

New Issue 13 Die Werker out now!

The latest issue (Oct 2019) of Die Werker

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Onslaught on the working class.

Transnamib will not listen.

The Workers Advice Centre (WAC) was instructed by Namibian workers to conduct three foundational investigations. It summarises the most Demonstrative facts of the semi- colonial dilemmas and atrocities.

Unresolved contradictions come to bite again.

Namibia Fishermen United Association to: working class organisations, the judges of Namibia – petition.

Electronic voting system proven a national scam.

Greetings to the SWANU on its 60th anniversary.

A powerful manifesto and a serious appeal

As the Workers Revolutionary Party of Namibia submits the Manifesto reproduced below to voters in the 2019 National Assembly Elections, reports flood in from around the globe of movements by the masses in Iraq, Lebanon, Chile and elsewhere in direct and open opposition to poverty and exploitation and the corruption and economic mis-management of their 'own' venal governments acting as the local agents of imperialist powers and interests.

They follow on from the events of the "Arab Spring" earlier

in the decade and the more recent echoes of these movements in Tunisia and Sudan.

These movements are impressive in their scope and energy and their ability, especially since in Iraq and Lebanon they unite sectors of the population hitherto separated by religious and ethnic affiliations.

Powerful as they are, however, all these movements are hampered by the lack of a political programme and of a well-thought-out strategy to alleviate the suffering expressed in their simple and compelling demands.

In a few boldly-drawn paragraphs, the Namibian WRP Manifesto sketches out the main lines of that programme and underscores the rightly central role which the working class is called upon to play within such movements, how it links to other parts of the masses and what targets it can set itself to ensure future progress.

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International is extremely proud to submit the Manifesto to the consideration of serious socialists everywhere. Our comrades in Namibia have established significant roots among mineworkers, fishery workers, pensioners, homeowners and tenants and more

The Namibia WRP are experiencing a wave of media and other public interest in their Manifesto. They need resources to spread it far and wide. Workers International will provide whatever support it can so that they can send material, speakers and organisers the length and breadth of the country in the election campaign. Please help us:

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THE CONTEXT OF THE 2019 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Namibia is an example of a Comprador State. In a political context the word “comprador” is used to describe an agent having control over a nation’s workforce by acting on behalf of foreign masters. In Namibia it means the Namibian government having control over the working people on behalf of foreign and capitalist masters.

Using law enforcement agencies, the care-taker regime since 1990 has systematically destroyed the legal rights and gains of the working class through legislation and corruption. At the behest and in favour of corporate business, these agencies, which include the Office of the Labour Commissioner and the Courts of Law, disregard the laws concerning the rights of workers.

The State is destroying the nation’s infrastructure (roads, hospitals and schools) by a lack of maintenance and brazen theft. Our education system is proof thereof. The adage “education is the greatest equalizer” remains out of reach for the masses, where enrolment in private schools is reserved for children of the middle class and the children of the working class and the poor (peasants) receive sub-standard ‘location’ education.

The State’s express policy on the land issue is “no land to the poor”. The plight of those who lost their land to imperialists is not addressed by the care-taker regime. On the contrary, the state further disowned the impoverished communities by seizing their remaining snippets of land.

The judiciary is subservient to the same masters, foreign and local corporate business; banks, industries and capitalists. It destroys the rule of law.

The *modus operandi* of the imperialists and international corporations in conjunction with the State is to exploit the workers by means of low wages, hazardous work conditions and

the blatant disregard of labour laws. This practise is common in southern Africa.

The imperialists and capitalists have a vested interest in our presidential and national assembly elections. Our elections are a farce. It is run and controlled by the Indian Army and nullified our sovereignty. Both the registration of voters and voting by the electronic machines are a mockery. Voter registrations are duplicated. Voters can cast their votes multiple times.

Since independence these farcical elections are approved by the USA, EU, AU, SADEC and the IEC as "free and fair" in the name of 'political continuity' to serve their interests and to ensure the unbridled exploitation of the colonies.

Under the Comprador State, Namibia as a whole is disintegrating by the day. The prospects for the nation are a continuously lowering material and cultural standard of living. The vast resources of fish, minerals (strategic and precious), oil and gas reserves, and the most essential resource, the land of the people, are corruptly sold to foreign masters.

The State, bankrupted by rampant looting of the Treasury, is further intensifying its insolvency by turning the country into a tax haven for money launderers. Industries operating in Namibia are registered for tax purposes elsewhere, where they pay no taxes in any event.

There is no HOPE, only DESPERATION unless the programme of the workers' party is realised.

PROGRAMME

The only force which can turn the economic and human wastage around is the organised working class.

The WRP as the vanguard of that organisation is participating

in the 2019 National Elections for no other reason, but to throw light on the main issues wracking this nation and the Southern African working people and to propagate its proposals to achieve working class organisation to fight the scourge.

It harbours no illusions about the mockery of elections which will once more yield results contrived by the Indian State in collusion with the Namibian State.

ISSUES

1.Plundering of natural resources

Namibia's coastline is unguarded. This allows for unlimited exploitation of marine resources. Also, this resource is sold to imperialist countries (South Africa and Spain) by the State on behalf of individuals.

2.The land question

The majority of Namibians have no access to land. Dispossession is absolute and total. The Comprador State has gone as far as legislating the Traditional Authorities Act 25 of 2000, which prohibits communities from owning their land. The so-called traditional authorities have no authority or jurisdiction over land.

The stated policy of the regime is, "no land to the poor".

3.Labour situation

Legislation, pervasive corruption, non-policies and dysfunctional administration and executive combine to set off unbelievable levels of unemployment with literally hundreds of youth rushing for single job openings.

The incumbent regime is oblivious of mineral and natural reserves of priceless minerals (strategic and precious) and massive self-generating resources such as marine and other natural resources. The greatest source of life, land, is

squandered away in the same manner.

The obscene squandering of all these resources for laughable bribes by national and international capital leaves the nation abused and bewildered.

PROGRAMME

The WRP uses these elections to articulate its clarion call to the working class to organise at all levels to declare war on **the destruction of the nation through the destruction of its sovereignty**, its self-determination and its liberation, etc.

The programme of the WRP calls on the working class to rebuild their unions in the fishing, mining sectors and industrial and commercial fields under the guidance of the workers' party. This rebuilding shall take place in the process of arresting the unadulterated exploitation of the country by such demands as opening the books of corporations from mines to factories, and from banks to insurance companies; a public audit of the resources exploited and taken out of this country; the cessation of the money laundering mechanism put in place by the Comprador regime; the derogation of labour rights through legislation and corruption; and, a national review of the de-education of the youth.

The WRP programme calls on the working class to organise at all levels to optimise the utility of their resources; the optimum utilisation of these massive resources to create permanent jobs, to demand rational industrialisation demanded by the total human and technical and natural resources at its disposal.

The WRP call on the working class to treat issues affecting women, men, youth, homosexuals, etcetera as issues affecting the working class as a whole and not issues to be separated.

The working class has no interest in the designs of the black and Khoisan middle classes to step into the shoes of the white

landowners by laying claim to the lands of the people. Its sole interest is to restore the collective property of the disowned communities which was collectively disowned. The WRP advise the working class and poor peasantry to call for a national land conference to discuss the restoration of legality in the country by restoration of illegally expropriated lands. (The peasants never held individual title, they held collective ownership. Both the black and white middle class balk at the idea of a historical inquiry into the land issue in Southern Africa.)

ONLY the ORGANISED working class armed with a programme for all the working people of the NATION can take power and lead the country out of extreme backwardness and squalor in the midst of untold wealth.

ONLY the ORGANISED working class led by a workers' party can break the suffocation of the nation by imperialism.

WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (WRP)

TO REBUILD THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

A political party duly registered in terms of the electoral laws of the Republic of Namibia

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Defend Casual Workers Advice Office in Johannesburg!

On Monday evening 2 September 2019, during a campaign of xenophobic violence, a 200-strong gang wrecked the premises of the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWA0) in Johannesburg, South Africa. The door was broken open, glass was shattered and the premises were thoroughly trashed. The CWA0 stated: "We lost our furniture, printing and communications equipment, our case files ... this is a heavy loss in already difficult circumstances."

CWA0 works mainly with labour broker workers who are among the most exploited and marginalised sections of the working class.

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International condemns the xenophobia which divides the exploited and the oppressed and exculpates the imperialists and their servants in the South African state who exploit the masses and violently bar the way to social progress.

Please support the CWA0's appeal to restore their premises and facilities and continue to organise and defend casual workers. You can donate to their fund here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/solidarity-with-casual-workers-advice-office-sa>

Hewat Beukes expressed the views of WIRFI on these matters in this posting:

UNRESOLVED CONTRADICTIONS COME TO BITE AGAIN

In 1971/72 Namibian contract workers went on a general strike in the mines, agriculture, and in the colonial industrial and commercial sectors. It was an indelible demonstration of

workers' power. It inspired and set off the South African veld fire of strikes which culminated in the struggle for union rights and the student struggles of 1976. By 1978 Namibia had a fully-fledged union movement in tandem with South Africa. The bourgeois nationalists in both South Africa and Namibia, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Stalinists did not like it. Lacking a workers' party, the workers' movement was relatively easy prey to slander and liquidation both here and in exile.

The 'Marxist left' which ought to have given clarity failed to see the attacks against the working class as the deployment of a toxic lumpen proletariat by a tribal petit-bourgeoisie to subjugate the class and its struggles to the alliance of the bourgeoisie and pre-capitalist tribal structures. They even went on to mistakenly characterise the kangaroo courts, necklacing of workers, etc. as "self-rule" and "dictatorship of the working class". The most insidious, reactionary, and horrific reaction against the rising working class could not come from the race regime. It came from the tribal agents of the bourgeoisie within oppressed communities.

This lumpen vice-like grip on working class communities is now being used to revive the caretaker regime's grip on the working class. It is not directed against organised crime: drug dealing, etcetera. It is directed against mostly vulnerable impoverished refugees, as a smokescreen for lumpen elements to loot and advance petty crime. The political objective is far more sinister, which is to deliver the working class bound hand and foot to the capitalist exploiter and international capital.

It is the obligation of the workers' movement to correctly define and characterise the present instigated attacks against the working class under the smokescreen of xenophobia. Its central objective is to disable working class organisation and subjugate working-class communities. It is the same monstrous legacy of the 1970s and 1980s. It is meant to lift the

caretaker petit bourgeoisie out of its crisis.

This politics is encompassed by the ongoing denial that the determining factor in the independence of Namibia, the universal right to vote in South Africa (nothing more) and the independence of Zimbabwe were the mass uprisings of the working classes in Southern Africa since 1971. The scale of disruption of Apartheid tyranny in Southern Africa by the South African working class as the decisive factor of change (albeit in caretaker states) is denied and absurdly assigned to individuals to boot.

There can be no revolution in Southern Africa if these historical analyses are not concretised in the organisational structures of the working class. The agencies of the bourgeoisie shall be identified analytically. We shall know and recognise the operations of reaction as against the operations of working-class struggle for political power.

Hewat Beukes

7 September 2019

Out Now! Latest issue of Die Werker, June 2019

latest issue of Die Werker

In [this issue](#):

The discrimination against the San continues unabated.

Organisation and program in place of hopelessness – Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party launched in South Africa

Message from the WRP to the SRWP.

Birth of the United Seafarer's Association.

The Committee of Parents petition the United Nations High Commission for Refugees for accounting on the atrocities committed against Namibian refugees.

Where have all the trains gone?

TSUMEB: The Endobo Hostel fraud.

Workers Advice Centre pledges to join SAFTU in the giant federation's fight against the organised criminality of the First National Bank.

TCL miners resume their struggle for their stolen pensions.

**Algeria: Release all the
political prisoners
immediately!**

Workers international has endorsed this demand and urges it's widespread support

**Algeria: Release all the political prisoners
immediately!**

**(Hadj Ghermoul, Hadj Brahim Aouf, Louisa Hanoune and
many others)**

Since 22 February, millions of Algerians have been demonstrating to demand democracy and sovereignty – a chanting

“Regime, Out Now!”

The Algerian regime has responded by unleashing repression against political activists, lawyers, young people and trade unionists.

In particular, the regime has targeted the following (listed in the order that they were arrested):

- **Hadj Ghermoul**, a young activist of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights and a member of the National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Unemployed, who in February was sentenced to six months in prison without parole for holding a sign that read, “No to a Fifth Term!” (for former President Bouteflika).
- **Kameleddine Fekhar**, a human rights activist campaigning in defence of the democratic rights of the Mozabite population of the Algerian province of Ghardaïa and a member of the FFS (Socialist Forces Front), was arrested in Ghardaïa in March. **On 28 May, Dr Kameleddine Fekhar died in prison after a 56-day hunger strike. Despite his deteriorating health and the many protests demanding his release, the authorities allowed the situation to worsen.**
- **Hadj Brahim Aouf**, a teacher from Ghardaïa who was arrested along with Dr Fekhar, who is also on a hunger strike and whose life is in danger.
- **Louisa Hanoune**, General Secretary of the Workers Party (PT), who was arrested on 9 May and charged with “conspiracy against the State authority and the military authority.”

Many other activists also have been arrested and imprisoned.

We, the undersigned, express our solidarity with the Algerian people and call for the immediate release of all political

prisoners!

Endorsement Coupon

NAME

POSITION (for ID purposes only)

UNION/ORGANISATION

New issue of Die Werker

In [this issue](#):

TransNamib's shenanigans.

Is there hope for the poor?

Health Minister dismissed.

South Africa – A crucial debate ensues.

International Inquiry into the mass murders of SWAPO resumes.

**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 reader 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 20th 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*

France: The “hi-viz” movement

A translation of a report from A.V. in Marseille. Published on lernnimkamp website in 23 November 2018

The “hi-viz” movement started with motorists protesting against the increase in fuel prices following an increase in

the tax on diesel fuel.

For years diesel fuel prices in France have been low, and this led many people to buy diesel vehicles. Now the taxes on diesel fuel are going up. Calls for road blocks started on Facebook and other social networks. These began on Saturday 17 November. According to government sources, 280,000 people gathered together at 2,000 different locations on that day, blocking roads, demonstrating and occupying motorways. The road blocks have persisted since then.

Although parties like La France Insoumise or the far-right Rassemblement Nationale support this movement in the media, they do not officially contribute to it. What you hear on the roadblocks is above all peoples' fury at Macron and his government. For years, and in particular since Macron came to power, living conditions for the majority of French people have been getting worse. He has cut taxes affecting the rich (what the French call "ISF"), raised the tax burden on pensioners and civil servants ("CSG"), cut housing benefit and at the same time introduced an annual cut of 40 bn euro on business ("CICE"). Inflation is rising more strongly and wages are stagnating, so real wages are falling. And now motorists, particularly in medium-sized towns, have to pay more for fuel, although they have no alternative way of getting around at a time when we are all told labour has to move more mobile. The overwhelming majority of people know that they are not paying this tax to protect the environment, and that in the framework of the reform of the state railways more and more routes are being closed. The entire French tax system is unfair. In comparison with what they earn, French workers pay a lot more than the rich, the shareholders, the bourgeoisie. A few weeks ago Macron told an unemployed person he only needed to cross the road to find a job. Today thousands of French people are not just crossing the road, they are blocking it shouting "Macron demission!" – "Macron resign!" With his pro-rich policies and his arrogance (he recently told a pensioner to

quit complaining), Macron has lined up over 70% of French people – basically the whole working class – against him. To add fuel to the flames, the security service, who mostly had no idea on 17 November where the road-blocks and demonstrations were going to happen, have reacted very hesitantly. But since last Monday things have changed. Since Saturday thousands of workers, tradespeople and -noticeably – lots of women have been blocking France's roads. The movement is strongest in the medium-sized towns. However, on 17 November there were also actions in Paris, where over 1,000 demonstrators nearly got through to their stated target in front of the Elysee Palace (Macron's Official residence). Now the government is trying to criminalise the movement, portraying the demonstrators as wreckers. Even if the movement has ebbed a little, it remains popular. And it has a new goal: the 24 November demo in Paris.

The demonstrators want Macron to resign and they know that power lies in the Elysee Palace.

Apart from the road transport industry sector of the (moderate socialist) Force Ouvriere union, who yesterday called for support for the movement, the "hi-viz" movement has not yet been supported by the big union confederations. The (traditionally Communist-led) CGT confederation calls for support for a demonstration they have already planned for 1 December. It is left to the bourgeois press to speculate about the movement's far-right potential. A lot of people are wondering why the trade unions are hesitating about joining the movement. The same is true of France Insoumise, which has not so far got involved in the struggle as an organisation. The well-known France Insoumise parliamentary deputy, Francois Ruffin, stated on the evening of 21 November on TV that France Insoumise is not calling for Macron's resignation, but that if he continued to defend only the interests of big business he would have to go. This lack of determination and political clarity help the government. Francois Ruffin demands a

reduction in the fuel tax, more tax justice and the reintroduction of the wealth tax. That is right. These are also demands which the unions could bring into the movement.

Basically, the question of power is raised. So far neither France Insoumise nor the union leaders have contributed to bringing the government down. On 24 November the “hi-viz” are planning to head for Paris in numbers to force the government to listen to them. We can assume that these workers and intermediate layers who are not organised in unions will try to head for the Elysee Palace. They are right to do so. Today trade unions can establish a clear platform of demands and offer support in organising this demonstration.

“Hi-viz vests”: Unions slow to join the dance

The below article is a translation of an article appearing in French on the Mediapart website:

(<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/231118/gilets-jaunes-les-syndicats-hesitent-entrer-dans-la-danse>)

(Notes)

(CGT, Force Ouvriere and CFDT are the three main and separate union congresses in France, broadly-speaking divided along political lines, SUD is the common name for some more radical independent, breakaway unions. It is difficult to really know how best to translate “gilets jaunes” (yellow waistcoats), which applies to both the fuel-tax demonstrators and their “uniform”, the hi-viz safety jacket.)

“Hi-viz vests”: Unions slow to join the dance

23 November 2018: By Mathilde Goanec and Dan Israel.

If most national trade union leaders hold their noses when the “hi-viz vests” are mentioned, activists locally are taking the plunge citing the levels of social crisis. Nevertheless, there are still raw edges, mainly because of instances of racism and some of the demands about cutting taxes.

When we called CFDT member Pierre-Gael Laveder off the cuff, he replied (hi-viz vest on his back) straight from the Magny road-block at at Montceau-les-Mines (Saone-et-Loire). Last year, this man was one of the main actors in the fight against the closure of the Allia factory at Digoin. Now “newly redundant” he is a “hi-viz vest”.

However, Laurent Berger, the national secretary of his union, has not called on his troops to join the movement. On Monday 19 November he even denounced the “totalitarian” tone of some of the meetings. Nevertheless, concerned about the movement’s increasing popularity, the leader of the CFDT on Saturday proposed to Emmanuel Macron to quickly unite unions, the employers and associations “to set up a social pact for ecological conversion”, a proposition which the government turned down flat. All this means little to Pierre-Gael Laveder, who wears no label when he goes to the “hi-viz vests” meetings, quite happy to play locally the role of go-between his national secretary hankered after.

“There’s a bit of everything on the road-blocks: tradesmen, shopkeepers, public service people ... and quite a few trade unionists”, Laveder explains. “I think it’s important to be there because what we’re fighting for here are things we stand up for in everyday union work: an increase in buying power and a wage rise. It makes sense to me”.

Like the CFDT, most union leaderships are hesitating, while on the ground many union activists have taken the plunge, even though the “hi-viz vests” always start a lot of arguments. The

CGT position, for example is somewhat embarrassing. Less than a week ago Philippe Martinez was hammering out the line: "The CGT does not march alongside either people on the far right or bosses who talk about taxes but also mean social (National Insurance) contributions."

All the same, on 20 November the national union published a statement calling on the government to respond to the "urgent social situation" which the "hi-viz vests" emphasise. Visiting Rouen last Thursday, Philippe Martinez went further, conscious of the pressures in his own organisation: "What worries us is not the 'hi-viz' movement but those who try to exploit it".

There was the same shilly-shallying at Le Havre, a town the authorities are keeping a very careful eye on because it hosts a port, docks and refineries. A general assembly of the local CGT discussed "hi-viz" on Wednesday 21 November. Activists didn't want to "be associated with 'hi-viz'", but planned to carry out a series of actions in parallel, especially since some of them are already out on strike over wages, for example at Total (six of whose seven French refineries are affected this Friday). On Thursday morning a two-hour leafletting session and a partial roadblock took place at the Oceane roundabout, where "hi-viz" have been setting up off and on since Saturday.

Sandrine Gerard, the secretary of the local CGT branch, has also informed Mediapart that there will be "growing popularity" from Monday 26 November with a possible blockade of "the economy" at Le Havre, almost certainly referring to the refineries. According to our information, the Le Havre CGT docks and harbour group, which has an extremely high percentage of union membership but is very tight-lipped where the media are concerned has been even clearer and passes the line on to members calling on them "not to let the caravan of anger pass by" but mix "their red vests with the yellow vests".

For all their concern about who might be trying to exploit the movement, the group believes “there is a place for the CGT in this movement” and calls on “all members to participate in progressive assemblies”. Their comrades in La Mède (Bouches-du-Rhone Department) have already taken the plunge: they have been blockading their Total refinery alongside “hi-viz vests” since Thursday 22 November.

Even before 17 November, the union’s chemical industry group was warning that the “hi-viz vests” anger was not “illegitimate” and calling for a mobilisation a mobilisation in all the main sectors such as transport, oil, energy, ports ... and the Lavera refinery and the fuel depot at Fos-sur-Mer in Bouches-du-Rhone have been regularly blockaded by “hi-viz vests” since Saturday.

Force Ouvriere union’s national leadership is undergoing a big internal crisis and has not really adopted a stance. However, their Transport section, which is the strongest union in road transport and ambulance drivers, has officially called on members to join the “hi-viz vests” and join in actions in favour of greater buying-power. “We call on them to come to the support of existing movements” General Secretary of the transport section of the union, Patrice Clos, explains, one of three candidates standing to replace Pascal Pavageau at the head of the national union.

If the unions are going forward on tip-toe, the official reason given for that is first of all the occasionally racist, sexist and homophobic tone of a very disorganised movement which is pulling in all kinds of directions. The CGT is sticking to its guns: “This period of powerful contrasts of light and shade can give birth to monsters, and citizens should not allow their anger to be diverted by those pushing xenophobic, racist and homophobic ideas”, the union says, referring to instances of physical and verbal violence experienced at a certain number of assemblies since 17 November.

Specifically the CGT section covering Customs Officers responded in a very lively way to publication on social media of a Facebook video showing “hi-viz vests” at Flixecourt (Haute-de-France department) congratulating each other on discovering migrants in the cistern of a tanker lorry and calling the police, and by the way making fun of the customs service. “Confident in their racist convictions, they preferred to call the police rather than an aid organisation which could have helped them”, the union group says in a press release. “This video shows protagonists calling for a ‘giant bonfire’ All this is reminiscent of very sad and inglorious events in our history”. The union follows up with an official complaint for slander and defamation of their service and incitement to racial hatred.

Acrobatics

CGT activist Vincent Labrousse was prominent in the struggle to save jobs at the La Souterraine factory (Creuse Department) in September. Now sacked, he too is careful in discussing the composite character of the movement. “I can’t march with people from the fascistosphere. It goes against nature”, this activist explains. “But they are not the only ones in the movement. Others simply want to denounce the society of exclusion we are being led into. I support them”. Moreover, about fifty of his comrades were present at the road blocks on Saturday. “In our CGT industrial group there is no rejection. Some of us support it but don’t go. Some do go there. Others will go”.

The sociologist Jean-Michel Denis, who specialises in trade unions and social movements, points out that most trade union bodies are in “horror of spontaneous movements”. “Most of those demonstrating here are wage-earners”, CGT member Fredo, who we met in Rouen, states simply. “What do they want? More purchasing-power. Our job is, without imposing anything, to get them to think about the question of wages. After all, that’s the heart of the matter.”

Activists also claim that the movement can also help to restore faith a little. "I'm really struck by the conviviality, the atmosphere ... We've obviously got a lot to tell them, but a lot to learn as well", explains Manu at Rouen. "What's not to like about blockading Disney, supermarkets, petrol stations?" notes Laurent Degousse, who is a member of the independent union SUD Commerce in Paris and one of the founders of the social front "Front Social" "In any case it's very effective. 2000 people gathering together on 17 November. If it works, it's mainly because you can come as you are and its on your doorstep. These are lessons for the social movement to bear in mind".

Xenophobic, sexist and homophobic language which does occur in certain assemblies also do not discourage this "Solidaires" (independent union) activist, although he too mentions strong pressures within his organisation, which is used to sticking close to the social movement but is also involved in particular in anti-fascist and anti-sexist struggles. "Concretely, it's not enough to say 'that stinks' and 'that's infected by the far right', and in any case that's not the atmosphere on the road blocks. Even if it can crop up, since there is all sorts of everything in this movement, which has neither structure, leaders, or security stewards. But I think the determining factor is the rejection of Macron's policies and his very person". On Saturday he will put on his violet vest (union colours) to join in with the yellow crowd. "If you go there to play the red professor, it's guaranteed that it won't work, so no preachy-preachy".

"Solidaires" in any case spoke along more or less the same lines on 19 November, but without an official call to demonstrate. This trade union body firmly opposes neo-liberalism and the far right and its representatives, but it proposes to draw all forces together and to "look for what we agree on". It has also, in vain, invited the other national union bodies to meet to discuss possible mobilising

strategies.

The national unions are just as much at sea as the political leaders. They are grappling with contradictions and prepared to adopt fairly acrobatic postures in the process. "Some trades unions have had such a hard time of it in recent years that they are telling themselves, for once things are moving, let's not miss the boat" notes researcher Jean-Michel Denis. "But it's still very complicated. The values expressed by the demonstrators are very mixed in character, not to say pretty reactionary." For example, what they have to say about fiscal matters, often anti-tax, doesn't go down well with activists very attached to the public services and a redistributive system.

"In other spontaneous movements like the 'nuits debout' (when protestors spent entire nights awake in crowds) or the indignados, there was a kind of left-wing consciousness, a shared culture which made a link", Denis emphasises. "Nothing like that here. The people we are dealing with don't seem to have any habit of mobilising, or to have lost it. In their yellow vests, you also see small-scale craftsmen, home helps, liberal nurses, etc. these are categories of people who don't work in big businesses with big groups of trade unionists, and where they live, work has been more and more de-structures. That doesn't help when it comes to building bridges with traditional organisations.

A few trades unionists on the ground admit to a little bitterness at seeing struggles which have for years been carried on in the shadows suddenly emerge into the light – outside of the trade union field. "We fight year-in-year-out in the workshops, in the street, for wages, pension rights, against unemployment. When we go and ask the 'hi-viz vests' to help us against the reforms of pension rights, will they then turn up?" asks Jean-Luc Bielitz, CGT delegate at Smart on the Moselle. But he won't throw everything overboard: "I think we should jump onto the movement if it keeps going. The union is

there to walk with them. Who in this crowd is going to negotiate with the government? Who is the leader today!”

Nevertheless, the period resonates as a lesson for Pascal Raffanel of the CFE-CCG at Bosch. “Trades unions have a few questions to ask themselves. If the resistance struggle is carried out solely on the basis of social networks or citizens’ movement, that could be the death of trade unionism.”. Laurent Degousse, who has long campaigned in the Front Social for a very aggressive trade unionism, is even clearer: I think that because of our repeated setbacks on the social level, we have created a monster, and the void has been filled s best it could. It is mainly the people in power who are responsible, including those we have been walking with in trade union work and politics for 15 or 20 years.

Draft proposal to the working people of Namibia and South Africa: Restoration of the land to its rightful owners

We are pleased to announce the publication of this [new pamphlet](#) by our Namibian Comrades.