political life (and thought) has actually asserted itself!

Does Cde. Jensen have any real idea about how workers reach decisions and organise – essentially, how the working class thinks collectively? The flip side of “union chauvinism” is the democratic rights and participation in decision-making of workers who belong to different trade unions. Their membership of this or that trade union and confederation (wherever and whenever it arises, and whatever it appears to be) is not a trivial matter, nor should anyone “over-enthusiastically” try to override the decision-making process of each independent trade union.

Numsa has been in a constant dialogue with the leaderships of other unions and has demonstrated consistently to the memberships of these unions its principled efforts to find the way out of the failure of the NDR

Actually the movement around Numsa has brought together a Steering Committee which this summer claimed a meeting of 31 unions. As representatives of their own rank-and-file membership, the Numsa leadership were right to carry out a systematic and thorough struggle for their rights in what was the central organisation of workers in South Africa – Cosatu. The middle class radical undertakes splits and schisms in the movement readily, even light-mindedly on the basis of this or that “impressive” news item, some or other theoretical dogma, or more often personal or clique considerations. This is not the way to build workers’ organisations rooted in principles.

The Numsa leaders are precisely providing “serious and

consistent" leadership. Cde. Jensen offers a kind of political ambulance-chasing after whatever events appear to be the most impressive at the time.

In arguing his case, Cde. Jensen touches on many important issues. However, he gets many of these issues wrong and in other instances deals rather superficially with genuine problems which require a little more thought.

Let's start with the really big one:

"Numsa's biggest impediment that stood in its way and still stands in its way of realizing revolutionary objectives is its history and culture of reformist politics" with "its roots in the formation of the union in 1987 that brought together various radical and conservative trade union political tendencies and necessitated by unification compromises of the unions' leadership", says Cde. Jensen.

From the heights of his revolutionary consciousness (or "sober analysis of the overall relation of forces" as he calls it), Cde. Jensen seems to think that the best help he can give Numsa is: "Stop being reformist and start being revolutionary!" No doubt he hopes this advice will fall "on fertile ground". The more experienced among us may well be less sanguine. Did not Karl Marx himself say of this approach: "If that's Marxism, then I'm not a Marxist!"

All the same, Cde. Jensen stumbles upon a number of important points when trying to explain why Numsa (indeed the whole trade union movement in South Africa) became mired in the politics of Stalinism and the "National Democratic Revolution". The thing is, does he really grasp the significance of what he describes?

MAWU and other unions were born in bold, independent struggles by black workers against a South African capitalism embedded in white minority rule and the Nationalist police state. In these struggles these workers naturally asserted their class

independence of the bourgeois/tribalist ANC and its Stalinist supporters in the South African Communist Party. Where the ANC and the SACP promulgated the Freedom Charter, MAWU developed the Workers' Charter with explicitly socialist demands. The Workers' Charter is not a mere empty dogmatic call to revolution, but it is very far from being a reformist programme. (The two documents are conveniently available for study and comparison at <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/1912>)

Cde. Jensen rightly identifies the period of the collapse of Apartheid and the installation of the ANC in power as a key moment for the workers' movement in South Africa. He points to the damage which was being done to the movement even as the apartheid regime collapsed: "By the early 1990s, with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc 'socialist' regimes and the political reforms of the Apartheid government the union had become seeped (sic) in various reformist approaches to its work that saw it shift away from the radicalism and militancy of its main predecessor, MAWU..."

And yet for all its "reformist approaches", Numsa was the union which led determined and vigorous opposition to the GEAR plan.

Does Cde. Jensen understand the full significance of what he raises? He returns to the matter (perhaps not seeing that it is the same issue) towards the end of his article, calling for "an honest and thorough assessment of the state of class struggle and balance of class forces" as a basis for deciding "on correct tactics and courses of action to achieve maximum working class unity".

"Since the Numsa moment and still now" (but in reality since the early 1990s!) "the mass organisations of the working class remain weak or simply non-existent. The general level of class consciousness has remained low. The 'Left' is still weak – small, fragmented with limited implantation within the working

class. Our trade unions are still bureaucratic and politically conservative lifeless shells, not prepared to fight and participate in broader struggles of the working class”.

Actually this blanket description of trade unions expresses an ultra-left prejudice endemic among petit-bourgeois socialists. It is a hint that Jansen himself is not immune to the “impressionism” he condemns in others.

With that exception, the points raised are important. But the timescale matters: these general political conditions didn't fall from the heavens in December 2013!

Cde. Jensen soon gets onto this, saying: “This weak state of working class organisation exist in the context of the continued neo-capitalist ascendancy after more than two decades of economic and political attacks against the working class that has created new structural divisions within it”.

In reality, the core of this “continued neo-capitalist ascendancy” has been the assault on the working class, in its most concentrated form on the political leadership of that class.

The collapse of the workers' states in the USSR and Eastern Europe has gone hand in hand with a sustained and co-ordinated attack on Marxism at every level and from every quarter. This has seen more than a few former Marxists turn their coats and become abject evangelists for capitalism.

Behind the “structural divisions” which Cde. Jensen rather blandly evokes lurks the reality that working-class populations with their organisations and working-class leaderships have been broken up, dispersed and thoroughly trampled upon. Where they could, the bourgeoisie has destroyed these bodies and the social structures which underlie them; where they cannot, they have poisoned the minds of their leaders with the idea that capital is all-powerful and above challenge.

This has left scars on the workers' movement which will not heal overnight or on the basis of chasing after the numbers of the student movement or the EFF. Numsa's leaders have been all-too conscious of the effects of neo-liberal policies: – de-industrialisation, the fragmentation in the workforce, the dilution of workers' organising scope and rights and all the rest of it. The practical proposals adopted at the December 2013 Special National Congress were carefully designed to roll them back. But Cde. Jensen thinks they are “hardly the issues that could have captured the imagination and concerns of other workers”.

What Cde. Jensen says about the “creaming off of several layers of leaders of the mass movement from the early 1990s by the ruling class who offered them lucrative jobs in the state and companies owned by white monopoly capital” is well-put. It must be added that many of the revolutionary workers who had come to the fore in MAWU were at that time deliberately sidelined in the movement and some of them openly threatened with violence and their lives put in danger by ANC thugs.

These questions are central to the whole matter of what has happened to the workers' movement and therefore how and by what steps it can recover. Cde. Jensen is impatient to unite the EFF and Numsa in a movement which will somehow empower the masses to achieve “decent housing and service delivery, jobs for the unemployed, free quality education, etc.” It's all so simple! It is also more than a little light-minded. The key question is not adding together numbers to the most possible demonstrators can be called out onto the streets, but how a movement and a leadership can be built in the course of struggle.

There is starting to be a recovery of working-class struggle and socialist consciousness, but it is emerging very tentatively out of the very conditions of the previous defeats and setbacks the movement has suffered. The real danger exists that petit-bourgeois “revolutionary” Marxists sects see these



still fragile beginnings – such as the Numsa turn, Bernie Sanders run in the US Democratic Party primaries, the movement which put Jeremy Corbyn into the leadership of the UK Labour Party, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece – and think they are simply an audience for their dogmas, a sphere in which they can build their own groups. At the same time they are impatient, demanding that the movement should produce better results and move faster than it actually can. They are not able to see the working class going through a stage in its own political development.

The dogmatist insists that every development in class-consciousness has to reflect and follow some abstract ideological purity.

The trade unions in South Africa came under sustained pressure to be “bureaucratic and politically conservative lifeless shells”, but it is within the trade unions that workers have collided head-on with the reality that within the Triple Alliance and the government of South Africa the ANC leadership promulgates the policies of the capitalist ruling class and attacks the rights and the very existence of workers, and that the leading lights in the SACP provide a threadbare theoretical justification for what the ANC leadership is doing.

Cde. Jensen emphasises one side of the matter: workers are held back because of the damage suffered by revolutionary socialist consciousness. But the struggle to overcome that damage is (despite the “impressions” that individual academic Marxists may form) actually taking place through Numsa and Irvin Jim’s insistence that the promises of the National Democratic Revolution should actually be delivered, their obstinate comparing of the results of ANC-Triple Alliance rule with what was promised.

The promises made by the ANC and SACP in the early 1990s were a deception. The tribal elites in the ANC leadership had

reached a fundamental agreement with imperialism and the big mining interests that these interests would remain intact. It took a quarter of a century, but over time it became clear to more and more workers and their leaders that they were being conned. The benefits expected and promised from the National Democratic Revolution were not being delivered because there was no move to carry out an NDR. Instead the government has been inflicting neo-liberal attacks on workers and the masses and protecting the interests of big monopolies.

The development in political consciousness reflecting this could not happen in the way a university-trained rationalist might expect, where individuals contemplating the world cogitate about the matter and conclude that the Marxists were right and the National Democratic Revolution is wrong.

The whole dynamic underlying the Numsa turn became very apparent in Numsa General Secretary Cde. Irvin Jim's Ruth First memorial lecture delivered at Wits University, Braamfontein, on 14 August 2014 (see: <http://www.numsa.org.za/article/uth-first-memorial-lecture-delivered-numsa-general-secretary-cde-irvin-jim-thursday-14-august-2014-great-hall-wits-university-braamfontein/>).

This is a detailed indictment of the experience of a quarter of a century of Triple Alliance rule. Cde. Jim starts by paying homage to Ruth's First's dedication to the struggle as a Marxist who "perfectly understood the necessity to fight simultaneously racial, patriarchal, national and class oppression, domination and exploitation."

He salutes her as one of those SACP members who helped to frame the ANC Freedom Charter, and goes on to contrast the slogans of the Freedom Charter with the reality of Triple Alliance rule

"The Freedom Charter says:

- The People Shall Rule: I argue that the people are not

governing ...

- All National Groups Shall have Equal rights

How far have we gone in this regard? Substantively, South African society is structurally incapable of delivering equal rights to all national groups. The system of colonialism, which continues to this day, was based on defining national groups on the basis of race. And so, it came to pass, that Africans remained at the bottom of the food chain ...

- The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!

Nalena abayifuni! There is complete refusal to share the country's wealth! Some said it will happen over their dead bodies ...

- The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!

Estimates are that black people own between 13–16% of agricultural land in South > Africa. Only 10% of the 30% land earmarked for land restitution has been transferred to black farmers, the target date for the 30% is 2014. At this pace, it will take 100 years to transfer 50% percent of the land back to the people ...

- There Shall be Work and Security!

In the past 20 years, there has been no work! In 1995 the unemployment rate was 31%, in 2013 it had risen to 34% ...

- The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!

... It is estimated only 3% of the children who enter the schooling system eventually complete with higher grade mathematics. 24% of learners finish schooling in record time. The pass rate in African schools is 43%, while the pass rate in white schools is 97%.

- There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!

There is no security and comfort in the houses of the working class!"

And so on for all the other demands of the Freedom Charter, what was promised is compared unfavourably with what has been achieved.

Trotskyists (including Workers International) warned beforehand that this would be the outcome.

Is it enough now to stand on the touch-line bragging that we were right and the working class allowed itself to be dominated by an illusion? Surely not.

It is in interrogating the experience of 25 years of Triple Alliance rule that the workers' movement of South Africa starts to find a way back to its revolutionary roots. It is in the persons of the Numsa leadership and their supporters that this interrogation is taking place. Vague references to "revolution" on Cde. Jensen's part, far from assisting their development, serve to repel the more thoughtful, organised trade union activists away from Marxism rather than attracting them to it. Practical advice (bad advice) to tail-end the demagogues of EEF will not enhance the reputation of the Marxists who give it, but will bring the science of Marxism into disrepute. As Numsa says –

Following Marx – it is only the organised class-conscious working class that can lead in making the socialist revolution.

Workers' International has enthusiastically supported the Numsa turn because it will enable South African workers to test to the limit the theory that the Freedom Charter can bring them satisfaction. And this new movement is standing clearly and consciously against the bourgeois "class enemy" politicians of the ANC.

There is a clear parallel with the British trade unionists (mainly in the United Left group in Unite) who have made up their minds to test to the limit the theory that the working class can find a way to socialism through the election of a

left-wing Labour government. Theoretical purists, their eyes fixed on the appearance of the movement, form the “impression” that these workers are “reformists”. And so they are, except that nothing stands still. The determination of these activists to put their convictions into practice in the interests of their class and against the class-collaborators in the trade unions and the Labour Party is the condition for a rebirth of socialist consciousness.

The responsibility of Marxists is thoroughly to support and promulgate and practically advance such developments (usually against sectarians and dogmatists who try to impose their quack remedies and verbal radicalism on the movement).

The conditions exist for unity in action between those of us who are convinced that the future of working people lies in the ending of capitalism and those many people who hope a more limited aim can still bring results, and who certainly are dominated at best by social-democratic and Keynesian conceptions. The basis for unity in action is that these movements are gearing themselves up to fight on the class issues involved. Within that unity in action lies the potential for a development in consciousness.

The Numsa initiative has brought together a Steering Committee to form a new Trade Union Federation. 31 trade unions attended the meeting of this Steering Committee on 30 August this year, which the following day issued a highly interesting Press Release.

(<http://www.numsa.org.za/article/numsa-welcomes-fawu-decision-leave-cosatu/>).

The first thing to say about this press release, which really does deserve attentive study, is that it starts from a thorough consideration of “The Current Political Situation and What it Means for the Working Class: Global Balance of Forces”. This glance around the horizon says in the first sentence: “... conservative forces are attempting to consolidate

their power all over the globe and here in South Africa.”

Unlike Cde. Jensen, the leading group in this initiative starts by grappling with the international development of the class struggle.

Turning to South Africa, the Press Release makes the comment reported above about service delivery protest, but goes on to say:

“We remain firmly opposed to corruption by the elite political class. We are however acutely aware that the theft of our wealth, is not just by a few rogue families, but the entire capitalist class”.

It continues: “Despite shifting huge amounts of capital off shore, big business is still sitting on R1.5 trillion in our banks as part of an investment strike, which they conveniently blame on political and economic uncertainties, but is actually to force more neo-liberal concessions from government”.

### **“Agency” and the EFF**

Cde. Jensen points out how “the thousands of EFF members are mere spectators to their leaders’ parliamentary shenanigans and occasional letting off steam mass marches”. It is true that the young supporters of EFF are denied any real role and power in the direction of their movement (in which Marxist rhetoric is mixed up with Black consciousness). For some reason, Cde. Jensen thinks the Numsa leadership could simply rush into a “principled” united front with this EFF.

But Numsa and its allies are actually engaged in a break with the petty-bourgeois politics of the ANC and the Triple Alliance. They are involved in the profoundly important historical job of probing the actual experience of the programme of National Democratic Revolution under ANC rule.

Cde. Jensen believes that the insistence of the Numsa leadership on carrying through systematically the break in the

Triple Alliance and Cosatu and the organisation of the biggest possible new trade union federation is a purely conservative reflex which “meant that from the outset in 2011, the workers of the majority of unions in Cosatu were excluded from the important political battle, isolated and disempowered. As mere spectators they did not grow politically ... Only during the last phase when it became clear that Numsa would be expelled and Vavi dismissed, did the leaders convene shop stewards council meetings to engage the rank and file about some (!!)

of the issues and even then the unions on the other side were excluded”.

Cde. Jensen reveals here a stunning inability to understand vital aspects of actual working-class organisation and consciousness.

First of all, he wants working-class leadership to have as the ready-made starting point of its struggles the worked-out “revolutionary” understanding of all and everything that he, Cde. Jensen, has in his head, when he knows (in his calmer moments) that the whole movement itself has undergone a degeneration from which it must struggle to recover.

He knows that the politics of Stalinism which predominates in the Triple Alliance is wrong, but he cannot see the essential point about the Numsa turn: that it is a break in the carefully-constructed domination of the workers’ movement by Stalinist and reformist conceptions under the pressure of actual events in the class struggle. At one extreme this break is expressed in the killing fields around the Kopje at Marikana, at the other (and this is equally important) at the very top of the trade union movement and in the break-up of the Triple Alliance.

On the one hand Cde. Jensen concedes: “the tasks of Numsa and its allies were enormous”; on the other he criticises “Numsa and its allies” for the slow progress, systematic procedures and careful attention to their own ranks, the body of the

rank-and-file Numsa leaders and their development, etc. In the middle of a big political and theoretical struggle, Cde. Jensen urges the Numsa leadership to rush off into an alliance with the EFF who embody the same petty-bourgeois politics with which they are at odds in the ANC and the Alliance.

The 1 September Press Release has a different approach. It expresses extreme concern about “the growing numbers of citizens disengaged with electoral politics. More than 21 million adults of voting age did not even participate in the elections ... there is a crisis of political representation, and our people are less clear about who exactly can best represent their interests”.

It confronts frankly the difficulties the trade union movement faces: “In a staggering indictment of Union powerlessness, the employers now set 54% of all wages without any negotiation with workers, either through their union or bilaterally directly with workers” ... “The share of wages in the national income (GDP) has continued to plummet well below 50% from 57% in 1991” ... “More jobs have been shed. In the last three months of 2015 alone 21,000 manufacturing jobs were lost, with another 80,000 gone in the first three months of this year.” ... and: “According to statsSA a staggering 54% of our population lives in poverty”.

From this, Numsa turns toward laying the foundations of a new workers’ movement which “will pay more than lip-service to crucial principles and that will instead offer a vibrant, inclusive and tolerant space for workers to discuss the challenges they face. We hereby pledge that workers will not be expelled for holding different views to the leadership or the majority of other workers! The Constitution that we envisage will not be a throwback to times gone by but will instead be a living document that guides our actions”, including “a real attempt to build women’s leadership and counter both informal and institutionalised discrimination and sexism”.



This path inevitably brings great theoretical and practical challenges which will not be solved by hot air or academic condescension.

In finding its way forward, this movement will need to cast a critical glance back at its own history in order to benefit from the theory and practice, mistakes and triumphs of past revolutionaries as a foundation for its own creative work.

The task is urgent!  
Bob Archer, Jan 2017

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## **The Numsa Moment – Has it lost Momentum?**

*Martin Jansen*

*This critique is offered for the union ahead of its next national congress in December 2016 as food for thought towards unlocking Numsa's historical task that present possibilities for unifying the working class in struggle, increasing its confidence and steering us towards socialist revolution.*

In an interview last year, Floyd Shivambu, the EFF's Deputy President, had this to say in response to Numsa's reluctance to build unity with them, 1 "What we know is that efforts to start a rival socialist or workers' party will dwindle into insignificance and will not benefit the working class and workers whom our ideological allies claim to represent." It has been three years since the historic Numsa moment and it appears that the EFF leader's claim is true. For three years we have not seen any significant mass campaigns or struggles led by Numsa, let alone grassroots mass democratic organisations emerging that have captured working class interests. What are we to make of this?

The “Numsa Moment” was hailed by socialists locally and internationally as the biggest political breakthrough in Southern Africa since the late 1980’s. Numsa’s special national congress held during December 2013 committed itself to fight and campaign for the most pressing political tasks confronting the working class. These included – to fight and campaign for a militant, independent and unified Cosatu that would of necessity break from the Tripartite Alliance and lead in the establishment of a new United Front (UF) that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and communities against neo-liberal policies such as those contained in the ANC government’s National Development Plan (NDP) and at the same time explore the establishment of “a movement for socialism”. The latter involved a comprehensive study of working class parties all over the world to identify elements “of what may constitute a revolutionary programme for the working class”. Importantly, Numsa’s *organizational* break with the ANC and SACP was of huge symptomatic and symbolic importance and reflected a sharper working class response to the global economic crisis and rising class tensions in South Africa.

While many socialists correctly supported Numsa’s important watershed political decisions and got directly involved in their realization, they failed at the same time to recognize the historical and current weaknesses of the union and assist in overcoming them. A combination of impressionism and overzealousness saw many socialists jumping in without critically appreciating the challenges of the period and limitations of Numsa and its leadership.

By the following year the union initiated a flurry of activities and events to implement its resolutions. This included national and international conferences and a 6-phase programme of “rolling mass action”. The latter focused too narrowly on issues and concerns of the union instead of common issues of all workers and other sections of the working class. The critical Phase 1 of the rolling mass action plan had as

its main focus the Employment Tax Incentive Act; beneficiation of all strategic minerals, a ban on the export of scrap metals etc.

These were hardly the issues that could have captured the imagination and concerns of other workers, let alone impoverished sections of the working class. It is hard to fathom why Numsa at the time did not take up the challenge of leading Cosatu's Living Wage Campaign that, with the right approach, could have won over millions of workers in a common

1 Amandla Magazine, Issue No. 42 October 2015, p16.

struggle. This could have connected directly with the struggle of the platinum mineworkers under AMCU and their demand for R12500 per month. Instead, soon after a five-month strike by the mineworkers, two hundred thousand Numsa members went on strike separately in support of their own wage demands.

This was a missed opportunity for building the UF. Moreover, the 6-phase rolling mass action programme should have been changed to ensure that issues more important to the working class, with a greater preparedness on their part to struggle around, such as for decent housing and service delivery, jobs for the unemployed, free quality education etc. Unsurprisingly, the 6-phase programme has not seen much rolling mass action and faded into oblivion.

Overall, Numsa's key weakness in attempts at implementing their political resolutions was that it underestimated the tasks at hand and overestimated its own strength and ability. While the fact that it claimed to be the biggest union on the continent with over 300000 members, together with correct political decisions presented great potential for political and organizational advances, this by itself was far from enough to accomplish what is required during this period.

***Reform versus Revolution***

Numsa's biggest impediment that stood and still stands in its way of realizing revolutionary objectives is its history and culture of reformist politics. This legacy of reformism has its roots in the formation of the union in 1987 that brought together various radical and conservative trade union political tendencies and necessitated by unification compromises of the unions' leadership.

By the early 1990's, with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc "socialist" regimes and the political reforms of the Apartheid government, the union had become seeped in various reformist approaches to its work that saw a shift away from the radicalism and militancy of its main predecessor, MAWU, ten years earlier. By this time the Numsa leadership from the various strands had converged around the SACP as its political home and accepted National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as its theoretical perspective for achieving socialism in South Africa and the need for engaging with white monopoly capital and the state for "radical reform" that would move towards a "mixed economy", "high skills and high wages" for workers and an internationally competitive South African economy.

The central vehicle for achieving this by Numsa and its leadership was the Tripartite Alliance and deploying much of its top leadership into the state, including senior government posts by the likes of Alec Erwin who became the minister of trade and industry in the Mbeki cabinet that led the anti-working class neo-liberal programme. In recent years the union and its leadership was even part of the "die for Zuma" bandwagon believing that he would lead an anti-neo-liberal ANC government and revert back to the social democratic and Keynesian RDP and Freedom Charter.

While the 2013 Numsa Moment marked a shift to the left by Numsa, coming on the back of ANC government defeats of Cosatu around E-Tolls, labour brokers, the youth wage subsidy, the NDP and the violent state attacks of the Marikana massacre, the farmworkers' strike and several service delivery protests

as well as the extreme levels of corruption of the state – we did not see a simultaneous fundamental shift away from the reformist politics of the union and its leadership. The union still remained committed to the Stalinist two-stage theory of socialism in the form of the NDR and views as its programme the vague and reformist Freedom Charter.

The Numsa leadership still yearns for the SACP of the era of Joe Slovo instead of bad man Blade Nzimande (current SACP General Secretary and Minister of Higher Education). And yet it was the very Slovo who led the rejection of one of the key tenets of Marxism-Leninism, the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessity to usher in socialism. It was the self-same Slovo who introduced neo-liberal measures of privatisation into the government's housing policy. It was the same Slovo who proposed the "Sunset clauses" during the negotiations with the Apartheid ruling class that led to the democratic counter-revolution, the results of which are all too clear to see after over 20 years of bourgeois democracy.

### ***Illusions of Restoring the Capitalist Economy to favour the Working Class***

The union still believes in "transforming the economy in line with the Freedom Charter objectives" and believes that South African capitalism can be saved by "broad-based industrial development". It still views as its road to socialism using the failed social democratic politics and method of radical reform through pressurizing and "engaging the employers and the state". These approaches are reformist efforts to transform capitalism along social democratic lines. This internationally discredited class collaborationist approach has misled working classes of other countries for decades. Not only is this view fundamentally incorrect, it is also misplaced since it seriously misunderstands where capitalism is today that makes widespread significant material reforms in favour of the working class extremely unlikely.

Various Numsa leaders have since the early 1990's sowed this illusion, promoting and leading industrial restructuring to ensure that the South African capitalist economy can be "more competitive". Numsa leaders like Alec Erwin and Adrienne Bird were the prime movers of this reformist approach and ended up directly serving the interest of capital within the Mbeki government.

Prospects for a return to social democratic measures are at an all-time low. Capitalism cannot be reformed in this period of advanced systemic decay. Reformism is itself an expression of the pressure of the ruling capitalist class on the working class and some of its leaders and the union should not continue to succumb to these pressures. A prime example of this phenomenon was when in the wake of the 2008 – 2009 economic crisis, Vavi in symbolic show of unity with white monopoly capital, jointly at a press conference with Bobby Godsell, called on workers to accept wage freezes in order to save jobs and capitalism.

In line with its "red revolutionary character", Numsa needed to reject and decisively break from the notion of reforming capitalism since it only serves the interests of monopoly capital and further impoverishes the working class. It cannot be reformed in this period of advanced capitalism. Continuing to hang onto this reformist illusion unnecessarily postpones the revolutionary struggle for socialism. **It is only a revolutionary overthrow of the system that can resolve this crisis in favour of the working class.**

### ***A thorough Political Review was Required***

The union, together with its allies and supporters and involving rank and file members, needed to prioritise having the fullest possible political review of its history and politics. In this way it could have enabled us to learn the lessons and chart forward a revolutionary course that should have informed the mass work required for developing the UF and

socialist party.

This review should also have entailed an examination of the union and its own operations and all the factors that inhibit and undermine its ability to direct a revolutionary path for building strong mass working class fighting organisations.

This includes problems such as its own bureaucratization (despite its proud legacy of “worker control”), union chauvinism and not connecting with other trade union and rank and file members and working class communities, its conservative collective bargaining arrangements, its participation in the capitalist economy through its investment company, the social distance of the union leadership from its members with the top union officials earning the salaries of senior managers and top state officials etc.

In fact, three years later and there is still very little evidence of Numsa’s own over 300000 rank and file members having been politically inspired and stirred into action by the Numsa moment.

### **The Current Period, Numsa and the United Front**

In order to give Numsa and its allies a clear idea of the tasks in relation to building the UF, the entire union and its allies, especially the rank and file, require an honest and thorough assessment of the state of class struggle and balance of class forces. This will enable us to decide on correct tactics and courses of action to achieve maximum working class unity and strong mass organisations in the process of struggle at local and national levels.

Since the Numsa moment and still now, the mass organisations of the working class remain weak or simply non-existent. The general level of class consciousness has remained low. The “Left” is still weak – small, fragmented with limited implantation within the working class.

Our trade unions are still bureaucratic and politically conservative lifeless shells, not prepared to fight and participate in broader struggles of the working class. This characterization includes the nine unions that originally allied with Numsa, with some of them still in Cosatu and others like the Food and Allied Workers union (FAWU) that has joined to form a new federation.

This weak state of working class organization exist in the context of the continued neo-liberal capitalist ascendancy after more than two decades of economic and political attacks against the working class that has created new structural divisions within it.

Despite the lower middle class also being severely affected by neo-liberalism, its intelligentsia has become disconnected from the working class and disillusioned with radical politics and even shifted to right-wing and conservative politics.

This loss of this "class ally", traditionally socially and politically close to the black working class in South Africa during the Apartheid era, has in turn had a detrimental effect on working class politics and its capacity to organize. This came on top of a huge creaming off of

several layers of leaders of the mass movement from the early 1990's by the ruling class who offered them lucrative jobs in the state and companies owned by white monopoly capital.

But at the same time the capitalist system remains in deep crisis, especially since the economic collapse of 2008. Since then the ruling class has intensified neo-liberal measures against the working class internationally and in South Africa, thereby forcing more and more people to resist and to organize against the attacks on their living standards and to seek radical solutions.

This means that unlike the 1980's in South Africa, the building material for immediately constructing a mass fighting



UF did not exist in abundance and the tasks of Numsa and its allies were enormous. At the same time the Numsa juggernaut had to be politically and organizationally re-orientated to lead and implement the tasks to build the UF and lay the basis for a socialist movement. This could only be achieved through a process of intense organized class struggle and political clarification towards revolutionary Marxism.

The state of the working class during this period can therefore be characterized by a few important features, namely;

- □ Increased structural divisions and atomization of the working class due to the impact of neo-liberalism and a growing insecure precariat constantly in survivalist mode.
- □ Low levels of class consciousness and confidence to consistently engage in class struggle
- □ Weak and low levels of mass based organization
- □ A waning political hegemony over the working class by the ruling tripartite alliance
- □ A growing rebellion against neo-liberalism and deteriorating living and working conditions

But despite this there has been a readiness on the part of the masses to struggle. It is the result of a build-up of frustration over many years with the impact of neo-liberal austerity measures on their lives, deteriorating living standards and disappointment with the corrupt and anti-working class ANC government who they had placed their hopes in for a better life for over two decades.

It is these factors that asserted itself in the revolt of the Platinum miners against the NUM bureaucracy and the wild cat strikes of both the miners and the farm-workers during 2012 – 2013. They are also the underlying cause of the uninterrupted local protests in every part of the country and more recently the #FeesmustFall student movement.

Both this pent up discontent within the working class and the intensification of class antagonisms are intimately linked and were the underlying causes of the constant attacks by the ANC on Vavi and Cosatu at the time, as well as Numsa's break with the ANC and SACP and its eventual expulsion.

Numsa's call for a united front and a "movement for socialism" should therefore have fallen on fertile ground if serious and consistent leadership was offered. These were ideas whose time had come but a sober analysis of the overall relation of forces was required. It is within the rank-and-file of the unions that the pent up discontent runs deepest and the Numsa and UF leadership should have organized that this section of organized workers could rub

shoulders with the youth, unemployed and women who have been in the forefront of the township and village protests country-wide.

What was therefore required was a reassertion of working class political and organizational independence through mass united front campaigns around the burning questions of the day. Alas this was not to be since 2013.

#### ▪ *Missed Opportunities for Building the United Front*

The UF approach also meant that Numsa had to do everything in its power to remain within Cosatu and do battle with the reactionary leadership to win over the ordinary members of the other unions to join the UF around the Living Wage and other campaigns. Instead of engaging the rank and file members of the right-wing ANC supporting unions through its own rank and file, the Numsa leaders, its allies and former Cosatu general Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, instead focused on confining the political battle to the Cosatu CEC, the mainstream media and courts. It meant that from the outset in 2011, the workers of the majority of unions in Cosatu were excluded from the important political battle, isolated and disempowered. As mere

spectators they did not grow politically and lacked the confidence to challenge and replace their corrupt leaders. This is where the real battle should have been since these workers had been suffering for more than a decade under their unions' leadership who instead of leading struggles, covertly sided with the employers for unmandated wage settlements – especially in the public sector – where they appeased their ANC government masters. Only during the last phase when it became clear that Numsa would be expelled and Vavi dismissed, did the leaders convene shop-steward council meetings to engage the rank and file about some of the issues and even then the unions on the other side were excluded.

For the Numsa leaders and their allies in the Cosatu CEC at the time, the old union adage of, what you don't win on the battlefield will not be won in the boardroom, seemingly did not apply.

▪ ***The Crisis and immediate Possibilities for the mass UF***

Why could Numsa and the myriad of smaller left formations that initially formed the "United Front" not have entered into a principled united front agreement with the EFF around common political goals? This would have enabled Numsa and other union members connecting with thousands of militant black working class youth in common struggles and opened up revolutionary possibilities. Instead the thousands of EFF members are mere spectators to their leaders' parliamentary shenanigans and occasional letting off steam mass marches. With such a mass united front in struggle, both the EFF and Numsa leaders' anti- white monopoly capital rhetoric could have been tested and advanced.

*In conclusion*, there can be no doubt that the main tenets of the Numsa moment, i.e. the struggle for working class unity (the UF), for a *revolutionary* and socialist workers' government, and the creation of revolutionary socialist or workers' party (the movement for socialism) remain relevant.

They are interrelated and interdependent aspects of the same process: the self-emancipation and liberation of the working class. However, Numsa has not come close to achieving any of the formations it committed itself to in its 2013 congress political resolutions. This, despite many opportunities presented during the past three years.

- ***Opportunities for the Numsa Moment to live up to the challenge***

The student protest movement that unfolded over the past year signaled the beginning of the end for the ANC regime. Notwithstanding the weaknesses and crudity of their methods, by directing their demands towards national government and activating a national movement, the students have demonstrated tremendous political tenacity. The rest of the working class has taken notice and has drawn this lesson. In future we are likely to see local communities that have engaged in hundreds of militant local struggles around “service delivery” for over a decade, seeking unity with each other and building a national resistance movement similar to the UDF of the 1980’s. This prospect needs conscious intervention and support in order to be realized and currently only Numsa, its allies and the EFF offer this possibility.

The World and South Africa are experiencing deep and widespread socio-economic and political crises and the situation has degenerated beyond barbarism, especially for the working class and poor. Inequality, the concentration of wealth and poverty are at unprecedented levels. The resultant class conflicts have produced wars, extreme violence, terror and suffering by a rampant western imperialism led by the US, without any alternative revolutionary working class resistance and political leadership. The challenges to the working class abound – with on the one hand, US imperialism setting up military bases in all the regions of the African continent and elsewhere and at the same time within the trade union movement conservative social democracy dominates. South Africa

and many countries in the region are faced with political crises, with all the governments of the traditional nationalist parties having lost credibility after years of corruption and repression. However, no revolutionary alternative exist for the masses to belong to and pursue the struggle in line with their historic interests and mission.

The stakes here are high, with the ANC government facing a crisis and implosion. Their hold over the state has increasingly come under threat. In the context of an economy still overwhelmingly dominated by white monopoly capital and the state being the main instrument of wealth accumulation for the ANC aligned new black section of the bourgeoisie, they will resort to extreme measures to hold onto state power. It is not coincidental that the discredited Zuma presidency has ensured that the state security cluster is led by his most trusted allies. Failing a mass revolutionary response supported by strong organization, working class resistance and opposition will be vulnerable to violent repression by the ANC government. Time is not on our side. The need for a genuine mass united front and revolutionary socialist movement or party is even greater now than in 2013 and cannot be postponed.

Despite its shortcomings, Numsa and the Numsa Moment remain the only real short-term prospects in South Africa for the struggle to form a mass socialist alternative in the process of struggle in response to the crisis and the right-wing backlash that it represents, pregnant with dangers to the working class on all fronts. The union needs to recognize that the real mass working class united front is on the horizon to challenge neo-liberalism and our rulers. It needs to connect with the student movement and local working class struggles to ensure real revolutionary achievement and realise the full potential of the Numsa moment. For this to happen, *its ordinary members* will need to drive tectonic shifts in its politics, organizational culture and orientation – towards the

masses, a genuine united front, a mass working class party and socialist revolution.

*Jansen is the director and editor of Workers' World Media Productions. He wrote this article in his personal capacity.*

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## **Message and publications from: The United Fishermen of Namibia**

Dear Comrades,

We have been advised by cd Hewat Beukes that we could send the following documents to you as you are in the same organisation, The Workers International. We hope you will assist in any way in our international campaigns of struggle against the international capitalists and our capitalist government. These documents we have sent to NUMSA with whom we wish to establish brotherly and sisterly links. We also want to establish similar links with your workers.

[The United Fishermen 2](#)

[The United Fishermen 3](#)

[The United Fishermen 5](#)

Mbapewa Kamurongo, Matheus Lungameni  
On behalf of the Steering Committee

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# Issue 5 of Die Werker out now.

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
- 

## Why they voted leave

*Mirek Vodslon, 5 July 2016*

"Why we voted leave: voices from northern England" is the title of a documentary (<https://vimeo.com/172932182>) which is really worth giving some thought to. To be more exact, it is a militant message in the form of a documentary. In just under 12 minutes it also shows some of the problems with the Lexit ("left exit") or "socialist Brexit" position. It was "filmed and edited by Sheena Sumaria, Guerrera Films", is being advertised by the left group "Counterfire" and shows an anonymous interviewer speaking to five other persons, also unnamed, a Remain voter and four Leave voters in Doncaster.

The supposed need to "take our country back" or "make Britain Britain again" comes up early on. These concerns are first and foremost on the minds of two interviewees. The main reason

(mentioned by one of these workers) is to control immigration.

Another two voted Leave "for change" and one of these states that his vote was not about immigration. But why is this change going to be a change for the better? They don't say, and neither does the interviewer who apparently agrees with these two. She converses with them at length and asks them about Corbyn. Their answer is that they are or were Corbyn supporters despite him adopting the Remain position or until he did. The interviewer, like the Socialist Party and Counterfire, thinks that Corbyn's Remain campaign was a terrible concession to the right wing of the Labour Party. The interviewer is ready to give him "one more chance" but not two.

One interviewee pleads, like Corbyn, for remaining in the European Union in order to change it. After 30 seconds, the interviewer takes over and "refutes" this lonely "Remainer" simply by asserting that she does not believe in social reforms of the undemocratic EU because the capitalists rule the EU and have the opposite agenda. So, yes, these are voices justifying why they voted Leave, at about 20 to 1 in terms of time, without any real debate with working-class Remainers.

There really is an unorganised working-class anti-EU "movement". The video shows that and also that it is in part "guided" by this desperate consideration: It can't get any worse (wrong!), so I vote for whatever promises a change. The presumably socialist interviewer belongs to the movement and supports this fraction of it. An even larger part of this movement voted for change and "knew" what kind of change they wanted, the one that they mistakenly believed would make British imperialism stronger. These two tendencies, desperate adventurism and nationalism, do not exclude each other.

We are not talking here about the nationalism of an oppressed nation. These workers have been falsely persuaded that their oppression is the result of the oppression of their British



nation by the European Union but, no, this is the nationalism of a medium sized decadent imperialism, part of whose ruling class dreamt of becoming "great again" by abandoning the EU and especially by getting rid of EU's minimal social standards. Workers supporting this act against their own immediate interests. The irony on top of this bitter irony is of course that the success of that project is already accelerating both the decadence of British imperialism and the demise of the EU.

The false premise of British workers' nationalism is the "austere" view that jobs, wages and social resources (NHS, schools, libraries, benefits etc.) – in fact the whole of the working and living conditions of workers – are self-evidently limited British national treasures. From that follows the necessity to guard these precious "possessions" both against foreign workers and against foreign powers like the EU.

These "austere" limits are obviously *the* issue that socialists need to take up with working-class Leave voters (and with all other workers, of course). Practical goals have to be proposed and cast as demands. Those can be only international demands to break with austerity and stop competition among workers, like demands of a European minimum wage allowing a decent living standard, and generally a European minimum of decent social standards.

The EU is able to finance large European programmes. For instance, German finance minister Schäuble has just proposed a big European programme of armament. This is an ideal occasion for Die Linke in Germany, Podemos in Spain, Front de Gauche in France, the renewed Labour Party of Britain and trade unions all over Europe to mobilise not just *against* this horror, but *for* a positive counter-proposal, a European plan of public works to improve the lives of working people and give them work, especially but not only in "deprived" regions like northern England. That is, make the transition from international "protests" to an international mobilisation for

demands to make Europe a place fit for working people.

Such demands can unite European workers and so make an international mobilisation possible. British workers can and must fight for such demands together with workers on the continent despite being now out of the EU by virtue, or rather by the vice, of a mendacious referendum. This has made their situation worse and solidarity with continental workers more difficult to organise, just as the "outsourcing" of a section of the workforce of a company makes it more difficult to organise the solidarity of the whole workforce. Both British and continental workers must now use their trade unions and political parties to intervene strongly in the Brexit negotiations in order to preserve as many of the conditions of that solidarity as possible and even develop them. This concerns especially workers' rights specified in the European treaties and conventions, however meagre they may be. No British exception undercutting those rights! No restriction of the free movement of workers across Europe, including Britain! These rights must be included in the settlement.

Unfortunately, most working class Leave voters have apparently already made up their minds that British subjection to the EU and especially immigration imposed by the EU are the problems. Coming back to the film, its thrust is to adapt to this position instead of offering an internationalist alternative to it. The interviewer may be an internationalist herself but she refuses to consider reforms of the EU and thus any real steps along a path of an international transition to a socialist Europe. This disarms her when it comes to arguing for internationalism and this may be why she does not even try to take up the subject of internationalism with her polite interviewees. Had she tried some abstract internationalist proclamations on them (called "socialist" or "left" "argumentation for Brexit" by some ultraleft groups), she might have reaped polite disinterest or even a remark that such proclamations have no connection with their plight.

Instead, she offers the heartbreaking spectacle of a socialist confirming British nationalistic delusions with the following idea: "Austerity is coming from the EU because the EU governs governments". I beg to differ. This is one of the lies propagated by the class enemies who led the successful Brexit campaign. Efficient lies must be half-truths. In his case, it is just one fourth of the truth. First, the EU is a conglomerate of national states who have the last word in it, which is why the EU is currently paralysed on several questions. Second, the EU Commission does *appear* to govern governments and this appearance *has* been used to shield these governments from their responsibility for imposing austerity. This is the partial truth in the lie. The main part of the truth is that ever increasing "austerity" is an absolute necessity of contemporary capitalism which is why it is being imposed by all its political representatives, national and "European" and why the working class cannot wait much longer to get rid of capitalism. No less important is the fact that capitalism pushed back into the narrow limits of the British national state will have to impose even more severe austerity, and is already planning to do so.

The interviewer having herself adopted some irrational beliefs instilled by the bourgeois Brexit campaign, it is no wonder that she tends to gloss over the irrational or even reactionary aspects of her interlocutors' opinions in order to make these opinions *look* like expressions of some hypothetical kind of class consciousness that could do without internationalism. Except that this hypothesis is refuted not just by theory, but also by the long experience of working class movement.

These contortions are required to try to underpin the main thesis of the film, which is: the Leave vote of workers was a class vote. What the film really shows is that the vote of the five "Leavers", including the interviewer, was not about the *struggle* of their own class. It was desperate and in part it

was about slogans adopted by a fraction of the enemy class: "national independence" of Britain, mostly in order to curb immigration. If these five voices did cast a class vote, then it was the vote of a class that despairs of herself and has given up being a subject with a goal in life. So, by what it really shows, the film warns us of the possibility that *this sort* of working-class consciousness might prevail. If it does prevail, it will pave the way for barbarism to engulf humanity. Instead of glorifying it, socialists need to think hard how to rebuild real, organised, socialist class consciousness, even if it begins – as it obviously does – as that of a class which must first regain confidence and test seriously if it can defend or recover decent working and living conditions without overthrowing the capitalist class and its state.

To wrap it up, the interviewer spends time reminiscing on the defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-1985, the following deindustrialisation, and the fall of thousands into unemployment and despair. The lesson is that class struggle, in this case a defeat decades ago and subsequent defeats on top of that, are among the deep causes that created the contemporary conditions in which parts of the working class arrive at such utterly wrong conclusions as those expressed by four of the interviewees and the interviewer herself. No less important a cause has been the prolonged absence of a socialist alternative, but the film does not even touch on that. Whatever the causes, wrong conclusions from past struggles remain wrong.

The interviewer wished to correct the view that working-class Brexiters are all racists. She succeeded in that. Even one of the two working-class British nationalists interviewed is no racist, i.e., he does not derive his identity or that of his enemies from skin colour, skull metrics or pedigree. The other British nationalist is a waste collector, was interviewed at work on the road and had no time to explain himself. Both are

certainly afraid of their “foreign” class brothers and sisters and want to keep them out. They are xenophobes.

The strange insistence that most working-class Leave voters are no racists draws attention away from the terrible fact that working-class xenophobia has become a mass phenomenon. Not just in Britain, all over Europe. Trying to sweep that fact under the rug is plainly irresponsible and self-delusional. Nationalism and xenophobia will not go away simply because workers are now being taught a lesson about the negative effects of Brexit which are already setting in. On the contrary, further negative experiences threaten to make xenophobia fester and become fascism.

The question is, how to prevent that? British-nationalistic and xenophobic workers are not likely to be among the first who will be won to a socialist programme. They have some serious rethinking to do because there can be no programme of the working class which is both socialist and nationalist, or both for workers’ solidarity and for excluding foreigners from it. It will take time, fresh positive experience of struggle and above all help from other sections of the working class.

There are now two ways to deny them that help. One is to blame them for the living conditions to which capitalism condemns them and which engender despair and backwardness, and treat them all as enemies. Most are not, most have not yet joined fascist squads, it is still possible for socialists to talk to them, as the film suggests. The other way to fail them is to treat their convictions as a minor difference. Pat them on the shoulders and say: “Well done, you voted for change. You also voted against immigration but you meant no offence, did you? Cheers, mate.”

Socialists, revolutionaries, especially Marxists who supported the “socialist Brexit” or Lexit adventure, need to do no less rethinking than these workers: about their negative role and about how on earth they could make such an enormous mistake.

What is wrong with their "Marxism", their organisations and their respected "Marxist" leaders who led them into this impasse? I do hope that this reflection starts now. Simply proceeding with whatever each group thinks is next on the agenda is not an option. Or if it is, it is the option of ultimate degeneration and demise.