

# What Numsa decided in December 2013

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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).

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## [A reply to Martin Jensen: The Numsa Moment – Has it lost Momentum?](#)

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

By Bob Archer, Jan 2017

Since the end of Apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa has officially been ruled by a Triple Alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and Confederation of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). At its Special National Congress in December 2013, the South African metalworkers' union, Numsa, called for an historic break with the Alliance and adopted a series of initiatives. What they proposed – and how these initiatives have fared –

deserves serious and sustained discussion, not just in South Africa and the region, but right around the world. To that extent, Comrade Jensen's article raises important questions which deserve a response.

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

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

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

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

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

(Just a thought: One group of people identifies the Numsa turn as a politically and strategically essential break and decides to encourage that political development in every way possible, undeterred by difficulties and without setting themselves up to lecture the comrades involved about supposed shortcomings identified from outside. A second group compares the numbers whom the EEF 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 EEF. 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 coordinate 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

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

*Martin Jansen*

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

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

The "Numsa Moment" was hailed by socialists locally and

internationally as the biggest political breakthrough in Southern Africa since the late 1980's. Numsa's special national congress held during December 2013 committed itself to fight and campaign for the most pressing political tasks confronting the working class. These included – to fight and campaign for a militant, independent and unified Cosatu that would of necessity break from the Tripartite Alliance and lead in the establishment of a new United Front (UF) that will 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.*

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## **South Africa Dossier**

*The posts below are on political developments in South Africa including a report on steps by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) towards establishing a [United Front](#), a warning of a growing witch-hunt against NUMSA and her United Front allies, with particular reference to a recent speech by the South Africa Communist Party General Secretary "[Blade" Nzimande](#), and responses to recent written and oral statements by Cosatu General Secretary [Zwelinzime Vavi](#) and NUMSA General Secretary [Irvin Jim](#).*

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## **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>

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**

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## **Stalinist witch-hunt paves the way for violent repression**

Commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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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# Two opposed conceptions of the socialist revolution: A response to Irvin Jim

A fresh wind really has started to blow from South Africa, where the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) has responded positively to the growing resistance of the masses against the African National Congress (ANC) regime and the situation following the massacre of platinum miners at Marikana in 2012.

NUMSA proposes to:

- (1) Break the trade unions away from the ruling alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) because that alliance has been “captured by hostile forces”
- (2) Commission an international study of the history of previous attempts to establish working class political parties in different parts of the world in order to prepare to form one which can defend the interests of working people today
- (3) Establish a united front of struggle with all who are suffering and resisting under the present pro-imperialist government.

In a few short months since taking these decisions, NUMSA has successfully organised political schools for its militant activists and also held an international seminar attended by a range of left-wing political and trade union activists from different parts of the world. More recently they have managed to achieve united-front actions to defend manufacturing jobs and employment in the country and made great progress towards organising an actual united front as an instrument to take

forward the struggle of the broad masses of South Africans.

The NUMSA website and other sources now provide a rich stream of material in the discussion arising from this turn.

The union is at the heart of an increasingly fierce political and organisational struggle as the panicking supporters of the ANC-SACP alliance use a familiar range of strategies to silence and isolate this threat to their class-collaboration with the imperialist interests which are bleeding South Africa and her human and material resources.

Late last year they bureaucratically forced through a decision to expel NUMSA from the Confederation of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) – a body which NUMSA activists helped to establish in previous decades in the teeth of apartheid oppression! Workers' International stands foursquare with NUMSA and her allies against this undemocratic move to silence her.

A campaign of slander and intimidation against NUMSA and her supporters is now developing (cf. "Reinstate NUMSA in its rightful place in the leadership of COSATU" in *Workers International Press* no. 9.)

This present article seeks to contribute to the discussion NUMSA has forced open, with particular reference to two speeches by union general secretary Irvin Jim: his introduction to the NUMSA political school last January and the lecture he gave at Witwatersrand University in commemoration of the SACP activist Ruth First, murdered in 1982 by terrorists in the pay of the apartheid state.

(The text of Comrade Jim's address to the NUMSA Political School on 26 January 2014 is available at <https://www.facebook.com/polotiking/posts/691125047574724> . His Ruth First Memorial Lecture of 15 August 2014 can be read at <http://www.cosatu.org.za/show.php?ID=9329>).

A major strength of Comrade Jim's speeches is his excoriating critique of how the ANC/SACP regime has failed to deliver on the promises it made to the masses when it took office in the early 1990s ("the 1994 democratic breakthrough" according to ANC legend). It bears constant repeating: The ANC/SACP made certain very specific promises when it persuaded workers in NUMSA to shelve socialist aspects of their programme, including nationalisation of industry under workers' control; **it has not delivered**. Read these explosive speeches and form your own conclusions.

### **A necessary discussion**

South African workers and their own leaders in the organisations they control, such as NUMSA, have been trying to force the leaders of the SACP and the ANC to make good on the promises they made in the early 1990s, when government rule in South Africa was peacefully handed over from the apartheid Nationalist regime to the Alliance. The hope was dangled that the constitutional handover would start a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) which would gradually pave the way for a more radical socialist transformation of society. It seems inevitable that the present positive and necessary flowering of political discussion in South Africa should take the form of trying to hold the political leadership of the movement around the SACP to make good what it promised then.

The conception of the NDR was rooted in the Freedom Charter adopted by the SACP and the ANC in the 1950s. But long before that they were the conceptions of the "official" Communist movement which dominated working class politics around the world for a very long time.

There are great and profound issues to air and clarify. What is special about the "NUMSA moment" is the union's determination to mobilise on a mass basis to engage in this process at the highest political level possible.

At stake are two conflicting views of the way forward for the working class and broader masses in colonies and former colonies like South Africa. (But a further note is necessary here. The Stalinist view already separated such countries off from the rest of the world in a "Third World". The opposing, Marxist, view is an internationalist one which sees capitalism in its imperialist phase as an international phenomenon and the working class as an international class, while understanding that each country embodies a unique combination of the system's essential features.)

One strategy, the "two-stage" theory, explained that the first stage was for the country to achieve its independence. In the case of South Africa, which was independent but ruled by a White minority apartheid dictatorship, the first stage was to achieve majority rule and remove the various forms of discrimination under which the Black majority suffered. Action on a "second stage" of carrying out a socialist transformation of society was to wait until the newly-liberated nation could build up the economic and social resources needed for that task. The Freedom Charter adopted in the mid-1950s lays out this view.

The theory of permanent revolution, on the other hand, explains that the two stages are in Lenin's word "entangled", that although they are different, they are carried out in an uninterrupted process.

Unless working people organise and play the decisive role in dismantling imperialist rule in its various guises, the job will be botched and incomplete and dangerous remnants of the old oppression will remain.

Meanwhile, the conditions of world imperialism mean that most countries cannot hope to replicate the way capitalism in Western Europe (and then exported to North America) evolved through a series of stages over many centuries. A gradual development from feudalism to small-scale capitalism via

manufacture and trade towards the factory system and finally a fully-fledged "modern" finance capitalism is not an option today. And the exceptions here prove the rule: Countries which have apparently achieved this have done so in a leap, either because like South Korea they had an important role in the West's Cold War strategic arrangements, or because, as in Japan and now China, their rulers have developed methods of super-exploiting labour to an extreme degree.

Hopes of a new arrival achieving balanced national development of society and economy today under capitalism are an illusion. The real way forward involves nationalising industry and finance under workers control and socialist methods of planning, and the scope of the plan must be international. The continent of Africa is one sustained essay on this topic from the negative side.

Nevertheless, at the decisive moment, when the apartheid regime faced collapse and a new page was turned, it was the ANC and the SACP whose policies, based on the Stalinist conceptions underlying the Freedom Charter, prevailed and won the support of the trade unions.

Comrade Jim insists that the Freedom Charter written in the 1950s is and remains a valid "mass line" for South Africa. He attempts to justify this by copious reference to Lenin's 1905 pamphlet *Two Tactics of the Social Democracy in the Bourgeois Revolution*.

Lenin and Leninism really can guide our revolutionary socialist movement today. But in reading Lenin's writings we should take his life and work as a whole which combined very solid continuities with momentous changes and development, and we need to read his various works and understand the tactics he proposed within their historical context.

### **Lenin the social-democratic leader**

Comrade Jim seems perplexed that some critics of the ANC have

described the Freedom Charter and the whole conception of a minimum and a maximum programme as “social democratic”. In his Ruth First lecture he insists:

“Ruth First was killed for the Freedom Charter! Yet today, we are told that the Freedom Charter was influenced by the social-democratic fashion of the 1950s. Others even say the Freedom Charter is now irrelevant. Did Ruth First, and many others, die for fashion ...?”

Of course not! Ruth First, like many countless others, died at the hands of the bourgeoisie as a fighter in the class struggle. But the fact that she was deliberately murdered by the other side does not of itself mean that the political line and tactics she chose were correct.

The conceptions of “minimum and maximum” programme underlying the Freedom Charter absolutely are drawn from the – long outdated – arsenal of social democracy.

This must be known to Comrade Jim. Addressing the NUMSA Political School in January this year, he quoted effectively from a well-known author on the subject who was, at the time he wrote the pamphlet quoted, a leading member of the Second International and of the Russian **Social Democratic** Labour Party, an author who at the time had a lot to say about the question of maximum and minimum programmes. Jim said, for example:

“Lenin makes this absolutely clear in his *Two Tactics*, when he says: ‘A Social-Democrat must never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevitably have to wage the class struggle for Socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This is beyond doubt. Hence the absolute necessity of a separate, independent, strictly class party of Social-Democracy. Hence the temporary nature of our tactics of ‘striking jointly’ with the bourgeoisie and the duty of keeping a strict watch ‘over

our ally, as over an enemy'..." etc.

When he wrote this, in 1905, Lenin (like all the serious Marxists of the day) was a declared social democrat. Lenin wrote the pamphlet *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* during the Russian Revolution of 1905. The pamphlet explains the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party's programme and tactics intended to take that revolution forward and showed how they could guide the working class in Russia. He emphasised (in 1905!) how profoundly he identified at that time with "International Social Democracy":

"When and where did I ever claim to have created any sort of special trend in International Social-Democracy *not identical* with the trend of Bebel and Kautsky? When and where have there been brought to light differences between me, on the one hand, and Bebel and Kautsky, on the other—differences even slightly approximating in seriousness the differences between Bebel and Kautsky, for instance, on the agrarian question in Breslau?"

It must be said that what Lenin proposed in 1905 utterly puts to shame the ANC-SACP alliance in terms of its sweep and ambition.

### **Lenin against the theory of stages!**

In 1905, Russia was a sprawling empire in which the majority of the population were small farmers working the land under very backward conditions. Barely forty years previously they had still been serfs, the property of their feudal landlords. In 1905 they were still paying redemption payments (in other words buying their freedom by instalments) as well as rent for the land. The political system was autocracy: The Romanov Tsars ran the whole empire through a bureaucratic and military machine ideologically backed by the Orthodox Christian clergy.

What stands out in Lenin's handling of the question of programme and tactics even in 1905 is his refusal to rigidly separate the maximum and the minimum programme. This is one

expression of the difference between him and other prominent leaders of the Socialist International who were later themselves openly "captured by hostile forces". He was, it is true, absolutely convinced that the 1905 Russian Revolution had the historical job to abolish tsarist autocracy based on serfdom and replace it with a bourgeois society. He says in *Two Tactics*:

"It means that the democratic reforms in the political system and the social and economic reforms, which have become a necessity for Russia, do not in themselves imply the undermining of capitalism, the undermining of bourgeois rule; on the contrary, they will, for the first time, really clear the ground for a wide and rapid, European, and not Asiatic, development of capitalism; they will, for the first time, make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class."

Against those who want to wait with folded arms while this happens, he quickly adds:

"But it does not at all follow from this that a *democratic* revolution (bourgeois in its social and economic substance) is not of *enormous* interest for the proletariat. It does not at all follow from this that the democratic revolution cannot take place in a form advantageous mainly to the big capitalist, the financial magnate and the 'enlightened' landlord, as well as in a form advantageous to the peasant and to the worker."

After all, he says, in tsarist Russia:

"The working class suffers not so much from capitalism as from the insufficient development of capitalism."

But it was never his view that the working class should just stand idly by and wait for the bourgeoisie to carry out its mission: It is to the advantage of the bourgeoisie, he says, if the movement:



"... does not too resolutely sweep away all the remnants of the past, but leaves some of them, i.e., if this revolution is not fully consistent, if it is not complete and if it is not determined and relentless."

**"On the other hand,"** Lenin went on, **"it is more advantageous for the working class if the necessary changes in the direction of bourgeois democracy take place by way of revolution and not by way of reform; for the way of reform is the way of delay, of procrastination, of the painfully slow decomposition of the putrid parts of the national organism. It is the proletariat and the peasantry that suffer first of all and most of all from their putrefaction. The revolutionary way is the way of quick amputation, which is the least painful to the proletariat, the way of the direct removal of the decomposing parts, the way of fewest concessions to and least consideration for the monarchy and the disgusting, vile, rotten and contaminating institutions which go with it."**

But the whole point of the handover which ended apartheid and brought majority rule in South Africa is that it deliberately avoided a revolution! That is why the Black population still suffers from all the aspects of "putrefaction" which Comrade Jim describes in detail in various speeches.

Later Lenin adds:

"We cannot jump out of the bourgeois-democratic boundaries of the Russian revolution, but we can vastly extend these boundaries, and within these boundaries we can and must fight for the interests of the proletariat, for its immediate needs and for the conditions that will make it possible to prepare its forces for the future complete victory."

He therefore recommended that workers and socialists should take their struggle into provisional governments in order to carry out the bourgeois revolution in the most thorough way possible.

Even in 1905, when he was still a Social Democrat, even when he firmly denounced any idea of the immediate possibility of a socialist revolution in Russia, Lenin castigated his Menshevik opponents who crudely divided the revolution up into "stages". Denouncing their "theory of stages", he explained:

**"they have forgotten that the revolutionary pressure of the people will meet with the counter-revolutionary pressure of tsarism and that, therefore, either the 'decision' will remain unfulfilled or the issue will be decided after all by the victory or the defeat of the popular insurrection."**

By 1917, Lenin's views had undergone a significant shift. However, today's activists can still draw strength from what he wrote in 1905 because it is permeated by the spirit of active and practical struggle. He wrote: "The outcome of the revolution depends on whether the working class will play the part of a subsidiary to the bourgeoisie, a subsidiary that is powerful in the force of its onslaught against the autocracy but impotent politically, or whether it will play the part of leader of the people's revolution."

And part the answer to this "whether" depends on the leadership which the workers' party provides. The pamphlet *Two Tactics* is literally about two different approaches. Lenin contrasts them:

"One resolution expresses the psychology of active struggle, the other that of the passive onlooker; one resounds with the call for live action, the other is steeped in lifeless pedantry. Both resolutions state that the present revolution is only our first step, which will be followed by a second; but from this, one resolution draws the conclusion that we must take this first step all the sooner, get it over all the sooner, win a republic, mercilessly crush the counter-revolution, and prepare the ground for the second step. The other resolution, however, oozes, so to speak, with verbose descriptions of the first step and (excuse the crude

expression) simply masticates it.”

The resolution “steeped in lifeless pedantry” was the one adopted by Lenin’s opponents in the RSDLP who formed the Menshevik faction. In 1905, Lenin stretched the politics of social democracy, of the Second International, as far as they would go to make them serve the interests of the working class.

In South Africa, it turns out that it was the leaders of the ANC and the SACP who were actually “steeped in lifeless pedantry”. Rather than trying to “mercilessly crush the counter-revolution”, they made an accommodation with the sources of counter-revolution’s paymasters in the big mining monopolies and banks. Instead of fighting to “mercilessly crush” the practitioners of apartheid, the SACP and ANC leaders organised “truth and reconciliation” processes to protect them.

That is why South African society continues to be scarred by inequalities in every shape and form as well as social deprivation and violence, particularly against women.

It turns out that the SACP leaders who loved to quote certain texts by Lenin were closer to Lenin’s reformist, Menshevik opponents than they cared to admit.

## **The Fate of Social Democracy**

The first Russian revolution of 1905 happened on the cusp of momentous changes in world capitalism, developments which faced the Socialist International with challenges it could not deal with. So when World War I broke out 100 years ago in 1914, it was revealed that the majority of Europe’s socialist leaders had been “captured and taken over by right-wing forces”. They supported the interests of their “own” imperialist bourgeoisie (and dynastic regimes) against workers ruled by other imperialists, and urged them on into the carnage. This set the seal on the political collapse of social

democracy. Whatever long after-life it has had in western and northern Europe, it has never reverted to its potentially revolutionary days in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One of Lenin's responses to the outbreak of the world war was to devote considerable time to producing a handbook on the new stage reached in the development of capitalism.

His pamphlet *Imperialism* noted the end of the:

"... old free competition between manufacturers ... Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads right up to the most comprehensive socialisation of production; it, so to speak, drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order", where "production becomes social, but appropriation remains private".

It was because the epoch thus ushered in is an "epoch of wars, civil wars and revolutions" that the Socialist International entered a crisis and the majority of its parties, having sunk to the level of "passive onlookers" and increasingly "steeped in lifeless pedantry", turned out to have been "captured and taken over by right-wing forces" when World War I broke out, followed later by the revolutionary wave that started in Russia.

The policy of waiting for the development of capitalism to build up the numerical strength of the working class, while the socialist movement attended to its level of organisation and political maturity, hoping that the crisis of the system would ultimately make revolution inevitable, collapsed as a political project.

**This was because the arrival of the imperialist stage of capitalism signalled the need to actually carry out the socialist revolution despite the unevenness of development between different countries.**

A leader of the Socialist International such as Karl Kautsky,

a man who had previously been Lenin's mentor and ally and had fought shoulder to shoulder with him, changed his approach to imperialism. He came to view this imperialist phase as a passing policy of the capitalists, a set of measures which could be reversed by political pressure and agitation, without a revolution. Lenin decisively broke with such leaders, asserting that imperialism is a definite stage of capitalism, and moreover, the stage which makes necessary the socialist revolution. (From this point of view, Lenin's work on imperialism also forms a basis for understanding specific features of economy, society and politics in South Africa.)

And Lenin was right! World War I led to the collapse of tsarist autocracy and the 1917 Russian Revolution.

### **April Theses**

Lenin's guidance for the Revolution of 1917 is summarised in the *April Theses*, written on his journey back to Russia from exile. Lenin then believed:

“(2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie – to its *second* stage, which **must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants.**” (My emphasis – B.A.)

He therefore insisted:

“(3) No support for the Provisional Government” which he describes as a “government of capitalists”, and “(5) **Not a parliamentary republic ... but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom ...** Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy ... Confiscation of all landed estates ... Nationalisation of all lands in the country ... The immediate amalgamation of all banks in the country into a

single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies."

He knew: "It is not our *immediate* task to 'introduce' socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of product at once under the *control* of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies".

This is both a continuation of his approach in 1905 and a huge significant change. And the October 1917 Russian Revolution started to achieve the goals he set.

Back in 1905, in *Two Tactics*, Lenin had talked about a time in the distant past when:

"... the slogans advocating mass agitation *instead* of direct armed action, preparation of the social-psychological conditions for insurrection *instead of* flash-in-the-pan methods, were the only correct slogans for the revolutionary Social-Democratic movement." But even then, in 1905, he already warned that:

"At *the present time* the slogans have been superseded by events, the movement has left them behind, they have become tatters, rags fit only to clothe the hypocrisy" of liberal politicians and reformist socialists.

### **The "socialist" enemies of the Russian Revolution**

Now the whole policy and programme of the Socialist International had been "superseded by events". Leaders of the Socialist International supported the "war effort" of their "own" bourgeoisies and tried to impose a class truce on the working class, a cessation of hostilities against their own employers. The end of the war brought revolution in Russia, the collapses of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires and revolutionary movements of international scope. In Russia, the revolution established a government of Workers' and Peasants' Soviets. In these events, the leaders of the old

Socialist International opposed the Soviets and organised troops to suppress revolutionary movements throughout Europe. When momentous political changes are actually happening in a seismic shift, clinging to a separation of “minimum” and “maximum” programme partly reveals, partly fulfils a process in which a whole movement has rotted from within.

### **The Communist International**

Up until 1914, Lenin had tried to make the revolutionary action which the new situation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries required fit into the social-democratic division into “minimum programme” and “maximum programme”. He had “stress-tested” the politics of the Socialist International to its limits. That whole organisation and its programmes had become tatters and rags fit only to clothe its hypocrisy.

Lenin, the Bolsheviks and their allies rescued Marxism from the wreckage of the Socialist International and took it forward in the formation of Communist Parties and the Communist International. How these organisations faced up to the task of world revolution is recorded in the minutes and other documents of the first four congresses of the Communist International, which are now widely available for study and should be carefully studied as part of the movement which NUMSA is setting afoot.

Among the many problems the Communist International carefully addressed was the task of winning over workers and working-class organisations which were still dominated by social-democratic policies and leaders. Two vital tools in this work were the policy of the **united front** and the development of **transitional demands** as a bridge across which working people could cross over from reformism to revolutionary politics.

### **Stalinism and social democracy**

Lenin died in January 1924. Under a show of continuing his

work, his successors in the leadership of the Soviet Union and the Communist International abandoned the struggle for world revolution. They established a bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union and claimed that it would be possible to achieve socialism in that country alone. This happened under specific conditions under which hopes of a rapid spread of revolutionary overthrows were disappointed. It is not simply a matter, as Joe Slovo explained in his *Has Socialism failed*, written in 1989, (and Zwelinzima Vavi repeats today) that Communists in government got accustomed to the harsh practices of civil war and the habit of issuing orders. Trotsky and his followers in the Left Opposition and later the Fourth International analysed and explained the many factors involved in the degeneration of the Soviet Union and above all the reactionary nature of the political line that came to dominate in the Comintern. The crux of the political degeneration was the policy of building socialism in a single country.

From being the world party of socialist revolution, the Communist International started to abuse the huge respect and enthusiasm the Russian Revolution had evoked in working people to control and dominate the Communist movement. It inculcated into its members unswerving loyalty to the Soviet leaders and the view that the way forward lay in an accommodation with capitalism under the slogan of peaceful co-existence (although there were occasional but devastatingly destructive ultra-left lurches).

Vavi lifts a corner of the blanket of confusion which Stalinist history-writing has spread over the Spanish revolution (See *Vavi wades into the discussion*, p.11). But did you know that in the mid-1940s Stalin tried to hold back the revolution in Yugoslavia, accepted the suppression (in which the British army played a big role) of the Greek revolution, told his supporters in Vietnam to crush a revolt against the restoration of French rule once the Japanese occupiers had been defeated and actually put pressure on the Chinese



Communists to collaborate with the bourgeois Guomindang?

A good example of Stalin's policy in relation to colonies and semi-colonies of imperialism was his support for Ghandi in India. An entire library of books would be needed to trace how Stalinist influence in the huge wave of revolts against imperialism has systematically ended with local bourgeois puppets of imperialism running corrupt and dictatorial regimes.

Stalin and his supporters could only justify what they did by actually returning to the "tatters and rags" of social democracy. The policy of building socialism in a single country is itself a social-democratic one. So is the idea that, despite Lenin's insistence that imperialism is a new and final stage of capitalism, there is still such a thing as a benign, non-imperialist capitalism within which working people can reach an accommodation.

Today's activists should study for themselves the history of the movement in China in the 1920s and Spain in the 1930s in order to understand what it meant for the masses in these countries and the parties of the Communist International to be guided by these "tatters and rags".

Then for Britain, for example, Stalin is supposed to have personally crafted the "British Road to Socialism" after World War II, supporting gradual progress through parliamentary reform and fostering illusions that working people could see their needs met under a parliamentary bourgeois state with a mixed economy (part state-owned, part private).

How cruelly history mocks these "tatters and rags"! The Soviet Union has collapsed and many of its leading lights rushed to join the thieving mafia which has taken over. All over the world, including the "industrialised" West, workers bear the brunt of the capitalist onslaught that seeks to dismantle all the gains they made after 1945.

This after-life of social democracy was far from being just a political fashion. It was a deliberate policy to disarm the working class and dupe it into accepting a future under capitalism, a "Faustian pact" as it has aptly been described.

The theory of a "democratic" revolution as an initial stage in the socialist revolution is also just such "a tatter and rag" and it too has been tested to destruction in South Africa since the accommodation of 1990-1994. The process is ripping apart the very force which fought might and main to impose it, the South African Communist Party in alliance with the ANC.

The Left Opposition and then the Fourth International stood against the degeneration in the Soviet Union and in the politics of the CPSU and the Comintern. These comrades fought to rescue and develop the work of the Russian Bolsheviks and the Communist International in its early period. Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International continues that tradition in the struggles of today. That is why we have a distinctive and positive contribution to make in the great project NUMSA has called into being.

***Bob Archer***

January 2015

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# Unions fight to reclaim COSATU – FAWU Press Release 19 November 2014

The seven unions (FAWU, SACCAWU, PAWUSA, SASAWU, CWU, NENOSA and SAFPU) plus NUMSA convened a joint meeting of shop stewards and members attended by 2,200 participants at the City Hall on Sunday morning 16 November 2014 to report on the crisis ravaging COSATU.

The mass meeting was addressed by the General Secretaries of FAWU and CWU, respectively Katishi Masemola and Aubrey Tshabalala, before a keynote address by the President of NUMSA, Andrew Chirwa.

Katishi Masemola indicated that there cannot be a united COSATU without NUMSA and there cannot be unity without others and that a united COSATU is a first prize and the only prize hoping that the basis for such a united federation will be the implementation of the 2013 COSATU National Congress Resolutions.

Katishi reflected that challenges in the federation, with NUMSA expelled, means that the working class will be the loser and those gaining will be Capital as it intensifies "class terror" (super-exploitation, be it through youth wage subsidy and labour broking or other ways) and the State as it aggressively pursues neoliberal policy trajectory, with National Development Plan (NDP) as its apex, all against the workers, the poor and entire working class.

Abrey Tshabalala indicated that rational discussions and robust debates have been replaced by "let's vote", and voting is now happening on every issues, including on the adoption of agenda and approval of credentials among others. This, he said, led to NUMSA being expelled without substantive debates on the contents of a 59-page submission delivered over three hours.

Aubrey further insisted that the struggle of the 8 unions plus NUMSA is about reclaiming COSATU back to its rightful owners, which are workers and not the 33 individual leaders, many without a mandate to expel NUMSA.

The NUMSA President explained the NUMSA Resolutions and took the meeting through the rationale behind their resolutions of their Special Congress in December 2013 and on the five charges that it was charged for as a result of the court outcome forcing this clarity.

Chirwa took the meeting through the five charges and why these are frivolous and how the defective procedure has led to a botched process in that no guilty verdict was arrived at and the sanction was based on preconceived "surgical removal" sentiments held by some affiliates before the Special COSATU CEC in which this comprehensive submission was made.

The NUMSA President explained that the implementation of the Freedom Charter is their uncompromising clarion call and the basis for their Resolutions. A Freedom Charter that must move

South Africa from the dire situation facing the working class to a truly better life to workers and the poor than the enrichment of the few, no matter how black they may be.

He explained that the National Development Plan (NDP) does not represent this vision of the Freedom Charter but it is a neoliberal programme that will trap the working class in triple crises of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Participants were allowed to ask questions/clarifications and to make comments and the overwhelming majority were in full support for the immediate re-admission of NUMSA into the federation and encouraged the seven affiliates to keep fighting for such a noble cause.

The underlying key theme in virtually all the questions asked by workers was whether we stay in COSATU or we form another federation. The answers from leaders and from other participants, which ultimately became decisions, were that we will fight for our COSATU that has NUMSA and return that COSATU to its rightful owners, the workers, with Special National Congress as a platform to achieve those goals.

The press statement was issued at 14:00 hours, when workers were still engaged in discussions and debates on the state of their federation ...

Issued by

Katishi Masemola,

FAWU General Secretary

On behalf of the Seven Unions.

(Food and Allied Workers' Union, SA Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union, Public and Allied Workers Union of SA, SA State and Allied Workers Union, Communication Workers Union, Democratic Nursing Organisation of SA, SA Football Players Union, National Union of Metalworkers of SA)

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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 17<sup>th</sup> (England) 18<sup>th</sup> (France, America) and 19<sup>th</sup> (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".

Workers International 25.10.2014

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## [Numsa and the question of a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist political organ of the working class in South Africa today](#)

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*“It is obvious that the black capitalist class favours capitalism and that it will do its best to influence the post-apartheid society in this direction.*

*It is obvious that the black middle and upper classes who take part in a broad liberation alliance will jostle for hegemony and attempt to represent their interests as the interests of all Africans.*

*It is obvious that (like their counterparts in every part of the world) the black middle and upper strata, who find themselves on the side of the people’s struggle, are often inconsistent and vacillating. They are usually the enemy’s softest targets for achieving a reformist, rather than a revolutionary, outcome.” (Joe Slovo, 1988)*

It has become necessary, and quite urgent, to emphatically re-

state and explain the December 2013 historic Numsa Special National Congress Resolutions, especially the ones that talk to the formation of the United Front, the Movement for Socialism, the ANC and its alliance, and the formation of an independent revolutionary socialist vanguard party of the working class and the role of Numsa in all this.

The Resolutions adopted in our Special National Congress were a culmination of more than 26 years of working inside the South African Liberation Movement (LM) in general, and inside and building the ANC and its alliance in particular.

Over more than two decades of struggle inside the LM and the ANC and its alliance, by December last year, Numsa came to the inescapable observation and conclusion that there is no chance of winning back the ANC led alliance to what it was originally formed for, which was to drive a revolutionary programme for fundamental transformation of the country, with the Freedom Charter as the minimum platform to transform the South African economy and society.

As for the South African Communist Party (SACP) it was clear that its leadership had become embedded in the state and it was failing to act as the vanguard of the working class. Nor, for that matter, has the SACP any revolutionary programme, post 1994, for the struggle for socialism for South Africa.

By December last year, we became convinced that the chances of winning back the ANC onto the path of radical implementation of the Freedom Charter and the SACP onto the path of genuine working class struggles for working class power had become very remote, truly, had actually evaporated!

We therefore correctly resolved to call on Cosatu to break from the ANC led alliance. We stated that the need for looking for a political alternative had arrived.

We then resolved that NUMSA was going to lead the establishment of a **new United Front**, which will coordinate

struggles in the workplace and in communities, in a way similar to the UDF of the 1980s.

The task of this Front will be **to fight for the implementation of the Freedom Charter and to be an organisational weapon against neoliberal policies such as the NDP**. For this to happen, the Special Congress charged our members and shopstewards to be active on all fronts and in all struggles against neo-liberal policies, wherever these policies were being implemented.

Clearly, the United Front is not a political party – it is simply an **organisational weapon against neoliberal policies and for the demand for the radical implementation of the Freedom Charter**. The fundamental purpose of the United Front is to **coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities**.

We have noticed that some creative journalists have gone so far as to announce for us that Numsa's political party is called the United Front. Nothing could be further from the truth. In our Resolutions, we clearly stated that the United Front will be an organization similar to the United Democratic Front (UDF) – a democratic umbrella coordinating structure of the shopfloor and community struggles of the working class bringing together all sorts of working class and progressive community organisations and individuals.

Again and for the record, the United Front **is not a political party!**

Side by side with the establishment of the new United Front, we resolved that Numsa would explore the establishment of **a Movement for Socialism**, as the working class needs **a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa**.

We said that Numsa would conduct discussions on previous and current attempts to build socialism. We resolved to commission



an international study on the historical formation of working class parties, including exploring different type of parties – from mass workers parties to vanguard parties.

In our Special Congress we even mentioned countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Greece – as potential sources on socialist experiences we would study. We then said the whole learning process would lead to the union **convening a Conference on Socialism.**

We said that the work to explore the formation of a Movement for Socialism must be regularly reported to our Numsa constitutional structures and the work must be finalised by **the first NUMSA Central Committee in 2015.**

In the meantime, in all the work being done, whether on building a new United Front or exploring the formation of a Movement for Socialism, we said that **we must be alert to gains that may present possibilities of either the new United Front, or any other progressive coalition or party committed to socialism, standing for elections in future.** We charged the NUMSA constitutional structures to continuously assess these developments and possibilities.

It is in pursuit of this objective that we have recently announced that we will consider the possibility of the working class fielding candidates in Metros and Municipalities, in 2016 Local Government Elections, such as in the Nelson Mandela Metro.

The “Movement for Socialism” is not the name of a political party Numsa has formed. The name of such a political organ (could be a broad coalition of revolutionary socialist formations) or party (could be a straightforward revolutionary socialist workers party – not necessarily of that name!), and how such an organ or party will be formed, **all will be determined in the theater of struggle** – the working class, once sufficiently mobilized and united behind the demand for

socialism, will determine the programme, form and name of such a structure.

From the above, a few things that are very important must now be very clear.

Numsa is and will remain a trade union, inspired by Marxism Leninism. It will not convert itself into a political party. It cannot do so, anyway.

Numsa sees itself playing **a leading role** in the formation of the United Front and **a revolutionary and catalytic role** in the formation of the revolutionary socialist organ of the working class – it is theoretically and factually wrong to assert that **“Numsa will form a political party”** or more ridiculously and quite incorrectly, that **“Numsa has formed a political party”** in the same way that Julius Malema or Bantu Holomisa formed their parties!

The political organ to logically arise out of the processes outlined above (whether it be a socialist movement or a socialist workers party, and called by whatever name) cannot be about **“beefing up, or providing credible opposition to the ANC”** precisely because the process we have outlined above are processes of **the immense majorities** – the South African working class, both black and white, in all their workplaces and communities!

All other previous and historic political formations, including the birth of the ANC itself, were movements of minorities!

The ANC and SACP are everyday reminding Numsa that the working class organised in Cosatu unions and Cosatu itself will always remain in the ANC and its Alliance. This is arrogance of the highest order, and it reveals shocking ignorance and abandonment of Marxist-Leninist class theory and analysis, on the part of the leadership of both the ANC and SACP, about why the working class both organized in Cosatu unions, and those

not organised in any union, have tolerated a clearly dysfunctional and anti-working class alliance for more than 20 years!

Simply stated, the working class, are not the political property of either the ANC or the SACP – their presence in the ANC and SACP **is premised on the sole fact that these organisations are able to protect and advance the class interests of the working class**. As more than 27 years of our Marxist-Leninist analysis and revolutionary work has shown, both these organisations no longer champion the interests of the working class or socialism. And the advanced working class has, and continues to, abandon these organisations.

The revolutionary strategic objective of all these processes is for the advanced detachment of the working class to rally the immense majority in order to win economic and political power for **the immense majority of South African working class** in all its manifold manifestations, for a socialist South Africa as the only solution to the human crisis in South Africa, and the world, today.

There are no individuals among the Numsa national leadership who harbor **illusions of personal grandeur, or who want political power in order to advance their personal economic interests**. Only a malicious and extremely ignorant imbecile would make such a mischievous and unashamedly false accusation.

Numsa as a revolutionary trade union inspired by Marxism-Leninism, will play its revolutionary part in solving the human crisis in South Africa by advancing the cause for the only alternative and solution available to us: socialism.

Writing in 1988 at a time when many left and revolutionary socialist formations condemned the SACP's strategy of working inside the ANC led Alliance for many reasons, including the possibility of the SACP abandoning the struggle for socialism

in favour of the struggle for bourgeois nationalism, Joe Slovo then SACP General Secretary warned the working class thus:

*“It is obvious that the black capitalist class favours capitalism and that it will do its best to influence the post-apartheid society in this direction.*

*It is obvious that the black middle and upper classes who take part in a broad liberation alliance will jostle for hegemony and attempt to represent their interests as the interests of all Africans.*

*It is obvious that (like their counterparts in every part of the world) the black middle and upper strata, who find themselves on the side of the people’s struggle, are often inconsistent and vacillating. They are usually the enemy’s softest targets for achieving a reformist, rather than a revolutionary, outcome.”*

Twenty years into our neoliberal capitalist democracy, it has become clear to us, the working class, that **sections of the black petit-bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie who took part in the broad liberation alliance are viciously jostling for hegemony and attempting to represent their interests as the interests of all Africans by claiming that the Black and African working class will forever remain in the ANC and the SACP, and in the neo-liberal and capitalist ANC led Alliance.**

The SACP, when it was still led by Marxist-Leninists, further warned the working class about these tendencies of the vacillating strata among Black people, in its 1989 Programme:

*“In the period after the seizure of power by the democratic forces, the working class will need to continue the struggle against capitalism. It will need to strengthen its organisations and build the bases of working class and popular power in the economy, in all sectors of the state and in the communities where the people live.*

*A deliberate effort will have to be made to prevent attempts by the bourgeoisie and aspirant capitalist elements – and their imperialist supporters – to dominate state power and divert the revolution. Constant mass vigilance will also have to be exercised and action taken against such negative tendencies as the stifling of popular democracy, the bureaucratisation of the state and corrupt practices in government or in society as a whole.*

*In order to prevent the emergence of a seed-bed for capitalist resurgence and ensure an advance to socialism, the working class must win to its side other sections of the working people, both now and after the popular seizure of power. The landless rural masses, sections of the intelligentsia, students, large contingents of youth and women (as social groups) and some small businessmen and other forces stand to gain from the victory of the socialist revolution.*

*The transition to socialism will be neither completely separate from nor contradictory to the tasks of the national democratic revolution. On the one hand, consistent implementation and defence of the national democratic programme constitute a major guarantee for progress towards socialism. On the other hand, many of the major objectives of the national democratic revolution will be fully accomplished in the process of socialist construction. Among these tasks are complete national liberation and equality, elimination of sex discrimination, and, more significantly, the elimination of monopoly domination over the economy.”*

As Numsa we have consistently maintained that the NDR is not on track. The only track for the NDR is towards socialism because we believe many of the major objectives of the NDR can be fully achieved in the process of socialist construction. Our call for a United Front of the working class and a Movement for Socialism is precisely a defence of the national democratic programme, the Freedom Charter, which remains the only programme that is capable of laying the basis for

socialist transformation of South African society.

There is no turning back, for us in Numsa. We will do whatever it takes to contribute to uniting the working class behind the demand for the radical implementation of the Freedom Charter, for the struggle against a neoliberal capitalist post-Apartheid South Africa, and for Socialism. As the Marxist-Leninist SACP said in 1989; “in the aftermath of the democratic forces assuming political power, the working class has the duty to continue the struggle against capitalism, for socialism”.

***Irvin Jim,***  
***Numsa General Secretary***  
***20May 2014.***

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