

Numsa's New Year Message

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NUMSA News Special edition

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Message to NUMSA members in welcoming 2018

Welcome 2018!

The National Office Bearers of NUMSA wish all NUMSA members a fighting and revolutionary 2018, to advance and defend the interests of the working class and to struggle for Socialism. Even with the miserable wages we receive from the bosses, we hope all our members had some well-deserved rest and some fun, during the festive season.

2018 is upon us. It is time to go to work to defend our livelihoods and to advance the struggle for Socialism. We can do this if we defend and grow NUMSA, return the United Front to what we intended it to be, defend and grow SAFTU and urgently put all our revolutionary energies in creating and growing the Workers Party. These are our revolutionary tasks in 2018.

2017 was indeed a difficult year for workers and challenging for NUMSA, whose task at all times is to defend hard won gains of workers and wage relentless struggle to improve workers benefits and conditions. The socio-economic conditions of the working class have constantly worsened under the current political leadership of all political parties in South Africa.

This is a fact. StatsSA has the figures supporting this fact about the state of the working class and the poor conditions under which we toil. It is another institution under attack, with the recent unceremonious departure of its CEO, as it has the proof of the dismal performance of our government as a

result of poor policy choices by the ANC for the past 24 years. StatsSA puts unemployment figures at 27,7 percent but it does not count those unemployed workers that are considered discouraged because they have lost hope of finding a job. If we add include these discouraged workers, unemployment is over 36 per cent and as a result over 30 million South Africans live in abject poverty with no food on their table.

Those in employment are often underpaid and unprotected. Some in South Africa are determined to peg the national minimum wage at R3 500, which is well below a living wage. If your employer does not believe that a worker deserves a living wage, then this is in fact a racist stance. Black economic empowerment begins with a living wage.

We know that it is tough for workers all over the world. Since the 2008 global economic meltdown; capitalism has been in crisis. The old international capitalist order of the industrialised world is being challenged by a new capitalist disorder with the rise of emerging nations. This, together with rising inequality and deindustrialisation in the developing world, is creating a new dialectic of capitalist privilege. We are part of a globalised world and our sectors and ultimately our jobs are affected by global capitalist sourcing and production which is constantly seeking higher profits, especially with regard to multinationals. We cannot just look at the situation in the country in isolation of the global dynamics of the sector and in the supply chain. We must keep up to date with and be vigilant of changes, so that we are not caught off guard and fight to protect workers, we must be both a shield and a spear.

In our country changes in capital accumulation strategies globally is destroying jobs. We are suffering the consequences for these changes in plant closures and disinvestments of companies such as General Motors, retrenchments and attacks on collective bargaining by hostile right wing employers who continue to pursue the old apartheid mentality which views

workers and their trade union with contempt.

The mess that we bring into 2018

Company closures are destabilising entire sections of our economy. We have seen this in components plants and suppliers that are linked to car manufacturers such as Johnson Control. This deindustrialisation is now our reality. If we are going to recover from this, it will take decades to rebuild and those jobs are not coming back in our lifetime. And it's not just our manufacturing sectors, the whole economy is down having slumped into a technical recession in 2017. Two of the three international rating agencies have downgraded the South African economy to junk status and a third has put the country on review pending a junk status downgrade early in 2018.

Why are we in this mess? The blame lies with the ANC government supported by COSATU and the SACP that arrogantly continues to implement these policies that are hemorrhaging jobs and destroying the economy. Now it is clear that the whole country was put on terms as we see that the white monopoly candidate Cyril Ramaphosa has been victorious at the ANC conference and immediately the confidence of the capitalists in South Africa improves, seen in the strengthening of the Rand.

Remember in 2013 NUMSA was ridiculed for calling on the ANC led Alliance to remove Jacob Zuma. Getting rid of Thabo Mbeki and putting in place Jacob Zuma did not result in a break in the neoliberal agenda. We are distracted from the shocking state of affairs in this country with no compassion for our people, who remain the working poor, exploited by the ruling class. Our distraction is the soap opera antics of the alliance-made politicians with Jacob Zuma cast in the leading role; he is an embarrassment, moving from one scandal to another.

The alliance partners, the SACP and COSATU, has stood by these

politicians. Worse still they have defended them, absolved them from wrong doing as they did with Zuma over the Nkandla debacle, been the bouncers when anyone within the alliance spoke out. We witnessed in 2017 an imploding of the ANC led Alliance; unable to contain the rot internally, infighting among themselves spilled into the public arena. We are vindicated when we witness the SACP, its cronies threatened from within the Alliance and compromised to such an extent that the party had no option but to scrape together its last vestiges of credibility by joining civil society marches that demanding 'ZUMA MUST GO'; the very same stand that the SACP publicly tore into NUMSA for taking.

NUMSA has been ridiculed for making radical economic demands in the interest of economical marginalized and dispossessed. The Alliance cast aside the Freedom Charter which could have been the blueprint to restructure the South African economy. Instead they have refused to address the land question, and the fundamental critical demand of ownership and control of the economy in the hands of the people. Instead they have allowed our economy to remain in the hands of white monopoly capital and have implemented backward, right wing, conservative, structural adjustment programs in the form of GEAR and the NDP. The NDP does not advance manufacturing or industrialization in order to create jobs. They want people to create their own employment as entrepreneurs, opening window cleaning services or hair dressers. It does not touch the huge wealth of this country that is kept out of reach of the black majority. So the mineral energy and finance complex that makes up the South African economy as we know it has remained untransformed.

The ANC government dumped the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), a policy that affirmed the black majority in development carried by a democratic state. Had we remaining committed to transformation in a manner that change power relations, we could have uprooted racism in South Africa.

Instead the ANC-led alliance and government chose to listen to the terrible imperialist advice from the West despite knowing what this advice has done on the African continent. African countries are trapped in poverty and debt having listened to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), they took instructions from multinational capitalist CEOs at the World Economic Forum. Their message is always the same, that government has no business in business. Their actions go even further, undermining the autonomy of governments to determine their development path and creating an environment that makes it virtually impossible for democratic trade unions to exist.

The West served the interest of white monopoly capital, saying that the state's role is not to intervene in the economy, its role was merely to level the playing field and allow the private sector to drive development. By taking this inferior advice, government has destroyed state capacity. It is ironic the apartheid Nationalist Party, before its defeat in the liberation struggle, actually used the state for the Afrikaners – the apartheid state intervened in the economy by building critical institutions such as Eskom, Telkom, Transnet, Volskas Bank, Iscor. In other words the apartheid state was directly involved to create jobs for its Afrikaner folks. The racist regime served the Afrikaner well and because it was in the best interest of the Afrikaner, municipalities and provincial government during the nationalist party regime employed black workers in public works that had capacity to build gravel roads, tar roads, four room houses that were both owned and rented stock. All of this created jobs and the ANC leadership chose to be the best Man in the wedding of capitalist accumulation Umkhaphi Emtshatweni.

These jobs were destroyed by the ANC government's tendering system that has plunged us into a very deep crisis of cronyism and corruption. Billions have been lost from the national fiscus and this government cannot deliver basic services.

NUMSA has challenged this path of development, where the government champions outsourcing and casualisation and has stripped state assets. We warned the ANC that a social crisis would unfold unless they dumped these policies and address the land question, restructure the South African economy, nationalise all South Africa's minerals under worker control and ensure that they are beneficiated to champion a job led industrial strategy. Almost 60 percent of our population lives in poverty, a number that grows exponentially each year. Today South Africa is world leader in service delivery protests because there is a crisis in service delivery.

NUMSA was dismissed from COSATU for warning the ANC that continuing with these policies would frustrate South Africans and they would lose political power to the racist Democratic Alliance, the political axis of the exploitative class the party of big business, led by Maimane. As predicted all the metros were lost to the DA in the last election. Other rivals have risen from the inability for the ANC led Alliance to critically engage on the shortcomings of leadership. Julius Malema was a lapdog for Zuma but when he dared to question policy direction of the ANC, he was kicked out of the ANCYL and he monopolised on the discontent to create the Economic Freedom Fighters.

Indeed all revolutions that fail to address the property question, that fail to affirm its indigenous people to own and control land, The economy after colonisation and ravages of oppression and exploitation, always end up being victims of corruption and dictatorship that continue to serve and benefit imperialist powers.

This has been the fate of the ANC. ANC National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe admits that the biggest issue is corruption but fails to take responsibility for the policy environment that has allowed this to fester. Instead he says they will be able to defeat corruption because they now have a rich ANC President in Ramaphosa. Mantashe insults honest working class

men and women by insinuating that they cannot give good leadership, that only the rich can lead and exposes the ANC as having no revolutionary agenda to liberate the working class. Contrary to his excitement the most corrupt class is the capitalist class it has elicited billions out of this country both legal and illegal and Stenhof is the case in point.

In the build up towards the 2017 ANC Conference there was a big noise about 'Radical Economic Transformation'. Yet in 2012 NUMSA and the ANCYL won the nationalisation debate in the commissions leading to the Mangaung ANC Conference but the resolution was changed unilaterally by the ANC leadership to keep it off the table. At this point, we began to lose faith that democratic processes could take forward pro poor and working class agenda in the ANC.

Despite radical economic resolutions taken at the 2017 Conference, it is clear that the ANC will never pursue radical economic transformation and any NUMSA member who believes this "usenga inkunzi" (is busy milking the bull). The nationalisation of the Reserve Bank, expropriation of land is given lip service to rally popular support but this is immediately tempered by assurances to white monopoly capital that there is no commitment to actually carry out any of these resolutions.

There will be no radical economic transformation from the ANC because we were sold out by the ANC before 1994, in a deal with white monopoly capital that they will continue to own and control the economy and the land. This deal was negotiated by Ramaphosa and Rolf Meyer of the Nationalist Party regime. Are we supposed to be proud of a worker leader that was willing to leave behind his class? Since then Ramaphosa has been busy becoming rich, his personal riches and opulence made possible by the policy environment he helped to put in place. He has become a servant to maintain the dominance of white monopoly capital accumulation, a very rich one but a servant none the less.

There should be no confusion within NUMSA ranks that Ramaphosa represents the interest of the white monopoly capital. He is a blood billionaire whose business has tentacles in all sectors of the economy. He is a greedy capitalist, a South Africa Trump. We will not forget that Ramaphosa was a Director at Lonmin and his call for a strong action by the police resulted in the slaughter of workers exercising their constitutional right to strike in Marikana, a year later he let Lonmin workers and their families starve in the longest strike in South Africa's history simply for demanding a living wage.

Ramaphosa has been allowed into the ranks of the mining oligarchy and now champions the racist wage of super exploitation of black labour as an accumulation strategy for white monopoly capital in South Africa. Billionaire Ramaphosa and his sellout collaborators at NEDLAC insult workers with a national minimum wage of R20 an hour or R3500 a month. This is an insult to those workers who were brutally killed by the state at Marikana fighting for a wage of R12,500.

The excuses of the Alliance partners cannot be tolerated any longer. The National Democratic Revolution has not been delayed, it has been abandoned. An entire generation has been raised in the absence of a revolutionary agenda, the hoax of the 'born frees' enslaved to poverty. The SACP leadership flip flopping without a political vision for the future of workers and the working class. SACP party leaders decided to back capitalist billionaire Ramaphosa for President of the ANC and the country. This had nothing to do with working class interests, these leaders were booking their ticket on the next gravy train to parliament. Zuma dealt with this betrayal by removing these leaders from leadership positions in the NEC and the final blow was the removal of SACP leader Blade Nzimande from the cabinet. Their current bravado challenging Zuma is not motivated but a sudden interest in the working class, but a show for Ramaphosa of their availability to once again sell out the working class.

In fact, both factions in the ANC serve capitalist interests, a deal has been reached to made to maintain dominance of these capitalist forces. The real losers are the working class, we are on our own. The ANC will not improve the life of Africans who are economically marginalised and dispossessed, it just does not have such an agenda or interest.

Ramaphosa and ANC economic transformation committee led by Enoch Ngodongwana will never agree to implement the Freedom Charter; they will not nationalise the commanding heights of the economy, put all our minerals and mines under worker control and champion a job led industrial strategy. They will never repeal the property clause in the constitution and agree to expropriate land without compensation into state hands under worker control this does not mean there will be no NUMSA members or shopstewards of NUMSA who will support this forces correctly so that NUMSA as a union is not a political Party so freedom of association and political affiliation is protected and its an individual choice but we are upfront that truth is truth.

They will not dump the destructive policies of GEAR and the NDP. At the beginning of 2017 Ramaphosa accompanied by Pravin Gordon went to Davos to the World Economic Forum to promise global capitalist leaders that the ANC will maintain and champion austerity measures.

This is not new, GEAR has been all about putting in place austerity. They imposed belt tightening that closed nurses colleges, agricultural colleges, teachers training colleges. It closed irrigation schemes in poor villages and destroyed a state led agricultural sector. They clustered poor municipalities through a process of demarcation and reduced budget allocations so most working class communities have no meaningful local development plans, leaving those in ghost towns and rural villages condemned to a life of poverty.

They will not agree that all the boards of corrupt State Owned

Enterprises must be reconstituted and that labour must have representation on those boards. They will not agree to dump tenders, fill all vacant posts and create more jobs in the public sector to build once more the capacity of the state to provide services. They will not agree to nationalisation of the Reserve Bank change the Reserve Bank's inflation targeting policy which maintains high interest rates that destroy jobs for the sole interest of protecting the value of white wealth. They will not move away from serving the IMF, World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. They will not break with legacy of Mbeki that was supported by Trevor Manuel, Tito Mboweni, and Pravin Gordon, of austerity measures and privitisation.

Our demands

NUMSA calls on the Ramaphosa and the ANC to boldly endorse free and compulsory education for all children who pass matric as education is the key to liberate society. This is only possible if the South African government is prepared to tax the rich; instead corporate tax reduced in South Africa during Trevor Manuel's tenure as a Minister of Finance from 48 % to 28. If we nationalised the mines under worker control and used our minerals to diversify and industrialise then we would have money for free and compulsory education but Ramaphosa dare not touch the interests of his mining oligarchy.

NUMSA demands that the ANC government end reckless spending and abandon the Nuclear Deal. We have enough electricity capacity out of Medupi, Khusile, Ngula. Instead and as a matter of urgency the focus must be to fix the problems at Eskom so that the utility can deliver a competitive electricity tariff both to electrify communities and the economy. The whole Eskom board and all other boards of SOES should be fired and replaced with a competent board that has representation from government, business, labour and civil society.

Their first task must be to employ a competent, qualified and

skilled CEO. All Eskom coal mines that were ceded to mining companies must be taken back and others nationalized to supply Eskom with quality, cheap coal. Eskom should return to its original mandate of delivering cheap electricity to the economy and to electrify communities. This can only be done if Eskom moves away from commercialisation. NERSA must also be dealt with and restructured as many companies are going to be affected with negative impact on jobs because of the five percent.

NUMSA members and all workers in SAFTU must be prepared for national strikes and stay aways in 2018 to fight back against the attack on workers.

We must ban labour brokers once and for all. We must honour those massacred workers in Marikana who demanded R12500 by working against the R3 500 or R20 an hour minimum wage.

We remain resolute in our demand for a national minimum wage but it must break the backbone of the apartheid colonial wage not perpetuate the racist capitalist accumulation strategy achieved through the super exploitation of black and African labour. NUMSA demand that as a starting point, workers should receive a national minimum wage for now of R12500 and is should be compulsory for all employers to negotiate through centralised collective bargaining.

Ramaphosa is using his position politically and in business to champion an agenda at NEDLAC to tamper with the right to strike. He wants to bring back an apartheid practice that before workers can embark on a strike they must first ballot. We defeated it then and we will defeat it again. We must be prepared to take rolling mass action and we will also challenge it in court as an attack on our constitutional right. Such actions prove that Ramaphosa and the ANC leadership are anti worker, and anti-trade unions. defend your right to strike. We know the DA is fully behind this counter reactionary agenda which is why we will never understand how

our members can be confused and vote DA or why a political party that claims to be revolutionary like the EFF would cooperate with DA.

Building the Workers Party

We cannot accept the continued betrayal of the working class. NUMSA has led the way in the United Front, we have launched a new federation SAFTU which is both a spear and a shield for workers, and now we are forging ahead, resolved to form a Workers Party which is firm in demanding socialism in our life time to end economic exploitation, poverty, unemployment and inequality. NUMSA Central Committee of NUMSA in December 2017 appreciated the work we doing to put together structures and supports the launch of the Workers Party in 2018. This year we will not just register the Workers Party but we will let you know the following details:

- a) The name of the Workers Party and the joining fee.
- b) Its constitution will be revealed very soon.
- c) Its national core will be introduced. Remember the Workers Party will be completely separate from NUMSA. NUMSA will remain an independent worker controlled union that supports the formation of the Workers Party.
- d) We shall very soon announce how many members are needed form to a branch of the Workers Party.
- e) We shall reveal its regalia in terms of T-shirts, and we shall be calling on our members to volunteer and make financial contributions to build the Workers Party. A Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party that is challenge the present exploitative system of capitalism will not be funded by the capitalist class.

This is not a gravy train Workers Party it's a party to deal with working class miseries. The party will work for and

support NUMSA and SAFTU members and the working class in general. It must have clear policies when it is launched that deal with the miseries of the working class. To have a situation where one in three people are unemployed is completely unacceptable. Politicians that stand by while companies close are not friends of the working class. Why must the working class vote into power political parties who champion policies that subject workers to poverty by destroying their jobs. These parties will refuse to take decisions that will protect jobs, yet workers continue to vote these butchers into power. We cannot expect exploiters and oppressors to hand us our freedom.

Many of us have comrades and family, who worked for a company that was closed. We are witnessing plant closures and massive retrenchments when every worker supports five people or more, so job losses put communities in distress, with many homes struggling to meet basic needs. As 2017 was coming to an end we called on all NUMSA nine regions to give us a list of companies that have retrenched and plant closures. The picture looks extremely bleak. This is a ticking bomb, pushing our people to despair and desperation. We have to defend our production capacity and jobs by championing industrial policy that meet the needs of our people.

Inequality is a national crisis, South Africa is the most unequal nation in the world. More than 40 million South Africans have no food. Members of NUMSA and SAFTU know that this is not just a number, these are our people, our children, our mothers and fathers that are caught up in the everyday struggle of what will they eat. Those of us that have jobs are the fortunate one but tomorrow it may be our turn to be retrenched. We can no longer trust the ANC with our members' lives. It's time to take a stand and fight for workers, for their right to work and to demand that the state must be the employer of last resort.

The Workers Party we talking about should go back to basic of

building organisation of peoples' power what we used to call M Plan. NUMSA, the United Front and the Workers Party should launch a campaign going door to door, street by street, collecting information about in each household. If each member of NUMSA and SAFTU did this on their street, we would have a detailed understanding of our communities and their needs. Workers Party activists will need to call general meetings in communities to hear from the people in a democratic fashion what do they suggest must be done to address their plight, to find solutions making sure people have somewhere to eat and something to eat. Street and area committees whose task and mission must be to bring to an end to crime and restore pride, dignity and hope in our communities. This form of community organising existed in the past when we were fighting Apartheid and the Nationalist Party and unionists volunteering in their communities as activists were vital to the success of these efforts not this today's opportunistic culture of renting the masses to fill stadiums and still render them to be victims of poverty until the next January 8th statement of the ANC.

The Workers Party is going to need honest leadership including young men and women. We have to take head on patriarchy, where women are oppressed, looked down upon at work, at home and in the community. The Workers Party as well as NUMSA and SAFTU must champion women as equal to men, promote women's active participation and inclusion in structures and in leadership positions.

Building NUMSA and SAFTU

NUMSA can only be strong and deliver on these noble aspirations for workers and the working class in general if it succeeds as a union to successfully represent workers against the bosses so quality service by organisers and by all of us in the leadership of NUMSA remains compulsory in 2018.

NUMSA is committed to improve turnaround time to resolve workers problems. We must not frustrate workers; when a

problem is reported, we must report on progress and discuss what is the way forward within a reasonable time period. Where employers are taking workers for a ride NUMSA must constantly take the side of workers and fight for them. We must continue to win hearts and minds of workers. We need the confidence of our members because NUMSA has many enemies and opportunists that are looking to prey on our members, wanting to snatch them away with promises they can't keep. NUMSA is loyal to its members and needs loyal members for us to go from strength to strength.

There is a political agenda to deal with NUMSA. Our members in many of the state owned enterprises are being tested by a deliberate attack on our union recognition rights. We are the majority union in PetroSA with full organisational rights, but this is the exception. We are facing resistance in a number of others such as Eskom, SAA and Denel. Transnet is refusing to deduct NUMSA members' dues. We call on our members in state owned enterprises to hold the ground we have won, we are committed to organising your workplaces as they are key to our industrial development and we will convene a national shopsteward council in 2018 to strategise on how we can fight back.

In 2017 we have had running battles with employers who consciously take cue from Cyril Ramaphosa national minimum wage. They want to vary down NUMSA members' benefits and conditions in the key collective bargaining sectors of motor and engineering to be paid at R3500 or to half their wages. We reached a wage agreement of 7 percent increase with the majority of employers within SEAFSA and we are expecting to gazette this agreement so that it is extended to all employers in the sector. NUMSA has negotiated at plant level with some companies, achieving even higher agreements, for example 9 percent at Scaw Metal and 9.5 percent at Nampak. In 2018 we are ready ourselves for battle with those employers that are hell-bent in making sure that the signed agreement in the

engineering sector is not extended to include plastic employers and those affiliated to NEASA.

In 2017 we had good cooperation with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Economic Development Department. We secured anti-dumping measures and an increase on tariffs for 8 products at Arcelor Mittal to protect jobs. Despite this Arcelor Mittal has served us with section 189 A notice and we closed the year defending our members. We did not back down and overcame this challenge with Arcelor Mittal withdrawing the notice and agreeing not to close the plant in Vereeniging and Newcastle.

We saved over 300 jobs at Scaw Metal by putting workers on a training lay off scheme. Transnet had ordered wheels from Italy instead of from Sacw, creating the threat to jobs. IDC that had a majority stake in Scaw, sold this to investors in the hope that the company can be turned around but the new investors want to break up the company. Numsa is challenging this, we believe that Scaw Metal can be saved intact and that the company has an important role to play in the future development of our country.

NUMSA has never accepted the closure of Evraz Highveld steel we pleased to report that our consistent fight has results. There is the possibility for reopening Evraz, Mapochs mine and Venchem.

We campaigned against closures of five power stations in Mpumalanga. NUMSA is not against reduction of emissions but we call for just transition that must first guarantee jobs security for workers. In terms of renewables, there must be a social owned renewable sector. It is against this backdrop that NUMSA rejects the introduction of nuclear at the present moment as the country cannot afford it and it will destroy many jobs in the manufacturing sector as our electricity costs are already uncompetitive. Instead we should invest in gas as a strategic niche of Petroleum South AFRICA (PETROSA),

defending existing jobs of PETROSA workers and creating more jobs. There is a lot of gas in South Africa and Mozambique this can be mutually beneficial to both countries.

All car manufactures are not compliant with the BEE score card; these companies are MBSA, VWSA, BMWSA, NISSAN SA, FORD SA, TOYOTA SA and GMSA which is now ISUZU SA. Government revised BEE requirements and car manufacturers must ensure that 25 % of their core business is given to black individuals or black workers. Instead companies make a mockery of the BEE objectives by outsourcing. We are currently negotiating with MBSA to resolve the BEE score card issues but the final position on this matter can only be taken at a Workers Indaba so that NUMSA acts on the mandate given by members. So far we have succeeded in getting MBSA to withdraw plans to break up the plant into separate legal entities.

NUMSA has engaged employers and government through DTI to begin to plan the future of the Auto industry called Vision 2035. The plan forces car manufacturers to stop dumping and to champion localization in a way that will create jobs both in the car manufacturing and the component sector. Employers have turned against the plan, unwilling to give up on existing incentives that they are using to maximize profits.

NUMSA must address the needs of level five workers that want to break the ceiling on their career path. We are seeking a solution to this through negotiations with employers at the Industry Policy Forum. Another challenge we face is the gap in wages between auto workers in the assembly car plants and component supply and logistics workers. The NUMSA Central Committee calls on all members and shop stewards to recruit workers in companies where we work and we must include workers in service providers to our companies, including security services, material handling, logistics, canteen workers, component suppliers and cleaners. We must make sure that they are well represented and that NUMSA bargains for them. We cannot win gains for our members whilst there are other

workers in our workplaces that are exploited. It is our revolutionary duty of NUMSA members to ensure that these workers are represented by our union.

The union has employed an actuary to restructure and transform retirement funds so that workers money can be deployed strategically in a manner that benefits workers whilst they still work to address some of their needs such as housing and still be available to workers when they retire with good value. We are working with the NUMSA investment company on the formation of an industry medical aid. our aim is to pool our contributions, reduce cost and ensure that our members' have access to good quality health care. At the same time we need to demand a national health insurance scheme and quality healthcare facilities and services accessible to every South African.

The most important victory we secured in 2017 which NUMSA members in all sectors and all workers in the entire country must continue to celebrate and defend as the victory of NUMSA on behalf of its members and all workers a victory COSATU and all its affiliates failed to secured against labour brokers, is a victory NUMSA secured against one labour broker company called Assign services which set a precedent for all labour broker companies that after three months all workers who work in South African companies must and should be automatical made permanent employed.

Whilst we were still busy celebrating this victory this blood sucker employers decided to appeal this labour court ruling in the constitutional court we pulling all the stops we are taking to senior legal counsel lawyers to go and fight for NUMSA members and all workers in the country to defend this working class victory but we also call on our members to come to court on that they to demonstrate support for such a ruling and call on the constitutional court not to temper with the previous ruling that fairly makes workers permanent after three months. NUMSA members and all exploited workers must

under labour broking slavery must continue to celebrate this victory against scrupulous labour broker employers, ANC and DA leadership that refused to ban labour brokers.

What must be done

Our members must be honest and loyal to NUMSA by raising their concerns about their union inside their union, with the intention to better NUMSA. Building NUMSA means workers must be united to defend workers and improve their benefits and conditions. NUMSA at all levels starting with the President and the General Secretary must be committed to this task.

We need to recruit every unorganised worker in companies where we work under banner of NUMSA and take up the fight against exploitative and scrupulous bosses. An injury to one must be an injury to all, at plant level, at sector level and even at international level.

NUMSA members and shop stewards must organise and advance working class interests, in our churches, shebeens, burial societies, in our choirs, sports clubs, and hairdressers. We must advance a struggle to end economic exploitation by building our union.

We must also build the United Front to take up the struggle to say no to privatisation of municipal services and challenge poor service delivery in our communities, fighting back against crime, corruption and violence against women. This might necessitated that once more forming of street and area committees.

NUMSA members must remain critical of their union and its leadership and must continue to make every NUMSA shop steward accountable to members, every NUMSA leader accountable including the President and General Secretary. Our members must not be confused by yellow unions, our union is alive and well, we are a fighting union, a militant union but most of all we are a democratic worker controlled union. Numsa will

always uphold organisational renewal through worker democracy leadership. Members are free to contest leadership including that of the Numsa secretariat and the General Secretary through democratic process upheld in our union constitution. The winners of these democratic processes will lead Numsa and the losers must respect elected leadership and continue to make valuable contribution to our union.

In 2013 as a result of being sold out by the ANC led Alliance, NUMSA resolved at the Special National Congress that it was time for the working class to organize itself as a class for itself by forming a and building a movement for socialism meaning it must lay building blocks to form a Worker's Party. This was resolved and further endorsed at the 2016 NUMSA National Congress. "We know as a matter of fact as our union announce its honest intention of correctly, sticking to its resolved to catalyse formation of the Workers Party which will continue to be both a shield and a spear for workers to raised working class revolutionary consciousness to take up the struggle against capitalism and all social ills which it breeds such as crime, poverty, violence and abuse of children and women, inequalities and unemployment, economically marginalisation, land hunger for the majority which is black and African."

Be assured that our support for the formation of a workers Party is to ensure that there is political representation of working class interests. NUMSA is South Africa's biggest trade union, we are worker controlled and we intend to remain so. We have no intention of becoming a political party. There are those who will continue to attack this initiative because they fear what is to be born. Defend our union against attacks by government and the ANC led alliance; workers deserve political representation that has not compromised the working class. This workers Party when its final launched it will be completely separate from NUMSA will be in in the street with workers and the poor.

In 2018 we are building NUMSA and continuing to grow as a fighting giant to resist and reject any attack on workers. 2018 will be a year of action for gains in our workplaces. At the same time we shall continue to build and strengthen the United Front and we shall launch the Workers Party. All those who want to join a revolutionary Workers Party, whose mission and task is to overthrow capitalism and build a system that detest greed of capitalism which is socialism are free to do so. NUMSA is part of this initiative to build the Workers Party but membership is voluntary. NUMSA remains committed to recruit all workers, regardless of their political affiliation. We must be extremely be vigilant and jealously guard unity in NUMSA as a home for all workers regardless of their political affiliation and we should not allow opportunists to create confusion in our ranks and for those who have made their business to attack this revolutionary mission to succeed.

NUMSA President Andrew Chirwa in closing the NUMSA 10TH National Congress in December 2016 had this to say about this important but difficult journey to build an alternative Workers Party and the need for workers to pursue class struggle against capitalism for a socialist republic of South Africa.

“There is no alternative to organizing the working class for the revolutionary struggle for them to be their own liberators, their own masters. We have no choice but to take on this huge revolutionary task. The alternative is permanent misery, poverty, unemployment and suffering extreme inequalities. All this of course leads to brutal and painful short lives, for the majority of the working class. We must create the revolutionary mass vanguard political party to lead the struggle for socialism in South Africa. The alternative is the continued savagery and barbarism of capitalism, and civil wars.”

Let us be victorious in 2018. I leave you with a quote from

Lenin which better represent the NUMSA moment and the urgent need to turn the NUMSA moment into a working class revolutionary movement in the form of a Workers Party, "What Is To Be Done? Dogmatism And 'Freedom of Criticism'" (1901).

"We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not of retreating into the neighboring marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation. And now some among us begin to cry out: Let us go into the marsh! And when we begin to shame them, they retort: What backward people you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road! Oh, yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us, but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh. In fact, we think that the marsh is your proper place, and we are prepared to render you every assistance to get there. Only let go of our hands, don't clutch at us and don't besmirch the grand word freedom, for we too are "free" to go where we please, free to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh"

Viva NUMSA Viva!

IRVIN JIM

NUMSA General Secretary

Workers Day Celebration, Durban 2017

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 Catalanian 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.

An analysis of the crises of Southern Africa

A situation characterised by increasing burden of parasitism on the working people

Southern Africa is in the throes of economic and political crises in **South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola**.

In South Africa there's a louder and louder clamour even from the ranks of the ANC itself for President Zuma's removal on the misleading conception of so-called State capture. Zuma's relationship with the Guptas is put forward as 'State Capture'.

(The fact is that the ANC State was always a comprador State for the ruling classes of South Africa. In this sense the State was 'captured' long before the Guptas. Police Chief Jackie Selebi's undignified relationships with organised gangsters uncovered in 2010 and the Marikana Massacre of miners in 2012 amongst general caretaking were adequate proof of the aforesaid.)

Nevertheless, the South African State is all but bankrupt and the mismanagement of central institutions such as ESKOM (the power utility), which is now under investigation for 'State Capture', and the State's endangering and intrinsic inability to develop adequate infrastructure for capitalism are undoubtedly major issues behind the demand instigated by the ruling classes.

In the midst of the South African crisis, the Zimbabwean Army for all intents and purposes deposed Robert Mugabe due to internal squabbles in the ZANU-PF seemingly on the question of succession. However, the real reason (like in the rest of the sub-region) is clearly dwindling or depleted resources and a

frenzy to be close to the last remaining State finances and to serve international capitalism under austerity, which insists on as few servants as possible.

(Unemployment is estimated in the bourgeois press at 95%. But since the 'estimate' is coupled with 'underemployment', it is actually impossible to 'estimate'. This 'statistic' was probably dreamed up in order to further revile Mugabe. What probably is true is that in one fell swoop working people have been rapidly turned into mostly temporary and seasonal contract workers. But this trend is anyway happening in the rest of the sub-region.)

Likewise, in Angola the new president Joao Lourenco, who took over from Eduardo Dos Santos in August this year, is reported to have dismissed Isabel dos Santos as chair of the state oil company Sonangol on Wednesday, 15 November. She is said to be \$3,5 billion 'strong' from oil income. Given that oil is said to comprise 90% of exports and the bulk of production, that payment is in dollars, but that there is a perennial shortage of FOREX (dollars), it will probably never be known how much she and others are truly 'worth', as the dollars seem to disappear before reaching Angola. (Exports in 2015 were estimated at \$37,3 billion and imports at about \$22 billion. There should have been no problem with foreign valuta.)

President Lourenço had reportedly already dismissed the heads of several other state companies, including the three state-owned media companies. Bottom of Form Sonangol is reported to be a partner with some of the biggest international oil companies, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and BP.

When MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) took over in 1975, they 'nationalised' all corner shops and retail outlets, replaced them with severely under-stocked 'Peoples Shops' and set up 'black markets', without price control, which allowed government ministers and officials to make profits many times over the purchase price of the items.

These so-called black markets had hundreds of metres of shelves loaded with every conceivable item and openly operated with consumables and imported goods.

The same frenzy to loot as in the other countries of Southern Africa saw the MPLA ignore the many high-rise buildings under construction when the Portuguese had to leave in 1975. Until very recently they were left with their cranes still standing and the deteriorating infrastructure. Not even drainage was considered, let alone aesthetics.

If one considers the reports that from 2001 to 2008 Angola was one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with an estimated average of 11% growth, of which increased oil production constituted 17% of growth per year, it indicated a seriously sick situation in which the rest of the economy, especially agriculture, actually contracted by 6% per year: negative growth of 6% growth in essential economy sector. Agriculture is said to remain by-and-large subsistent.

Officially Angola has 26% unemployment, but some Angolans put it much higher, even 70%. There is no way to determine the true figure.

No doubt stirring popular anger had a say in these newest developments just as in Zimbabwe.

However, if there is any change, it will be to strengthen the grip of the IMF, World Bank, the European Union and the United States. But, given the nature of oil companies, the looting will undoubtedly continue in Angola, leading to a much harsher situation for the more than 50% of impoverished Angolans and the rest who are employed.

Namibia has seen the State go into bankruptcy due to uncontrolled looting since 1990. By 1996 they had figured out how to loot Pension Funds, in cahoots with mining companies such as Rio Tinto Zinc and the Goldfields South Africa. They further discovered how to loot State Finances through sham

building and construction projects with costs inflated by multiples.

Buildings and construction projects at absurdly inflated costs litter the entire country and the capital city, Windhoek. The most notable of these was firstly the State House. The original cost estimate was a few hundred million rand, but it was finished at the astronomical price of 19 billion rand. Besides being the residence of the President, it was designed to house cabinet offices and conference halls. These offices are now standing unoccupied.

The second most cynical project was the Neckartal Dam, which was contrived before 2011 as an irrigation scheme in the far south of the country. The Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment (SAIEA) had submitted a report that the project was not viable as the dam would require highly specialised skills and largescale capital investments to produce high value produce for the overseas market, which was the purported object. It was further pointed out that the nearby Naute Dam's capacity was not utilised to the full. The project continued irrespective. It was initially costed at R3,02 billion, but it escalated to R5,7 billion in 2017, when the uncompleted construction ground to a halt due to State bankruptcy.

The particularly ludicrous procedures for contrived building and construction were as follows: Cabinet would decide on the project and determine the price; the consultants and quantity surveyors would work out the bill of quantities to correspond thereto; the fees of engineers, consultants and contractors would rise proportionally with the multiply-inflated initial price. The feasibility study would be made last. Members of the Cabinet and State officials would collect relatively small kickbacks. State assets worth billions would be sold for kickbacks of a few million. (The resultant bankruptcy ['illiquidity'] is thus not temporary, but permanent, as future assets such as for example State land were depleted.)

For the past year major projects like highways from Windhoek and construction generally have ground to a halt, but it is clear that the IMF, World Bank and the European Union have moved in for direct 'State Capture', albeit clandestinely in order to shield the Comprador State from a public perception of not only its uselessness and debilitating ineptitude, but encumbrance to true freedom.

The form and national peculiarities of each Southern African State may differ, even remarkably in some instances. For example, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique waged relatively effective guerrilla struggles, driving the colonial rulers to the negotiating tables, but nevertheless ended up as bourgeois (pseudo Stalinist) States. African National Congress (ANC) and South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) were foisted on South Africa and Namibia directly as Comprador States with parodies of armed struggles. The similarities are nevertheless much more essential than the differences. These situations could only be reached by a brutal and ruthless eradication of any local opposition: In 1977, MPLA obliterated 5000 youth in Luanda; Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) eradicated opposition by assassinating for Herbert Chitepo and working-class youth in exile, and thereafter an estimated 30-60,000 and perhaps many more civilians in Ndebele in Southern Zimbabwe. It made many disappear, and massacred farm workers during its 'land-grab'. ANC waged a war within South Africa against the working class and its leadership, and, SWAPO and ANC waged terror against youth in exile.

But the content of the crises remains essentially similar: that is, bankrupt States seeking to be bailed out by 'white monopoly capitalism'.

The cash-strapped South African electricity utility ESKOM and South African Airways (SAA) now openly seek private partners ('white monopoly capital') to overcome inefficiency and to piggy-back on what is presumed to be an effective and competent private sector and the self-regulation of the

market. The absurdity is still argued that making State enterprise attractive for private investors makes it profitable. Which begs the question: if a State enterprise is profitable, why sell it off?

Nevertheless, TELKOM's 46,000 employees are already targeted for reduction, although not the astronomical management incomes and lavish international lifestyles and obscene expenditures. A third of the employees are to be reduced.

In Namibia, the SWAPO government is appealing to the World Bank for help in getting private partners for the State Owned Enterprises.

Privatisation is demanded despite two major publications on the effects of privatisation in Eastern Europe, Africa and South America in the 1990s. UN researchers show that nowhere in the world has privatization yielded the vaunted results. Instead it has created mass unemployment, social destabilization and hardships.

The signs are clear that international financial instances have already moved into place and already demand 'austerity'. In Katima Mulilo, the CEO of the Municipality stated that 'urban land' is not for 'poor people' and bulldozed settlements in order to save money on services. In Okahandja letters have been issued to settlements giving notice of bulldozing.

In general, the comprador States are clearly putting on their nicest clothes to woo imperialism back to take over their State functions as there is little to loot anymore. But, this has set off intense proliferation of factions in the States and squabbles amongst them. (This explains the nice and friendly *coup d'état* in Zimbabwe)

Given the desperation of the working people in the deteriorating economic situation and their falling living standards, within the context of a crisis of leadership they

cling to each hope generated by demagoguery of the compradors to bring change. And yet, there are many sceptical observers amongst them.

In Zimbabwe, many notice that it is the same old edifice which proclaims new salvation.

Likewise, in South Africa and Angola, working people are observing the situation with caution.

CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Working people find it hard to respond to the looming threat. Whilst no doubt their largely amorphous stirrings are the main pressure for the compradors to feign a hope for real change, they are also in crisis, a crisis of leadership.

This crisis is historic in context.

Especially in South Africa and Namibia, the working classes have generated their own leadership in the union struggles which started in 1971/2 in Namibia and lit the veld fire of workers' struggles in South Africa since 1973.

Whilst these struggles led to real union rights by the 80's, the ANC and SWAPO have led physical attacks against the working class and its leaders since 1976. By 1984 they had succeeded in disbanding or killing the union and workers' leadership and corralling workers' organisations behind the nationalists through the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). In 1990 in Namibia and 1994 in South Africa, this union leadership abandoned the workers for an alliance with what they now call 'white monopoly capitalism'.

Since 1992 when The Labour Act which contained significant rights for workers was promulgated in 1992. Since then the SWAPO regime, together with corporate lawyers, started dismantling labour rights, first through endemic corruption in

the law courts, then using the introduction of illegal practices such as contract labour, and then by rewriting the Labour Act in 2007 to put it in line with neo-liberal requirements of a total onslaught on labour rights.

This same process was followed in South Africa with the Labour Relations Act of 1995 and its later amendments and conventions introduced illegally such as contract labour.

These developments suggest that the working people must generate a new and independent leadership both at union and political levels.

They need a union leadership which leads them in the struggle against the erosion of rights gained through three decades of bloody struggle. They still have union rights to organise and strike. But, they need a conscious and alert struggle against the facilitation of the comprador class to enable capitalist corporations to erode workplace rights by slave conventions.

There is no point living with your head in the political clouds while working people need to understand their historic tasks through fighting for concrete rights.

The meaning of fighting for political power on a mass scale can only come from the fight for the protection of past gains and rights against slave labour conditions, which the IMF, the World Bank, the EU and the US are set to further entrench through the compradors of Southern Africa.

Hewat Beukes

19 November 2017

Notes:

The bourgeoisie of Southern Africa was a comprador class for imperialism before and after 1994. (Compradors are traders in a colony or semi-colony who facilitate their county's pillage by imperialism.)

The Apartheid State was able to build a pseudo welfare state on the backs of the working people, who with their families comprised 90% of the South African nation.

The entrance of black governments heaped a further burden on the working people. Not allowed to dig into corporate capital and assets, they took hold of working peoples' assets and life savings.

The entrance now of direct control by the imperialists heaps the ultimate burden on the working masses of Southern Africa.

They will not be able to bear any further burdens.

Editor's Note: this is an edited version of a document that is already circulating on social media.

Sloganeering and coat-tails – A response to some South African activists

John Appolis, Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan have kindly passed on texts they have produced dealing with the current political situation in South Africa, as well as a contribution to discussion by Oupa Lehulere.

I must apologise for the delay in responding to these texts. It is not easy to orientate oneself from a great distance away.

I have to confess I am still at a loss to understand why the various authors continue to place their hopes for the future in an alliance with this or that faction of the "official" liberation movement, the ANC, when the country has seen major irruptions of the working class into public affairs. The events around the miners' struggle and Marikana unleashed a

huge wave of industrial action. All this was reflected in the December 2013 Special Conference decisions of Numsa and the progress made since then in consolidating a combative new trade union federation.

The fact is I find the arguments presented in these texts unconvincing and misleading.

Ahmed and Shaheen compare the current situation in South Africa with that in Germany in 1932, on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power. On this basis, they recommend that workers and young people in South Africa should fall in line behind the Democratic Alliance, the South African Communist Party, the various anti-Zuma factions of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Malema in the "Zuma Must Go!" bandwagon. To ward off the danger of being overwhelmed by all of that, they append a wordy "socialist" programme and cross their fingers behind their back.

Revolutionary tactics cannot be deduced from a cook-book. Empiricists identify any phenomenon abstractly (that is, they reduce it to a name, a suitable label, leaving out all its complexity, internal and external contradictions, motion, indeed its very life) and place this definition confidently in the appropriate pigeonhole. When another phenomenon arises with superficial similarities to the first, they say: "Ahah!", sort through their files, triumphantly fish out the label and the attached recipe and tie it to the new situation.

They forget the warning traditionally drummed into medical students: "Therapy is easy; diagnosis is difficult". Patients who present with apparently similar symptoms may be suffering from very different diseases, and require quite different treatment

Without writing a full-on history of Germany between the World Wars, it is useful to recall some essential details about the situation in which revolutionary Marxists called for a United Front of working-class parties to stop Hitler from coming to power.

For all her problems, Germany under the Weimar Republic was a highly-developed modern, industrial, imperialist state. There was a very numerous and politically-conscious working class which had built not only

its own mass, nominally Marxist, Social-Democratic Party (SPD) but also a the most significant revolutionary Communist Party (KPD) outside of the Soviet Union.

This working class had made enormous experiences of struggle in the course of World War I and the following 14 years. At one point a short lived-socialist republic had been proclaimed. Workers had organised strike waves, military and naval insurrections, a general strike to defeat a right-wing coup attempt, workers' and soldiers' councils in many cities and actual Red Armies in some industrial regions. In 1923, the year of the great inflation, there had been serious moves to prepare, equip and carry out a workers' revolution.

The large German Communist Party was inspired and materially supported by the successful revolution in Russia and the workers' state established there.

The Nazi regime was a reckless, foolhardy (and of course profoundly criminal and barbaric) option forced upon the German bourgeoisie by the rival imperialist powers who prevailed in World War I. It was underpinned by a (fairly) worked-out ideology of blood, soil, violence and conquest. This involved extreme nationalism, racism (towards all allegedly "non-Aryan" races and most immediately affecting the millions of Jews living in Europe), a leadership cult based on utter subjection of the mass, hero-worship, militarism and a simplistic concept of the survival of the fittest. Another aspect of this ideology was utter hatred of all kinds of Marxism and a determination to stamp out Communism in the USSR and everywhere.

We do criticise the policies and actions of the Soviet-led Communist International (CI), and consequently of the German KPD, during the period of "bonapartist" rule by Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher between 1929 and 1933. First of all, these alleged Marxists did not see the real depth of the coming catastrophe. They had a mechanical view of the effects of the economic meltdown of 1929.

The CI of the day saw the Social Democrats (the reformist socialist party) and the Nazi Party as "not antipodes but twins". After all, a

Social-Democratic government inflicted welfare cuts and austerity measures on the working class and sent armed police to shoot workers demonstrating on May Day. A Social-Democratic minister had said in 1919 "someone has to play the bloodhound" and unleashed vicious right-wing paramilitaries on revolutionary workers. Could the Nazis be any worse?

But of course, they were!

The second mistake the CI made, as a consequence, was that they did not anticipate what damage Hitler would inflict on the workers' and socialist movement, which was comprehensively crushed with the use of extreme violence and intimidation once Hitler was elected German Chancellor. The CI and KPD leaders thought that Hitler's accession to power would generate enough mass resistance among workers to lead to a Communist counter-stroke: "After Hitler, us!" they said.

The third mistake the CI and the KPD made was to believe that they could win over Social Democratic workers by propaganda alone, just by brow-beating them with arguments. They offered a "United Front from below" to SPD supporters against their own leaders. In effect, they were saying: "if you agree with us, join our United Front on our terms" instead of "let's see how we can get your leaders to work with ours to stop Hitler". This attitude let the leaders of the SPD and the trade unions "off the hook", because it was clearly not a serious attempt to overcome the division in the working class. If they had been sincere about a united front, the KPD leaders would have negotiated jointly-acceptable terms on which to organise one with the Social-Democratic party and trade union leaders. In the face of the Nazi threat, such a workers' united front could have made sense.

It is worth quoting what Trotsky wrote in 1932 in Germany, *What Next?*, not in order to appeal to some Holy Writ, but to get to grips with how the dynamics of class relations are approached:

"Without hiding or mitigating our opinion of the Social Democratic leaders in the slightest, we may and we must say to the Social Democratic workers, 'Since, on the one hand, you are willing to fight together with us; and since, on the other, you are still unwilling to break with your

leaders, here is what we suggest: force your leaders to join us in a common struggle for such and such practical aims, in such and such a manner; as for us, we Communists are ready.' Can anything be more plain, more palpable, more convincing?

In precisely this sense I wrote – with the conscious intention of arousing the sincere horror of blockheads and the fake indignation of charlatans – that in the war against fascism we were ready to conclude practical military alliances with the devil and his grandmother, even with Noske and Zörgiebel.”

But there was another side to the question of the United Front, a tactic which the Communist International under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky had adopted: applied incorrectly, it could also become a cover for passivity and inaction. Further on in the same text, Trotsky wrote:

“In the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the policy of the united front became a hue and cry after allies at the cost of sacrificing the independence of the party. Backed by Moscow and deeming themselves omnipotent, the functionaries of the Comintern seriously esteemed themselves to be capable of laying down the law to the classes and of prescribing their itinerary; of checking the agrarian and strike movements in China; of buying an alliance with Chiang Kai-Shek at the cost of sacrificing the independent policies of the Comintern; of re-educating the trade union bureaucracy, the chief bulwark of British imperialism through educational courses at banquet tables in London, or in Caucasian resorts; of transforming Croatian bourgeois of Radich's type into Communists, etc., etc. All this was undertaken, of course, with the best of intentions, in order to hasten developments by accomplishing for the masses what the masses weren't mature enough to do for themselves.”

The mistake the CI leaders then made after they had digested the depth of the disaster that Hitler's take-over represented, was to believe that there was a way to prevent the spread of fascism by forming an alliance with “democratic”, anti-fascist capitalists in which the interests of the working class were clearly and officially subordinated to the leadership of the bourgeoisie. This policy of a so-called “Popular Front” also enters our story, because it is the entire foundation and backbone of the

policy of the CI's successors (although the body itself was wound up during World War II) towards the colonial liberation movement in general and the African National Congress in particular. They dressed this tribal and bourgeois formation up as the main revolutionary force in South Africa and systematically over many years did everything they could to subordinate the South African working class to it.

But it was the black working class which drove the struggle against apartheid forward. Nevertheless in 1990-1994, the ANC, supported by the SACP and in close dependence upon imperialist governments, the mining monopolies and the parties of the white minority, carried out its own form of "state capture". Subsequent history (as many can explain) has exposed what this "state capture" actually meant.

Is Zuma Hitler?

No, Zuma is Zuma.

Since the end of apartheid rule, governments of the ANC in alliance with the SACP and Cosatu have all provided a democratic screen, engaging the support of as many local forces as possible while serving the interests of international capital. Apartheid was ended and majority rule installed by arrangement with the international mining companies, major banks and imperialists governments.

The Triple Alliance was cobbled together from individuals in exile all over the world parachuted into positions of authority in the major institutions, including the trade union movement. "Sections" of the South African bourgeoisie black and white were appeased to various extents to make the Triple Alliance workable, while the commercial headquarters of the big mining companies were prudently moved abroad to major imperialist centres such as London. It is the imperialists' requirements which have predominated ever since under a veneer of national independence and self-government.

But the Triple Alliance was fragile and it is breaking up, above all under the pressure of the masses, first and foremost the working class.

Now candidates for power in South Africa must demonstrate to the

satisfaction of their international imperialist masters that they can directly confront and subjugate that pressure. Zuma is up for the job, equipped with the necessary qualities and eager to enjoy the fruits of such work.

Such regimes practice a level of self-enrichment at the expense of their own peoples which is not merely tolerated but actually encouraged by their international patrons. These regimes were conceived in corruption and live by it. They steal state property with impunity, rob the public treasury and have been known to “nationalise” and then take over (or sell to cronies) traditionally-owned tribal land, etc.

They will play every vile trick to protect their access to wealth, including crushing democratic protests, imprisoning and murdering opponents and fanning ethnic differences into open conflict.

To retain local control over their populations they rely on tribal elites bought with a fraction of the loot often alongside the straightforward rule of gangsters.

Such are the shared characteristics of African “independence” regimes. And for that reason, they are instable regimes of crisis. But although they share some features with fascist regimes (for example, suspension of the “rule of law”, crimes against the people, even outright genocide in some cases) they are not as such fascist regimes.

Labelling them “fascist” can be quite misleading. Tony Blair and George W. Bush branded Saddam Hussain a “fascist” in order to justify the second Gulf war. They went to war against the “fascist” Hussain, but it was the Iraqi people they were aiming at and actually hit. You could say the same about their treatment of Libya under Ghaddafi and Syria under Assad, all in different ways.

Confusing Popular Front and United Front

“The Popular Front”, Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan correctly say “is the main strategic weapon of the bourgeoisie to tie the hands of the working class to the interests of the bosses”. However, they soon go on to urge NUMSA and its allies to plunge straight into – a sort of Popular Front!

They spend five sentences enumerating the forces predominating in the “anti-State Capture Movement” which make it very clear that this is a mass popular movement around a “single issue” (i.e. “Zuma Must Fall!”). They then write: “The class character of these movements is not as important to ordinary people as the fact that they are ready to take up the fight practically and immediately”.

Yes, it is good for the masses to get involved in political action. But it is the job of revolutionary movements to point out the things which are really important to ordinary people above and beyond what the bourgeoisie presents as important.

Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan think that the presence of a working-class force inside the movement armed with “its own programme and banner” will magically convert the Popular Front into a United Front. It is worth quoting what they say in full:

“20: The task of the proletariat and its leadership is to join the general movement. However, in doing so it enters the fray under its own programme and banner. It applies the policy of the united front which is ‘unity in action’. March separately. Strike together”.

However, they have just spent more than a few lines describing the class character of the “general movement” in considerable detail, which makes it clear that this movement is NOT a workers’ united front but a cross-class popular front irrespective of whatever programme and banner we Marxists “enter the fray” under.

Comrade Appolis (“Critical Comments on the article: *Platform of the Left Bloc in the Zuma Must Go Campaign* by Comrades Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan”) notes the discrepancy here (which is to his credit). He also sees the need to build a core of politically-conscious leading activists with a breadth of vision which extends beyond the parochial. However, he both turns his back on the main force able to bring about such a cadre (which is NUMSA and the new trade union federation) and proposes a different version of the same popular front which Ahmed and Shaheen put forward:

“The working class and its forces should enter this conflict with its own vision, strategy and demands. It should enter it against the big

bourgeoisie and its system of accumulation by calling for Zuma to go. And this call is in line with the sentiments and mood of the masses”.

Further on he notes: “the working-class movement exhibits numerous weaknesses – organisationally, politically and ideologically. It is marked by fragmentation, low levels of mass implantation and has a very disperse advance guard who are caught up in the immediacy of its issues.”

He is impatient of the developments among organised workers:

“The trade unions are only now in the beginning phase of shaking off the effects of years of false politics, bureaucracy and inertia. Legalism and an excessive emphasis on an industrial relations’ approach to class struggle seems to still frame its politics and methodologies. Its social base is not as yet at the cutting edge of anchoring a mass movement. NUMSA/SAFTU have so far express some correct sentiments but have a way to go.”

It is true that trade unions cannot solve all the political problems of the working class. The characteristics which John Appolis lists reflect one side of the conditions under which trade unions operate: they deal with the day-to-day problems of their entire membership containing a wide range of men and women with a variety of outlooks; they deal with bread-and-butter issues; they deal with employers; they stand up for their members’ rights day by day within with the legal and political framework of class relations and understandably both work within it and work to improve it using established channels.

Trade unions have to have an administrative machine and responsible leaders. If they are doing their job properly they have to spend a lot of effort on organisational matters. This is their strength as class organisations but at the same time it makes them susceptible to the influence of the employers’ class.

What was overwhelmingly striking, following Marikana and the resulting wave of mass industrial working-class action, was that the leaders of NUMSA decided to use their union’s resources in order to lay the basis for a political development by their class. The quantity of experiences mounting up of 20 years of majority rule under the Triple Alliance turned

into a new quality, the determination to work for a new political organisation which would fight for the interests of the working class, the fulfilment of the promises of the liberation struggle.

The trade union movement is not just some undifferentiated mass. There is a mass movement and there are leaders at various levels. Some leaders were not equipped to draw political lessons from the struggles that broke out. Others were loath to escape their intellectual vassalage to the Triple Alliance. It is enormously to the credit of NUMSA's leadership that the union has taken forward its special conference decisions of 2013 into re-building the strongest possible unity in a new union confederation around new positions in the movement.

Unlike them, Comrade Appolis is looking for a short-cut to overcoming the movement's "numerous difficulties". He says:

"What the demand for Zuma to go offers is an opportunity to unite these struggles, give them a national expression and a connection to a common national cause. The present conjuncture requires this qualitative shift in the struggles of the working class. And the Zuma must go provides the basis to effect such a qualitative shift.

"The unification of these struggles on a national basis will not amount to an artificial manoeuvre. Rather it will organically weave together the thousands of different struggles of the masses into a national stream. This will place the working class in a position to articulate an alternative ideological and political explanation of the political economy of corruption, of the class character of the ANC and its factions, of the nature of the South African social formation and the position of white monopoly capital therein".

On this basis, he asserts: "This coalescing and cohering of a nation-wide cadre of militants with their thousands of connections with the concrete struggles of the masses is the key task of the moment".

To achieve this, he proposes:

"The starting point is to convene a National Assembly of Representatives of the Struggling Formations of the Working Class, especially those at

the cutting edge of the anti-corruption struggles, for instance Outsourcing Must Fall movement, Abahlali Freedom Park, Housing Assembly, Tembelihle Crisis Committee, SECC, Black Sash, R2K and many others. It is these formations that must anchor the movement against the Zuma Bloc and white monopoly capital. The coalescing of these formations on a national scale with clarified class perspectives on the political economy of corruption and crystalizing around a common set of demands shall enable the working class to make its presence and imprint felt on the national anti-corruption movement. NUMSA and SAFTU are to be engaged to be part of this initiative. At some point overtures should also be made towards COSATU to come on board.”

However, he proposes all this under conditions where the movement is dominated by the demagogy of various self-seeking sectors and above all of the Economic Freedom Fighters of Julius Malema.

“White Monopoly Capital” and demagogy of every kind

Oupa Lehulere is even more pessimistic about the role that organised labour can play than is John Appolis. But this only becomes clear at the end of a long and rather confusing article, *Cronin and Company harness Marxism to the service of White Monopoly Capital (The SACP and the Cronification of Marxism)*, which foregrounds the significance of “white monopoly capital”.

At the heart of Lehulere’s emphasis on “white monopoly capital” is the idea that the future of the mass movement must involve an alliance with one or another “sector” of South Africa’s black bourgeoisie as a stepping-stone into the political arena; that such an alliance is essential and possible against the common enemy, “white monopoly capital”.

To put it briefly: The whole basis for the “Zuma Must Fall” agitation is that in robbing the state finances alongside his Gupta associates, Zuma is seeking to (or obliged to) “capture” the South African state, turning it from a democracy of some sort into his own personal fiefdom.

The existence of black capitalists in South Africa is noted and they are classified into two main sectors. The “credit” bourgeoisie are said to be

those who were bought off by the big international corporations with credits which enabled them to become shareholders and then branch out into businesses of their own. (One thinks of the former miners' union leader Cyril Ramaphosa).

The "tenderpreneurs" on the other hand, are those who exploit any kind of relationship with the ruling alliance in order to win contracts to carry out public or government works. Jacob Zuma and his Gupta associates are meant to be placed in this category.

It is made into an article of faith that these are two separate groups who constitute the South African black bourgeoisie. Essentially, all those who call for the South African workers' movement to advance by joining the "Zuma Must Fall" campaign are arguing for the workers and the masses to support the "credit" sector of capitalists.

Zuma carried out a cabinet reshuffle in March this year, removing Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan and replacing him with the supposedly more malleable Malusi Gigaba. Gigaba appointed as an advisor a well-regarded left-leaning associate professor at Wits University, Chris Malikane.

Malusi Gigaba may have had good reason to believe that Malikane was a Zuma loyalist, but he apparently had not gone into detail about how he (Malikane) rationalised that position. That became clearer when people got around to reading what Malikane actually wrote. Take *How to break monopoly white capital for example* (<http://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/how-to-break-monopoly-white-capital-8779291>).

Malikane starts dramatically by saying: "The class structure under colonialism or apartheid remains intact. The African is at the bottom of the food chain. The darkest skin performs the toughest job at the lowest wage."

He goes on: "Even within the capitalist class, the darkest skin is the lowest in the hierarchy. It should also be mentioned that, within the African capitalist class, the upper stratum which is credit-based is found inside, and accumulates directly through, established white monopoly capitalist structures."

And: "White monopoly ownership and control of state power is even more secured if the government in place is democratic, since the masses believe 'this is our government, we voted for it'. Yet, what cannot be explained is why 'our government' is failing to resolve our centuries-old problem of white monopoly of social power.

"The battle over the removal of the finance minister is the battle waged by white monopoly capital in alliance with the credit-based black capitalist, against the rise of the tender-based black capitalist class, which also has links with the leadership of political parties."

He explains further: "South Africa has now entered a phase of intense rivalry between capitalist groupings. In this phase, it is not possible to advocate political abstention, especially of masses of the oppressed and super-exploited African working class.

"The fight against white monopoly capital and its black/African allies, is an integral part of the struggle to consummate the national democratic revolution."

(The reference to "consummating the national democratic revolution' rings rather hollow in the mouth of a man who asserts that "white monopoly ownership and control of state power is even more secure if the government in place is democratic", etc.)

"The tender-based black capitalist class", he continues, "is not likely to win without the support of the mass of the black and African working class. Unlike its white counterpart, the tender-based black capitalist class has no coherent historical international backing. Its relationship with the organised working class, which is the only force that is capable of disrupting white monopoly capitalist power at production, is very weak if non-existent.

"Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the objective analysis of the class forces, in so far as the tender-based capitalist class has begun the war against the dominant white monopoly capitalist class, it has to be encouraged." (my emphasis – B.A.)

And in order to "encourage" that "tender-based black capitalist class",

Malikane took a government job under Zuma!

Apart from that one little detail, his proposals are the mirror image of those of Ahmed, Shaheen, Appolis and Lehlere. They all say that the South African working class is in no state to lead the struggle; its only hope to get into the game is on the coat-tails of this or that "sector" of the bourgeoisie; either sector. Toss a coin ...

Lehlere is so enamoured of the phrase "white monopoly capital" that he uses it nearly sixty times in his article. It is a conception he profoundly shares with Malikane (and many on the radical left in South Africa). It is a phrase which seems to evoke the condition of the black masses, and it does capture one side of the imperialist oppression of the people of South Africa. However, it leaves out so much about imperialism that is easily abused by demagogues.

If it is thought mainly to be the whiteness of the foreign monopolies (which are indeed in the main run by rich white men) which enables them to exploit and oppress the people of South Africa, then the suggestion is left open that black capitalism is a less daunting prospect.

What is startling is that Malikane's proposals are also barely different from the proposals of Julius Malema and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), proposals which "radical lefts" such as Rehad Desai now laud to the skies in the TV documentary *Julius vs the ANC!* "White monopoly capital" continues to rule South Africa, is the cry. Resources and industries must be taken away from the control of "white monopoly capital" and nationalised.

The fact that Chris Malikane's attitude is simply as it were a photographic negative or reversed mirror image of the attitude of the EFF etc. places Lehlere in a certain difficulty. While he understandably defends Chris Malikane against the cynical sophistry of the South African Communist Party's Cronin, his own adherence to the theory of "white monopoly capitalism" is uncomfortable. Mouthing the catch-phrase "white monopoly capital", one could support Zuma against his opponents, or just as easily support Malema, the SACP, the Democratic Alliance et al against Zuma. It is a formula tailor-made for demagogues.

To put some distance between himself and Malikane, Lehulere drags in a disagreement over the question of the state.

It would of course have been quite enough to say that Malikane's decision to accept a job as an advisor to a minister hand-picked as a crony by Zuma was either misguided or unprincipled. He (Malikane) may have imagined that the job would enable him to advance the nationalisation of the country's resources and their mobilisation to fulfil the needs of the population.

But if Lehulere had merely expressed that simple truth, it would have left open to view how threadbare is the illusion that any "sector" of the South African bourgeoisie is interested in furthering the interests of the working class in any way.

So Lehulere raised his understandable disagreement with Malikane's career choice to the level of a principled disagreement over the nature of the state. Lenin is dragged into the discussion, not to mention Gramsci. We are told to concern ourselves not with "inside the state" or "outside the state" but in a different state. It is wrong not merely to sell yourself for a job on the Zuma payroll, but to direct any demands on the state.

Now whatever Lenin thought about the state (and his works are available for all to study), he never thought the working class (and the broader masses) could ignore it. He encouraged workers to place demand upon the state, to raise their political demands at the level of the government, the state and the legal system, to try to place their own representatives in institutions at that level.

The task facing the South African masses has little to do with individual lefts taking government jobs. What is needed is what NUMSA has put forward: a united front throughout the masses alongside a movement for socialism, enriched by a study of the examples of struggles for socialism around the world and leading to the formation of a genuine workers' party.

There are no short cuts to this. The organised working class in the unions in the new federation needs to be a backbone of iron sustaining this movement. The work has to go forward systematically and soberly. It

can only succeed if, alongside a growing mass of conscious support, a cadre is steeled in the course of the struggle. The movement must train itself not to be stampeded or derailed by demagogues of any stripe. The stakes are too high.

Bob Archer, 23 June 2017

What Numsa decided in December 2013

What Numsa decided in December 2013

The Numsa Congress declaration explained: “The African National Congress (ANC) has adopted a strategic programme – the National Development Plan (NDP). The fault of the NDP is not that it is technically flawed, or in need of adjustment and editing ... **Its fault is that it is the programme of our class enemy. It is a programme to continue to feed profit at the expense of the working class and poor.**”(My emphasis – RA)

It goes on to state: “The ANC leadership has clarified that it will not tolerate any challenge” and “Cosatu (the Confederation of South African Trade Unions) has experienced a vicious and sustained attack on its militancy and independence ... Cosatu has become consumed by internal battles by forces which continue to support the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) with its neo-liberal agenda and those who are fighting for an independent militant federation which stands for the interests of the working class before any other”.

Referring to the 2012 massacre of miners at Marikana, the declaration says: **“the state attacked and killed workers on**

behalf of capital". It goes on to outline a campaign to support the victims of the massacre and punish those responsible, situating the massacre in the context of imperialist exploitation: "Marikana was a deliberate defence of mining profits and mining capitalists!".

The declaration notes: "The treatment of labour as a junior partner within the Alliance is not uniquely a South African phenomenon. In many post-colonial and post-revolutionary situations, liberation and revolutionary movements have turned on labour movements that fought alongside them, suppressed them, marginalised them, split them, robbed them of their independence or denied them any meaningful role in politics and policy making."

The declaration summarises a political way forward: "There is no chance of winning back the Alliance or the SACP"; "The working class needs a political organisation"; "Call on COSATU to break with the Alliance!"; "Establish a new United Front"; "Explore establishment of a Movement for Socialism" ("NUMSA will conduct a thoroughgoing discussion on previous attempts to build socialism as well as current experiments to build socialism. We will commission an international study on the historical formation of working class parties, including exploring different types of parties – from mass workers' parties to vanguard parties. We will look to countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and Greece ... This entire process will lead to the union convening a Conference on Socialism"

The declaration says Numsa will "set a deadline for this process" and "look for electoral opportunities". It lays down a number of steps cutting ties with the ANC and the SACP.

It goes on to propose a campaign over the rampant corruption of Jacob Zuma's presidency, pointing out that this corruption goes hand in hand with "the continuation of neo-liberalism".

A sizeable section of the declaration deals with the crisis

within the union confederation Cosatu, outlining the questions of principle involved.

The declaration also re-positions Numsa as a trade union as “shield and spear of workers”, pointing to the need to confront the fragmentation of the workforce through outsourcing and seeking to organise all workers in given workplaces and along supply chains.

A final section outlines a practical campaign, including taking forward the “Section 77” campaign to reverse neo-liberal policies and “address the plight of the working class and poor”. Cosatu had adopted this campaign but failed to pursue it energetically. Numsa pledged to act against the Employment Tax Incentive Act, and organise a “rolling mass action” with a detailed list of concrete demands, for example: beneficiation of all strategic minerals, a ban on the export of scrap metals and the rebuilding of foundries, an increase on import tariffs on certain goods, nationalisation of the Reserve Bank, exchange controls and other demands culminating in the nationalisation of the mining industry.

(For the texts of the congress resolution and declaration plus material to place them in a historical context, see the Workers International pamphlet *Movement for Socialism: South Africa's NUMSA points the way*, ISBN 978-0-9564319-4-3).

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 EEF 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

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 co-ordinate 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.

Vavi wades into the discussion

Zwelinzima Vavi, the General Secretary of COSATU and himself an SACP member, got into a public argument with SACP Deputy General Secretary Jeremy Cronin last November over contentious issues in the Alliance that rules South Africa.

This bare fact alone shows how utterly fundamental the political crisis in South Africa is.

A lengthy reply by Vavi to Cronin dated December 17, 2014 is available online at:

<http://www.numsa.org.za/article/response-comrade-jeremy-cronin>

[-open-letter-leaders-members-south-african-communist-party-sacp-zwelinzima-vavi-general-secretary-congress-south-african-trade/.](#)

The basic division in the political crisis is between the working class and wider layers of working people on the one hand and the bourgeoisie and its representatives in the Alliance on the other. That was made very clear when armed police opened fire on striking rock-drillers at Marikana on 16 August 2012 and in the way political forces have lined up subsequently. It is therefore very hard to understand why in his reply Vavi makes no reference of any kind at all to the events at Marikana. The silence on this issue robs his remarks of meaning in a certain sense. It belies the very reality he attempts to portray at considerable length in the letter.

The crisis in South Africa involves the unravelling of the National Democratic Revolution's meretricious promises. It is a crisis which involves workers driven to mobilise against the Alliance government in order to defend their class interests, but also one which works right through every element in the alliance, COSATU, SACP and ANC.

It is a crisis in which the developing leadership of the working class lies in the hands of the NUMSA officeholders, who correctly take the fight through all parts of the Alliance, while at the same time building their movement in a very open way in the United Front and among their international contacts. Their insistence upon their right to belong to COSATU and fight within the federation testifies to their understanding of their responsibilities towards their class and the masses in general. Big, indeed historical, political issues are at stake. They cannot be resolved by walking away from this fight or displacing it elsewhere.

Vavi comes across from this letter as a man of a somewhat different kidney from the NUMSA leaders. He describes very tellingly the abusive nature of the working class's

relationship (through the COSATU federation) with the SACP and the government, but also he is looking to restore a relationship that is damaged, appealing to common sense and goodwill to overcome a rocky patch in a fundamentally sound, if occasionally violent, marriage.

For all its diplomatic language, however, this long letter makes it absolutely clear that it is the government which is smashing up the ANC-SACP alliance along class lines on behalf of bourgeois interests, and that many leading figures in the SACP are up to their necks in collaboration with this government. It stands out that, to say the very least, the SACP fails to provide leadership for the working class, deceives and betrays the interests of that class, uses prevarication and double-talk while class interests are attacked and that, having stood back while neo-liberal "reforms" are inflicted, belatedly adapts to pressure from workers' organisations via bombastic rhetoric not backed by actions. The leaders of the SACP are the splitters. Vavi is not just any member of the SACP: he is the elected secretary of the trade union confederation Cosatu.

Vavi is aware that the stakes are high: "“Labelling, rumour-mongering and character assassination become the order of the day”, he warns, bringing the threat of “the unthinkable – physical conflict between the members and leaders of the working class”.

He calls for: “necessary debates about the state of the National Democratic Revolution and whether the current trajectory can even herald a seamless movement towards socialism.”

Vavi goes through a long list of issues which have been contentious. His treatment of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan (GEAR) provides a good example of the problems he is describing. Vavi recalls that the SACP statement of 14 June 1996 welcomed and “fully backed” GEAR,

insisted it “situates itself as a framework for the National Democratic Revolution”, asserted that it “resists” “free market dogmatism” and “envisages a key economic role for the public sector” and “reaffirms and reinforces the bilateral (between government and unions) National Framework Agreement process.” The SACP statement went on that it “envisages the extension of a regulated market and it introduces an innovative approach to flexibility. It rejects laissez-faire market-driven flexibility and instead calls for negotiated regional and sectoral flexibility.”

“The opposite of the truth ...”

Vavi’s comment now should be written in letters of fire:

“History will record that, on this critical issue of GEAR, which was to divide the movement for many years to come, virtually every line of this statement proved to be incorrect and problematic, and the SACP itself subsequently came to realise this fact. This is important because it raises the question as to how such a fundamental error of judgement could be made on such a vital question for the working class”. How indeed!

Recalling that the SACP rushed this statement out without consulting its members, Vavi continues: “The SACP statement on every key topic makes assertions which would later be exposed as the opposite of the truth”.

“It is now history that GEAR sought to replace and overturn the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme)”, Vavi continues. “GEAR espoused market fundamentalism, and sought to slash the public sector ...” He adds: “It aimed to remove key rights of workers in the labour market”. Vavi describes GEAR as “a comprehensive neo-liberal macroeconomic strategy, which the Party was later to denounce as the 1996 Class Project”.

“This is still relevant”, he continues, “because it was seen by the working class as a major betrayal of trust in the SACP’s responsibility as a leadership rooted in its attempt to retain its proximity to power. Others on the left of the SACP argue that this was not a misjudgement but a political choice and have from that time written off the SACP. It didn’t help that a leader of the SACP, Cde Alec Erwin, was a prominent driver of the GEAR strategy.”

On this, as on other matters, Vavi recalls that the SACP made purely “rhetorical” adjustments. It had been the same previously with the 1995 “6-pack” and privatisation plans. The SACP claimed: (*Umsebenzi* February 1996): “Contrary to many press reports, the GNU (government) position actually calls for the basic retention of Telkom, Transnet, SAA etc. in public hands, while allowing some minority strategic partnerships with private companies ... We see in it a rejection of mindless privatisation”. The Party also welcomed “comrade Mbeki’s very clear statement that the positions were a point of departure for negotiations, in particular with labour”, as an implied promise that the privatisation measures would not be pushed through roughshod (Mbeki was at the time President of the country).

Although COSATU was able “to exercise power by the Federation’s membership, which, in the end partially halted the privatisation drive in its tracks”, Vavi comments: “Today workers at Telkom and other SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) are still paying a heavy price of private equity partnerships and commercialisation and therefore neoliberalism”.

Vavi praises the SACP’s policies on the banks and the land, but points out: “But deeper analysis suggests that it has studiously avoided anything which could be construed as taking on the state ... where it has raised criticisms they have tended to be muted, or so ‘nuanced’ as to be ineffective or simply sending out confusing messages”.

With the “launch of the NDP (National Development Plan) in August 2012 “there was silence from the Party about the ideological and class problems within it”, says Vavi (himself no stranger to “muted” language and “nuances”), pointing out that top Party leaders were members of the cabinet which had endorsed it. While SACP Deputy General Secretary Jeremy Cronin engaged in double-talk about fighting “for our macro-economic policies to be better aligned to those important micro-economic interventions”, Vavi notes: “The NDP ... proposes both macro- and micro-economic policies which are at odds with the progressive elements of the NGP (New Growth Path) and IPAP (Industrial Policy Action Plan)”.

In other words, while the unions solemnly negotiate socially progressive measures through the NGP and IPAP processes, the government is pressing ahead with neoliberal reforms and deregulation measures which, along with the general pressures of imperialism on wages and working conditions, completely undermine such agreements.

Vavi’s explanation is that the Party is “seemingly blinded by not just its close relationship with government but the presence of top leaders in government ... If the Party was the vanguard, why was it constantly taking up a position at the rear?” This remark arises in relation to the 2013 Alliance summit (held at the end of August, immediately after the Marikana Massacre which Vavi fails to mention). Discussing how the NDP was simply imposed, Vavi says:

“The price paid by the working class in this process is immeasurable. A pro-business economic strategy will now run till 2030 unless a major pro-left political rupture takes place within the ANC and the Alliance. Frankly I see no possibility of this happening inside the government or even the ANC in the near future. COSATU has found itself completely isolated, as many government leaders, in particular the President, have repeatedly told the world that there is sufficient consensus to implement the NDP. **But this ‘national**

consensus' excludes the working class."

According to Vavi, the SACP neglects macro-economic policy and believes "we must rather focus on micro-economic policy, industrial policy, etc. In this respect the Party has shared common ground with many conservatives inside and outside the state..." But he explains that this is a problem because "macro-economic policy is the state's major lever to drive development". He goes on: "Our progressive IPAP policy has failed to stem deindustrialisation ... because the incorrect macro-economic policies are in place".

In his own "muted" and "nuanced" way, Vavi is depicting how the National Democratic Revolution has crashed into the buffers.

He again (politely) accuses the SACP leaders of lying to the masses over budgets. For example, this is how the SACP responded to the 2013 "austerity" budget: " ... the budget's stance has rejected the path of austerity disastrously followed by many countries in Europe". The Party claims that "many of the major pillars of expenditure including infrastructure, education and health-care are maintained". The trade union federation COSATU was forced to reply: "We are following European/IMF austerity policies, which have only plunged Europe deeper into crisis".

Vavi points out the key role of "certain economic ministries and state institutions (including the Reserve Bank, strategic SOEs etc.) ... with the Presidency as the coordinating centre. But the institutional engine for monopoly capital in the state is the National Treasury", which "uses its control of the purse strings ... to attempt to shape, drive and often frustrate the policy agenda in the state".

When COSATU called for the scrapping of motorway e-tolls and a boycott of ebills, the SACP accused them of allying itself with the Democratic Alliance.

Vavi deals directly with the crisis in relations between the Alliance government and the metal-worker's union NUMSA:

"The question we must ask is: why, in its Special National Congress, did NUMSA move from being the defender of the ANC to its biggest critic? ... The intensity of NUMSA's critique, particularly since 2013, and the NUMSA Special National Congress resolutions of December 2013, reflect the crisis in COSATU, in the Alliance and in the working class as a whole.

"This is what the Party should have been responding to, not their irritation with NUMSA positions which they regard as extreme. Rather they should be responding to the extremity of the moment, in which the working class find itself in deepening crisis.

"Secondly, we need to ask, why is the SACP so threatened by NUMSA's critique of 'neoliberalism' in South Africa?

"It may be that NUMSA's critique has sometimes been overly crude in not recognising areas of progress, contradiction and contestation in the state. But equally the SACP has been in denial about the reality that neo-liberalism is a significant feature of strategic aspects of government economic policy, and that this needs to be contested. If the economic proposals of the NDP are clearly neoliberal, what else should we call them?"

Vavi points out that the SACP is: "... very cautious – many would say too cautious and hyper-diplomatic" in its approach to "managing its differences with the ANC, even in the face of attacks from the movement".

"However it has chosen to adopt the opposite standpoint in handling its differences with NUMSA. The Party seems to have decided on a course of total confrontation, engaging in running battles with NUMSA, hyping up the war talk, and pushing for the purging of NUMSA from the movement."

Complaining about a “confrontational posture ... reflected in the extreme language continuously used by the Party”, Vavi adds:

“Party statements thinly disguise the fact that it was celebrating the expulsion of NUMSA. This creates the clear impression amongst workers that the Party was indeed behind this, despite its denials.

“The SACP can’t say that we want worker controlled unions and a democratic federation, but we also want to purge particular unions we disagree with, or change the democratically determined mandate of their federation.”

These are words which must be weighed seriously by trade unionists and political activists around the world who are accustomed, without reflecting too much, to respecting the Alliance as the leadership of the South African people’s struggle for liberation.

More broadly, Vavi raises the general question:

“Many workers will be astonished, and also perplexed, at how a party calling itself Communist and with a long history of revolutionary struggle, could have ended up supporting right-wing, pro-capitalist economic policies and becoming the main defenders of a democratic yet capitalist government, while waging a campaign to emasculate, weaken and ultimately destroy the independent mass workers’ union movement, COSATU.”

This is of course the central question. Vavi thinks: “The best answer to this question is to be found in a famous pamphlet by ... Comrade Joe Slovo: *Has Socialism failed*, written in 1989”.

Discussing the source of the degeneration and collapse of the USSR and the international Communist movement, Slovo said: “ ... the party leadership was transformed into a command post with overbearing centralism and very little democracy ... the gap between socialism and democracy widened ... the commandist and

bureaucratic approaches which took root during Stalin's time affected communist parties throughout the world".

Now Vavi takes this matter somewhat further. He comments that the Party members should have addressed the problems of bureaucracy and personality cult much earlier, and points to some of the consequences:

"The fear of any democratic opposition from within each country spread to other parts of the world. In Spain in the mid-1930s the Communist Party uncritically supported the Republican government which, although a left-wing coalition, was still essentially a capitalist government, and it declared war on workers who were then struggling for a socialist Spain. The anarchists, Trotskyists and independent workers, not the capitalists and fascists, became the CP's main enemy.

"They were attacked with exactly the same sort of insults and absurd conspiracy theories we hear today in South Africa, in which NUMSA and COSATU leaders, NGOs and progressive civil society groups are charged with 'anti-majoritarianism' and conspiring with international counter-revolutionaries to destabilise 'our' ANC government."

Yes, this is an SACP member and the elected General Secretary of one of the world's most respected trade union confederations speaking!

We Trotskyists in the Workers International have more – much more! – to say about the origins and character of the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Communist International. We have a scientific analysis of these things which places "personal" failings and "commandist and bureaucratic approaches" in a proper context.

A useful introduction to our analysis, and the issues raised, is contained in the articles *Stalinism and Bolshevism* which Trotsky wrote in 1937. It is easily available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/08/stalinism.htm>

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Vavi concludes his long letter with an expression of hope that:

“It is not too late for the Party to change direction, and recapture its historical role, so that together we can transform our skewed internal development and place society onto a new growth and development path”.

Whether or not this is too optimistic, the issues he raises must be fought out to the very end at all political levels in the movement. They are clearly under discussion in every nook and cranny of the movement in South Africa. We at Workers International stand shoulder to shoulder with all those who wish to take the theory and practice of the masses forward.

Bob Archer, January 2015

Stalinist witch-hunt paves the way for violent repression

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

“The good example set by Slovo epitomises the importance of unity in the struggle for liberation, the unity of our

Alliance; the unity of our broad movement; the unity of the working class; the broad unity of our people!”

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

Nzimande quoted from Slovo’s “seminal work” *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*:

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

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

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

And it is true that the working class has not “abandoned its independent class objectives”, but it has had to turn to its militant trade unions to fight for them, since the SACP is not an “independent class organisation”. The SACP certainly does not fight for real “independent class objectives”, as the

reply of COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi to SACP Deputy General Secretary Jeremy Cronin (also discussed in another article), for all its very diplomatic language, makes abundantly clear.

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

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

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

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

But "the abandonment of socialist perspectives and ... a surrender of working class leadership" by the SACP leadership is precisely what Zwelinzima Vavi describes at length in his

letter (discussed elsewhere in this magazine).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The strategy to divide Cosatu, including attempts to separate it from the Alliance" (it is the SACP which sent its supporters into Cosatu to expel NUMSA, as Vavi complains!) "represents a classic imperialist strategy to defeat revolutionary movements ... The initiative led by the Numsa leadership fits perfectly into the same imperialist strategy

to try and dislodge the ANC-led Alliance from power. It is therefore important that we understand the idea of a 'united front' and 'workers' party' from this political angle."

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

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

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

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

Bob Archer, January 2015

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Reinstate NUMSA in its rightful place in the leadership of COSATU

Statement by Workers International

On 8 November, 33 out of 57 office bearers of the South

African trade union federation COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) voted to expel the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) from their federation. NUMSA is the biggest, among the most militant, and certainly the most socialist-minded of the South African trade unions. It was a founder union of COSATU.

The decision to expel was taken by a bare 58% of the federation office bearers, because those who had determined to get rid of NUMSA could not be sure that they would win the expulsion vote at a national Congress of all COSATU members.

NUMSA's expulsion was the latest act in a long saga of a developing and increasingly stark division in the South African trade union leaderships, which has now resulted in this very visible split.

The breaking point was 12 August 2012, when the South African police force shot down 34 striking miners at Marikana. Their crime was to refuse to sell their labour for less than a living wage.

At that point the metalworkers' union declared that South African politics could not carry on in the same way. They said, when a government collaborates with super-exploitative foreign-owned mining companies to keep wages at poverty levels by shooting down striking workers, that government can no longer be deemed a democratic government.

The split in the South African trade union movement is a fundamental split – between the class collaborationist pro-African National Congress union leaders, and the union leaders (and members) who know that class collaborationist politics have achieved almost nothing since 1994 for the working class and the impoverished masses.

NUMSA and its predecessor union, the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) has fought since it was formed against class collaboration politics, and for the working class to take the

leadership of the South African revolution.

This split between the South African trade union leaders is also the material manifestation of an old argument – the opposition between the Stalinist theory of the two stage revolution, and the Marxist understanding of permanent revolution.

The two stage theory says that in colonial and semi-colonial countries exploited by foreign capital in increasingly brutal ways, the path to socialist revolution and common ownership of the means of production must obey certain rules of development, and pass through two stages.

First must come a bourgeois democratic revolution. The class that must lead and take power is the national bourgeoisie, which will introduce democratic reforms – the right to self-rule, democratic elections, and equal rights for all sections of society (before the law, in education, in employment) and so on. This notion is modeled on the formal premise that every colonial and semi-colonial country in the world must pass through the same stages as the developed countries did in the 17th (England) 18th (France, America) and 19th (Italy, Germany) centuries.

According to the two stages theory, many, many years later, the democratic rights introduced by this first stage will gradually result in a socialist transformation of the economy and society. The huge hole in the theory is that it cannot explain how the exercise of these democratic rights will gradually and peacefully persuade a brutal exploiting class to hand over the means of production. It is in reality a cover for the permanent handing over of power to that class. The “second” stage is a sop to the workers and oppressed masses of those countries – to persuade them to support their own bourgeoisie into government.

This ideology, proselytised by the South African Communist

Party (SACP) into the ranks of the African National Congress (ANC), and the trade union movement, resulted in an understanding of the 1994 elections in South Africa as the "National Democratic Revolution" rightfully led by the ANC, and the first stage in the journey towards socialism.

The democratic elections were brought about through a "negotiated settlement" with the bankers, mine-owners and land-owners made by the ANC leadership with the ideological backing of the SACP. That settlement was made between a national bourgeoisie and its international counterpart.

The deal was that democratic elections would be allowed in exchange for the right of the international bourgeoisie to maintain its super-exploitation of black workers, and appropriation of South Africa's wealth at the expense of the masses of South Africa.

The deal was made only because the foreign exploiters of the country feared they faced the seizure of all their property, the mines, the banks, the land and the major industries by a mass resistance led by the working class.

In the early 90s, the huge self-sacrificing struggle of the oppressed masses of South Africa (led by a powerful and socialist-minded trade union movement) had reached the point where it constituted a challenge to the control foreign capital had over the South African economy. But those trades unionists and impoverished masses were exactly the people who were to be excluded from the deal. Those who were to benefit were the foreign exploiters and those black South Africans with close ties to the ANC.

The Marxist theory of Permanent Revolution maintains that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries the class which must lead any democratic revolution is the working class, and that it must lead an alliance with the poor peasants in a struggle to realise democratic demands. In order to thoroughly achieve

those democratic demands (making them available to the working class and poor peasantry) it must carry over the democratic revolution to socialism. This means starting the overthrow of property relations through the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under workers' control – at the same time as achieving these democratic demands. The theory of Permanent Revolution is also clear that socialism cannot be sustained in a single country, and can only survive if it is carried out on an international scale. This is a key aspect for a working class party in South Africa, which must reach out beyond its borders as it seeks to establish a socialist society.

Crucial for the development of Permanent Revolution is that the working class must be in the leadership of both the struggle for democracy, and for socialism, and the dual processes cannot be separated. The class must have an understanding that it is not challenging one manifestation of capital (like apartheid) but challenging capitalism itself – and this means that the working class must have its own socialist party to fight for the development of that class consciousness. NUMSA (while remaining a trade union) is currently carrying forward the patient and solid investigation necessary for the building of that party.

NUMSA's document on the Freedom Charter's demands (pages 3 & 4 of the Workers' International journal October 2014) shows how the democratic demands of the South African National Democratic revolution can't be fully realised for the masses in the context of the continuing poverty, unemployment and inequality resulting from the maintenance of the capitalist economic system.

An example not used in that article is that of South African women. Despite having their equal rights enshrined in the South African constitution, South African women cannot equally participate in society because of the horrifying rate of gender-based violence in South Africa. This flows from the

existence of a lumpen layer abandoned with no stake in society through mass unemployment. The lower a South African woman's income, the more she will suffer from sexual harassment, violence and rape.

The most powerful demonstration of all is the fact that striking mineworkers could not exercise their democratic right (enshrined in the South African constitution) to go on strike for a living wage because they were shot down by the "democratic" state.

We should remember that the difference between permanent revolution and the two stage theory – and which class should be in the leadership – had already been fought out in the 1980s through the development of the Workers Charter in the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), the forerunner of NUMSA. This precious clarification was suppressed in the formation of COSATU when the National Union of Mineworkers under Cyril Ramaphosa used its weight in the movement to sideline the discussion.

That disagreement – over whether the trade unions should have the Workers Charter or the Freedom Charter as their programme – was the fundamental disagreement over which class should lead the South African revolution.

Our Workers International comrade, Bongani Mkungho, fought for those conceptions his whole life long, but that period of South African working class history has now been airbrushed out. It appears only in hostile formulations on the National Union of Mineworkers' website to what they call "workerists".

It is almost impossible to find the Workers Charter on the internet – one of the few places is on our website here:

<http://workersinternational.info//?s=workers+charter>.

NUMSA General Secretary Irwin Jim's generation arrived after that fight had taken place – and has had to rediscover the class nature of the ANC government at the cost of 34 striking

miners' lives. These leaders still speak as if the two stages of the democratic and socialist transformations can be looked at as two separate processes and are putting the ANC's Freedom Charter forward as their programme. NUMSA (and the six other unions allied to them) are demanding to implement the socialist second stage immediately – locked in struggle with those who (under the guise of saying that 20 years is not long enough to change things) are determined that the second stage will never appear. In order to make sure of that, they must ensure above all that the working class does not take leadership and take power.

The pro-ANC office bearers of COSATU undemocratically threw NUMSA out of their federation because they want to expel a force which fights ceaselessly for the rights of South African workers, and which is clarifying for millions of workers what the split in their movement really means.

They and particularly the South African Communist party (of which many if not all of them will be members) are the “splitters” of the movement – and they have split the movement in order to benefit the exploiting class.

Thus, when Gwede Mantashe, Secretary of the African National Congress (and ex-NUM General Secretary, like Cyril Ramaphosa) says that he is saddened by the split in the unions and talks about unity – but then asks NUMSA to look at their actions – he speaks with a forked tongue.

COSATU must organise the Special National Congress that NUMSA and other COSATU unions have demanded for the past year – so NUMSA can put its case to the COSATU membership against expulsion, and for advancing the policies on nationalisation agreed at its 2012 conference.

The international working class must take sides in this split – between class collaborationist “sweetheart” trade union leaderships and those that clearly and unequivocally are

fighting for the interests and the independent socialist programme of the working class.

We are not a group of outside observers but have participated actively in our trade unions and political groups over decades to support the long struggle against apartheid – only to find the government our efforts helped put in power shooting down striking workers.

Just as we took sides against the apartheid regime, we need to take sides in NUMSA's struggle – so the whole of the international trade union movement can be clarified. Socialism will never be achieved through collaboration with the exploiting class, and waiting for the day that never comes when they hand over power.

In Britain we are not yet at the stage of the most politically advanced trade unions in South Africa.

We are still working our way through the class collaborationist outlook instilled by social democracy and Stalinism over many decades, which manifests itself in uncritical support for an array of national liberation movements which are not led by the working class.

We still look to Stalinism's most successful international popular front organisation the Anti-Apartheid Movement (now known as Action on Southern Africa) to advise us on solidarity with South Africa. We are still going through the process of fighting for the Labour party to stand up for crucial democratic rights, like the right to strike unhampered by repressive laws, and the right to the Welfare State.

The issues and the choices are starker in South African because (as a new working class) they have not spent so long under the domination of a trade union bureaucracy saturated in social democratic and Stalinist conceptions, like Stalin's doctrine of "peaceful co-existence" between socialism and capitalism. The very best and most class conscious of the

British trade union movement (among which is the leadership of Unite) sees itself still as fighting austerity and not capital.

That is why it is so important that take sides with NUMSA in this split – because they can help clarify us through their hard-won conviction that “the interests of capital and the working class are irreconcilably antagonistic”.

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