

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL

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Political and theoretical journal of Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International
No 4 May 2014

The decisions of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) Special National Congress:

‘Numsa raises vital matters for workers everywhere’

Statement by the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International Conference 29-30 March 2014

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The Special Congress (17-20 December 2013) of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), with 1,200 delegates representing 338,000 members, unanimously decided to break with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) as the first step towards establishing “a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a Socialist South Africa”.

For NUMSA 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 9th 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 decided to break with the ANC and 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 is raising 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 “thorough-going 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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For the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International these decisions of the NUMSA Special Conference and the union's subsequent statements and actions towards socialism are historic and crucial for the working class and its organisations internationally.

▪ **Inspired by the example of NUMSA we are making every possible effort through our own currently small and isolated**

organisations to oppose all the opportunism and anti-working class politics which are so widespread in the so-called "advanced" capitalist countries, with a view to preparing socialism. And, like NUMSA, in the midst of the majority of organisations which have gone over to the side of anti-Marxism or falsification, we are guided by Marxism.

▪ **We support, and will circulate and publicise, NUMSA's Special Congress Resolution and Statement throughout the working class;**

▪ **We support and will act on NUMSA's decision to build a Movement for Socialism;**

▪ **We enthusiastically welcome and want to take part in NUMSA's decision for an international study on the historical formation of working class parties.**

As they get ready to storm the heavens

Long live the South African working class

By Balazs Nagy, April 2014

Here in France, as elsewhere, the media have hardly mentioned the social and political ferment currently convulsing South Africa, which is no surprise actually. This evasive and rather suspect silence contrasts oddly and strikingly with the unprecedented enthusiasm these same media showed during Nelson Mandela's elaborate funeral rites, an enthusiasm whose real purpose was to glorify the man's politics.

The sleight of hand that makes important information like this simply disappear also contrasts strangely with the endless, servile, outpouring of "easy-reading" chatter when the President of France recently visited the US. (This sycophant never once stopped licking his hosts' boots, although they hack into his private communications like they do everybody else on the planet, and US-owned businesses in France don't even pay their taxes).

These glaring contradictions clearly reveal what these media are really like and what they are there for. All working people, especially the politically active among them, should ponder this. It exposes the highfaluting idea that the media are there to provide reliable information as a gross, outrageous fiction. The deception they are currently trying on exposes even more clearly exactly what this vast brainwashing mechanism is for: to stop workers becoming conscious of the situation they are in and what they really need to do by mutilating, obscuring, and in this instance deliberately camouflaging, the great, irresistible strength that lies in workers' international unity. This colossal strength, whose development is as

uneven as that of capitalism itself, is still deeply divided and fractured along national and regional lines. It is split and stunted even more by the crying lack of political organisation, a genuine, powerful International, on the part of this working class.

So what have the bourgeoisie and its purveyors of mind-altering mush been trying to keep from us in recent months? An initial answer to this question will "just" focus on the essential facts about this qualitative development in the workers' movement in South Africa, since this exceptional groundswell is something we really will have to return to in days to come.

South Africa's biggest trade union takes some amazing decisions

To start with, these are admirable and astonishing decisions which break up the class-collaboration that the bourgeoisie's power is based on and theoretically and politically re-arm the South African working class. Moreover, their character is such as to shift the international relationship of forces between the working class and the bourgeoisie, halting the long process of defeats and set-backs the international proletariat has suffered.

In December 2013, the powerful South African engineering workers' union NUMSA (the biggest union in the country with more than 341 000 members) held a Special National Congress (SNC) attended by more than 1 000 delegates. After passionate debates it took a number of historic decisions (see *Workers International Journal* no 3, March 2014). To summarise:

The Congress paid appropriate homage to the miners massacred at Marikana, collecting a huge sum in financial support of the victims' families, and condemned the compliant attitude, not to say downright complicity, on the part of the country's political and trade union leaderships. Then in the same spirit it resolved:

To reject the tripartite alliance between the governing party, the Stalinist "Communist" Party and the trade union confederation (ANC - SACP - Cosatu) as agencies of the bourgeoisie and its policies. As NUMSA General Secretary Irvin Jim stated in his speech of 11 February 2014, the "ANC and SACP ... leadership has consistently attacked the working class", because "... the current leadership, the very same leadership that calls itself anti-imperialist, is in a lucrative alliance with international capital." The delegates emphatically declared that "The chance of winning back the SACP onto the path of working class struggle for working class power is very remote", something which Deputy General Secretary Karl Cloete re-stated in another speech in early February. Consequently the SNC decided to suspend payment of financial contributions to the ANC.

Evoking the disturbing situation the country faces, especially the growing impoverishment of the working class, the SNC launched a call for the nationalisation of the mining and finance sectors as an "immediate and urgent requirement to save our nation".

This gathering of workers also "resolved that NUMSA will play a central role, as a catalyst, in the building of a united front. That United Front will

take up the bread and butter issues of the working class. It will link our struggles on the shop floor with our struggles in our communities.”

The Congress then took a vitally important step. As Irvin Jim emphasised in the speech quoted above, there was in the SNC a profound understanding “that unless the working class organises itself as a class for itself it will remain unrepresented and forever toil behind the bourgeoisie”. For this reason the SNC decided “to study, research and investigate various forms of independent working-class parties and to serve as a catalyst to form a party.” Deputy General Secretary Karl Cloete was obliged to add in his speech that, as a trade union, NUMSA could not commit itself to setting up such a party, but it “should explore” the means and methods leading to it. So he recalled the exact words chosen by the SNC, according to which NUMSA “should organise a Conference on Socialism” as a stage in organising a “Movement for Socialism” to now be initiated by the trade union. In preparation for this conference, the whole union should “look at experiences of building socialism, now and in the past.” At the same time: “We must conduct an international study on working class parties”.

He went on to explain this fundamental decision by saying: “... that the building of such an instrument needs patient and consistent work. Parties require political programmes that clearly spell out what they are fighting for. Such programmes need to inspire millions of people as alternatives to the existing order. A socialist political organisation needs to be rooted within the working class and its struggles. History is littered with initiatives to form parties that came to nothing and where such parties collapsed like packs of cards. History is also full of experiments to build socialism that went in other non-socialist routes.” And he summarised NUMSA’s position thus: “While we understand the urgency, we are not rushing as we are not building an electoral machine but an instrument of revolution and transformation with very deep roots within the working class.”

We cannot here present in detail the full richness of these resolutions, which trace the innovative revolutionary path taken by this working class in South Africa. We will return to this very shortly. Now, in line with its political line of class combat against the bourgeoisie and for socialism, the SNC took further substantial decisions.

It voted to call on the leadership of the trade union confederation Cosatu to convene a Special Congress and to break the alliance (with the ANC and the SACP) which, according to General Secretary Jim, “failed to use the political power it secured in 1994 to take ownership and control of the national wealth of our country and replace the white racist colonial economy.”

Going straight from words to deeds, the congress decided to launch a “campaign of rolling mass action initiated by the NUMSA structures to demand fundamental change in the direction of the South African economy and society”. For a start, NUMSA launched a powerful call for a General Strike and mass and community actions for 26 February. As Irvin Jim emphasised towards the end of his speech: “We are starting to build the irresistible force that will take back our nation and build it in the interests of the majority”.

A few days after this speech, which clarified and explained the Congress decisions, nine trade unions affiliated to Cosatu, at NUMSA’s prompting, launched a Statement which testifies to the fact that a tumultuous awakening of the working class is underway in South Africa. Note the names of these trade unions: Public and Allied Workers Union, the SA Football Players Union, the Democratic Nurses Union, the SA Municipal Workers Union, the Food and Allied Workers Union, the SA Commercial and Catering Workers Union, Communication Workers’ Union and the SA State and Allied Workers’ Union. There can be no doubt that this list will soon grow, although this will involve intense internal struggles in each union. The nine unions which signed this Statement urged the Cosatu leadership urgently to call a Special National Congress of Cosatu, which the “factional leadership” (an obvious reference to the line-up of leaders behind the right-wing leadership of ANC and the Stalinist party) has prevented from meeting for some time. At the same time they demand the re-instatement of Zwelinzima Vavi, the elected secretary of Cosatu, who was arbitrarily removed because he refused to follow slavishly the opportunist watchwords of the ANC and the SACP.

To complete its resolutions, which profoundly alter class relations within the country, NUMSA decided to organise “Marxist-Leninist Schools” for trade union delegates to explain, discuss and assimilate the union’s socialist orientation and to explain what it means and how to do it. The first of these week-

long schools took place in early February 2014.

What the historic rebirth of NUMSA means and what it teaches us

It would be impossible to squeeze into one short article everything that can be learnt from the way this big trade union adopted radical positions, even just in relation to South Africa, not to mention the rest of Africa, starting with her neighbours, or indeed the international working class movement, especially Europe. So we are obliged to confine our remarks to some essential points, with a promise to return soon to a more complete and systematic evaluation of the invaluable contribution to Marxist theory and socialist practice this section of the great South African working class is making as it starts to move.

First and foremost, this class vigorously states that, faced with the bourgeoisie and its policy of enslaving working people, the only way forward is to commit firmly and openly to smashing capitalism and opening the road to socialism. This clear and unequivocal slogan, backed up by energetic commitment, stands in striking contrast to the reticence, not to say downright confidentiality, in relation to their programme, on the part of the great majority of organisations on the so-called “Left” in Europe and elsewhere. Even the most advanced political formations such as the Front de Gauche, Syriza and die Linke (France, Greece, Germany) drown their programmes in a fog of mealy-mouthed phrases and random, unexplained and non-committal hints. In the unflattering popular phrase, they try to hide behind a matchbox. One wonders whether they have any plan at all apart from somehow improving capitalism. We urge our comrades in these organisations: be inspired by the example of NUMSA in South Africa. Steer a clear course towards socialism! All the experience in South Africa and in Europe proves that there is no third way between this path and the reign of the bourgeoisie with its attendant attacks and miseries.

Such a clarification would allow us to take the South African road, and so cleanse from top to bottom the theoretical source that illuminates workers’ struggle for emancipation, by opting for creative Marxism, as the African workers did, the only theoretical guide for such a struggle. Of course such a choice goes hand in hand with a complete rejection of the jumble of all sorts

of left-over ideologies and conceptions the bourgeoisie uses to keep working people chained to them. It is urgently necessary to get rid of the mish-mash of the most widely-held – but all bankrupt – fragments of conceptions about class-collaboration, from the insipid hotchpotch of stale Keynesianism to Stalinism's various – catatonic but still clinging on – popular fronts.

For all trade unions, even the most combative ones, like the CGT in France, the message from South Africa should ring like a persistent wake-up call. It is frontally opposed to the opportunist and degrading conception and practices of “partnership” with the bourgeoisie and its state which the European trade union leaderships put forward for their unions, following their bourgeois gurus, anti-reform reformists and de-frocked Stalinists. This is where NUMSA has made a radical break. By taking up the resolute defence of the interests of the working class against this class-collaboration, it has necessarily chosen and politically committed the union to fighting for the interests of the independent working class as a whole. By doing so it has entirely confirmed and reinforced the correctness of Trotsky's analysis in “Trades Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay”, the writing of which was interrupted by the ice-pick of Stalin's assassin. All working people and the activists among them should study this pamphlet afresh in the light of the formidable break-through opened up by the South African trade union.

By its very nature, said Trotsky, imperialism in its death agony provokes violent and repeated aggression on the part of the bourgeoisie which mean that they must urgently fulfil a political role in relation to the fundamental choices the working class as a whole faces. Now the trade union leaderships have done and still do everything they can to divide up trade union activity and restrict it – at best – to the absolute minimum of defending their members' immediate interests. They have erected this separation, which in reality is the same actual break already advocated by the syndicalism of old, into a rigorous, strict dogma in union work, which the majority of organisations, even ones claiming some attachment to Lenin and Trotsky, cheerfully adopt, promote and ruthlessly apply. Now NUMSA flatly repudiates this whole trade union swamp in a way whose ultimate ramifications are still difficult to foresee.

The only European trade union which to my knowledge has decided and adopted a definite, truly political role

on the side of the working class is the biggest UK trade union, “Unite”. This surely demonstrates that NUMSA is not at all on its own and that the awakening of the world working class really has begun. Clearly opposed to the so-called neo-liberal policies of the Labour Party, “Unite” has rejected its opportunist leadership and pushed the party to break with this policy and adopt a workers' programme. The significance of the tenacious struggle going on in the UK is not confined just to that country; its implications are and increasingly will be valuable for the working class as a whole right across Europe. Similarly, there is no doubt that the meeting between NUMSA and “Unite”, which was planned before these most recent events, will involve fruitful exchanges of considerable interest not only for the working class of these two countries but for the whole international working class.

As against this renewal, our Journal has already denounced, in particular in a recent article, the class collaboration on the part of many unions, their consequent refusal to take on a political role for the working class and their insistence on confining themselves to an obsolete, ossified, narrow and sterile trade union practice which has led a great mass of workers to turn their backs on them and reject them as blunt and rusty tools. Even a weapon as powerful and deadly (and double-edged!) as the general strike, which the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish working class have boldly and repeatedly wielded in the course of recent years, showing remarkable courage and spirit of self-sacrifice, has ended up each time in a bitter setback. All that these repeated general strikes have actually achieved has been to exhaust the working class and undermine its morale, since their leaders have refused to open their only way out, i.e. the political assertion of the working class taking over the economic and political leadership of the country. As for the half-hearted mobilisations in partial strikes and demonstrations, whose pathetic results merely emphasise the contradiction between what the situation demands and a trade union movement embalmed in routine, the less said the better.

This sclerosis has eaten its way so deeply into the unions that their leaders now constrict and limit their actions even further, not even fulfilling their basic responsibility to organise workers and defend their interests. Just take unemployment! Deferentially adopting the doctrinal precepts of bourgeois

ideology, trade union leaderships only consider those who are directly – and officially – employed in an actual job to be workers. Capitalists are throwing more and more workers out of the production process, but these leaderships are no less eager to get rid of them out of the unions! They don't think that the unemployed “deserve” to belong to trade unions at all, and any attempt to organise them systematically on a wide scale is sabotaged and abandoned.

Fortunately, pretty well all over Europe workers will not accept being thrown on the scrap heap in this contemptible, humiliating way, like worn-out rubbish. Spontaneously, but at the initiative of local former leaders and cadres, they have gathered in various other structures at the margins of or outside the official unions. In the UK, the Liverpool dockers, after a long and difficult two-year dispute sustained and encouraged by port workers around the world, which was the stuff of legend, were nevertheless deprived of their jobs and the historical Liverpool docks wiped out. But they never said die. Inspired by local leaders and cadres such as Jimmy Nolan, Terry Teague and others, they organised, in this ravaged working-class city, around their “Casa” with its intense political, social and cultural life to maintain their class as a living, active force. And in the North East of the country, in Tyneside and Durham, former miners whose mines have all been completely closed and the miners left to rot, like one of our former comrades, Dave Temple, have woven back together the broken threads of the union and kept alive the collective activity of the miners. They even revived their disused links with the Spanish Asturian miners when they came under attack.

It is no co-incidence that this rock-solid working-class resistance has kept going in the UK, the historical cradle of the working class and its movement, a country where working peoples' consciousness of belonging to a distinct working class is incomparably stronger than anywhere else. But even in Europe, various groups of workers are stubbornly trying a variety of ways to resist degradation. They are essential component parts of a united and powerful working class and of re-constituting its general movement as a whole.

The deterioration caused by the massive destruction of the productive forces, in the first place of workers themselves, has been made even worse by the way in which the aims and methods of their organisations have

been obscured and by the general denaturing and impoverishment of their trade unions. However, the determined orientation and decisive action of South African workers bring the reviving message of a real global awakening of the workers' movement.

NUMSA's SNC has opened the flood-gates to a development of profound importance in the trade union movement, comparable to the general shift from craft unionism to industrial unionism which started in the first half of the twentieth century. Whereas the trade union bureaucracy's practices, ossified into a dogma by reformists and Stalinists, stop at the gates of the workplace, the NUMSA SNC resolved to smash through this barrier. It decided to extend the activity of the union to the struggles waged in the communities (townships, suburbs, settlements, towns and villages) for workers' and unemployed people's basic demands for water, electricity, housing etc., – struggles which are intense in South Africa. Consequently the union has taken the initiative to take on and directly organise these struggles and the activists involved.

These struggles already have a long history stretching back to the 1990-1994 period, and even then NUMSA wanted to link them up with what it was doing. Its then leader, Moses Mayakiso, worked out a whole political and organisational plan to that effect, to which NUMSA now refers. But the union abandoned these plans when its revolutionary line buckled under the right-wing influence of the overall ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance. And it was precisely then that these community struggles really took off as the way in which the impoverished masses defended themselves against the violent destruction of their living conditions by the government's class-collaboration policies.

As a member of a NUMSA delegation to the UK led by Mayekiso, the young Durban engineering worker Bongani Mkhungo easily grasped the correctness of the Marxist orientation of our day contained in Trotsky's teaching. And so it was as a member of our Workers International that he returned to Africa, where from the outset he was marginalised by NUMSA. But he completely dedicated himself to organising these community struggles to obtain and improve water and electricity supplies and other essential services and for a decent life. Illness and privation struck down our comrade, whom we sorely miss, before he could witness this re-birth of our movement, but what he

did greatly contributed to its preparation and current flowering.

The struggle is particularly lively and violent throughout the region. In neighbouring Namibia, our comrades Erica and Hewat Beukes and their group have spent years organising a whole movement of impoverished and dispossessed working people for access to decent housing and against various abuses at the hands of their bosses and the state.

Over the last two years, these comrades have broadened out this activity to include the defence of miners and teachers robbed of their pensions by the mining trusts and state organs, and of the rights of various ethnic groups of farmers and agricultural workers. To organise and centralise them, they and their supporters and associates have established the "Workers' Advice Centre", whose activities and influence have become quite extensive. Rapid and brutal reaction from the Namibian bourgeoisie, its old colonial master South Africa, and its own repressive legal organs was not long in coming, especially once our comrades resolved to prepare to set up the Namibian workers' party in the very near future. A raft of administrative hassles, legal threats and arbitrary measures, fines and charges and police summonses and harassment, cutting off of water and electricity supplies, warnings, intimidation and arbitrary accusations paralyse their work and disorganise and even put in question the very existence of the Workers' Advice Centre. Certainly they will not be put off doing what they do, and especially not their big project. But active and effective solidarity on the part of working people across the whole world provides precious support which, even in modest forms, helps the Namibian comrades' efforts and forges and cements international unity of the working class and all working people.

For a "South African" turn everywhere!

The immense scope of this initiative by South African workers in NUMSA arises in an international atmosphere where sharpening class contradictions have already provoked a series of revolutionary explosions. Since the Tunisian people unleashed their revolutionary march, spurred on by the working class and rapidly spreading to Egypt and then more or less all Arab countries, the massive mobilisation of working people against the bourgeoisie and the intolerable measures they are taking has accelerated and taken on increasingly sharp

and violent forms. The inevitable avalanche of the world revolution has started, even if its various manifestations have a spontaneous character which makes their rhythm somewhat jagged, and even though they dress up in the nationalist or religious garb of past dominant ideologies. "A spectre is haunting Europe" (or rather the world): "the spectre of communism". Even in the last year it has appeared noisily in Egypt, then entered the scene albeit briefly in South Korea and Turkey, while more or less gate-crashed and disguised by nationalist and religious stand-ins, defied the powerful from Palestine to Pakistan by way of Iraq and Afghanistan, and it is ready to burst out in our old Europe, albeit tempered, softened and enfeebled. And all the while, travestied and disfigured as it has been, side-tracked and losing its bearings in Syria, it terrifies the possessors and drives their rulers all over the world to either desperate self-defence or complete paralysis.

This is the explosive powder-barrel within which the working class masses in Ukraine frontally attack the authorities with exemplary determination – but wrong and confused ideas. Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian workers in Bosnia-Herzegovina in turn have courageously and with great determination launched into an attack on the bourgeoisie's feeble rule and its nationalist henchmen. Imperialism and bureaucrats joined together to impose this through the rotten Dayton Agreement, which divides these peoples and ties them down in the straitjacket of the failed and unviable pluri-national framework. Now they are under pressure from all sides to accept the so-called "proper" application of this Agreement, whereas it is precisely the yoke against which they rose up, as Comrade Pavlovic's article explains very clearly (*Lutte des classes* no 20, February 2014).

At the same time in Ukraine the revolutionary explosion of the working masses has advanced legitimate demands but gets bogged down in the swamp of a false choice between the suffocating embrace of Putin's dictatorship or the deceptive siren voices of a capitalist Europe that has itself lost its way.

The lucidity of NUMSA's position and its explicit orientation towards socialism cuts through this whole dense morass to bring vital clarity into the chaotic tangle of wrong roads. It brings the light people need to separate the good seed from the various kinds of bourgeois chaff fed to it, and opens the

way to the only solution, which is socialist. It is also entirely valid for all organisations, even those claiming to speak for working people in the more developed countries. It spurs us on to either act like South Africans or take sides with the oppressors or, at best, fall into historical oblivion – and in both latter cases to drag working people into a defeat.

Now, this re-orientation of the whole international workers' movement that NUMSA has started – to take up once more and unequivocally the class struggle and the goal of socialism – is absolutely essential to combat the opportunist perversion of the movement. But other dangers immediately arise along the way to recovery. The most dangerous is probably the adventurous impatience inspired by panicking petit-bourgeois intellectuals – followed unfortunately by young people who are, by nature, necessarily impatient – who try to push this profound correction towards an ultra-left practice that is the licensed midwife of sectarianism.

In South Africa itself, on 14 February 2014, the small, recently-created, workers' party WASP (Workers and Socialist Party of South Africa) published a statement. Having greeted the NUMSA decisions, the statement hurries to "advise" them that "the time has come for NUMSA to lead the way to a new trade union confederation." In other words, whereas elsewhere in the same document it supports NUMSA's action in fighting inside Cosatu and forming an opposition group along with nine other unions, it also repeatedly calls for an immediate break with the Cosatu confederation! But that is exactly what the right-wing ANC-SACP leaders want! They would love NUMSA to leave Cosatu and abandon the fight inside it. It would save them a lot of grief. No, the struggle is inside Cosatu and in all the affiliated unions, and fortunately NUMSA shows not the slightest intention of following this suicidal recommendation to put the knife into this struggle by giving up in mid-stream. In particular, this short-sighted haste would limit the horizon to just Cosatu, whereas what is boiling up here is the whole South African working class with all its movements and organisations.

Not only is a bitter struggle developing inside every union, but the ANC and the SACP are undergoing an unprecedented crisis in which oppositions and groupings along a new line are endangering the right-wing monolith Stalinism built up within them. Even the

radical turn made by the NUMSA SNC would not have been possible without a decisive political turn on the part of communist and ANC activists who are NUMSA members and delegates. Do the WASP comrades seriously think that NUMSA and its leaders are going to put the brakes on this huge movement of renewal and strangle it by giving up the fight and looking for a hole to hide in somewhere outside this whole class in ferment? ...

They want nothing to do with this kind of siren call. Only recently it was very evident how this rash impetuosity allied to sectarian adventurism blocked and isolated the broad scope of the movement that developed after the Marikana massacre. They saw with their own eyes how a lot of activists, advised and guided by the UK-based Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) launched themselves against the ANC-SACP right-wingers running the big miners' union (NUM) in partnership with the mining trusts and compromised in the Marikana massacre. The CWI also urged them on to set this workers' party (WASP) up in a hurry. Knocked off balance by the CWI's inveterate ultra-leftism, itself resting on the young workers' genuine – understandable but ill-advised – impatience, activists encouraged the break with the union and with Cosatu and the establishment of an improvised and therefore botched "left" union. In that way they put themselves outside the battle in the unions and were absent from the actual renewal of NUMSA and the ferment going on throughout Cosatu. Alongside that, by over-hastily declaring the workers' party WASP, they bungled its own process of growth to maturity and they are now marginalised in the workers' movement as a whole and even stand outside of NUMSA's work for a new party.

These are recent examples which speak volumes to all activists about the CWI-WASP's methods. The great working class mobilisation following Marikana was disrupted and blocked and ended up at the back of the queue. Thoughtless excessive haste meant that the "mountain" of a huge upsurge by the

working class gave birth to a mere "mouse".

WASP and its CWI inspirers try to distract NUMSA from the job of winning the other unions for its socialist positions through a struggle inside Cosatu and winning the confederation back. Instead they urge it to break away, as if that struggle was already over, and to stand on the side-lines as spectators. Which is where they themselves are.

Instead, the WASP comrades could have grasped the real job facing Marxist worker-activists by thinking through for themselves, for example, the implications of the NUMSA resolutions, instead of following the CWI's ultimatic watchwords. That organisation is known in various parts of Europe as a body locked in sectarian isolation which prefers brandishing ultimatums to democratic discussion either in its own ranks or beyond. WASP comrades have nothing to gain by following these watchwords; on the contrary, by doing so they risk doing damage to the South African workers' movement. It isn't NUMSA which should break with Cosatu, but WASP which ought to break with the CWI.

All in all, sectarianism constitutes a significant obstacle throughout the whole great international movement, and one which it we must oppose from the outset. The struggle against the bourgeois degradation of the movement and the job of cleansing it of every nuance of its methods and agents is a greater, more urgent and more complex task, and that is what we need to get down to now.

The most obvious and natural thing to start with is to call on all trade union and political organisations anywhere which claim any attachment to the working class to publish the NUMSA resolutions and statement in full and organise a discussion about them as urgent, necessary tasks.

That is an elementary duty, for if it is true that recent weather conditions have been somewhat out of kilter, it is no less true that to see the sun of workers' struggles rise, from now on we should look not East but – South!

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A programme of action for the South African revolution

This article is the second of a two-part series by South African members of Workers' International first published in the UK in the weekly *Workers Press* as the apartheid regime crumbled. This programme mapped a course which could unite working people to overthrow capitalism in South Africa

Fight for a workers' government

The sustained offensive of the masses has thrown the political system of the racist rulers into disarray.

The community council system lies in tatters: only the worst kind of opportunist give the tricameral parliament any credibility; the surrogate regimes of the "homelands" survive only by brutal suppression; while within the racist state itself the ruling class is racked by indecision and dissent.

The struggle of the masses reflects their deeply-felt desire for a political system over which they have control and which is based on the will of the majority of people in South Africa.

Because of the integral links between apartheid and capitalism, nothing less than a workers' government will be able to bring about the thorough-going democratisation of South African society.

The working class alone, as the most revolutionary class in South Africa, can be relied on to lead the struggle. And as this class suffers most under apartheid, it alone can be trusted to destroy every last vestige of apartheid once it comes to power.

Advance the struggle for democracy!

Guided by the slogan: "For a workers' government and workers' democracy" we must begin mobilising for a mass united campaign which includes the following demands:

- Universal suffrage for everyone from the age of 16 in a single, unitary and non-racial South Africa!

We must resist very strongly any idea that "minority" rights need to be protected in South Africa. The South Africa which emerges from the struggle for democracy must reflect the will of the majority of people.

- An immediate end to the state of emergency, the release of all detainees, the unbanning of all political organisations, the lifting of all restrictions on people, political organisations and the media!

The absence of democracy in South Africa is shown most glaringly in the

extreme, repressive legislation which the racist rulers use to keep apartheid capitalism intact.

As revolutionaries we have a duty to ensure that the class struggle takes place under the best possible conditions for the masses and that every attempt which the state makes to reverse the gains of the masses is vigorously opposed.

- A unitary, non-racial and democratic educational system controlled by parent-teacher-student associations; and universal, free and compulsory education for all South Africans from pre-school to university!

The gross inequalities which characterise apartheid are nowhere more glaring than in the educational system. In few other areas is the racist state so determined to maintain complete control.

The state's heavy-handed response to the students' struggle reveals just how crucial the educational system is to the perpetuation of apartheid-capitalism and how afraid the state is that the student struggle will grow over into a full-blown workers' struggle.

Complete support must therefore be given to the struggle for PEOPLE'S EDUCATION – but at the same time it is our duty to point out to the students that only a WORKERS' GOVERNMENT will be able to ensure that this is achieved.

- The abolition of the "homelands" system, migrant labour and single-sex hostels!

The masses have no illusions about the "homelands". They know they have not been designed to satisfy their democratic aspirations. They know from bitter experience that the true role of the puppet regimes in the "homelands" is to act as the executioners of the oppressed and exploited.

To these "union-free zones" the bosses are increasingly moving their factories, the better to be able to subjugate the workers. These state policies, which are aimed at weakening the ability of the working class to fight, and

so driving them into submission, have to be strenuously fought against.

The system of migrant labour not only makes possible the ultra-exploitation of the working class but, together with single-sex hostels, is the principal means the racist rulers use to create divisions and foment "tribal" hostilities amongst the masses.

The National Union of Mineworkers' demand for a commitment by the bosses to abolish migrant labour and its insistence that in the interim the induna (hostel guard) system of controlling the hostels (the main reason for "faction fighting" on the mines, says the NUM) be scrapped and that democratically elected HOSTEL COMMITTEES replace it, must therefore be generalised throughout the country.

This must become the means whereby the "tribal" divisions and hostilities that the racist rulers are constantly trying to foster among migrant workers are resisted.

- The right of people to live where they choose, the abolition of influx control, and an immediate end to the uprooting and resettlement of people!

The acute economic crisis in South Africa throws increasing numbers of workers into the ranks of the unemployed. Fearful of the unemployed, fearful of the consequences of having a large army of unemployed in the main urban centres, the racist ruling class is increasingly using the "homelands" as dumping grounds for the thousands of "surplus people".

Once in the "homelands", these people are so driven to despair by the surrogate regimes of apartheid-capitalism, that many of them, out of sheer desperation and the seeming absence of any other alternative, join the vigilante squads of these hangmen of the working class and themselves become instruments of reaction and repression.

While struggling for the abolition of the "homelands" system, we have also to be struggling simultaneously against the state's attempt to condemn workers to poverty and a merciless

reign of terror in these concentration camps of apartheid capitalism.

▪ The unconditional right to strike and the unconditional right to picket!

The organ of rule of the bosses, the state, always acts to safeguard the interests of the capitalists against those of the proletariat. This is most glaringly shown in the many obstacles the state erects in the path of the working class to prevent them from being able to mount a serious challenge against the exploiters.

The trade union movement must consistently fight against all attempt by the state to impose a system of “compulsory arbitration” upon it, and must also consistently fight to challenge the “freedom” of scabs to break strike.

Fight for a Constituent Assembly! No sell-out negotiations!

The struggle to smash the apartheid state places the call for a CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY foremost on the agenda of the struggle for democracy.

Such a sovereign body arises out of the struggle of the masses. It will be constituted on the basis of universal suffrage, with every delegate subject to recall. It will be convoked under conditions where the armed forces of the racist state have been disarmed and a workers’ militia formed. And it will draw up a new constitution for the country that expresses the true will of the exploited and oppressed.

Nothing less can be trusted with the fate of the revolution. Only by consistently agitating for the convocation of a constituent assembly will we make it plain that our aim is the victory of the masses and not the preparation of conditions for their betrayal through a sell-out settlement.

Capitalism is in its death-agonies!

The struggle for democracy in South Africa takes place against the background of an economic system in its death-throes.

In its desperate struggle to survive, capitalism is heaping indescribable miseries on the working class. Between four million and six million blacks are unemployed: almost half of the economically active population.

No fewer than 40,000 jobs are wiped out each year as the crisis of capitalism deepens. It has been estimated that at least 80 per cent of Africans aged between 18 and 26 have never had permanent employment. And all this while only 83 per cent of South Africa’s productive capacity is being used and about one fifth of its factory space lies idle.

It is hardly surprising therefore that a member of the racist white parlia-

ment could warn that “the plight of unemployed blacks in present-day economic conditions does not encourage them to support the free-enterprise system”.

More and more black workers are being reduced to poverty and starvation as wages fail to keep pace with inflation and prices constantly rise. Even white workers who always believed that apartheid would guarantee them a secure livelihood are being forced to learn new lessons.

Inflation and recession know no “colour bar” and are incessantly gnawing away at the living standard of all workers.

Nor is the black petty bourgeoisie being spared from the ravages of decaying capitalism. Deep-seated recession and monetary instability lead to more and more small businesses being closed, with the banks only prepared to extend credit to the major conglomerates, which are considered to be “safer” investments.

Struggle on the basis of transitional demands

The rotten nature of the economic system makes it imperative that our struggle be guided by transitional demands.

These demands begin from the day-to-day struggles of the exploited and oppressed, but they are so formulated as to expose in consistent and revolutionary ways the true source of the masses’ misery and impoverishment – the system of capitalism itself.

Work for all! For job-sharing without loss of pay!

It is our duty to ensure that it is not the working class who is made to bear the brunt of the decline of the capitalist system.

Unemployment and pauperisation not only limit the capacity of the working class to engage their class enemies in battle, but it is also from these “declassed” sections of the masses that capitalism is often able to recruit the “human dust” for its vigilante squads.

Under dying capitalism our principal demand must therefore be the RIGHT to a job for all. If capitalism is the “best” of all possible systems, as the bosses never tire of telling the workers, then it must prove it by guaranteeing WORK FOR ALL! It must guarantee that there will be no retrenchments [redundancies].

Furthermore, it must guarantee that if a factory is no longer able to function at its full capacity there will be no lay-offs, but that instead the working day will be equally divided

among the workers without any decrease in wages.

If the capitalist cannot provide the basic right to a job, then, as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has said: “We don’t want the bosses’ system”.

For wages linked to inflation! For every price increase, a wage increase!

The working class has suffered sustained attacks on its standard of living. We must therefore raise the demand for wages which guarantee the workers a secure standard of living and, above all, which keep pace with the rate of inflation.

An old and “favourite” trick of the bosses is to take back quickly with the one hand what they give with the other. Built into all wage agreements therefore must be the proviso of automatic wage increases with any price increases.

We can best ensure that unions will not be caught off guard if we establish PRICE COMMITTEES to monitor the situation constantly. These committees should be made up of members of all groups of the oppressed – workers, unemployment, students, housewives, etc. – and should become key organs of the united front, regularly providing the unions with information vital to a successful struggle against the bosses.

For worker control to end secret deals and the withdrawal of capital!

We must demand greater control over the workplace by workers themselves. With capitalism in its death-throes, the workers’ position becomes increasingly insecure.

Decisions to relocate factories or to form mergers are taken behind the backs of the workers, invariably leading to a worsening of their plight. We must therefore demand an end to all secret deals and an end to all business secrets!

The world-wide crisis of capitalism, coupled with the political crisis inside South Africa, makes the international bourgeoisie fearful for their investments in the country. They are constantly on the look-out for ways in which they can withdraw their capital, not because they want to isolate the South African government, but because they are beginning to lose confidence in the government’s ability to guarantee the former high returns on their investments.

The sanctions and disinvestment campaigns have become useful pretexts for finance capital to withdraw large sums of money from the country. Those corporations which have left

would of course have withdrawn their capital, sanctions or no sanctions, if their investments no longer proved profitable.

Withdrawing under the guise of "sanctions" gives them, they believe, a certain "credibility" which will stand them in good stead if a black petty-bourgeoisie nationalist government is installed in power.

We certainly have no wish to see the international bourgeoisie remain in our country. They can leave if they choose but without taking any capital out of the country in whatever form. This is wealth that the South African working class has produced and it is the workers who must decide what happen to it.

We must therefore call for the establishment of FACTORY COMMITTEES, which monitor every aspect of the running of a company, and independently of which the bosses are not allowed to take any decisions. As a vital component of the united front, the factory committees will be able to translate into concrete reality the demand for greater workers' control over the workplace.

The recent strike of the General Motors workers in Port Elizabeth who (after the fake pull-out of capital by the American parent company) demanded that worker representatives also serve on the board of the company, is testimony to the fact that the working class is learning from its own experience, that unless they have greater control over their bosses there is no guarantee of a secure future for them.

Win over the unemployed! Fight for a programme of public works!

Unless we take up the struggle of the unemployed in a serious and consistent way we shall see more and more of their number being recruited into the armed forces of the state, its "kitskonstabels" [special constables] and its vigilante squads.

But it is not enough to call for the establishment of unions for the unemployed. To win the unemployed over to the side of the class struggle means to convince them in practice that only by uniting with the rest of the proletariat is there any hope of a solution to their problem.

We must therefore take up the fight that the government begin a PROGRAMME OF PUBLIC WORKS! As an immediate priority the students need schools and the oppressed need houses. Such is the sharp shortfall in only these areas that just to provide this will absorb hundreds of thousands of unemployed.

We must also never tire of pointing out to the masses the complete absurdity and wanton wastefulness of the capitalist system. Despite the fact that there is a chronic shortage of schools and houses for the oppressed, more than 27,000 jobs have disappeared in the building industry since 1982!

In the campaign to win over the unemployed, the establishment of LOCALS can play a crucial role. If all the exploited and oppressed join – unionised workers, non-unionised workers, unemployed, youth, housewives – they can become the main organs which link the factory struggles with township struggles in a dynamic fighting unity.

What gives LOCALS such a special significance is that the strongest organisation of the working class, COSATU, has called for their formation.

Recognition of unions for farm labourers and domestic workers!

Among the different sections of the South African working class it is certainly the farm labourer and the domestic workers who are the least protected against their bosses.

The fact that their unions do not have legal recognition (in reality farm workers do not even have the right to organise), and that they are not covered by any minimum wage legislation, means that they are forced to eke out an existence on a starvation wage. Farm labourers and domestic workers also do not qualify for unemployment benefits or old age provision.

It is our duty to ensure that all members of the working class are always in the best possible position to conduct their struggle against their capitalist exploiters. By advancing the call for the recognition of unions for farm labourers and domestic workers we will not only create more favourable conditions for their struggle to be waged, but will also bring their struggle into closer unity and harmony with that of the rest of the proletariat.

Women workers are proletarian fighters!

More than half of the South African working class is made up of women. Yet only a small percentage of women workers is represented in the organisation of the masses.

We must consistently strive to bring more and more women workers into the class struggle. This means ridding ourselves of our chauvinist ideas, promoting the formation of a women's section in the united front, and consistently agitating for the establishment of creches and child-care centres which will relieve women of the sole responsibility for child rearing

and thereby free them in increasing numbers to take their place alongside the men workers as equals and comrades-in-arms.

To perpetuate the existing divisions between men workers and women workers is to weaken substantially the fighting potential of the working class and to delay for a long time the day of reckoning between the bosses and the proletariat!

Students and young workers are the battalions of the proletariat!

No one can deny the vanguard role that the youth have been playing in the struggle over the past few years.

Through their heroism and readiness for self-sacrifice they have acted as catalysts, drawing greater and greater numbers of the oppressed masses into the struggle.

Of all the sections of the working class, the young workers are always the most ready to do battle against the bosses. Their youthfulness makes them susceptible to new ideas, and while some older workers may still have illusions about the capitalist system more and more young workers are enthusiastically embracing socialism as the only alternative to the system of wage slavery.

In their exuberance and boundless energy however the youth often run far ahead of the rest of the exploited and oppressed. Often too, they incorrectly interpret the caution of the older workers (gained from years of experience) as "dragging of the feet" and conservatism.

Certainly the youth must always strive to infuse the struggle with a greater militancy and must always be looking for ways in which to raise the struggle to a higher level.

But the youth must be made to realise that unless the working class as a whole leads the struggle, there is no hope that apartheid-capitalism will be overthrown. The task of the young proletarian fighters is therefore not to try to usurp the role of the proletariat but to harmonise their struggle with that of the working class.

Patience with older workers and less militant workers must replace the tendency to be dismissive. Careful and repeated explanation of the goals of the struggle must replace compulsion; young workers must show a readiness to learn from the older members of the proletariat; above all, joint and carefully drawn-up plans for the struggle must replace "adventurism".

Given the role that the youth have been playing until now, there can be no doubt however that it is the youth who

will form the main fighting battalions of the proletariat.

Build defence committees to protect the struggle.

The only way in which the racist rulers can sustain their vicious system of wage slavery is through the institution of a merciless reign of terror.

Suppression of the trade union movement, harassment and arrests of union officials, the beating-up and murdering of workers (BTR Sarmcol, OK Bazaars, Gold Fields Ltd., etc.): this is the reply of bankrupt capitalism to the demands of the working class for a proper standard of living.

More and more also the racist state is using vigilante squads (of which Inkatha is the most prominent) in an attempt to beat back the offensive of the masses.

COSATU's call for DEFENCE COMMITTEES to protect the struggle of the working class must therefore occupy a central place in the programme of action. When workers are on strike, when they are picketing, when they are involved in a factory occupation or a sit-in strike, defence committees must be built as the fighting attachments of the united front.

At the time this is written, one of the most significant battles of the masses of the past two-three years stands in great danger of being drowned in blood.

The countryside rent strike, which has been a source of inspiration for all of the exploited and oppressed, is seen by the racist rulers as too serious a threat to allow it to continue indefinitely. They are hatching all sorts of plots to reverse the gains that the masses have made, and as soon as they detect any sign of weakness, they will not hesitate to bring the full might of the state to bear on the resisters.

To delay in building defence committees will thus mean making it easier for the racist state to succeed in breaking the resistance of the masses.

Prepare for insurrection! Organise towards the general strike!

While our programme of action must of necessity begin from defensive struggles, we must also realise that every forward march that the masses make is going to bring them into every greater conflict with the racist rulers.

Increasingly, defensive measures are going to give way to offensive ones and more and more the struggle of the masses is going to assume the form of civil war as apartheid-capitalism is shown as not only unwilling to satisfy their demands but also incapable of doing so.

The role of the working class as the leading and most revolutionary class in South African society is going to be decisive in this coming battle. Only the working class will be able to provide the struggle with the weapon which can dislodge the racist rule from their seemingly impregnable position – that is the GENERAL STRIKE.

To “predict” when the general strike will take place, or how many such actions will be necessary before the racist state is overthrown, is a futile exercise. Of more importance is for militants to be clear about the role that the general strike plays in the struggle!

The general strike places the call for INSURRECTION on the order of the day. Through it all the resources of the working class are marshalled for battle. It unifies the whole working class, gives it a concrete sense of its power and strength and, by drawing the rest of the oppressed masses behind the working class, creates the conditions for the masses to struggle for power.

A programme of action that stops short of placing such revolutionary tasks before the mass of workers will not be able to mobilise them even for defensive struggles.

Only if we present the masses with a programme which not only calls on them to make sacrifices for the struggle but also prepares them for victory, can we expect them to give it their full support.

No bosses' sanctions but international working-class action!

We must reveal to the working class in South Africa who its true allies are – the international proletariat.

The mass of workers must be taught to place their faith not in sanctions that are dependent on the “goodwill” of bourgeois governments, not on the “conscience” of finance capital, but on international working-class solidarity in action.

Militants in Britain and in other countries who successfully implement the trade union action against South Africa – provided that this is done in harmony with the South African working class – will be able to speed up the development of a truly revolutionary consciousness among the workers in South Africa.

The fraternal links that have been established between the NUM (Britain) and the NUM (South Africa) and the trip abroad of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWEUSA) representatives to secure international working-class support for the striking OK Bazaars

workers are the first promising steps in this direction.

The programme of action and the united front are demanded by the masses!

The longing for greater unity in the struggle is felt deeply and acutely by all of the oppressed and exploited. It is felt particularly sharply by those who are newly entering the struggle – militant young workers.

But the older and more experienced layers of the masses are also becoming impatient with their leaders' lack of clarity and sectarianism. They want to be given the opportunity to struggle in unity with all the oppressed and exploited.

To fail to provide the struggle with a programme or action – to obstruct in any way the building of the united front which alone will be able to implement it – is to desert the masses in their hour of greatest need.

The proletarian party alone can ensure victory!

The principal duty of the revolutionaries is to establish communist cells in the mass movement and to fight conscientiously for the adoption of a revolutionary programme of action in the place of the ad-hocism and regionalism that now characterises the struggle.

They must also consistently agitate for and work towards the building of a united front to implement this programme.

Only if these revolutionaries at the same time fight for the building of a centralised proletarian party that is guided by the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism, will the programme of action and the united front not only see the light of day, but also become the means for victory of the exploited and oppressed over the racist ruling class.

- **Forward to a workers' government!**
- **Forward to a revolutionary programme of action for the South African struggle!**
- **Forward to international working-class solidarity with the South African revolution!**
- **Forward to the building of a Bolshevick-Leninist party in South Africa!**

Where is Ukraine going? And where is Europe Going?

By Balazs Nagy,
April 2014

"The Ukrainian question is destined in the immediate future to play an enormous role in the life of Europe." (Trotsky)
All commentators on the revolutionary process unfolding in Ukraine express general confusion mingled with anxiety; their confusion arises from an inability to understand what is going on, while the anxiety is provoked by the pervasive threat of war. They are at a loss, and it shows in the wide range of explanations and solutions on offer and programmes proposed, programmes which, themselves born of the widespread confusion, also help to feed it.

But, broad as the variety of conceptions and proposals seems to be, they all amount, either directly or as a variant, to one of two opposing bourgeois programmes: either they accept and even support the new regime in Kiev and its capitalist European and American godfathers, or they "understand" or are inspired by the Great-Russian ambitions of the bourgeoisie that Putin represents. The stance always more or less varies, of course, according to the particular nature of this or that movement or organisation and its specific place in the political spectrum.

An independence struggle the bourgeoisie perverted – and some people deny!

And so the European bourgeoisie asserts that what we have here is a movement inspired by western democracies which is trying to join their European Union. This refrain is orchestrated across the piece, with development and variations provided by bourgeois propaganda, not forgetting the petit-bourgeois second fiddles. Listening to them, you might be excused for believing that the Ukrainian people are ready to die on the barricades for the kind of democracy Hollande and co. exemplify. When that Europe – with its unelected leaders answerable to no-one, its peremptory decrees and its Troika dictatorship – tries to play the champion of democracy and national independence, the sheer pretentious arrogance is breath-taking. The low cunning involved reveals a profound contempt for Ukrainian workers, making a travesty of their aspirations to real independence and genuine

democracy, and imagining that they don't know what kind of democracy you actually get from Brussels, or what was done to Greece, for example.

Against this vicious and ridiculous lie is ranged the other bourgeois version, that of the Great-Russian neighbour led by Putin. Many find his menacing, ape-like brutality more repulsive than the honeyed but deceitful blandishments of the Europeans, whose rough edges have been smoothed by centuries of cheating and hypocrisy. But Ukraine's revolutionary movement developed precisely against Yanukovich, the front man for Putin representing the parvenu rapacity of the Great-Russian bourgeoisie. A few thousand agitators rattling their weapons, protected by a thinly-disguised foreign army and venal officials, cannot drown out this whole great people's obvious desire for independence.

Only a Marxist analysis can grasp this whole reality and provide a coherent explanation, above all by insisting that, despite all the commentators, this national independence struggle is an objective, and even fundamental, fact of the Ukrainian workers' movement and not some unwholesome blemish. What distort its content and deform its significance are the fake solutions proposed by the managers of European capitalism and their Ukrainian acolytes, up to and including fascists. Even their ostensible predominance and apparent influence prove, in their own way, the powerful vitality of this desire for national independence.

This is not some recent invention of the European bourgeoisie, nor a diabolical fascist plot. It has a long history nourished by centuries of tradition. There is no point in going over here in detail all the struggles for the independence of Ukraine, trapped between the feudal Polish state's desire to expand and the Muscovite state's efforts to centralise. After the glory decades of this struggle in the 17th century, the country was broken up between the two oppressors, and then above all by Russia, and although the fight was never abandoned it also never recovered. Here lie the roots of the inseparable link, nay inextricable entanglement, of social problems with those of

national independence. This close embrace is what, historically, has determined the overall situation in Ukraine right up to the present, as in many other Eastern-European countries. On this point there undoubtedly is a kinship between the struggle in Ukraine and that waged by working people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however different the forms they take. The close correlation between these profoundly mingled problems has been reproduced in a particular form at every historical stage. In the 19th century, in particular, national independence was integral to the demands of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Not only was it indissolubly linked to them in every one of these countries, it formed the indispensable pedestal on which they rested.

This organic and uninterrupted connection was naturally reproduced in Ukraine during the Soviet period insofar as the counter-revolutionary turn on the part of the Stalinist bureaucracy installed a political regime which fell far short of bourgeois-democratic freedoms, to say nothing of those of a socialist character. In his fundamental critique of the Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky revealed that this anti-working class caste from the outset erected its counter-revolutionary political policies on the wreckage of political freedoms, including those of a bourgeois-democratic nature, and that what necessarily crowned its regime was the Great-Russian oppression of all the peoples of the USSR. It was no accident that he placed the question of national independence at the very heart of what he wrote on Ukraine:

"Nowhere did restrictions, purges, repressions, and in general all forms of bureaucratic hooliganism assume such murderous sweep as they did in the Ukraine ... (which) became an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR." (*"The Ukrainian Question"* in *Writings of Leon Trotsky [1938-39]*, Pathfinder Press New York 1974, pp. 302-303.) That same year he devoted several articles to Ukraine, clearly explaining the need for a struggle for national independence as a major factor in this fundamental interdependence.

In the light of this one and only thread capable of guiding our current orientation, the positions that some have adopted, even if they fraudulently present themselves as Marxist or even Trotskyist, look dangerously simplistic and mistaken. This is true of the "World Socialist Web Site" of the American David North and Co. which, in their inveterate sectarianism, squarely refuse to recognise the authentic popular character of the independence struggle. They write that: "Washington and Berlin ... are stoking an explosion of tensions between various ethnic and religious groups...", having already declared that: "The principal responsibility for the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine rests with the United States and Germany".

(*The Crisis in Ukraine*, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/03/03/pers-m03.html>)

This sectarianism in relation to national demands goes hand in hand with identifying the whole movement, including its democratic demands, with the fascist contortions acting on its surface. "Nor is there", they say, "the slightest democratic content to the fascist-dominated protest movement in Kiev and western Ukraine ..."

What chiefly characterises explanations of this sort is the almost total disappearance of the working masses, who at most appear as frail and impotent playthings of the bourgeois manipulators of Europe. On the other hand the bourgeoisie, German and American – or even Russian! – in this case, are seen as the overwhelming, ubiquitous powers able to unleash and organise this whole movement.

Sadly, Comrade Melancon in France has also fallen victim to this confusion. In a hasty initial reaction to the Ukrainian events in his personal blog, he wrote that he found Putin's reaction to the machinations of the European Union understandable. Without defending the EU, we still have to say his opinion is wrong, especially since it brings a note of discord into party devoted to serving the interests of working people. As it goes, he later corrected this mistake inspired by a superficial impressionism, but his position remains at the level of vague, contemplative generalities that hardly go beyond the narrow limitations of the bourgeois view.

Again on national independence and how to solve it

There have been relatively few serious efforts, overall, to go beyond interpretations which steer a way around the immediate surface of things.

You can find such efforts in the accounts provided by some workers and/or their trade unions who are present as participants in or observers of these movements. Their testimony is unanimous: This is a general popular movement against the then existing government's destructive policies of national oppression. Onto this groundswell a variety of bourgeois programmes have been grafted which have tried to channel it into this or that direction.

On the other hand, you can see the same sort of thing in commentaries by those outside Ukraine who have been through the school of Trotskyism or still lay claim this Marxism of our day, and who conceive these current upsurges, however vaguely, as class movements and struggles. An article by Comrade Philippe Alcoy of the New Anti-Capitalist Party's (NPA) Revolutionary Communist Current contains reflections of this type. But sadly his efforts also remain at the level of the superficial contemplation of simple facts, even though one should not identify him entirely with other appreciations, which can be criticised for various imperfections, the most significant of which are closely bound up with the problems raised above.

Comrade Alcoy's view is that the struggle for Ukraine's national independence – even if he personally thinks that it is a real struggle – is not worth talking about and he obviously thinks it is even something of an embarrassment. Unlike those quoted above, he does not take a hard and fast position, but sort of manoeuvres around this annoying obstacle. More exactly, he considers social problems as the only valid ones and the national problem as a useless and dangerous surrogate, and so gets it off his back. He frankly writes in the second sentence of his article that "popular discontent is a response to much deeper causes than simple 'European aspirations'." Having thus set aside the disturbing question of national independence and the struggle for it, Comrade Alcoy can formulate his bookish and stereotypical demands in the third subtitle of the article: "Put economic, social and political demands of the exploited at the centre of the dispute!"

Here you find the same attempt to replace Marxist analysis of a movement as it is, i.e. in its multiple and contradictory living reality, with a voluntarist construct with its demands dictated by the rigid schemas of a supposed "Marxism", a method often encountered in cadres and leaders of the Fourth Inter-

national deformed by Pablo and Mandel. In the event, he turns his back on the actual struggle being waged for national independence and thus presents the abstraction of a social demand in itself detached from its context, which confers on it a lifeless character. (And anyway he is completely unable to specify what social demands!) This fact obliges me not only to insist on the importance of this national question in general but to put it, as it is presented in reality, at the centre of this article.

The combined and unified existence of social and national problems and the way they are entangled neither contradicts nor detracts from the struggle for social demands. On the contrary, their mutual embrace fertilises and strengthens each of these struggles in their respective domains. The whole of history, especially in the 20th Century, serves to illustrate and emphasise that struggles for national independence have strongly enriched social struggles, giving them greater prominence and redoubled vigour. One can only repeat that it was not just some caprice that led the banner of Ukrainian independence to be raised anew in the struggle against the social gangrene of the bureaucracy, and integrated into the general struggle to liberate the working class.

Now, like many NPA activists, Philippe Alcoy has completely forgotten these teachings of Trotsky's, including his articles on Ukraine. It may very well be that he now rejects these conceptions which were still accepted until quite recently. In any case, the fact that he has gone over to a bourgeois position does not stop our analysis, based on Trotsky's, nor does it prevent us from affirming that if fighting for national independence spurs on the social struggle, the maturity and historical level of the latter in turn determine the character and concrete configuration of that independence. That is why Trotsky firmly stated the only road to Ukrainian national independence: "The program of independence for the Ukraine in the epoch of imperialism is directly and indissolubly bound up with the program of the proletarian revolution." (*Ibid.* p. 305). And he replied in advance to all those bourgeois or "socialists", or even alleged "Marxists", who seek a solution within the confines of the existing context defined by the bourgeoisie.

The way he describes this remains valid today:

"... only political cadavers can continue to place hope in any one of the

factions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie as the leader of the national struggle for emancipation". (*ibid.* p.306).

How true this assertion is leaps to the eye when you see Ukraine being tossed around between two wings of the mafioso comprador bourgeoisie grouped around either Yanukovich or Timochenko, and gnawed away – and threatened – by predatory mafias whose Great-Russian appetites have been whetted in Chechnya and in the Caucasus. Trotsky re-emphasised his conclusion and extended its scope:

"Only hopeless pacifist blockheads are capable of thinking that the emancipation and unification of the Ukraine can be achieved by peaceful democratic means, by referendums, by decisions of the League of Nations, etc. In no way superior to them, of course, are those 'nationalists' who propose to solve the Ukrainian question by entering the service of one imperialism against another." (*Ibid* p. 304.)

And so he arrived, as the logical culmination of his analysis, at the demand for an independent, soviet Ukraine, even then routing more than one schematic "Marxists" along the way. But since then there have been big historical changes which have done more even than war to change the face of the world. And in line with this concrete historical development, this same demand put forward by Trotsky, although identical at bottom, is posed somewhat differently in its form, in line with considerable alterations in the general context.

On what the collapse of the USSR means

The greatest of these changes is beyond argument the fall of the USSR, of which Ukraine was an integral part, brought about by the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Now if many sincere socialist who have lost their way and even many so-called "Marxists" consider the national struggle of Ukrainians to be a futile waste of time or even dangerous, then they are completely missing out this change in the general context. In what they say about Ukraine in particular, they completely leave out the considerable phenomenon of the collapse of the USSR and what it means.

It is highly characteristic that these people view the effervescence in Ukraine – if they recognise its popular character at all – as being exactly like similar movements which have animated southern Europe and then shaken the Arab countries and also appeared elsewhere. Indeed there is a link between these movements,

however much they differ in form, as singular movements of a re-launch of working people's resistance to capitalism. Their outbreak is a clear sign – of course partial and full of gaps, imperfect and contradictory, but very real – of a step forward in and growing maturity of an awakening of the movement of working people. That is the basis of their shared kinship and certainly the turmoil in Ukraine is part of that. But we all know that here it embodies a quite different reality from similar events elsewhere, i.e. the collapse of the USSR.

But all commentators without exception, including "lefts", pseudo- or ex-Marxists, also "forget" this fact, although it is pregnant with meaning. The world working class lost its state, its forward bastion in its class war against capital, for all that that bastion was in an advanced state of dilapidation, undermined as it was by the parasitical bureaucracy. This loss constituted an historic loss for the whole working class, whatever the differing (and often opposed) views on these matters held by various currents around the world. It marked the end of an epoch and the start of a new one, the latter marked by a radical swing in the international balance of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie and thus of the triumphant advance of that class's reactionary neo-liberal wing, based on immense losses and successive retreats by the working class.

If the commentators mentioned above so obviously avert their eyes from the collapse of the USSR, the reason is that they clearly do not know what to make of it, either at an international level or as regards Ukraine in particular. And that is why they elect to remain silent on this embarrassing question, as if nothing had happened. That is why their views on Ukraine lack all perspective and depth and are reduced, apart from empty and inappropriate recipes, to a banal description of events. Having summarised the international effects of the collapse of the USSR, we should examine its consequences in the countries of which it was made up, Ukraine in particular. That is the only way to understand events and sketch a viable solution.

While the USSR has collapsed, the Stalinist bureaucracy itself has not disappeared from the country but, like matter in nature, it has changed. In the counter-revolutionary process of dismantling the USSR, the major part of it has simply been content to mutate into the new bourgeoisie of each country in the former union. No-one has the right

to ignore this significant fact, although bourgeois propagandists like to conceal it, while the whole of the more thoughtful "left" use sleight of hand to do so. This new class has completed this reactionary turn, which is bound up with its own consolidation, with a cupidity that is all the more rapacious and a brutality that is all the more determined for it having arrived as the latecomer to the world bourgeoisie's feast, stretching from Russia's Putin with his Great-Russian dreams and his unacknowledged idols including the Tsars and Stalin, to Ukraine in the hands of the Timochenko and Yanukovich clans, by way of Kazakhstan and Belarus.

This liquidation of the USSR and its counter-revolutionary social transformation took place in bitter class struggle in which the Soviet working class, initially aroused by the hope of achieving its own aims against the bureaucracy, mobilised massively. But very quickly this struggle itself turned into a series of defensive struggles lasting a whole decade to protect its social gains against the painful installation of the new bourgeoisie. Of course, bourgeois propagandists had a material interest in keeping completely silent about these struggles, and we can only sketch them in summary form here.

This movement started in July 1989 in the great Kuzbas industrial and coal-mining region in western Siberia, and it immediately spread to the miners in the Donbas in Ukraine and those in Vorkuta in the high north of Russia. After this first wave of great strikes, there was a second in 1993 in Ukraine, with 1.5 million miners, electricity workers and engineering workers on strike, centred in the Donbas. As Comrade Alcoy wrote in another article, in this strike "... the Donbas miners, seeing the disastrous effects of the application of pro-market reforms, came into conflict with the new Ukrainian authorities." They brought down the first president of the new Ukraine, Kravchuk and, alongside their wage demands, lent support to pro-bourgeois formations.

In fact, from the very start these movement were marked by a howling contradiction. Besides typically working class demands, and other, broader ones which seem to have come straight off the page of the programme worked out by Trotsky (which workers found out of their spontaneous class instinct), they advanced the demand for a market economy against the bureaucracy's monstrous planning system. That was how they were duped and their movement exploited by bourgeois for-

mations and conned by this or that clan in the nascent bourgeoisie. And so, disappointed by the Timoshenko clan's rapacious policies, they most recently supported "regionalism", that special form of nationalism of the clan which finds its living incarnation in Yanukovich.

This spectacular lack of any political clarity of vision is entirely due to the heritage of the Stalinist dictatorship since the end of the 1920s, which established its power on the total annihilation of the Leninist party and maintained itself by falsifying revolutionary ideas and the revolutionary past and one after another eliminating all the genuine cadres and activists of the working class, hermetically isolated from the international workers' movement. The result of this process, this unnatural deviation of the workers' movement, can be compared with what had happened with Solidarnosc in Poland a decade previously, where the Catholic Church played the role of seducer. Since then, first the bureaucracy, and then the new bourgeoisie which arose from its ranks, massively applied the tactic of the carrot and the stick in these countries in order to divide, hijack and corrupt these workers' movement. So it is hardly surprising that by the end of the 1990s a "certain demoralisation" had taken hold of Ukrainian workers, as comrade Alcoy says in one of his articles.

But when in his latest article the same comrade writes: "A certain basic weakness in this movement (recent events in Ukraine) is the absence of the organised working class", he speaks completely in – the abstract. In particular he leaves out the concrete fact that this movement is not simply absent, but has been conned, de-natured and weakened by a series of disappointments and defeats. So the "absence" is not just due to some sort of inattention but arises from a long run of defeats, so that the Ukrainian working class on the one hand is economically and socially bled white and on the other has not yet been able to grasp, digest and overcome its serious disappointments and grave errors of judgement. So comrade Alcoy is right, but – only abstractly. But in the concrete situation of this defeat, his recommendations about "advancing social demands of the exploited" rings false, since the advice has no traction in real life. To get out of this reality of a tragic blind alley, Ukrainian workers don't need incantations of this sort, they need a real electrifying jolt from the international workers' movement.

Meanwhile all the evidence indicates that the situation in Ukraine and all the countries of the former USSR confirms Trotsky's sombre prognosis in the case of a possible counter-revolutionary turn by the USSR, not just on the social level but also in relation to the national independence of the various peoples. Unless this evidence is looked squarely in the face, there can only be a blind groping forward.

Since 1989 workers have been hard hit by persistent and monstrous inflation of the order of several hundreds of points along with unrestrained privatisation accompanied by massive closures of unprofitable factories and mines, late and deferred payment of wages and the unemployed living in poverty. Even bourgeois western economists recognise that these countries have experienced "the highest levels of inequality ever measured" and that between 1989 and 1995, despite the wealth of unscrupulous Mafioso businessmen, per capita incomes fell by 62% in Ukraine and 42% in Russia, but "only" 26% in Poland. (*Le Monde*, 13 March 2014). The list goes on, leading to a natural conclusion: the only road to solving these severe problems is socialism. This is the main conclusion that Ukrainian workers could – and should – reach, as a whole, rather than some vague, neutral and uncertain "social demand".

In general it can be established that the working class of the former USSR, and therefore also its Ukrainian portion too, suffered a crushing defeat in 1989-1992, followed by a series of retreats and a general worsening in its situation. But for all that, it should not be said that the victorious bourgeoisie has been able definitively to consolidate its power.

Throughout the former USSR, with the exception perhaps of Russia, local economies have only been able to integrate into the world economy as its most ramshackle portions, largely subordinated and exploited as colonies. Only the new Russian bourgeoisie can try to offset its economic weaknesses and backwardness by adopting Great-Russian aggression towards the other former soviet countries. Everywhere these bourgeoisies, feeble and rickety because, like the mafia, they are based on economic predation rather than on a rise in production, are torn apart by vicious struggles between various local clans. They are, therefore, quite incapable of furnishing a solid foundation for political authorities which are profoundly unstable and can only maintain themselves through merciless dictator-

ships. These are instable regimes of permanent crisis, which have been unmasked as such by recent movements in Ukraine and which render this victory of the bourgeoisie dicey and relative.

Under these circumstances it would be a mistake to think that the overall process unleashed in 1989 has been completed as a movement. On the contrary, it is experiencing a new upsurge in Ukraine whose impact on other countries is still not easy to assess. In any case, the Ukrainian (and other) working classes may have lost a lot of battles, but no one has the right to say they have lost the war, whereas we can say here and now that all the anaemic bourgeois regimes established on the ruins of the USSR are interregnums, historical accidents, just an unhappy interlude in humanity's development.

Ukraine and the Question of Europe

The other big change which has altered not just the general framework of politics but also to a large extent its content and form has been the attempt at European unification and how it has evolved. This problem raises a number of questions in relation to Ukraine, too, especially since Ukrainians themselves see it as central and also because the issue has been pretty well muddled by the comments of both supporters and opponents of this unification.

From the outset I should emphasise how wrong it is to condemn out of hand the desire of working people in Ukraine to join Europe without examining more thoroughly the circumstances and the content of what they are asking for. After all, even organisations to the left of the socialist party are in this Europe and the only organisations agitating to get out of it are those of the – fascists.

It would be a gross error to think that the European aspirations of working people in Ukraine somehow represent a desire to line up behind Barroso and his ilk. It would be a massive over-simplification, since people who have only just shaken off a clique of predators in order to achieve national independence are certainly not about to carry out the kind of "recommendations" that issue from Brussels or submit to the Troika, whose cruel voracity far outstrips all the Ukrainian oligarchs and Putin's lot put together.

So, contrary to the majority of bourgeois commentators whom quite a lot of working-class activists unfortunately take as good coin, the only Europe the working people of Ukraine want to join is one that is truly free and genuinely democratic, just like their French,

German or Greek sisters and brothers. There is no major difference between them, even though some Ukrainian working people do still harbour illusions in the Europe of Brussels. The division that you can be sure exists is between Ukrainian and European workers on the one hand and the oligarchy in each and every country on the other. And we all know very well that fascist don't want Europe either, not the French ones, not the ones in any other country, and certainly not the ones in Ukraine.

These are the basic facts of the problem, which are more decisive than any fleeting impressions or passing illusions one might have. So this is the basis on which to look for a real solution, and certainly not by turning your back on it.

The European question is not just considerable in importance, it is absolutely fundamental. Even back when there was still a USSR – and no European unification of any sort – Trotsky drew his organisation's attention to how decisive the relationship between Ukraine and Europe was: "The Fourth International must clearly

understand the importance of the Ukrainian question in the fate not only of Southeastern and Eastern Europe but also of Europe as a whole." (*Ibid.* p. 304).

Today, Ukraine's importance to Europe has grown even further while, in return, Europe's has grown perhaps even more for Ukraine. In fact it is obvious to all that Ukraine is in a complete blind alley if it stays where it was on the eve of the present big movements. Its opposition to one of the big clans of oligarchs has been exploited to achieve the victory of a different clan, without the workers' conditions improving, in fact just the opposite.

In the same way, her struggle for national independence was perverted into an extreme bourgeois nationalism which faced it with a false choice between the European bourgeoisie and Putin's Russia, leading to the brink of war. Cooperation between the Ukrainian and Russian working class, which is a necessary condition if the process of their respective defeats is to be turned around into a united movement against the oligarchs running these countries, has been severely compromised by the

out-and-out nationalisms on both sides of the border.

The only way to break the deadlock is to overcome the national frameworks which obstruct a satisfactory solution. That can only be done at a European level. Not in bourgeois Europe as we know it, which, by the way, so far from being united, faces dislocation under the pressure of its own contradictions. It requires all those organisations which speak on behalf of working people to go beyond the stage of mere opposition to this bourgeois Europe, a stage which does not amount to a policy but merely paralyses all these organisations within an outmoded national framework.

Only the struggle for a working people's Europe can bring a solution not just to the problems faced by working people in the west but also that of Ukrainian national independence.

It is also the only way to overcome the defeat inflicted by and in the liquidation of the USSR by uniting working people, including Ukrainians and Russians, in a fight against all oligarchs in Europe East and West.

Why did Putin invade the Crimea?

**By Radolslav Pavlovic,
April 2014**

Since Ukraine was declared independent in 1991, Russia has had the use of the Crimea as a base for its Southern Fleet along with 25,000 personnel through a long-term contract in due and proper form. The majority of the population speaks Russian, so their support is secure. The Russian army set up shop there as a state within a state. Never for a single moment has Kiev had the slightest intention of putting this contract into question, partly because it brought them certain advantages and partly because the military relationship of forces meant it was inviolable. The coup d'état has shown that the Ukrainian army's presence there is mainly symbolic. There was no "Maidan" protest in Crimea, just Russian propaganda about a "Nazi" coup d'état in Kiev.

Nor was there any economic interest for Russia, who now will have to bear the enormous cost of paying the salaries, pensions and welfare benefits

for which the local state is responsible. Not to mention the cost of gas, sold cheaply to Ukraine when the government there is amenable, but at prohibitive cost when the government shows signs of independence (but then cannot pay the bill). In neither case does Russia make a great deal out of it. To supply the peninsula, Putin will have to either cross Ukrainian territory or take over more of it. That would shake things up much more than Moscow can handle, leave aside the turbulence on the stock market, capital flight and so on. So why is he playing with fire?

Explaining the seizure of the Crimea in terms of Putin's megalomania and desire to stand in monument alongside Stalin and the Tsars is no profounder than blaming the Yugoslav wars on Slobodan Milosevic's delusions of grandeur. Both cases involve incomparably deeper social, class, motive forces than the acrobatics of some tightrope athlete. To get to the answer, you have to dig a lot further than superficial journalistic platitudes.

In fact, a short note such as this does not provide enough space to deal with it as thoroughly as it deserves. Let's just say: Putin invaded Crimea because it was the easiest and most accessible. He can't stop there if he wants to bring Ukraine to heel. At the very least he would have to cut the country in two and take over the whole of the eastern part, with its industries and mining, not for its economic wealth, but to make Ukraine unviable as a state ... the idea that a few hundred kilometres of land are urgently needed to protect Russia's borders against the threat posed by NATO bases is simply a fairy tale. In 1999 an American shell launched from the Adriatic, 400km away as the crow flies, was laser-guided right into Milosevic's conjugal bedroom in his villa in the upper-class Belgrade enclave of Dedinje; to within a metre! They knew Milosevic wasn't actually staying there, they just wanted to show off how powerful and accurate their weapons are. NATO's bases in Turkey are just as able to target the Crimea as anything they

can set up in Kiev. So the “legitimate national defence” argument doesn’t stand up. Russia’s best defence against hostile western imperialism is a free, democratic and friendly Ukrainian state.

No, what is driving Putin is neither economic nor military, but political. And although it’s possible that the few hundred Ukrainian Nazis have been manipulated from the start by the Russian FSB to use as a pretext, the impact they have owes more to the nationalism of a people under threat from their “big brother” than to any fascist ideology. What Putin is afraid of is how hugely the whole nation thirsts for democracy. His fear of the “Maidan” in Kiev is really fear of a “Maidan” in Moscow.

Putin’s regime is in no way different from Yanukovich’s; absolute rule by oligarchs protected by the political police. He could not let the contagion spread unchecked. The Kiev “Maidan” was no different from the ones in Tunisia or Egypt: it was a cry of opposition to the political oligarchy turned financial oligarchy protected by semi-fascist police. Bread and democracy; no more and no less. There were just as many salafists and Muslim Brothers in the mass rallies in Tunisia and Egypt as there were partisans of Bandera in the Kiev versions.

They talk of revolution on one side and fascism on the other! Could anything be more short-sighted? And why did Putin send the fascist Zhirinovskiy as ambassador to the Crimea? And what about the hooded common criminals dressed in military uniforms without insignia? Isn’t it all a bit over the top to talk about spontaneous popular support, or to claim that these battle-ready Cossacks are inspired by democratic values, while those that inspire their Ukrainian counterparts are supposed to be fascist?

The Yanukovich regime decided the social and democratic contagion had “gone on too long” and hoped to stop it in its tracks, using rooftop snipers to ignobly massacre 80 civilians. But it had the opposite effect: Yanukovich and his Berkut forces were forced to flee to avoid being lynched. They could not have done more to help the far right in Ukraine if they had tried. Their failed gamble was followed by another, and this time the stakes are considerably higher. Putin takes the risks he does because he knows that Western Europe and the USA are mainly worried about their own interests and will just bluff to fool the Ukrainians and shore up

their own democratic credentials in the eyes of public opinion. But there are still the Russian people.

Nobody who saw how Greater Serb nationalist propaganda grew in power has anything to learn from today’s Russia. A regime with its back to the wall, unable to meet the people’s elementary social and political needs, or those of the new generation, plays the card of the great nation humiliated by history, the “celestial people”, chosen but not recognised, to turn them against their weaker neighbours, the present or former members of the federation that emerged from the revolution. To sow distrust and then fear among neighbours of different nationalities who have lived together their whole lives in harmony and mutual aid, they had to find something big: propaganda that gets into every household; deliberately provoked bloodshed; the state; the media; glory-seeking intellectuals; journalists who would sell their grandmother for a good meal or a holiday in the sun; the church seeking income and ideological influence; fascist emigrés seeking a country; civil servants who would take orders from the Devil just to keep their petty jobs; and above all the numerous social class emerging from the social ruins, the Lumpenproletariat.

This is a class apart, the product of the ruin of all social classes, including the proletariat; a class ready to sell itself to anyone who suggests a way out of the sewers of society. A class of

sports, show-bizz and dodgy-dealing celebs, envied by a rag-tag army surviving from hand to mouth. Get them drunk on national myths, a patriotic song and some brandy or vodka, and then hand out the weapons. But watch out, anyone who says “no”, even on pacifist moral grounds, must be a traitor or a paedo. Saying “no” takes courage, a lot of it, because there is nothing to face down this “sacred union”, no organised workers’ movement, no progressive or socialist alternative.

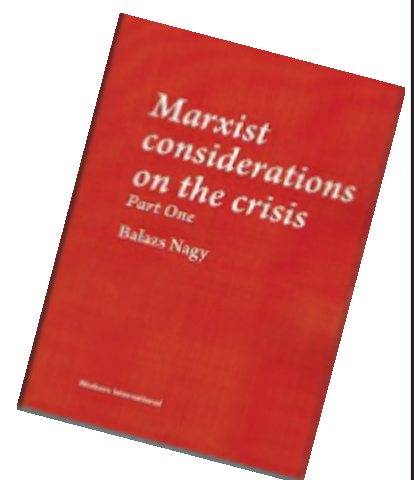
And yet the Russian people has shown its greatness. Not Putin and his admirers, not out of nostalgia for the Russia of the Tsars or Stalin, but in the democratic young people of Moscow. You can spread terror by killing their journalists, you can use the fascist brutes of Putin’s “Nachi” youth movement to stop them demonstrating – the nationalists proclaim “there will be no ‘Maidan’ in Moscow” – but they found the strength to demonstrate 50,000 strong through Moscow against the war in the Crimea: “For your freedom and ours!”. Given the general configuration of forces in Russia, this is an achievement little short of a miracle. A country that could produce a Chernyshevsky and a Dobrolyubov in the darkest days of Tsarism or a Trotsky in the darkest days of Stalinism and an Anna Politovskaia to castigate the war in Chchenya will have what it takes to create the phalanxes of a Russian, Ukrainian and European renewal.

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