

# The Workers Charter

## Workers' Charter

adopted by National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) 1987

### Preamble

We, the working people of South Africa, the main producers of our country's wealth, declare:

*That, as workers, we are daily robbed of a rightful share of the fruits of our labour.*

*That, as black workers, we are subjected to even more intense exploitation by a system of capitalism which uses national domination to keep wages low and profits high.*

*That, as part of the black oppressed whose forebears were conquered by force of arms, we continue to suffer all the social, political, economic and cultural deprivations of a colonised people.*

*That, the most urgent task facing us as workers, as black workers and as part of the black oppressed, is to use our organised strength both at the point of production and among our communities, to put an end to the race tyranny and to help bring about a united, non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa based on one person one vote, as broadly defined in the Freedom Charter.*

*That, we see the winning of such a non-racial democracy as part of a continuous process of creating conditions for the building of a socialist society which will be in the interests of all our people; a society free of all exploitation of person by person which alone can complete the liberation objectives in all spheres of social life.*

*That, we are the most vital social constituent of the broad*

*liberation movement in which we play a part both as individuals and through our trade unions and political organisations. We stand ready to work together with all other classes and groups genuinely committed to a non-racial democracy, at the same time safeguarding our class independence and our right to propagate and mobilise for a socialist future.*

*That, we extend a hand of friendship to our white class brothers and sisters whose long-term interests lie in the unity of all labour – black and white.*

**In order to ensure:**

*that victory in the national liberation struggle is not hijacked by a new exploiting class, of whatever colour;*

*that the immediate interests of the working people are fully safeguarded in the post-apartheid state and;*

*that we are not prevented from asserting our democratic right to win the majority of the people for a socialist future;*

*we, the working people, adopt this charter (as an elaboration of the Freedom Charter) and pledge ourselves to strive together, using our organised strength, to guarantee its implementation.*

**Ownership and control of the economy**

*The commanding heights of the economy shall be placed under the ownership and overall control of the state acting on behalf of the people. Such control shall not be exercised in an over-centralised or commandist way and must ensure active participation in the planning and running of the enterprises by workers at the point of production and through their trade unions.*

*Economic policy shall aim to generate the resources needed to correct the economic imbalances imposed by race domination and bring about wealth redistribution for the benefit of the people as a whole. More particularly, steps shall be taken to do away with the white monopoly of ownership and managerial control.*

*Participation in the state sector by domestic or foreign private capital, where judged necessary, shall not give such capital a controlling share and all enterprises, whether state-owned or private, shall be compelled to safeguard the interests of the workers and the nation as a whole. The continued operation of market forces in the functioning of the economy shall not prevent state intervention in areas relating to the people's basic needs.*

*In the period after the defeat of the race tyranny, the fundamental perspective of working class political and trade union organisations shall be to work for the creation of economic and social conditions making possible a steady advance towards a democratic socialist society.*

### **The right and duty to work and to a living wage**

*Every adult person has a right and duty to work and to receive remuneration according to his or her contribution. The new state shall, as a matter of priority, work to create economic conditions in which jobs are available to all. Until this is achieved the state shall ensure that social support is provided for the unemployed and members of their families.*

*All managerial and administrative posts and other jobs shall be open to every qualified citizen irrespective of race, colour, sex or religion. The equal right of access to jobs, managerial and administrative posts shall be subject to positive measures necessary to correct the imbalances inherited from the era of race discrimination. Public and private institutions shall have a duty to provide facilities*

*for training and opportunities to apply the acquired skills.*

*The State, in consultation with the trade unions, shall adopt and enforce a national minimum wage.*

*Child labour and all forms of forced and semi-forced labour shall be prohibited. Special attention shall be paid to redressing the*

*oppressive situation of workers involved in farm-work, domestic service and those trapped in the so-called homelands.*

## **The right to organisation and struggle**

*There shall be no restrictions on the rights of workers to organise themselves into political parties or trade unions. Trade union organisation shall be based on the principles of “one industry – one union” and “one country – one federation”.*

*Trade unions and their federation shall be completely independent and answerable only to the decisions of their members or affiliates, democratically arrived at. No political party, state organ or enterprise, whether public, private or mixed, shall directly or indirectly interfere with such independence.*

*The state shall ensure that the trade unions, as the key mass social organisation of the organised working class, are given the opportunity to participate at all levels of economic planning and implementation.*

*All workers, in every sector of the economy, shall have the right, through their trade unions, to engage freely in collective bargaining and to use the strike weapon.*

*All legislation dealing with procedures for collective bargaining, including any limitations on the right to strike*

*in exceptional cases, shall require the consent of a majority in the trade union movement.*

*In the case of all other labour legislation there shall be prior consultation with the trade union movement whose views on such proposed legislation should be timeously tabled in parliament.*

### **The right to media access**

*Steps shall be taken to break the existing media monopoly by big business and the State and to ensure effective workers' access to all sections of the media.*

### **The right to family life and social facilities**

*All legislation and labour practices which prevent or interfere with the right of families to live together shall be outlawed. Migrant labour shall be phased out or, in cases where it is unavoidable, provision shall be made for family accommodation during any period of service exceeding three months.*

*The state shall aim to make adequate accommodation and children's schools available to all workers and their families, close to their places of work. All enterprises shall help to create local or regional recreational facilities for the work-force as well as creches and primary health care facilities.*

*No parent, male or female, shall be disadvantaged or disabled from any form of employment by virtue of his or her duty to help rear children and, where necessary, this should be ensured by the creation of special facilities including provision for paid maternity and paternity leave.*

### **The right to health and safety**

*Conditions of work shall not threaten the health, safety and*

*well-being of the work-force or of the community at large, or create serious ecological risks.*

*All workers shall have the right to paid annual leave and paid sick leave.*

*Those injured at work shall receive proper compensation for themselves and their families. Provision shall be made for the rehabilitation of all disabled workers including, where necessary, the provision of alternative employment.*

### **The right to security in old age**

*All workers shall be entitled to an adequate pension or retirement, provided either by the state or the relevant enterprise.*

### **The rights of women workers**

*The state shall aim to integrate all women workers as full and equal participants in the economy. Any form of discrimination against women workers in regard to job allocation, wages, working conditions, training, benefits, etc., shall be prohibited.*

*Positive steps shall be taken to help correct the discrimination suffered by women both in the work-place and the home.*

*Opportunities shall be created to enable women to acquire skills for employment outside the home.*

*It shall be the duty of the state, trade unions, workers, political parties and all other mass and social organisations to ensure effective*

*women's participation at leadership, management and other levels and to take measures, including educational campaigns, to combat all forms of male chauvinism both in the home and*

outside.

*We declare that the above immediate and long-term objectives are in the best interests of all the working people and of society as a whole. As individuals and as part of the organised working class, we pledge to struggle, side by side, for their full implementation.*

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## **In Response to the SA Metalworkers union's “Movement for Socialism” proposal**

*HEWAT BEUKES, a leader of Workers International, previously a member of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) Youth League and now in opposition to the Namibian SWAPO government, interviewed TANGENI NUUKUAWO, a leader of the 1971-72 general strike and also formerly a member of the SWAPO Youth League. This is an extract from the book [“Movement for Socialism”](#)*

*In the first chapter of “Trade Union Struggles for Freedom in South Africa” (page 43 in this book) there is a reference to the 1971-72 general strike in Namibia (then South West Africa) being a prelude to the strike wave in Durban in 1973. The Namibian strike also profoundly affected the freedom movement when 4,000 youth joined the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) in exile.*

The South West African Native Labour Association (SWANLA) was formed in 1943 by the South Africa colonial government for the purpose of herding workers from the north of Namibia to work in the mines in the south.

Under the so-called contract system, workers were gathered together in Ondangua and then driven down to Grootfontein where their assigned bosses would collect them. The compulsory contract was for 18 months. Over time the entire commercial, small industrial, mining and agricultural sectors would be fed by contract labour.

Tangeni experienced this himself and remembers his father who was a labourer in Walvis Bay. He was employed on compulsory 18-month contracts, during which time he could not come home and his wife was not allowed to visit him. Tangeni obtained a permit to visit his father in the compound, but for only one hour at lunchtime.

The beds were concrete slabs protruding from the wall, one on top of the other. Rooms were small for two to four occupants, but during the return of seasonal workers these were overcrowded. The food was the same day after day for 18 months; lunch consisted of porridge with either meat or fish relish, and breakfast consisted of brown bread with jam.

It was slave conditions, performing back-breaking labour without sitting down for more than eight hours a day. Workers developed back problems and illnesses arising from the unsanitary conditions. If you became sick you lost your job.

Many Angolans were contracted. They were much cheaper than the Namibians. Mostly illiterate, they suffered even worse abuse and exploitation. Many lost their lives due to being killed on farms with no relatives to enquire and question their whereabouts. They were slaughtered.

The inhuman conditions built up frustration and resentment to breaking point amongst the vast number of workers housed in large compounds especially in the urban areas, and in 1971 the anger boiled over into a general strike which started on 13

December 1971 and ended on 20 January 1972.

The organisation was underground with the leaders explaining to the workers concentrated in the compounds that their situation could only be changed through political struggle. They needed to overthrow the system. They demanded amongst others:

- the right to free movement;
- better wages and better conditions of work;
- the pass book to be replaced by an I.D.;
- the right to negotiate for pay and to choose their own employers.

However, finally the only change brought about by the strike was the shortening to six months of the compulsory period before returning home to see their families.

Nevertheless the strike had a heavy impact on the economy. Production went down in mines and fishing, also farms were unattended. Most important, it gave way to political organisation and awareness. The colonial regime transported many workers back to the north, but they returned as organised workers, and as a token of defiance and freedom they cut a large section of the border fence between Namibia and Angola.

Before the strike, political organisation was loose. The SWAPO Youth League consisted of unstructured individuals. The Strike gave structure and organisation both to the workers and the Youth League. In 1973 there were school boycotts in the north and organisation of national resistance against the Bantustan policy enforced by the Odendaal Plan of 1964 which put homeland "second tier" authorities in place for the various national groups.

These boycotts and resistance were met by harsh repression by the colonial regime and the homeland authorities. In the north youth and workers were tied to trees and flogged with palm branches. This led to an exodus of four thousand youth in 1974 to join the SWAPO in exile in Zambia; when the Anti-Apartheid Committee interviewed the youth in Lusaka they mostly wanted to hear about the strike

No wonder! The Namibian General Strike defied the largest

colonial military force in Africa – one soldier for every 12 Namibians – and shocked not only the colonial administration for its determination and death defiance but the South African regime itself.

It was a big thing internationally. South African contract workers in mines and industry suffered the same conditions as those who took strike action in Namibia, and so the mood spread. A strike of 300 PUTCO workers in the Transvaal against low wages was followed by the wave of strikes which exploded in Durban in 1973. Our general strike had an impact in South Africa, and the development of workers' struggles in South Africa had an impact on us.

In Namibia the general strike led to a restive period of labour resistance and political organisation culminating in the 1978 Rössing Strike which involved thousands of miners at the Rössing uranium mine and other mines and which saw the formulation of a broad set of demands including trade union demands. This level of development was influenced by the trade union struggles in South Africa.

Today it is particularly important that the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) has broken with the ANC. Even when we joined SWAPO in exile in Zambia in 1974 we were already conscious of the corruption and political poverty of the SWAPO leaders and SWAPO in government has proved this to be true! We knew when we organised the general strike that workers' conditions could only be changed through political struggle. Workers here are faced with the same task as workers in South Africa – to start a Movement for Socialism.

NUMSA is the biggest affiliate of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), but COSATU is in President Zuma's pocket and the ANC can't even implement the Freedom Charter! I thought the general secretary of the ANC was a communist, but then I listened to his statements on relations between the ANC and the unions and realised that the ANC seeks to seriously weaken the workers' situation, and so I agree 100% with NUMSA's decision to work towards a new independent workers' party for socialism.

**It is now our job to educate and organise!**

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# **Reinstate NUMSA in its rightful place in the leadership of COSATU**

*Statement by Workers International*

On 8 November, 33 out of 57 office bearers of the South African trade union federation COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) voted to expel the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) from their federation. NUMSA is the biggest, among the most militant, and certainly the most socialist-minded of the South African trade unions. It was a founder union of COSATU.

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

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

The breaking point was 12 August 2012, when the South African police force shot down 34 striking miners at Marikana. Their

crime was to refuse to sell their labour for less than a living wage.

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

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

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

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

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

First must come a bourgeois democratic revolution. The class that must lead and take power is the national bourgeoisie, which will introduce democratic reforms – the right to self-rule, democratic elections, and equal rights for all sections of society (before the law, in education, in employment) and

so on. This notion is modeled on the formal premise that every colonial and semi-colonial country in the world must pass through the same stages as the developed countries did in the 17<sup>th</sup> (England) 18<sup>th</sup> (France, America) and 19<sup>th</sup> (Italy, Germany) centuries.

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

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

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

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

The deal was made only because the foreign exploiters of the

country feared they faced the seizure of all their property, the mines, the banks, the land and the major industries by a mass resistance led by the working class.

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

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

Crucial for the development of Permanent Revolution is that the working class must be in the leadership of both the struggle for democracy, and for socialism, and the dual processes cannot be separated. The class must have an understanding that it is not challenging one manifestation of capital (like apartheid) but challenging capitalism itself –

and this means that the working class must have its own socialist party to fight for the development of that class consciousness. NUMSA (while remaining a trade union) is currently carrying forward the patient and solid investigation necessary for the building of that party.

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

An example not used in that article is that of South African women. Despite having their equal rights enshrined in the South African constitution, South African women cannot equally participate in society because of the horrifying rate of gender-based violence in South Africa. This flows from the existence of a lumpen layer abandoned with no stake in society through mass unemployment. The lower a South African woman's income, the more she will suffer from sexual harassment, violence and rape.

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

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

sideline the discussion.

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

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

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

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

NUMSA General Secretary Irwin Jim's generation arrived after that fight had taken place – and has had to rediscover the class nature of the ANC government at the cost of 34 striking miners' lives. These leaders still speak as if the two stages of the democratic and socialist transformations can be looked at as two separate processes and are putting the ANC's Freedom Charter forward as their programme. NUMSA (and the six other unions allied to them) are demanding to implement the socialist second stage immediately – locked in struggle with those who (under the guise of saying that 20 years is not long enough to change things) are determined that the second stage will never appear. In order to make sure of that, they must ensure above all that the working class does not take leadership and take power.

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

They and particularly the South African Communist party (of

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

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

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

The international working class must take sides in this split – between class collaborationist “sweetheart” trade union leaderships and those that clearly and unequivocally are fighting for the interests and the independent socialist programme of the working class.

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

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

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

We are still working our way through the class

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

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

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

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

Workers International 25.10.2014

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# Nelson Mandela's Legacy by Bronwen Handyside



*“The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.”*

(Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom, p. 435)

How is it that UK Prime Minister David Cameron can say of Nelson Mandela: “A great light has gone out in the world. Nelson Mandela was a hero of our time”?

How is it that newspapers like the Daily Telegraph, the voice of the British ruling class, can express their regret at Mandela's passing?

Contrast this with Maggie Thatcher's opinion that Mandela and the ANC were nothing but a bunch of murdering terrorists.

Some might say the British ruling class is just jumping on a bandwagon and hoping to bask in some kind of reflected glory from the international outpouring of praise directed towards the ANC leader.

I think their approval of Mandela's history goes deeper than that. It fits in with the world bourgeoisie's global narrative of how the world's brutal inequalities should be solved, which is pumped out on a daily basis by their lackeys in the mass media. It is also propped up by the remnants of the grip that Stalinist ideas retain on the international working class (in particular the idea of “peaceful coexistence” between capitalism and socialism, which arose out of the deal the Stalinist bureaucracy made with imperialism to divide the world between them after the Second World War. This line constantly tended to limit and hamper struggles against imperialism, including those against colonial domination, and blunted them by stifling revolutionary socialist forces and

working through handpicked bureaucratic leaders. This is why uprisings of ANC militants demanding to wage the armed struggle in South Africa were violently, sometimes fatally, suppressed by the ANC's security apparatus(1).)

Brutal systems like apartheid are based on deliberate divisions created between working people across the world. Over centuries they have enabled imperialist countries and capital to exploit labour power and natural resources belonging to other nations and peoples. Apartheid stands out as a particularly anti-human system of institutionalised racism.

The soothing myth the politicians and media are peddling is that such systems do not need to be violently overthrown, but can be resolved peacefully to the benefit of the oppressed through a "negotiated settlement". It says that the protracted and deepening problems of gross inequality between different countries, and different classes within those countries do not emanate, as the siren voices of socialism say, from the capitalist system. They do not require the overthrow of the system of private property (progressing through a programme of nationalisation of the banks, industry, and land) but a process of "civilised" negotiation in which big business (aka capital) preserves the lion's share of the wealth while permitting a minority of the country's bourgeoisie to participate in the feast. The bourgeois narrative tells us that the brutal inequalities we see today (where an Indian child of 11 can be sold into a brothel for life, while on the other side of the world boys like David Cameron and Boris Johnson are born to wealth and power) are nothing to do with the class system, where the majority who produce all the wealth through their labour are exploited by a minority who own all the industries and the land.

This narrative declares that the violence of each side during the oppressed classes' struggle for equality can be brushed over with the "bland screen of moral equivalence"(2) as it was

in South Africa at the so-called "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (a useful model the bourgeoisie rolled out across the world, notably in Northern Ireland). The just violence of the masses in their fight for the equal redistribution of wealth of their nation is declared to be the same as the reactionary violence of those preserving their right to exploit others.

It says: not only is there no necessity for class antagonisms, there are actually really no class divisions in society. It is just that some people are born clever and resourceful and naturally grow rich, while others are not. The British ruling class, on a roll with its austerity measures and full of confidence, has started articulating much more clearly what really lies at the heart of this fairy tale.

Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson, now positioning himself for the Tory leadership – treading the ground where the rest of the Tories still do not quite dare to go – says: "Like it or not, the free market economy is the only show in town. Britain is competing in an increasingly impatient and globalised economy, in which the competition is getting ever stiffer.

"No one can ignore the harshness of that competition, or the inequality that it inevitably accentuates; and I am afraid that violent economic centrifuge is operating on human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth."

Tory Prime Minister Cameron now calls for permanent austerity – "a leaner state" – in other words a country in which the hogging of resources by a tiny elite will plunge millions into poverty, illness, despair and degradation. He wants a world in which such inequality is simply accepted – as a kind of natural phenomenon.

Negotiated settlements such as those in South Africa are the plan B the bourgeoisie rolls out at the point where it realises it can no longer govern with the iron fist, murdering

and torturing to repress dissent, and that it is under threat by a militant working class which is looking to the redistribution of wealth from the despoilers to the toilers. It needs to collaborate with a selected layer of the oppressed which it feels will do business, and [cheap MLB jerseys](#) in particular will collaborate in the suppression of the working class and its political programme of socialism.

This plan appeared in South Africa in the mid-1980s, when the country had become ungovernable, brought to its knees by a popular uprising led by an extraordinary and brand new trade union movement – which above all, and most important of all, had at its heart a conscious workingclass socialist current which produced the Workers Charter, demanding the redistribution of the wealth and the land to the masses of South Africa. “The scent of revolution was in the air”<sup>3</sup>. The Workers Charter was founded in opposition to the ANC’s 30 year old Freedom Charter (which as Nelson Mandela explains, was never a socialist document, but rather a programme for the establishment of a black bourgeoisie).

The plan appeared as it became clear to big business and [AngularJS, filter](#) the banks inside and outside of South Africa that the productivity and therefore the profitability of South [home](#) African workers had plunged into terminal decline as a result of the mass resistance against apartheid.

The suppression of the socialist Workers’ Charter in favour of the reformist (i.e. aimed at reforming capitalism and not overthrowing it) Freedom Charter inside the trade union movement, after the formation of COSATU in 1985, was the signal to South African capital that the way was open to a deal with the ANC.

Talks about the possibility of such a settlement had begun in late 1984, between exiled ANC leaders (in Lusaka and in London) and representatives of South African big business.

Some may say: what's the problem? Didn't that negotiated settlement bring about the enfranchisement of the black masses, and the creation of the "rainbow nation" so highly praised throughout the world's media? But that deal between the white bourgeois exploiters of South Africa and a new and very small black bourgeoisie, together with the violent repression of the working class and its socialist programme, is precisely what is currently bearing fruit in the "new" South Africa. Its government openly pursues the worst of the neo-liberal policies (fiscal discipline, deregulation, free markets and trade liberalisation, privatisation, low taxes and secure property rights) and instructs its police force to shoot down unarmed striking miners in the back (not the first time its police force has shot down protesters against its policies). It is clear why the rhetoric of Thatcher and her political allies was different from Cameron's, because when she was making her pronouncements, the South African ruling class was still hesitating between the iron fist of repression and the necessity of a settlement.

The "new" South Africa has resulted in:

The second most unequal society in the world – more unequal now than before Mandela came to office. The greatest inequality exists between blacks and other racial groups. Black income has virtually flat-lined since the ending of apartheid, [wholesale NBA jerseys](#) in contrast to that of other racial groups, particularly white South Africans.

- 40% unemployment. Importantly, 70% of SA's unemployed are younger than 35, while the unemployment rate among people aged less than 25 is around 50%50% of the population living below the poverty lineMore than half of black children are growing up in povertyAverage life expectancy declining from 62 years in 1990 to 52.6 years in 2012A crisis in public services including housingA collapse in social structures which means the highest rate of rape, gang rape and child rape in the worldThe

highest rate of HIV infection in the worldThe slaughter of 34 striking miners at Marikana, shot for demanding a living wage, after ex-NUM and current ANC leader Cyril Ramaphosa urged both the ANC Police Minister and the mining company Lonmin to deal with them, referring to them as “criminals”.The fabulous enrichment of a tiny minority, like Cyril Ramaphosa, (currently worth \$700m, which the ANC explains he made out of his business acumen – see Boris Johnson’s explanation for the divisions in society), and current ANC president Jacob Zuma who recently did up his residence to the tune of 17.2m of public money

Was it for this that the black masses fought and died?

And was it for this that the millions in the international workers’ movement, students and others waged their decades-long campaign against apartheid, and gave unstinting political and financial support to the exiled ANC, SACP and SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions)?

### **Confusion**

Mandela was surrounded by political forces from the 1960s to the 1980s which sowed confusion by representing him as a “communist” – including the South African and British ruling classes, and the South African Communist party (SACP) (under instructions from their international leaders). The SACP now declares that Mandela was a secret member of their Central Committee at the time of the Rivonia trial, which completely fits with their theory of the necessity for a two-stage revolution for South Africa. First a revolution in which the native bourgeoisie would come to power, followed many, many, many years later by a socialist revolution against capitalism, bringing the working class to power.

But Nelson Mandela never pretended that the ANC was a socialist organisation, with any desire to attack capitalism. He himself said at his Rivonia trial:

“The most important political document ever adopted by the ANC is the Freedom Charter. It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state. The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.”. Later, speaking about [What](#) the Freedom Charter’s demand for the nationalisation of the mines and industrial corporations, Mandela said:

“The charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold mining monopolies that have for centuries plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before.”.

When the constitution of the “new” South Africa was negotiated (by Cyril Ramaphosa and Thabo Mbeki, ANC leader following Mandela), a clause was inserted which, according to the ANC leadership, entirely negates that section of the Freedom Charter which calls for nationalisation of the land, the mines, and the banks. Throughout his life Mandela acted completely in accordance with his principles, which were to build a society in which a black South African bourgeoisie could partake of power and wealth along with the white owners of the banks, industry and the land.

Unfortunately that has produced a society of brutal inequality.

In 2006 Tory leader David Cameron was able to say: “The mistakes my party made in the past with respect to relations with the ANC and sanctions on South Africa make it all the

more important to listen now. The fact that there is so much to celebrate in the new South Africa is not in spite of Mandela and the ANC, it is because of them – and we Conservatives should say so clearly today.” Fortunately the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and other forces in South Africa continue the battle for the working class and its socialist programme. We should lend them every possible support in their fight against the violent repression promoted by the likes of Cyril Ramaphosa and the other bourgeois rulers of South Africa.

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# South Africa

[The Workers Charter 1987](#) [adopted by NUMSA in 1987]

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

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

[A Reply to Martin Jenson: The Numsa moment has it lost momentum?](#)

[What Numsa decided in December 2013](#)

[Reinstate NUMSA into its rightful place in the leadership of COSATU: Statement by Workers International](#)

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

[Numsa President Opening Speech during Central Committee at The Lakes Hotel and Conference Centre on – 16 May 2014](#)

[Statement on the decisions of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa by the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International Conference 29-30 March 2014](#)

[Long live the South African working class as they get ready to storm the heavens! by Balazs Nagy, April 2014](#)

[Numsa on the United Front and the possibilities of establishing a movement for Socialism](#)

[Numsa Views on the state of Class Struggles in South Africa and the Crisis in Cosatu](#)

[NUMSA 2nd Deputy President Comrades Basil Cele on jobs for Youth demonstration](#)

[Numsa national special congress secretariat report](#)

# The challenge that SRWP launch poses to sectarian propagandists:

**Show Us What You've Got!**

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

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

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

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

To show they mean what they say, the forces in the leadership

of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), which initiated this work, have spent 5 years systematically preparing the ground to launch this party.

It was the state-sponsored murder of striking miners at Marikana in July 2012 which dramatically laid bare the reality of society and politics in post-apartheid South Africa. Up to that point the alliance of South African Communist Party (SACP), African National Congress (ANC) and Confederation of South African Trades Unions (Cosatu) had justified and dominated a liberation (in the early 1990s) which has worked less and less for the benefit of the South African masses and more and more in the interests of a small group of black bourgeois and global capital.

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

However, the Alliance government continued on a capitalist road which left no room for what workers needed and wanted. Adherence to bourgeois politics in the 1990s inevitably led to continuing the neo-liberal reforms which had already been

started under the Nationalist regime. The consequences of these policies brought growing resistance from union members and the masses.

For a long time, leaders of Numsa and some other unions tried to shift government policies from within the Alliance. Under pressure from their members, they fought to align Cosatu on policies that defended workers' rights and conditions. This set them on a course which eventually led to an inevitable collision with the SACP and ANC and within Cosatu itself.

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

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

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

## **Dynamics of class struggle**

Quite a few commentators on the left are unable to grasp the class dynamics involved here. How they misconceive the relationship between the Alliance government (whose current President appears to have green-lighted the police attack at Marikana – he certainly publicly excused it), the massacre itself, and the workers' movement and its leaders is quite instructive.

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

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

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

Cope was formed by supporters of President Thabo Mbeki after his nakedly pro-bourgeois policies, and his obscurantist

backwardness over dealing with the aids epidemic allowed Jacob Zuma to force him out of office and replace him. Cope was led by Mosiuoa Lekota, who informed *The Sunday Times* that the ideology of his party would be one that embraces multiracial and multicultural participation in governance and promoting the free market. He denied any connection to Marxism and indicated that Cope was willing to ally itself with the (bourgeois) Democratic Alliance.

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

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

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

### **Abstract and concrete unity**

This Situation Paper even says somewhat later:

“What is especially troubling about the confusing NUMSA situation was that it could not have happened at a more

difficult time for the working class. In 2012, workers had been butchered on a notable occasion the Wonderkop koppie near Marikana ... At that moment, union organisation stood at a premium. It was imperative that all the union federations should stand together like one man and organise a worker fight back of historic proportions. This was not to be. Neither COSATU nor NUMSA were equal to the task.”

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

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

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

Establishing working class unity requires concrete steps,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and the masses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- we live in the consequences of the decay and collapse of the Soviet Union, which is (wrongly) felt and understood by millions of working-class people to demonstrate the collapse of all hope of socialist proletarian revolution. All working-class organisations – political parties and trade unions – have suffered from crisis and decay, and this has led to widespread disillusionment with these organisational forms;

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

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

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

- The working class has held on to its trade unions (in some places and by the skin of their teeth). Those trade unions which have resisted class-collaboration (social partnership) and retained their class-consciousness are now a vital source of strength in the regeneration of working- class politics. Numsa is one example, but Unite the Union in the UK, together with the civil and public servants in PCS, are another. And in the US, many teacher unions are spearheading class struggles in defence of education in their “social movement” campaigns.

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

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

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

The December 2013 Numsa Special Congress clearly sided with the working class in class struggle against the bourgeoisie and recognised that the working class needed a special

organisation – a party – to wage that struggle successfully.

### **A distraction?**

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

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

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

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

Well, at the very most basic level, if it grows properly, the SRWP can and must enter parliament and other elected bodies, push aside the corrupt ANC politicians, the DA etc. and fight to enact policies in the interests of the working people in

economy, justice, housing, health, education, power supply, utilities, public ownership and workers' rights for a start. Single-issue or localised campaigns cannot do this; Trade unions as such cannot do this, but Numsa has decided, as a trade union, to launch a party to unite all the struggles of the South African working class at a political level.

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

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

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

back to life!

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

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

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

The Numsa leaders started their explanations by contrasting

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

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

### **Who is the propagandist?**

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

leadership is”.

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

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

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

and kindness take precedents (sic) in all the affairs of human kind”.

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

“A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people,” as the Russian Marxist, Plekhanov, explained.

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

### **Parties and class consciousness**

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

What does he say about “where they are now in terms of

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

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

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

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

### **Conception of workers' power**

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Appolis needs to stop equivocating and state: does he agree with the preceding paragraph, or has he abandoned Lenin's views on the party completely? There is a good argument to be had about Leninist parties, because his

(Lenin's) views on the matter were systematically falsified in the later Communist International, in particular in one-sided interpretations of the book "What Is To Be Done?". This book is presented as if it proposes a hierarchical, top-down and bureaucratic party structure. All this will have to be clarified in discussion. What is not acceptable at all is the view that the working class can exercise its historical interests without its own, revolutionary, party.

### **Only in revolutionary situations?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This meeting was the almost natural outcome of the working class struggles which exploded in 1971/72 with the General Strike of contract labour nationally in various industries, agriculture and commercial businesses. The reciprocated infusion of the struggle for trade unionism in the massive struggles of the working class in South Africa since 1973

caused not only a pulsation in Namibia but accentuated the political division between the objectives of the workers' struggles on the one hand and the tribalist bourgeois nationalism of the petit bourgeoisie and the tribal royalties and chiefs on the other.

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

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

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

In 1988 the WRP was able successfully to call out national protests against the illegal occupation of Namibia. The SWAPO leadership and the SWANU leader (who is now a SWAPO member) declined the invitation to make the call.

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

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

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

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

January 2019

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# Numsa's New Year Message

Original .pdf here: [NUMSA-Special-Edition-20180125](#)

NUMSA News Special edition

20 January 2018

Message to NUMSA members in welcoming 2018

**Welcome 2018!**

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

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

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

political leadership of all political parties in South Africa.

This is a fact. StatsSA has the figures supporting this fact about the state of the working class and the poor conditions under which we toil. It is another institution under attack, with the recent unceremonious departure of its CEO, as it has the proof of the dismal performance of our government as a result of poor policy choices by the ANC for the past 24 years. StatsSA puts unemployment figures at 27,7 percent but it does not count those unemployed workers that are considered discouraged because they have lost hope of finding a job. If we add include these discouraged workers, unemployment is over 36 per cent and as a result over 30 million South Africans live in abject poverty with no food on their table.

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

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

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

### **The mess that we bring into 2018**

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

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

Remember in 2013 NUMSA was ridiculed for calling on the ANC led Alliance to remove Jacob Zuma. Getting rid of Thabo Mbeki and putting in place Jacob Zuma did not result in a break in the neoliberal agenda. We are distracted from the shocking state of affairs in this country with no compassion for our people, who remain the working poor, exploited by the ruling

class. Our distraction is the soap opera antics of the alliance-made politicians with Jacob Zuma cast in the leading role; he is an embarrassment, moving from one scandal to another.

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

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

The ANC government dumped the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), a policy that affirmed the black majority in development carried by a democratic state. Had we remaining committed to transformation in a manner that change power relations, we could have uprooted racism in South Africa. Instead the ANC-led alliance and government chose to listen to the terrible imperialist advice from the West despite knowing what this advice has done on the African continent. African countries are trapped in poverty and debt having listened to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), they took instructions from multinational capitalist CEOs at the World Economic Forum. Their message is always the same, that government has no business in business. Their actions go even further, undermining the autonomy of governments to determine their development path and creating an environment that makes it virtually impossible for democratic trade unions to exist.

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

These jobs were destroyed by the ANC government's tendering system that has plunged us into a very deep crisis of cronyism and corruption. Billions have been lost from the national fiscus and this government cannot deliver basic services. NUMSA has challenged this path of development, where the government champions outsourcing and casualisation and has stripped state assets. We warned the ANC that a social crisis would unfold unless they dumped these policies and address the land question, restructure the South African economy, nationalise all South Africa's minerals under worker control and ensure that they are beneficiated to champion a job led industrial strategy. Almost 60 percent of our population lives in poverty, a number that grows exponentially each year. Today South Africa is world leader in service delivery protests because there is a crisis in service delivery.

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

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

This has been the fate of the ANC. ANC National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe admits that the biggest issue is corruption but

fails to take responsibility for the policy environment that has allowed this to fester. Instead he says they will be able to defeat corruption because they now have a rich ANC President in Ramaphosa. Mantashe insults honest working class men and women by insinuating that they cannot give good leadership, that only the rich can lead and exposes the ANC as having no revolutionary agenda to liberate the working class. Contrary to his excitement the most corrupt class is the capitalist class it has elicited billions out of this country both legal and illegal and Stenhof is the case in point.

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

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

There will be no radical economic transformation from the ANC because we were sold out by the ANC before 1994, in a deal with white monopoly capital that they will continue to own and control the economy and the land. This deal was negotiated by Ramaphosa and Rolf Meyer of the Nationalist Party regime. Are we supposed to be proud of a worker leader that was willing to leave behind his class? Since then Ramaphosa has been busy becoming rich, his personal riches and opulence made possible

by the policy environment he helped to put in place. He has become a servant to maintain the dominance of white monopoly capital accumulation, a very rich one but a servant none the less.

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

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

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

Nzimande from the cabinet. Their current bravado challenging Zuma is not motivated but a sudden interest in the working class, but a show for Ramaphosa of their availability to once again sell out the working class.

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

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

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

This is not new, GEAR has been all about putting in place austerity. They imposed belt tightening that closed nurses colleges, agricultural colleges, teachers training colleges. It closed irrigation schemes in poor villages and destroyed a state led agricultural sector. They clustered poor municipalities through a process of demarcation and reduced

budget allocations so most working class communities have no meaningful local development plans, leaving those in ghost towns and rural villages condemned to a life of poverty.

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

### **Our demands**

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

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

should be fired and replaced with a competent board that has representation from government, business, labour and civil society.

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

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

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

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

Ramaphosa is using his position politically and in business to champion an agenda at NEDLAC to tamper with the right to strike. He wants to bring back an apartheid practice that before workers can embark on a strike they must first ballot. We defeated it then and we will defeat it again. We must be prepared to take rolling mass action and we will also

challenge it in court as an attack on our constitutional right. Such actions prove that Ramaphosa and the ANC leadership are anti worker, and anti-trade unions. defend your right to strike. We know the DA is fully behind this counter reactionary agenda which is why we will never understand how our members can be confused and vote DA or why a political party that claims to be revolutionary like the EFF would cooperate with DA.

## **Building the Workers Party**

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

- a) The name of the Workers Party and the joining fee.
- b) Its constitution will be revealed very soon.
- c) Its national core will be introduced. Remember the Workers Party will be completely separate from NUMSA. NUMSA will remain an independent worker controlled union that supports the formation of the Workers Party.
- d) We shall very soon announce how many members are needed form to a branch of the Workers Party.
- e) We shall reveal its regalia in terms of T-shirts, and we shall be calling on our members to volunteer and make financial contributions to build the Workers Party. A Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party that is challenge the

present exploitative system of capitalism will not be funded by the capitalist class.

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

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

Inequality is a national crisis, South Africa is the most unequal nation in the world. More than 40 million South Africans have no food. Members of NUMSA and SAFTU know that this is not just a number, these are our people, our children, our mothers and fathers that are caught up in the everyday struggle of what will they eat. Those of us that have jobs are the fortunate one but tomorrow it may be our turn to be retrenched. We can no longer trust the ANC with our members'

lives. It's time to take a stand and fight for workers, for their right to work and to demand that the state must be the employer of last resort.

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

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

### **Building NUMSA and SAFTU**

NUMSA can only be strong and deliver on these noble aspirations for workers and the working class in general if it succeeds as a union to successfully represent workers against

the bosses so quality service by organisers and by all of us in the leadership of NUMSA remains compulsory in 2018.

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

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

In 2017 we have had running battles with employers who consciously take cue from Cyril Ramaphosa national minimum wage. They want to vary down NUMSA members' benefits and conditions in the key collective bargaining sectors of motor and engineering to be paid at R3500 or to half their wages. We reached a wage agreement of 7 percent increase with the majority of employers within SEAFSA and we are expecting to gazette this agreement so that it is extended to all employers in the sector. NUMSA has negotiated at plant level with some

companies, achieving even higher agreements, for example 9 percent at Scaw Metal and 9.5 percent at Nampak. In 2018 we are ready ourselves for battle with those employers that are hell-bent in making sure that the signed agreement in the engineering sector is not extended to include plastic employers and those affiliated to NEASA.

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

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

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

We campaigned against closures of five power stations in Mpumalanga. NUMSA is not against reduction of emissions but we call for just transition that must first guarantee jobs security for workers. In terms of renewables, there must be a social owned renewable sector. It is against this backdrop that NUMSA rejects the introduction of nuclear at the present

moment as the country cannot afford it and it will destroy many jobs in the manufacturing sector as our electricity costs are already uncompetitive. Instead we should invest in gas as a strategic niche of Petroleum South AFRICA (PETROSA), defending existing jobs of PETROSA workers and creating more jobs. There is a lot of gas in South Africa and Mozambique this can be mutually beneficial to both countries.

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

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

NUMSA must address the needs of level five workers that want to break the ceiling on their career path. We are seeking a solution to this through negotiations with employers at the Industry Policy Forum. Another challenge we face is the gap in wages between auto workers in the assembly car plants and component supply and logistics workers. The NUMSA Central Committee calls on all members and shop stewards to recruit workers in companies where we work and we must include workers in service providers to our companies, including security

services, material handling, logistics, canteen workers, component suppliers and cleaners. We must make sure that they are well represented and that NUMSA bargains for them. We cannot win gains for our members whilst there are other workers in our workplaces that are exploited. It is our revolutionary duty of NUMSA members to ensure that these workers are represented by our union.

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

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

Whilst we were still busy celebrating this victory this blood sucker employers decided to appeal this labour court ruling in the constitutional court we pulling all the stops we are taking to senior legal counsel lawyers to go and fight for NUMSA members and all workers in the country to defend this working class victory but we also call on our members to come

to court on that they to demonstrate support for such a ruling and call on the constitutional court not to temper with the previous ruling that fairly makes workers permanent after three months. NUMSA members and all exploited workers must under labour broking slavery must continue to celebrate this victory against scrupulous labour broker employers, ANC and DA leadership that refused to ban labour brokers.

### **What must be done**

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

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

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

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

NUMSA members must remain critical of their union and its leadership and must continue to make every NUMSA shop steward accountable to members, every NUMSA leader accountable

including the President and General Secretary. Our members must not be confused by yellow unions, our union is alive and well, we are a fighting union, a militant union but most of all we are a democratic worker controlled union. Numsa will always uphold organisational renewal through worker democracy leadership. Members are free to contest leadership including that of the Numsa secretariat and the General Secretary through democratic process upheld in our union constitution. The winners of these democratic processes will lead Numsa and the losers must respect elected leadership and continue to make valuable contribution to our union.

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

Be assured that our support for the formation of a workers Party is to ensure that there is political representation of working class interests. NUMSA is South Africa's biggest trade union, we are worker controlled and we intend to remain so. We have no intention of becoming a political party. There are those who will continue to attack this initiative because they fear what is to be born. Defend our union against attacks by government and the ANC led alliance; workers deserve political

representation that has not compromised the working class. This workers Party when its final launched it will be completely separate from NUMSA will be in in the street with workers and the poor.

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

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

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

the struggle for socialism in South Africa. The alternative is the continued savagery and barbarism of capitalism, and civil wars.”

Let us be victorious in 2018. I leave you with a quote from Lenin which better represent the NUMSA moment and the urgent need to turn the NUMSA moment into a working class revolutionary movement in the form of a Workers Party, “What Is To Be Done? Dogmatism And ‘Freedom of Criticism’” (1901).

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

**Viva NUMSA Viva!**

IRVIN JIM

NUMSA General Secretary

Workers Day Celebration, Durban 2017

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

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

By Bob Archer, Jan 2017

Since the end of Apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa has officially been ruled by a Triple Alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and Confederation of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). At its Special National Congress in December 2013, the South African metalworkers' union, Numsa, called for an historic break with the Alliance and adopted a series of initiatives. What they proposed – and how these initiatives have fared – deserves serious and sustained discussion, not just in South Africa and the region, but right around the world. To that extent, Comrade Jensen's article raises important questions which deserve a response.

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

Martin Jensen hails the Numsa turn but is critical about how

Numsa has selected its practical proposals and taken them forward. He also criticises those of us who welcomed and forthrightly promulgated these initiatives.

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

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

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

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

Cde. Jensen has other criticisms of the action programme which Numsa developed in December 2013, describing it as "hardly the issues that could have captured the imagination and concerns

of other workers” and taking Numsa to task for failing to coordinate a campaign for a living wage with Cosatu and above all for not timing strike action to coincide with AMCU, the break-away from the South African mineworkers’ union.

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

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

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

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

“the Numsa leaders, its allies and former Cosatu General

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

"Our trade unions are still bureaucratic and conservative lifeless shells, not prepared to fight and participate in broader struggles of the working class", Cde. Jensen asserts, throwing in for good measure "bureaucratisation... , union chauvinism and not connecting with other trade unions ... conservative collective bargaining arrangements ... participation in the capitalist economy through its investment company" and "the social distance of the union leadership from its members..."

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

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

Numsa has been in a constant dialogue with the leaderships of

other unions and has demonstrated consistently to the memberships of these unions its principled efforts to find the way out of the failure of the NDR

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

The Numsa leaders are precisely providing “serious and consistent” leadership. Cde. Jensen offers a kind of political ambulance-chasing after whatever events appear to be the most impressive at the time.

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

Let’s start with the really big one:

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

From the heights of his revolutionary consciousness (or “sober analysis of the overall relation of forces” as he calls it), Cde. Jensen seems to think that the best help he can give

Numsa is: "Stop being reformist and start being revolutionary!" No doubt he hopes this advice will fall "on fertile ground". The more experienced among us may well be less sanguine. Did not Karl Marx himself say of this approach: "If that's Marxism, then I'm not a Marxist!"

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

MAWU and other unions were born in bold, independent struggles by black workers against a South African capitalism embedded in white minority rule and the Nationalist police state. In these struggles these workers naturally asserted their class independence of the bourgeois/tribalist ANC and its Stalinist supporters in the South African Communist Party. Where the ANC and the SACP promulgated the Freedom Charter, MAWU developed the Workers' Charter with explicitly socialist demands. The Workers' Charter is not a mere empty dogmatic call to revolution, but it is very far from being a reformist programme. (The two documents are conveniently available for study and comparison at <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/1912>)

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

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

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

“Since the Numsa moment and still now” (but in reality since the early 1990s!) “the mass organisations of the working class remain weak or simply non-existent. The general level of class consciousness has remained low. The ‘Left’ is still weak – small, fragmented with limited implantation within the working class. Our trade unions are still bureaucratic and politically conservative lifeless shells, not prepared to fight and participate in broader struggles of the working class”.

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

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

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

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

class.

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

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

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

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

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

There is starting to be a recovery of working-class struggle and socialist consciousness, but it is emerging very tentatively out of the very conditions of the previous defeats and setbacks the movement has suffered. The real danger exists that petit-bourgeois "revolutionary" Marxists sects see these still fragile beginnings – such as the Numsa turn, Bernie Sanders run in the US Democratic Party primaries, the movement which put Jeremy Corbyn into the leadership of the UK Labour Party, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece – and think they are simply an audience for their dogmas, a sphere in which they can build their own groups. At the same time they are impatient, demanding that the movement should produce better results and move faster than it actually can. They are not able to see the working class going through a stage in its own political development.

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

The trade unions in South Africa came under sustained pressure to be "bureaucratic and politically conservative lifeless shells", but it is within the trade unions that workers have collided head-on with the reality that within the Triple Alliance and the government of South Africa the ANC leadership promulgates the policies of the capitalist ruling class and

attacks the rights and the very existence of workers, and that the leading lights in the SACP provide a threadbare theoretical justification for what the ANC leadership is doing.

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

The promises made by the ANC and SACP in the early 1990s were a deception. The tribal elites in the ANC leadership had reached a fundamental agreement with imperialism and the big mining interests that these interests would remain intact. It took a quarter of a century, but over time it became clear to more and more workers and their leaders that they were being conned. The benefits expected and promised from the National Democratic Revolution were not being delivered because there was no move to carry out an NDR. Instead the government has been inflicting neo-liberal attacks on workers and the masses and protecting the interests of big monopolies.

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

The whole dynamic underlying the Numsa turn became very apparent in Numsa General Secretary Cde. Irvin Jim's Ruth First memorial lecture delivered at Wits University, Braamfontein, on 14 August 2014 (see: <http://www.numsa.org.za/article/uth-first-memorial-lecture-del>

[ivered-numsa-general-secretary-cde-irvin-jim-thursday-14-august-2014-great-hall-wits-university-braamfontein/](#)).

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

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

"The Freedom Charter says:

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

- All National Groups Shall have Equal rights

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

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

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

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

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

will take 100 years to transfer 50% percent of the land back to the people ...

- There Shall be Work and Security!

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

- The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!

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

- There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!

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

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

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

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

It is in interrogating the experience of 25 years of Triple Alliance rule that the workers' movement of South Africa starts to find a way back to its revolutionary roots. It is in the persons of the Numsa leadership and their supporters that this interrogation is taking place. Vague references to "revolution" on Cde. Jensen's part, far from assisting their development, serve to repel the more thoughtful, organised trade union activists away from Marxism rather than attracting them to it. Practical advice (bad advice) to tail-end the

demagogues of EEF will not enhance the reputation of the Marxists who give it, but will bring the science of Marxism into disrepute. As Numsa says –

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

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

There is a clear parallel with the British trade unionists (mainly in the United Left group in Unite) who have made up their minds to test to the limit the theory that the working class can find a way to socialism through the election of a left-wing Labour government. Theoretical purists, their eyes fixed on the appearance of the movement, form the "impression" that these workers are "reformists". And so they are, except that nothing stands still. The determination of these activists to put their convictions into practice in the interests of their class and against the class-collaborators in the trade unions and the Labour Party is the condition for a rebirth of socialist consciousness.

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

The conditions exist for unity in action between those of us who are convinced that the future of working people lies in the ending of capitalism and those many people who hope a more limited aim can still bring results, and who certainly are dominated at best by social-democratic and Keynesian

conceptions. The basis for unity in action is that these movements are gearing themselves up to fight on the class issues involved. Within that unity in action lies the potential for a development in consciousness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **“Agency” and the EFF**

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

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

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

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

First of all, he wants working-class leadership to have as the ready-made starting point of its struggles the worked-out “revolutionary” understanding of all and everything that he, Cde. Jensen, has in his head, when he knows (in his calmer

moments) that the whole movement itself has undergone a degeneration from which it must struggle to recover.

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

On the one hand Cde. Jensen concedes: "the tasks of Numsa and its allies were enormous"; on the other he criticises "Numsa and its allies" for the slow progress, systematic procedures and careful attention to their own ranks, the body of the rank-and-file Numsa leaders and their development, etc. In the middle of a big political and theoretical struggle, Cde. Jensen urges the Numsa leadership to rush off into an alliance with the EFF who embody the same petty-bourgeois politics with which they are at odds in the ANC and the Alliance.

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

It confronts frankly the difficulties the trade union movement faces: "In a staggering indictment of Union powerlessness, the employers now set 54% of all wages without any negotiation with workers, either through their union or bilaterally directly with workers" ... "The share of wages in the national income (GDP) has continued to plummet well below 50% from 57%

in 1991” ... “More jobs have been shed. In the last three months of 2015 alone 21,000 manufacturing jobs were lost, with another 80,000 gone in the first three months of this year.” ... and: “According to statsSA a staggering 54% of our population lives in poverty”.

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

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

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

The task is urgent!  
Bob Archer, Jan 2017

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

*Martin Jansen*

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

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

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

reflected a sharper working class response to the global economic crisis and rising class tensions in South Africa.

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

By the following year the union initiated a flurry of activities and events to implement its resolutions. This included national and international conferences and a 6-phase programme of "rolling mass action". The latter focused too narrowly on issues and concerns of the union instead of common issues of all workers and other sections of the working class. The critical Phase 1 of the rolling mass action plan had as its main focus the Employment Tax Incentive Act; beneficiation of all strategic minerals, a ban on the export of scrap metals etc.

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

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

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

This was a missed opportunity for building the UF. Moreover,

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

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

### ***Reform versus Revolution***

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

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

“mixed economy”, “high skills and high wages” for workers and an internationally competitive South African economy.

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

While the 2013 Numsa Moment marked a shift to the left by Numsa, coming on the back of ANC government defeats of Cosatu around E-Tolls, labour brokers, the youth wage subsidy, the NDP and the violent state attacks of the Marikana massacre, the farmworkers’ strike and several service delivery protests as well as the extreme levels of corruption of the state – we did not see a simultaneous fundamental shift away from the reformist politics of the union and its leadership. The union still remained committed to the Stalinist two-stage theory of socialism in the form of the NDR and views as its programme the vague and reformist Freedom Charter.

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

too clear to see after over 20 years of bourgeois democracy.

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

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

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

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

save jobs and capitalism.

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

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

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

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

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

In fact, three years later and there is still very little evidence of Numsa’s own over 300000 rank and file members

having been politically inspired and stirred into action by the Numsa moment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This means that unlike the 1980’s in South Africa, the building material for immediately constructing a mass fighting UF did not exist in abundance and the tasks of Numsa and its allies were enormous. At the same time the Numsa juggernaut had to be politically and organizationally re-orientated to lead and implement the tasks to build the UF and lay the basis for a socialist movement. This could only be achieved through a process of intense organized class struggle and political clarification towards revolutionary Marxism.

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

- □ Increased structural divisions and atomization of the working class due to the impact of neo-liberalism and a growing insecure precariat constantly in survivalist mode.
- □ Low levels of class consciousness and confidence to consistently engage in class struggle

- □ Weak and low levels of mass based organization
- □ A waning political hegemony over the working class by the ruling tripartite alliance
- □ A growing rebellion against neo-liberalism and deteriorating living and working conditions

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

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

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

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

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

wide.

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

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

The UF approach also meant that Numsa had to do everything in its power to remain within Cosatu and do battle with the reactionary leadership to win over the ordinary members of the other unions to join the UF around the Living Wage and other campaigns. Instead of engaging the rank and file members of the right-wing ANC supporting unions through its own rank and file, the Numsa leaders, its allies and former Cosatu general Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, instead focused on confining the political battle to the Cosatu CEC, the mainstream media and courts. It meant that from the outset in 2011, the workers of the majority of unions in Cosatu were excluded from the important political battle, isolated and disempowered. As mere spectators they did not grow politically and lacked the confidence to challenge and replace their corrupt leaders. This is where the real battle should have been since these workers had been suffering for more than a decade under their unions' leadership who instead of leading struggles, covertly sided with the employers for unmandated wage settlements – especially in the public sector – where they appeased their ANC government masters. Only during the last phase when it became clear that Numsa would be expelled and Vavi dismissed, did the leaders convene shop-steward council meetings to engage the rank and file about some of the issues and even then the unions on the other side were excluded.

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

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

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

*In conclusion*, there can be no doubt that the main tenets of the Numsa moment, i.e. the struggle for working class unity (the UF), for a *revolutionary* and socialist workers’ government, and the creation of revolutionary socialist or workers’ party (the movement for socialism) remain relevant. They are interrelated and interdependent aspects of the same process: the self-emancipation and liberation of the working class. However, Numsa has not come close to achieving any of the formations it committed itself to in its 2013 congress political resolutions. This, despite many opportunities presented during the past three years.

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

The student protest movement that unfolded over the past year signaled the beginning of the end for the ANC regime. Notwithstanding the weaknesses and crudity of their methods, by directing their demands towards national government and activating a national movement, the students have demonstrated tremendous political tenacity. The rest of the working class has taken notice and has drawn this lesson. In future we are likely to see local communities that have engaged in hundreds

of militant local struggles around “service delivery” for over a decade, seeking unity with each other and building a national resistance movement similar to the UDF of the 1980’s. This prospect needs conscious intervention and support in order to be realized and currently only Numsa, its allies and the EFF offer this possibility.

The World and South Africa are experiencing deep and widespread socio-economic and political crises and the situation has degenerated beyond barbarism, especially for the working class and poor. Inequality, the concentration of wealth and poverty are at unprecedented levels. The resultant class conflicts have produced wars, extreme violence, terror and suffering by a rampant western imperialism led by the US, without any alternative revolutionary working class resistance and political leadership. The challenges to the working class abound – with on the one hand, US imperialism setting up military bases in all the regions of the African continent and elsewhere and at the same time within the trade union movement conservative social democracy dominates. South Africa and many countries in the region are faced with political crises, with all the governments of the traditional nationalist parties having lost credibility after years of corruption and repression. However, no revolutionary alternative exist for the masses to belong to and pursue the struggle in line with their historic interests and mission.

The stakes here are high, with the ANC government facing a crisis and implosion. Their hold over the state has increasingly come under threat. In the context of an economy still overwhelmingly dominated by white monopoly capital and the state being the main instrument of wealth accumulation for the ANC aligned new black section of the bourgeoisie, they will resort to extreme measures to hold onto state power. It is not coincidental that the discredited Zuma presidency has ensured that the state security cluster is led by his most trusted allies. Failing a mass revolutionary response

supported by strong organization, working class resistance and opposition will be vulnerable to violent repression by the ANC government. Time is not on our side. The need for a genuine mass united front and revolutionary socialist movement or party is even greater now than in 2013 and cannot be postponed.

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

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

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## **Two opposed conceptions of the socialist revolution: A response to Irvin Jim**

A fresh wind really has started to blow from South Africa,

where the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) has responded positively to the growing resistance of the masses against the African National Congress (ANC) regime and the situation following the massacre of platinum miners at Marikana in 2012.

NUMSA proposes to:

(1) Break the trade unions away from the ruling alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) because that alliance has been “captured by hostile forces”

(2) Commission an international study of the history of previous attempts to establish working class political parties in different parts of the world in order to prepare to form one which can defend the interests of working people today

(3) Establish a united front of struggle with all who are suffering and resisting under the present pro-imperialist government.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **A necessary discussion**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, the conditions of world imperialism mean that most countries cannot hope to replicate the way capitalism in Western Europe (and then exported to North America) evolved through a series of stages over many centuries. A gradual development from feudalism to small-scale capitalism via manufacture and trade towards the factory system and finally a fully-fledged “modern” finance capitalism is not an option today. And the exceptions here prove the rule: Countries which have apparently achieved this have done so in a leap, either because like South Korea they had an important role in the West’s Cold War strategic arrangements, or because, as in Japan and now China, their rulers have developed methods of super-exploiting labour to an extreme degree.

Hopes of a new arrival achieving balanced national development of society and economy today under capitalism are an illusion.

The real way forward involves nationalising industry and finance under workers control and socialist methods of planning, and the scope of the plan must be international. The continent of Africa is one sustained essay on this topic from the negative side.

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

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

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

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

Comrade Jim seems perplexed that some critics of the ANC have described the Freedom Charter and the whole conception of a minimum and a maximum programme as "social democratic". In his Ruth First lecture he insists:

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

Of course not! Ruth First, like many countless others, died at

the hands of the bourgeoisie as a fighter in the class struggle. But the fact that she was deliberately murdered by the other side does not of itself mean that the political line and tactics she chose were correct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What stands out in Lenin’s handling of the question of programme and tactics even in 1905 is his refusal to rigidly separate the maximum and the minimum programme. This is one expression of the difference between him and other prominent leaders of the Socialist International who were later themselves openly “captured by hostile forces”. He was, it is true, absolutely convinced that the 1905 Russian Revolution had the historical job to abolish tsarist autocracy based on serfdom and replace it with a bourgeois society. He says in *Two Tactics*:

“It means that the democratic reforms in the political system and the social and economic reforms, which have become a necessity for Russia, do not in themselves imply the

undermining of capitalism, the undermining of bourgeois rule; on the contrary, they will, for the first time, really clear the ground for a wide and rapid, European, and not Asiatic, development of capitalism; they will, for the first time, make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class."

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

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

After all, he says, in tsarist Russia:

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

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

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

**"On the other hand,"** Lenin went on, **"it is more advantageous for the working class if the necessary changes in the direction of bourgeois democracy take place by way of revolution and not by way of reform; for the way of reform is the way of delay, of procrastination, of the painfully slow decomposition of the putrid parts of the national organism. It**

**is the proletariat and the peasantry that suffer first of all and most of all from their putrefaction. The revolutionary way is the way of quick amputation, which is the least painful to the proletariat, the way of the direct removal of the decomposing parts, the way of fewest concessions to and least consideration for the monarchy and the disgusting, vile, rotten and contaminating institutions which go with it."**

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

Later Lenin adds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In South Africa, it turns out that it was the leaders of the ANC and the SACP who were actually "steeped in lifeless pedantry". Rather than trying to "mercilessly crush the

counter-revolution", they made an accommodation with the sources of counter-revolution's paymasters in the big mining monopolies and banks. Instead of fighting to "mercilessly crush" the practitioners of apartheid, the SACP and ANC leaders organised "truth and reconciliation" processes to protect them.

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

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

### **The Fate of Social Democracy**

The first Russian revolution of 1905 happened on the cusp of momentous changes in world capitalism, developments which faced the Socialist International with challenges it could not deal with. So when World War I broke out 100 years ago in 1914, it was revealed that the majority of Europe's socialist leaders had been "captured and taken over by right-wing forces". They supported the interests of their "own" imperialist bourgeoisie (and dynastic regimes) against workers ruled by other imperialists, and urged them on into the carnage. This set the seal on the political collapse of social democracy. Whatever long after-life it has had in western and northern Europe, it has never reverted to its potentially revolutionary days in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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

His pamphlet *Imperialism* noted the end of the:

"... old free competition between manufacturers ... Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads right up to the most comprehensive

socialisation of production; it, so to speak, drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order", where "production becomes social, but appropriation remains private".

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

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

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

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

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

## April Theses

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

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

He therefore insisted:

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The “socialist” enemies of the Russian Revolution**

Now the whole policy and programme of the Socialist International had been “superseded by events”. Leaders of the Socialist International supported the “war effort” of their “own” bourgeoisies and tried to impose a class truce on the working class, a cessation of hostilities against their own employers. The end of the war brought revolution in Russia, the collapses of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires and revolutionary movements of international scope. In Russia, the revolution established a government of Workers’ and Peasants’ Soviets. In these events, the leaders of the old Socialist International opposed the Soviets and organised troops to suppress revolutionary movements throughout Europe. When momentous political changes are actually happening in a seismic shift, clinging to a separation of “minimum” and “maximum” programme partly reveals, partly fulfils a process in which a whole movement has rotted from within.

### **The Communist International**

Up until 1914, Lenin had tried to make the revolutionary action which the new situation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

centuries required fit into the social-democratic division into "minimum programme" and "maximum programme". He had "stress-tested" the politics of the Socialist International to its limits. That whole organisation and its programmes had become tatters and rags fit only to clothe its hypocrisy.

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

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

### **Stalinism and social democracy**

Lenin died in January 1924. Under a show of continuing his work, his successors in the leadership of the Soviet Union and the Communist International abandoned the struggle for world revolution. They established a bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union and claimed that it would be possible to achieve socialism in that country alone. This happened under specific conditions under which hopes of a rapid spread of revolutionary overthrows were disappointed. It is not simply a matter, as Joe Slovo explained in his *Has Socialism failed*, written in 1989, (and Zwelinzima Vavi repeats today) that Communists in government got accustomed to the harsh practices of civil war and the habit of issuing orders. Trotsky and his

followers in the Left Opposition and later the Fourth International analysed and explained the many factors involved in the degeneration of the Soviet Union and above all the reactionary nature of the political line that came to dominate in the Comintern. The crux of the political degeneration was the policy of building socialism in a single country.

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

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

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

Stalin and his supporters could only justify what they did by actually returning to the "tatters and rags" of social

democracy. The policy of building socialism in a single country is itself a social-democratic one. So is the idea that, despite Lenin's insistence that imperialism is a new and final stage of capitalism, there is still such a thing as a benign, non-imperialist capitalism within which working people can reach an accommodation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

***Bob Archer***

January 2015

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

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

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

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

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

Aubrey Tshabalala indicated that rational discussions and robust debates have been replaced by “let’s vote”, and voting

is now happening on every issues, including on the adoption of agenda and approval of credentials among others. This, he said, led to NUMSA being expelled without substantive debates on the contents of a 59-page submission delivered over three hours.

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

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

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

The NUMSA President explained that the implementation of the Freedom Charter is their uncompromising clarion call and the basis for their Resolutions. A Freedom Charter that must move South Africa from the dire situation facing the working class to a truly better life to workers and the poor than the enrichment of the few, no matter how black they may be.

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

Participants were allowed to ask questions/clarifications and to make comments and the overwhelming majority were in full support for the immediate re-admission of NUMSA into the

federation and encouraged the seven affiliates to keep fighting for such a noble cause.

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

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

Issued by

Katishi Masemola,

FAWU General Secretary

On behalf of the Seven Unions.

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