

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

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

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

I have to confess I am still at a loss to understand why the various authors continue to place their hopes for the future in an alliance with this or that faction of the “official” liberation movement, the ANC, when the country has seen major irruptions of the working class into public affairs. The events around the miners’ struggle and Marikana unleashed a huge wave of industrial action. All this was reflected in the December 2013 Special Conference decisions of Numsa and the progress made since then in consolidating a combative new trade union federation.

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

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

Revolutionary tactics cannot be deduced from a cook-book. Empiricists identify any phenomenon abstractly (that is, they reduce it to a name, a suitable label, leaving out all its complexity, internal and external

contradictions, motion, indeed its very life) and place this definition confidently in the appropriate pigeonhole. When another phenomenon arises with superficial similarities to the first, they say: "Ahah!", sort through their files, triumphantly fish out the label and the attached recipe and tie it to the new situation.

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

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

For all her problems, Germany under the Weimar Republic was a highly-developed modern, industrial, imperialist state. There was a very numerous and politically-conscious working class which had built not only its own mass, nominally Marxist, Social-Democratic Party (SPD) but also a the most significant revolutionary Communist Party (KPD) outside of the Soviet Union.

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

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

The Nazi regime was a reckless, foolhardy (and of course profoundly criminal and barbaric) option forced upon the German bourgeoisie by the rival imperialist powers who prevailed in World War I. It was underpinned

by a (fairly) worked-out ideology of blood, soil, violence and conquest. This involved extreme nationalism, racism (towards all allegedly “non-Aryan” races and most immediately affecting the millions of Jews living in Europe), a leadership cult based on utter subjection of the mass, hero-worship, militarism and a simplistic concept of the survival of the fittest. Another aspect of this ideology was utter hatred of all kinds of Marxism and a determination to stamp out Communism in the USSR and everywhere.

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

The CI of the day saw the Social Democrats (the reformist socialist party) and the Nazi Party as “not antipodes but twins”. After all, a Social-Democratic government inflicted welfare cuts and austerity measures on the working class and sent armed police to shoot workers demonstrating on May Day. A Social-Democratic minister had said in 1919 “someone has to play the bloodhound” and unleashed vicious right-wing paramilitaries on revolutionary workers. Could the Nazis be any worse?

But of course, they were!

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

The third mistake the CI and the KPD made was to believe that they could win over Social Democratic workers by propaganda alone, just by brow-beating them with arguments. They offered a “United Front from below” to SPD supporters against their own leaders. In effect, they were saying:

“if you agree with us, join our United Front on our terms” instead of “let’s see how we can get your leaders to work with ours to stop Hitler”. This attitude let the leaders of the SPD and the trade unions “off the hook”, because it was clearly not a serious attempt to overcome the division in the working class. If they had been sincere about a united front, the KPD leaders would have negotiated jointly-acceptable terms on which to organise one with the Social-Democratic party and trade union leaders. In the face of the Nazi threat, such a workers’ united front could have made sense.

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

“Without hiding or mitigating our opinion of the Social Democratic leaders in the slightest, we may and we must say to the Social Democratic workers, ‘Since, on the one hand, you are willing to fight together with us; and since, on the other, you are still unwilling to break with your leaders, here is what we suggest: force your leaders to join us in a common struggle for such and such practical aims, in such and such a manner; as for us, we Communists are ready.’ Can anything be more plain, more palpable, more convincing?”

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

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

“In the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the policy of the united front became a hue and cry after allies at the cost of sacrificing the independence of the party. Backed by Moscow and deeming themselves omnipotent, the functionaries of the Comintern seriously esteemed

themselves to be capable of laying down the law to the classes and of prescribing their itinerary; of checking the agrarian and strike movements in China; of buying an alliance with Chiang Kai-Shek at the cost of sacrificing the independent policies of the Comintern; of re-educating the trade union bureaucracy, the chief bulwark of British imperialism through educational courses at banquet tables in London, or in Caucasian resorts; of transforming Croatian bourgeois of Radich's type into Communists, etc., etc. All this was undertaken, of course, with the best of intentions, in order to hasten developments by accomplishing for the masses what the masses weren't mature enough to do for themselves."

The mistake the CI leaders then made after they had digested the depth of the disaster that Hitler's take-over represented, was to believe that there was a way to prevent the spread of fascism by forming an alliance with "democratic", anti-fascist capitalists in which the interests of the working class were clearly and officially subordinated to the leadership of the bourgeoisie. This policy of a so-called "Popular Front" also enters our story, because it is the entire foundation and backbone of the policy of the CI's successors (although the body itself was wound up during World War II) towards the colonial liberation movement in general and the African National Congress in particular. They dressed this tribal and bourgeois formation up as the main revolutionary force in South Africa and systematically over many years did everything they could to subordinate the South African working class to it.

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

### **Is Zuma Hitler?**

No, Zuma is Zuma.

Since the end of apartheid rule, governments of the ANC in alliance with the SACP and Cosatu have all provided a democratic screen, engaging the

support of as many local forces as possible while serving the interests of international capital. Apartheid was ended and majority rule installed by arrangement with the international mining companies, major banks and imperialists governments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Confusing Popular Front and United Front**

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

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

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

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

“20: The task of the proletariat and its leadership is to join the general movement. However, in doing so it enters the fray under its own

programme and banner. It applies the policy of the united front which is 'unity in action'. March separately. Strike together".

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

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

"The working class and its forces should enter this conflict with its own vision, strategy and demands. It should enter it against the big bourgeoisie and its system of accumulation by calling for Zuma to go. And this call is in line with the sentiments and mood of the masses".

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

He is impatient of the developments among organised workers:

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

It is true that trade unions cannot solve all the political problems of



the working class. The characteristics which John Appolis lists reflect one side of the conditions under which trade unions operate: they deal with the day-to-day problems of their entire membership containing a wide range of men and women with a variety of outlooks; they deal with bread-and-butter issues; they deal with employers; they stand up for their members' rights day by day within with the legal and political framework of class relations and understandably both work within it and work to improve it using established channels.

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

What was overwhelmingly striking, following Marikana and the resulting wave of mass industrial working-class action, was that the leaders of NUMSA decided to use their union's resources in order to lay the basis for a political development by their class. The quantity of experiences mounting up of 20 years of majority rule under the Triple Alliance turned into a new quality, the determination to work for a new political organisation which would fight for the interests of the working class, the fulfilment of the promises of the liberation struggle.

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

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

"What the demand for Zuma to go offers is an opportunity to unite these struggles, give them a national expression and a connection to a common

national cause. The present conjuncture requires this qualitative shift in the struggles of the working class. And the Zuma must go provides the basis to effect such a qualitative shift.

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

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

To achieve this, he proposes:

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

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

**“White Monopoly Capital” and demagogy of every kind**

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

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

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

The existence of black capitalists in South Africa is noted and they are classified into two main sectors. The “credit” bourgeoisie are said to be those who were bought off by the big international corporations with credits which enabled them to become shareholders and then branch out into businesses of their own. (One thinks of the former miners’ union leader Cyril Ramaphosa).

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

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

Zuma carried out a cabinet reshuffle in March this year, removing Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan and replacing him with the supposedly more

malleable Malusi Gigaba. Gigaba appointed as an advisor a well-regarded left-leaning associate professor at Wits University, Chris Malikane.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The fight against white monopoly capital and its black/African allies,

is an integral part of the struggle to consummate the national democratic revolution.”

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

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

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

And in order to “encourage” that “tender-based black capitalist class”, Malikane took a government job under Zuma!

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

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

If it is thought mainly to be the whiteness of the foreign monopolies

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

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

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

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

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

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

So Lehulere raised his understandable disagreement with Malikane's career choice to the level of a principled disagreement over the nature of the

state. Lenin is dragged into the discussion, not to mention Gramsci. We are told to concern ourselves not with “inside the state” or “outside the state” but in a different state. It is wrong not merely to sell yourself for a job on the Zuma payroll, but to direct any demands on the state.

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

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

There are no short cuts to this. The organised working class in the unions in the new federation needs to be a backbone of iron sustaining this movement. The work has to go forward systematically and soberly. It can only succeed if, alongside a growing mass of conscious support, a cadre is steeled in the course of the struggle. The movement must train itself not to be stampeded or derailed by demagogues of any stripe. The stakes are too high.

Bob Archer, 23 June 2017

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**What Numsa decided in**

# December 2013

## **What Numsa decided in December 2013**

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

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

Referring to the 2012 massacre of miners at Marikana, the declaration says: “**the state attacked and killed workers on behalf of capital**”. It goes on to outline a campaign to support the victims of the massacre and punish those responsible, situating the massacre in the context of imperialist exploitation: “Marikana was a deliberate defence of mining profits and mining capitalists!”.

The declaration notes: “The treatment of labour as a junior partner within the Alliance is not uniquely a South African phenomenon. In many post-colonial and post-revolutionary situations, liberation and revolutionary movements have turned on labour movements that fought alongside them, suppressed them, marginalised them, split them, robbed them of their



independence or denied them any meaningful role in politics and policy making.”

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

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

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

A sizeable section of the declaration deals with the crisis within the union confederation Cosatu, outlining the questions of principle involved.

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

A final section outlines a practical campaign, including taking forward the “Section 77” campaign to reverse neo-liberal policies and “address the plight of the working class and poor”. Cosatu had adopted this campaign but failed to

pursue it energetically. Numsa pledged to act against the Employment Tax Incentive Act, and organise a “rolling mass action” with a detailed list of concrete demands, for example: beneficiation of all strategic minerals, a ban on the export of scrap metals and the rebuilding of foundries, an increase on import tariffs on certain goods, nationalisation of the Reserve Bank, exchange controls and other demands culminating in the nationalisation of the mining industry.

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

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## Special supplement of “The Journal”

In this special supplement of [The Journal](#) we publish the full text of the “True State of the Nation Address” issued by the United Front in South Africa on 11 February 2015, the 25th anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s release from prison.

THE UNITED FRONT was initiated by the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa(NUMSA). We believe that this statement is of special interest to the People’s Assembly in Britain and people standing up for socialism all over the world.

NUMSA explained that for them the massacre of the Marikana miners “marked a turning point in the social and political life of South Africa”. It could not be “business as usual”. They put the question: “How do we explain the killing of striking miners in a democracy?” They had to conduct “a sustained and thorough analysis of the political meaning of

Marikana”.

The leadership concluded that the decisions of the union’s ninth Congress “were no longer enough to guide [them]. The situation had changed to a point where [they] needed a new mandate from the membership”, and their Special Congress in December 2013 decided to break with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) and call upon the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to re-establish its independent campaigning role, for “there is no priority more important than safeguarding the capacity of the working class to act in its own interests”.

In so doing NUMSA raised matters of vital importance for workers everywhere “engulfed by the crisis of capitalism which manifests itself in mass unemployment, deepening poverty and widening inequalities”. To end the rule of capital, workers are faced with the task of breaking with fake “socialist” and “communist” parties acting on behalf of the capitalist class and “failing to act as the vanguard of the working class”.

The Special Congress therefore decided on a new united front to coordinate the struggles in the workplace and in communities, to explore the establishment of a Movement for Socialism and to conduct a “thoroughgoing discussion on previous attempts to build socialism as well as current experiments to build socialism” and “an international study on the historical formation of working class parties”.

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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/.](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.

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

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

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

Talking to Young Communist League members on 12 December, Nzimande made an amalgam of NUMSA with a “wave of demagoguery”, an “anti-majoritarian, often racist, liberal



offensive whose object is regime change to dislodge the liberation movement from power”.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It will soon become urgent to build international capacity to defend NUMSA, its leaders and members and the United Front it is establishing from a state-inspired Stalinist witch hunt. Fortunately the United Front provides an excellent framework for explaining and mobilising such support and discussing the way forward. Real unity between those who struggle in a principled way for the interests of the oppressed (and not

unity with the imperialist exploiters) can and must contain and accommodate real diversity as activists and organisations establish a clear understanding of their past, present and future while struggling together for that future.

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

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

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

*Bob Archer*, January 2015

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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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# 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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