

Belarus: Free union leaders and activists

LabourStart

In the last couple of months, Belarus has experienced rigged elections, mass protests, and severe violence carried out by the security forces.

Union leaders, members of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU), have been arrested and imprisoned for participating in protests and strike action.



At the center of these events is the JSC Belaruskali potash fertilizer site. Dozens of activists and strike committee members at Belaruskali have been prosecuted, threatened, fined and deprived of benefits at work for their activities. BITU vice chair Siarhei Charkasau and three of his comrades, Pavel Puchenia, Yury Korzun and Anatol Bokun are in prison now. One sentence has followed the other while they were still serving their sentence.

BITU and IndustriALL are demanding an end to the persecution of employees of Belaruskali for their participation in the strike, and also those who continue to “work to rule” at Belaruskali. They are demanding an immediate release of the BITU leader and jailed activists.

Please take a moment to support the online campaign – click here.

And please share this message with your friends, family and fellow union members.

Eric Lee

Political training in South Africa under “lockdown”

“SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS PARTY

We are born of class struggle, in the fight to demolish the capitalist system that insists on the continued exploitation of most of society by a few humans. We seek to educate, agitate, mobilise and organize the working class into our political organisation.

The working class must fulfil our historic mission: to defeat imperialism and capitalism, establish a Socialist South Africa, Africa and World, as a prelude to advancing to a truly free and classless society: to a Communist South Africa, Africa and World!” (SRWP homepage)

It turns out that political organising and education can take place a lot more effectively than some comrades feared online, even during “lockdown” when physical gatherings of any size are impossible within the state’s arrangements for dealing with Covid-19. Some of the resources which have assisted imperialism to step up exploitation across the globe, such as computer technology and modern communications, are also tools in the hands of the workers’ movement.

At time of writing, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party of South Africa (SRWP) has just contributed to members’ political education online with two talks on Marx and the early beginnings of capitalism by SRWP Deputy General Secretary Dr. Vashna Jagarnath and a session with Vijay Prashad of Transcontinental: Institute for Social Research and Chief Editor of LeftWord Books.

Vijay Prashad's contribution on "CoronaShock & Imperialism" on 23 April 2020 is the one I would like to discuss here. It can be viewed on the SRWP Facebook page, so I urge the reader to do that, and I will make no systematic attempt to summarise his contribution here. It contained a number of important and useful observations.

Although Vijay Prashad only makes a couple of passing references to the Corvid-19 pandemic, he does lay out succinctly an analysis and a conception of present-day imperialism. Unfortunately, very informative though this presentation is, it does not shed light on how and why, in the course of the political struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie at an international level for more than a century now, we got to the point which society has reached today. Vijay Prashad merely lists as objective facts the changes in features such as technology, communications and banking and finance which facilitate the current form of imperialist plunder. Nor does his presentation refer to or illuminate the aims of the SRWP stated above: "our historic mission – to defeat imperialism and capitalism, establish a socialist South Africa and World", etc.

His references to the class struggle are all about forms of it which can be contained within the framework of existing bourgeois society. These are either trade union struggles over the extraction of surplus value in the form of "unpaid labour time", or the politics of pressure on the bourgeois state to set limits on the rapacity of the bourgeoisie, provide welfare and other essential services, and so forth. These have been historically very significant ways in which the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat has been waged, and indeed continue to be so. However, it has always been the understanding of Marxists that the culmination of this struggle must be what is expressed in the aims of SRWP set out at the head of this article.

In the globalised economy described by Vijay Prashad, these

two forms of struggle are held in check for reasons which he describes lucidly. His economic analysis of the workings of imperialism is linked to certain considerations of class relations, but the political issue of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society, of which imperialism is the highest expression, and progress towards a higher, Communist society is not mentioned.

But it was for precisely that purpose that Lenin wrote his famous little book: *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, early in 1916.

Vijay Prashad does refer to the book. He notes that Marx and Lenin viewed imperialism as being rooted in the political economy of capitalism. This is to his credit: there are those on the left who try to separate the two completely. However, in presenting Marx and Lenin's views on the matter, Vijay Prashad carefully steers around some core issues and mishandles others.

Vijay Prashed discusses certain topics which Lenin dealt with in *Imperialism*, but leaves other vital matters out. He (Prashad) picks up Lenin's description of the changes on the world scale within capital accumulation as the 19th century ended and the 20th century opened as "concentration of production and monopolies"; Vijay Prashad refers to the "finance capital and the financial oligarchy" which Lenin dealt with, and he also mentions the "export of capital". (These are all section headings in Lenin's book).

By the way, Lenin also mentioned "the division of the world between ... powerful trusts" and comments that this: "does not preclude redivision if the relation of forces changes as a result of uneven development, war, bankruptcy, etc".(1) He also devoted a whole section of his pamphlet to "Division of the World Among the Great Powers"(2) which catalogues the forms this took 100 years ago; the forms have changed but the

essence remains today!

But Lenin's Imperialism is about so much more! For a start, Lenin emphasised that the development of imperialism is a dead end for capitalism:

"Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving for domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations – all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism which compel us to define it as **parasitic or decaying capitalism**"(3). (My emphasis – BA)

In discussing the concentration of production and the growth of enormously powerful industrial and financial monopolies Lenin noted:

"Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads directly 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, a transitional one from complete free competition to complete socialisation."(4)

Lenin believed that the "new social order" of imperialism is a contradictory one, a "transition" from complete free competition to complete socialisation. He certainly did not believe that the necessary outcome (complete socialisation) can be achieved by methods which leave the social, economic and political power of the bourgeoisie intact. The transition will not take place spontaneously or without the deliberate destruction of the bourgeois social order as thoroughly as the bourgeois revolution destroyed the feudal social order that preceded it.

He devoted a significant part of the book to a critique of socialist theoreticians, such as Karl Kautsky, who thought that a stable and peaceful form of imperialism could be attained without violent disruption. Lenin had learnt his

Marxism at the feet of such Marxists of the Second (Socialist) International as Kautsky, but at the outbreak of World War I they found themselves on opposite sides!

One of the problems socialists face today is the prevalence, in public discourse and indeed of peoples' minds, of reformist approaches to imperialism, attempts to rein in the system's truly degenerate and destructive features and achieve a system of peaceful and progressive nation-states without attacking capitalist social relations at their root.

Lenin wrote in 1917 in a new preface to *Imperialism*:

"This pamphlet was written with an eye to the tsarist censorship ... It is painful, in these days of liberty, to re-read the passages of the pamphlet which have been distorted, cramped, compressed in an iron vice on account of the censor" (5)

Nevertheless, what stands out in reading the pamphlet, even as published in 1916 under the whip of the censor, is Lenin's extremely plain language when he is dealing with former Marxists like his own respected teacher and guide, Karl Kautsky, who now proposed that a peaceful and fruitful way forward would be possible under imperialism:

"No matter what the good intentions of the English parsons, or of sentimental Kautsky, may have been, the only objective, i.e., real social significance of Kautsky's 'theory' is this: it is a most reactionary method of consoling the masses with hopes of permanent peace being possible under capitalism, by distracting their attention from sharp antagonisms and acute problems of the present time and directing it towards illusory prospects of an imaginary 'ultra-imperialism' of the future. Deception of the masses – that is all there is in Kautsky's 'Marxist' theory".(6)

And yet it was a version of Kautsky's theory which came to dominate in the Communist International after Lenin's death

and the defeat of Lenin's followers by the bureaucratic caste which later took control in the Soviet Union.

The main expressions of the Kautsky-inspired politics of Stalin and his supporters were (1) asserting the possibility of building socialism in a single country, relying on "peaceful co-existence" with the imperialist powers, (2) the abandonment of revolutionary politics in the richer capitalist countries in favour of reformism ("Popular Fronts" and reformist socialism) and (3) the limitation of the revolutionary struggle of those peoples oppressed and subjugated by imperialism to national independence under their "own" bourgeoisie (the "Third World project").

Any analysis of imperialism which does not address these issues is bound to be of limited value because it leaves too many vital questions untouched. Imperialism exists today in the extreme form that Vijay describes in part. But imperialism has only been able to rot every more deeply because the working class and the masses have been disarmed politically by Stalinism. It was the Stalinist politics of the SACP leaders which led to South Africa's first democratically-elected government being firmly in the hands of big business and big financial groups. And these are precisely the question which were raised by the decision on the part of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) in 2013 to split the reactionary, Kautsky-inspired alliance of Cosatu, SACP and ANC and find a way back to the genuine, Marxist policies of Lenin.

It is important to emphasise these points because without accounting for the fate of the Bolshevik project, the seizure of power in 1917 and establishment the Communist International and its eventual fate, there can be no all-round understanding of imperialism in its current iteration. If imperialism survives until today and takes on even more extreme and even absurd forms, it is because of the degeneration and collapse of that Leninist project.

Without studying and understanding that, the historical account of imperialism is simply reduced to “one damn thing after another”, with no connection or thread of continuity, and consequently the collapse of the USSR is simply an objective “event”, a false step in history, at best a convincing reason why nobody can now ever look beyond the limits of the imperialist system. And yet that system is in front of our eyes falling into the ever-deeper forms of “decay and parasitism” that Vijay Prashad describes so vividly.

That is why Vijay Prashad can regard the epoch of imperialism such as Lenin described it as being over and done with, replaced by a new period of “globalisation” defined by new and in his view specifically different forms of financial capital from the ones Lenin analysed, involving more than just the “export of capital” but actually “new ways” in which capital accumulates. If the imperialism Lenin defined is over and done with, then so are the tasks it posed in front of the working class and the masses by that period.

This is how Lenin presented dialectically the changes between capitalism in the nineteenth century and capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century:

“Half a century ago, when Marx was writing *Capital*, free competition appeared to the overwhelming majority of economists to be a ‘natural law’. Official science tried, by a conspiracy of silence, to kill the works of Marx, who, by a theoretical and historical analysis of capitalism had proved that free competition gives rise to the concentration of production, which in turn ... leads to monopolisation. Today monopoly has become a fact”.

Vijay Prashad treats modern-day financialisation as something essentially different from the “finance capital” that Lenin described.

He argues that whereas Lenin talked about the “export” of

capital across borders, such borders are insignificant today as far as finance capital is concerned. They are only "borders" for the workers imprisoned in one country or another. But while such a distinction is not without its significance, it surely does not indicate a *systemic* change; it is merely an intensification of the contradictions of the imperialist epoch.

A better way to look at it all might be this: Imperialist policy in the last fifty years has successfully played on its ability to divide workers in the advanced metropolitan countries from workers in the rest of the world, which itself is in no small part caused by the leaderships of mass movements dominated by Stalinist and now post-Stalinist politics. Vijay Prashad gives graphic and compelling examples of how this works out, but not of the political developments which allowed it to happen. The results are that classic and significant weapons of the working class in advanced capitalist countries, like trade union militancy and parliamentary political pressure, are held in check by the threat (and the practice) of shifting production to underdeveloped countries. Meanwhile the factory owners in many a "developing" country can (and indeed must) impose savage rates of exploitation on their workers under the threat of "losing the contract" if production costs rise. By the way, the current setup frees the Multi-National Corporation, brand or main contractor from the obligation to fund the investment in production in the "developing" country: the local entrepreneur has to scrape that together somehow, further intensifying the pressure to exploit "their" workers.

These workers' wages are kept extremely low, even to the extent of compromising the reproduction of the labour force and with devastating cultural and social consequences. The tax bases of governments in underdeveloped countries are also eroded, so these governments have to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for permission to borrow money, which is

only granted on the condition of sustained cuts in living standards and wages. And so, the "Third World Project" is over. Meanwhile attempts to copy what was achieved in Cuba have resulted in long and debilitating and in the end fruitless guerrilla wars.

Most governments in former colonies have become "compradores" effectively servicing imperialist looting (while lining their own pockets at the same time, and stripping away any real democracy or the rule of law). Vijay Prashad can describe the ability of Multi-National Corporations and financiers to lord it over a global system which seems to offer no limit, but he fails to put his finger on the aspect of this that Lenin identified: These features are the characteristics of constantly intensifying "parasitism and decay".

"Globalisation" is not a completely new period in the history of capitalism, however essential it is to know at any stage "what is going on" and to take that into account when providing political leadership to workers. The fundamental features of imperialism are continued and intensified and above all unresolved today. The continued existence of capitalism in imperialism and the indeed increasingly absurd forms that takes testify not to the strength and viability of capitalism as a system but to the problems which have arisen in constructing the leadership of the working class.

It is indeed extremely difficult to raise these matters directly in most places. "official science" and "a conspiracy of silence to kill the works of Marx" join with a mood of resignation in many parts of the working class following the ignominious debacle of the Soviet Union and a series of industrial and political struggles frustrated by the "globalising" tactics which the imperialists have adopted.

But the class struggle never stops, never goes away entirely until it is actually resolved. The mass outburst of working-class resistance that led to the Marikana massacre and the

subsequent wave of industrial action in South Africa lifted a corner of the blanket of “official science” and “killing the works of Marx”, and that is what made the 2013 Numsa special congress decisions and the work to establish the SRWP so important, not just in South Africa but on the international stage.

Workers International greeted these decisions and encouraged their implementation. They open the door to a fuller and franker discussion on the past and the future of the workers' movement than is probably possible anywhere else on the planet at the moment.

These are the matters which deserve to figure most prominently in the political education of SRWP members, when they are preparing themselves to lead the political struggles of the South African working class. SRWP members need to make themselves familiar with all issues around the struggle for working class political power: the fate of the Paris commune, the Russian Revolution, the split with reformist “Marxism” and revisionism, the struggle to build the Communist International, how and in what way the Soviet Union and the world communist movement degenerated.

A cadre of politically-educated South African workers will not only be a powerful force in South Africa, it could also play a significant leading role in building anew the revolutionary proletarian leadership of the world socialist revolution.

Bob Archer

23 May 2020

1. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Moscow 1968 p.66

2. *Ibid.* p.71

3. *Ibid.* p.118

4. *Ibid.* p.23

5. *Ibid.* p.3

6. *Ibid.* p.111

Comments on some contributions to a discussion on the significance of the Coronavirus pandemic and the way forward

Comments have been requested on a number of texts (see below Ed.) which have arisen in left-wing, socialist and Marxist circles in response to the Coronavirus crisis and the background of chronic economic and environmental crisis.

Both Cde Shaheen Khan in South Africa and the “Public Reading Rooms” comrades in the UK make a number of serious analytical points in describing the current situation. Shaheen (1) writes: The capitalist system is in deep crisis and the rule of the capitalist class on a global scale is in jeopardy”. *No Going Back* describes the coronavirus crisis and the feeble economic recovery from the 2008 banking crisis as arising from “the structural limits of the entire system of social reproduction”. (This latter document also adds that “The wanton destruction of nature by capital creates the perfect conditions for the emergence and spread of pandemics”). All

three documents present proposals for a fresh impulse from the socialist movement and the working class to respond to these accumulating crises.

Both Shaheen and *No Going Back* emphasise the international and systemic character of the crisis. "As the pandemic spreads across the globe, the global health emergency is rapidly evolving into a crisis of the entire existing world social order", says Shaheen (1). "The pandemic is global; it cannot be stopped in one country" says *No Going Back*.

This is why Shaheen (1) says: "The task in the days, weeks and months ahead is to build a conscious socialist leadership throughout the world". (This assertion is missing for some reason in Shaheen [2]). *No Going Back* calls for "The convocation of a *Zimmerwald* conference – which united the anti-war left in 1915 – for our times, to unify all those prepared to fight for a fundamental change in society; who understand the necessity of renewing the left's strategic and theoretical framework as well as going beyond its existing organisational forms."

All three documents lay great stress upon the activity and consciousness of the working class. In "Our Perspectives and Tasks" Shaheen Khan states "The working class is not taking this lying down ... these are the molecular processes where the class is gradually beginning to comprehend the problems arising from the social crisis. Consciousness is determined by conditions". He then takes the thought further: "A revolutionary party bases its tactics on a calculation of the changes of mass consciousness. While the party must impress through its propaganda and agitation ... the dangers of the epidemic and the need for physical distancing we must begin to take leadership of the mass protest movement that is gaining momentum. The working class on its own is fighting and breaking down the parameters of the bourgeois lockdown and we need to direct this anger in the right direction and in the right quarters". Both of Comrade Shaheen's documents contain

sets of proposals for a programme of action to bring this about.

The *No Going Back* theses state:

“The most important factor in world politics is the struggle of working people, the poor and dispossessed to remake the world; most immediately it is to defend themselves against both the pandemic and the poverty of their everyday lives ...” And a bit later on, emphatically: “The pandemic indicates the possibility of ending the permanent subordination of labour to capital”.

Both Shaheen and *No Going Back* reject reformist policies and solutions. Shaheen (2) explains:

“These are difficult times, not only for the bourgeois but also for the leadership of the working class. Many bourgeois economists and NGOs have been making recommendations to the government to adopt a Keynesian economic approach rather than the neoliberal path they have been following. This is a nationalist capitalist trajectory which does not in any way serve the interests of the working class”. Although Shaheen addresses his proposals to the Socialist Revolutionary Workers’ Party, he is critical of the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers’ (NUMSA) who established that party. “The NUMSA open letter to the President is different” (from the Keynesian economic approach). “However we think it fails to address the question from a class struggle perspective and remains an economic approach to the question”.

No Going Back is even harder on reformism: “There can be no support for those in the labour movement who present the struggle against the virus as a national crisis in which class-struggle is suspended”. Quite right: the way the COVID-19 crisis is dealt with strikingly reveals aspects of class struggle which are even accentuated in this context.

They go on: "Leaders of the movement who fight for the interests of their members must be given every backing". And so they should; but who determines which leaders are fighting "for the interests of their members"? Like Shaheen Khan, the "Public Reading Rooms" implicitly set themselves up as the judges of that. They go on: "But we cannot support those who seek to corral the working class into subordination to the existing system. The institutions of social democracy have failed to adequately challenge capitalism, and have even failed to defend their own achievements". As the argument goes on, all "social democrats" are (wrongly) identified as "embracing of neo-liberalism in the 1990s" which "made them complicit in the savaging of the welfare state." So *No Going Back* throws into one pot all the groups in, for example, the UK Labour Party, when that includes in its ranks both unreformed Blairites (who were rather more than just "complicit" in the attacks on the welfare state between 1997 and 2010) and the supporters of former party leader Jeremy Corbyn who have spent a great deal of time elaborating precisely a "Keynesian economic approach", but did that mainly in order to defend the democratic, economic and social rights of the masses ("the many") including the working class. *No Going Back* concludes this paragraph with a resounding phrase: "The pandemic exposes the illusory nature of systemic transformation through incremental social change". In plain English they are saying: We think the Corbyn initiative in the Labour Party has fallen flat on its face and we would like to make recruits among its remnants".

What is clear in all three documents is that none of the discussion and the shaping of policies and programme demands arise in close connection with or on the same wavelength as the main groups of workers in struggle. **All the authors' remarks arise from contemplating the various media reports of the current situation, refracted through the discussion in a milieu of educated people for whom ideas matter as ideas.** There is of course nothing wrong with that: we all have to

orientate ourselves daily, hourly, minute by minute as the crisis unfolds at various levels, reflected in the media.

But it is not enough to proceed directly from the **impressions** in one's own head, having seen a news item and tossed it around in social media, to formulating proposals for action to place in front of workers.

Or to put it differently: if you are in an ongoing involvement in workers' attempts to deal with the class struggle and the issues that arise within it, then you will be very clearly (often painfully!) aware of the contradictions and moments within workers' consciousness and the preoccupations they bring to the struggle, what their priorities are. Your thoughts, when fresh and probably contradictory impressions flood in, will in that case be how concretely particular workers and groups of workers can be persuaded to react, how they themselves will take proposals on, reshape them and fashion them into real weapons of struggle.

This is a long way away from "A revolutionary party bases its tactics on a calculation of the changes of mass consciousness" based on a few impressions. "Mass consciousness" has a past and a future and its present is anyway contradictory. Slogans and programmes which are slightly (but not too far) ahead of the working class are powerful levers to action. Those that are too far ahead risk falling flat on their faces. Doing this involves a really demanding, actually scientific, "calculation of the changes of mass consciousness".

It is one thing to pontificate about the working class as an abstraction; it is quite another to work in sensuous involvement in class struggle, engagement within the forms of organisation which exist in the working class in every country.

To identify one's own reactions to the news with the reaction aroused in the working class is in itself a grave mistake. To

proceed from these subjective impressions and use them to decide for ourselves what practices workers should adopt is to succumb to pure contemplation – a form of idealism, if that is where you leave it.

It is even worse if – like Shaheen (2) – you add: “we must begin to take leadership of the mass protest movement that is gaining momentum”. Being guided by the fruits of one’s own untested thoughts is one thing: informing workers that these thoughts are the only correct ones and that they need to follow them is another, and it has nothing to do with providing leadership!

These approaches add up to the petit-bourgeois “left-wing communism” which Lenin excoriated in his 1920 pamphlet of the same name. Lenin asks: “How is the discipline of the proletariat’s revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact and – if you wish – to merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people – primarily with the proletariat, *but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people*. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct ... without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrase-mongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. **Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement**”.

The only organisation with the potential “to link up, maintain the closest contact and – if you wish – to merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people” in South Africa is the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP), set up as a result of the struggle of the National Union of Metalworkers’ of South Africa (NUMSA) and their break with the African National Congress -South African Communist Party alliance.

Fortuitously, the Socialist Workers Revolutionary Party has just used social media to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Lenin’s birth. Virtually alone in the world among mass workers’ organisations, NUMSA boldly (and rightly) brandishes the banner of Lenin.

Their FaceBook remarks on this auspicious occasion steer carefully clear of laying out and specifying Lenin’s actual contributions to our movement. The same is true of a half-hour radio broadcast by Dr Vashna Jagarnath, Deputy General Secretary of the SRWP (Radio 702, 10.30am 21 April 2020). Dr Jagarnath made some interesting observations about Russian history, Lenin’s biography and family background, his early studies of capitalism in Russia and his influence in former colonial territories. She avoided any mention of Lenin’s theoretical contribution or his role in the formation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, later its Bolshevik faction, later still the Communist Party Communist movement and in establishing the Communist International.

What emerged from this interview was that Marx was a “theoretician” and Lenin “put his ideas into practice”, but there was not really a lot about what these ideas actually were, except that they might have special application in the “global south”.

All this makes the SRWP leadership look like a party which has broken with Stalinism (in the acute form of the ANC-SACP), but only incompletely. The decisive tragedy of Stalinism is that

it was a political force which first falsified and then obliterated Marxism and Leninism in the movement it dominated. Many former “hardliners” have recoiled from the direst expressions of Stalinism, but their break took them in the direction of liberal bourgeois politics. Even the best ones hesitate to name significant insights that marked the work of Lenin: **that revolution (in whatever part of the world) needs to uproot and destroy bourgeois social relations, production for private profit, and that this requires an international leadership.**

In that same *Left-Wing Communism* Lenin wrote (in 1920):

“At the present moment in history, however, it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something – and something highly significant – of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in all lands have long realised this; more often than not they have grasped it with their revolutionary class instinct rather than realised it. Herein lies the international ‘significance’ (in the narrow sense of the word) of **Soviet power and the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics**” (my emphasis – BA).

We are no longer in that “present moment” (of 1920), and only middle-class radicals masquerading as Bolsheviks can pretend that we are. However, we hope that the leadership and membership of the SRWP will reach for Lenin’s writings – all the major ones at least, and find their current relevance. A good look at the booklet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*” would be a useful start and would aid an understanding of an aspect of the current crisis.

These are the horns of the dilemma on which the SRWP is caught, striving to break from Stalinism but still under the influence of Stalinist evasion and mangling of theoretical questions. But that fact itself can and must be taken together with the position of the working class and the masses in the last five decades. In considering how to encourage a genuine

move towards Marxism in the SRWP, we need to devote some thought to those decades.

The context

Outstanding characteristics of economic and social life over the last fifty years have included

- break-neck, revolutionary, increase in the rate of technical development and its social impact
- dismantling of barriers to the reach of trade around the world
- a parallel huge growth in banking and finance
- massive shift in industrial production from its former heartlands to “emerging markets”.
- In the course of the above, workers in the formerly under-developed world were manoeuvred into competing with workers in the old industrial centres, brutally breaking a tradition of solidarity internationally between workers’ movements. This has led to further contradictions in working class consciousness in those centres as jobs and industries disappeared and blind resentment grew. It appeared as if workers could only defend their existence by opposing and doing down workers elsewhere.
- a massively-focussed assault on all socialist ideas as the guiding principles of workers’ movements and organisations, not to mention states. This contributed to the discrediting and collapse of the bureaucratic state in the Soviet Union and its allied states.

All these drives interact with and feed each other. All have had powerful impacts on the way people live and the choices facing them.

They all arise from deliberate decisions adopted by the

capitalist class – the bourgeoisie – in order to confront the systemic social and economic crisis which surfaced in the 1970s (about the time the US was being driven out of Vietnam).

The results have been profound. The “advanced” nations of Europe and North America have been more and more stripped of traditional industries and trading patterns, with hugely damaging social consequences. Meanwhile, a country like China, which 40 years ago stood almost completely outside of world markets and whose citizens were mainly employed in agriculture, is now the industrial workshop of the world and a powerful leader in technical development. China has also become a major political power and challenges the hegemony of the United States.

Bangladesh, which has existed as a country for barely 50 years, has today cornered a huge wedge of the textile and clothing industry which two hundred years ago made Manchester great, although the social, legal and civil rights of the textile workforces there are in some ways worse than the mill workers of Lancashire knew.

But both of these (and many other) economies still rely on selling their products to customers in the wealthy countries of the world. They are thoroughly enmeshed in a variety of ways in “global chains” of supply, production and value.

While huge numbers of people have experienced a significant increase in their living standards from these changes, many have also experienced extremes of exploitation, while others have been expelled from world markets and marginalised from society. But above all huge profits have been made by a comparatively small group of the population. The results of this development of imperialism has been an increase in every dimension of inequality.

This kind of “globalisation” may have helped raise populations out of extreme poverty, but it has also blocked countries’

incipient development and triggered severe social crises.

Banking and finance have assumed enormous importance in daily life. They have been released from traditional controls and have been significant in enabling the “delocalising” of industries. Debt and the trade in debt have become major instruments of economic disruption and restructuring. The “casino” economy ensures that all businesses and industries face a standing holy inquisition based on the “bottom line”: if their business functioning does not yield the absolutely maximum profit, they are closed down, the “assets” realised and the workforce told to go away and die. Many an attempt by a militant working class to win back a little more of the surplus value they create at work has been undermined by the nimbleness of hyper-mobile capital.

Capitalist relations of production

Inspired by the idea expressed by Adam Smith that each individual ensures the benefit of all by pursuing selfishly their own interest, the lords of finance feel exonerated from contemplating the effects of their activities on the masses, or of even wondering how those masses protect themselves from famine, plague or poverty. This foundational conception for capitalism is most seriously brought into question by the coronavirus pandemic.

The damage inflicted on the workers’ socialist movement over the last fifty years has been profound. None of the great political organisations of the working class have emerged unscathed from these years and many, in adapting to the onslaught, have become ever-less ambitious in setting goals and establishing political programmes. This is understandable: the arrangements of capitalist economic globalisation have severely weakened working-class organisation in the workplace and in society. While the trade unions have continued in many places to be a potential bastion of class defiance, the best among them have been fully aware of fighting on the back foot.

The old equation of working-class industrial militancy and confidence with political class consciousness, which kept many a Marxist grouping together in the post-World War II period, is worn painfully thin, and mainly lives on among middle-class activists.

(*No Going Back* quite rightly refers to aspects of imperialist policy in the past period, but this is not related to a half-century of class relations and how they have worked out. For them, working-class consciousness is not the outcome of material social processes, it is an abstraction).

The best trades union and socialist political leaders are well aware of this context however, because they deal with it every day. They are very aware that for many workers their confidence in socialism is severely sapped. The collapse of the Soviet Union and of mass Communist Parties, as well as the vile work of the capitalist media contribute to this lack of confidence, just as the versions of global supply, production and value chains imposed by imperialism since 1970 turn worker against worker and have fostered a nationalist back-lash.

It is unions like Unite the Union in the UK and NUMSA in South Africa which deal with these and other problems on a daily basis. And at the moment that is where the main struggle for the consciousness of the working class is focussed.

And in the absence of real confidence in a socialist future, apparently “reformist” policies demanding government action to secure welfare, protect businesses from bankruptcy and defend workers’ living standards can play a role, if they rally a body of the more conscious workers to take their own fate in their hands as a working class leadership.

At a global level, the climate crisis and now the coronavirus pandemic cast a glaring light on the world that imperialism has fashioned. The productive forces of society (industrial capacity, technique, science and above all human labour) are

constrained by the social relations of production (capitalism, business, the role of money, the hegemony of the bourgeoisie). So long as the profit motive – that major element in the social relations of production – continues to dominate over the needs of the producers (and of the potential producers currently excluded), the more human society undermines the very conditions for its own continued existence on Earth.

This is the issue posed now. Our job is to assist recognition of this in the working class and in a mutual relationship of struggle. We do need to forge a new relationship between socialist intellectual and worker-activists. At the moment, certainly in the richer established capitalist nations, there are divisions between the better educated, socially-empowered and liberal-minded section of the labour-force which has generally done rather better out of “global” economy (which is where many of the socialist groups draw their membership) and those employed in less secure and rewarding jobs, who in the best cases are members of “blue-collar” trades unions. This division is one of the big obstacles to overcome.

But our movement has a rich history of resources which can help us to overcome the problems of working-class consciousness which mirrors this division.

A vital text to study

A text which is worth looking at carefully in connection with the current crisis (arising out of the dead-end and serious turning point in “globalisation” is a fragment by Friedrich Engels, part of a planned work (to be called *Forms of Bondage*) which was never completed. At the time Engels was writing, by the way, it was quite normal to refer to “man” as the representative of all human beings. This is not acceptable today, but we should be patient with the text on that account. There are some other aspects of Engels’ ideas in this text which reflect the limitations of the scientific notions of the day.

Because the fragment starts with considerations of *The Part Played by Labour in the Transformation from Ape to Man*, that is the title under which it was ultimately published. The text is available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm>.

Engels' topic in these few pages is how human beings are (like all life) part of nature. But they are a part of nature which has also evolved the ability to both envisage and execute changes in nature in order to achieved a desired goal. He explains: "The animal merely *uses* its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence: man by his changes makes it serves his ends, *masters* it."

But then Engels – this was in the early 1880s – issues a stark warning:

"Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us".

There follow a number of examples of historical human-generated environmental disasters. Engels points out about each "victory" that:

"in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first".

He continues: "Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside of nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and all that our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage of all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly."

Explaining that "with every day that passes we are acquiring a better understanding of these laws," he goes on: "we are more

than ever in a position to realise, and hence to control, even the most remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities. But the more this progresses, the more will men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature, and the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contrast between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body”.

(For Engels, the need for a materialist method of thought and opposition to idealist methods was a permanently important matter, and his advice must be taken seriously by all socialists. This is a point which will be expanded later.)

He concludes that “the social science of the bourgeoisie ... examines only social effects of human actions in the fields of production and exchange that are actually intended ... **As individual capitalists are engaged in production and exchange for the sake of immediate profit, only the nearest, most immediate results must first be taken into account.**” (my emphasis).

“In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different.”

Engels explains very simply and lucidly the content of the struggle and the aims which the Socialist Revolutionary Workers’ Party has adopted: “... by concentrating wealth in the hands of a minority and dispossessing the huge majority, this instrument” (he meant modern industry) “was destined at first to give social and political domination to the bourgeoisie, but later, to give rise to a class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat **which can end only in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of all class antagonisms** (my emphasis – B.A.). But in this sphere too, by long and often cruel experience and by collecting and

analysing historical material, we are gradually learning to get a clear view of the indirect, more remote social effects of our production activity, and so are afforded an opportunity to control and regulate these effects as well”.

Sadly, at the moment there are few established workers' organisations around the world in which these issues are seriously discussed, or can even be raised. The SRWP must be one of the ones where this is possible! Naturally, workers will look for a discussion of aims which look achievable within the current framework of social relations. This is entirely understandable, and gains made within this framework can be very valuable, as workers in the UK and US know.

But the current coming together of a major economic crisis, a major health crisis and a chronic environmental crisis does mean that a body of SRWP members needs to be conscious of the way Engels presented this problem of humanity and nature.

Selecting and putting forward proposals for action

Besides making available some of the best teachings of past socialist leaders, the best way to educate a movement of workers and temper the political consciousness of its members is to develop a systematic programme of demands which enables members to take action over burning everyday issues but in doing so opens the way for a discussion of the wider aims.

In the two recent documents submitted by Comrade Shaheen Khan (*The Coronavirus, Capitalism and the Response of the Working Class* and *Our Perspectives and Our Tasks*), various proposals are made which he probably believed would appeal to workers as solutions to the immediate problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, but also strengthen their awareness of their own power, which is a necessary preparation for looking for ways to make that power prevail.

The problem is that such demands cannot be successful if they are dreamed up in the heads of one or more intellectuals on

the basis of their own plans and aspirations. They have to be anchored also in the minds of, in the first place, those special workers who are going to persuade and lead many others, arguing on the basis of their daily experience, building up their confidence and their communal action with other workers. Sadly, it looks as if Comrade Shaheen Khan has chosen a set of proposals based on a the thoughts in his own head and now casts his bread upon the waters in the hope that it will be returned a hundredfold, whereas it is more likely it will fall on stony ground.

My first reaction (from thousands of miles away in London) was that it is not clear which audience among workers Comrade Shaheen Khan thinks he is addressing. He has a clear conception of the problems they face, and a fairly detailed set of proposals for dealing with them. But there is no sign of how these proposals could be discussed with the SRWP leadership and membership. Comparing the second document with the first, one can see that some proposals in the first document have been dropped, but there is no account given about why this is so. **That leads me to suspect that the proposals don't really find much traction among workers, because if there was, they would start to change and take on a concrete form as they developed from the "abstract idea" (in Comrade Shaheen Khan's head) towards the "practical idea" (as concrete plans in the hands of workers).**

The contemporary significance of Engels' concept

Dealing with a deep crisis in "the fields of production and exchange" in the 1970s, world capitalism, led by its American arm, chose the deliberate course outlined nearer the beginning of this text. People know it variously as "The Washington Consensus", "supply-side economics", the "Chicago School" and of course "globalisation". While revolutionary socialist movements around the world were being side-lined, defeated, undermined and corrupted, conditions were created for massive but one-sided "development" in the "third" world and China.

Maybe Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Henry Kissinger spared a thought for the “remote effects” of their drive to “globalisation” forty years ago. Maybe not. They probably consoled themselves with J M Keynes’ dictum that “in the long run we are all dead”. Certainly, they are not alive to see the actual results of their actions.

A form of globalisation which thoroughly and properly and thoughtfully shares with the rest of the world the advances which have marked European and North American societies would have been and will be a good thing, because it will eradicate poverty, ignorance and inequality. But it must be done for the benefit of all future human beings and in consciousness of the “remote effects” of all the actions involved, applying science and human measures to the process. Uncontrolled globalisation in the interests of capital has involved a huge anarchic expansion of “smoke-stack” industries and reliance on oil and coal power, which now destabilises the entire climate of the world. Only now – very late in the game – has capital turned to new forms of energy, and only when it can turn a profit from them.

Capitalist – anarchic – deregulation of global trade and movement of people means a giant city the size of Wuhan has a population which a generation ago mainly lived in the countryside. Adaptation to urban living and the needs of urban hygiene have always been problematic under such circumstances, and it is not clear that the entrepreneurs who have turned Wuhan into a world city prioritise the fostering of urban hygiene and modern culture of life among the whole population. Many workers do not enjoy the full rights of citizenship, and live on the margins. The experience of the European industrial revolution could have been extremely instructive in this regard, but it is not clear how far lessons have been learned from this. Meanwhile around the whole world, developed and “developing”, layer after layer of regulation has been stripped away. Bodies with responsibility for public health

have been deprived of experienced personnel and re-purposed or simply abandoned.

Wuhan is so integrated into the world that a local incident where (so far as we can tell) a virus formerly limited to other animals which has adapted to infecting human beings has been carried by infected humans virtually uncontrollably right across the world. Globalisation of trade and general intercourse, without applying the long and painful lessons of modern public health, has exploded beyond any chance of catching and suppressing such an outbreak early on. But it doesn't need to be like this.

The need for socialist globalisation, alert to the “remote consequences” of actions taken, was never greater. But recognition of this fact is only significant if it is embedded in the consciousness of the working class. And we now need to look at some of the factors which affect that consciousness.

The working-class response to the coronavirus crisis

Right across the world, the working-class response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been extraordinary.

When the 2008-2010 “sub-prime” banking collapse hit society with shattering effect, the most painful thing for conscious socialists was to see the bemused and confused response throughout the social layers affected most sharply, evicted home-owners, small businesspeople and laid-off workers. People reacted to their situation by camping in town squares as “indignados”, in the “Occupy” movement, engaging in frantic but eventually fruitless debates about what had gone wrong and how to go forward in a different way. The organised working class and its trades unions were put on the back foot. Even talk about the working class – as opposed to undifferentiated “citizens”, was denounced as outdated dogmatic nonsense.

Many Marxists will remember the difficult discussions with individuals and groups blown into the air by the effects of

the finance crisis who didn't want to be lectured about how the system works by people they suspected of being sectarian word-jugglers.

This may seem ironic to formal thinkers, but right across the US and Europe the last thing many of these people wanted was a Marxist explanation of how the crisis had come about!

(The "Arab Spring" also came as a reaction to the – global – banking crisis and its effects, but although this series of uprisings shared many traits with the "indignados" this movement really did seriously shake governments across the Middle East and North Africa.)

The most exceptional development anywhere in the world after 2008-10 was the magnificent class movement of South African workers unleashed by the massacre of the Marikana miners. This also led to the exceptional decision by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) to break the trade union movement's alliance with the ANC and SACP and set out to establish a working-class party based on revolutionary Marxism. This was the only development internationally that adequately reflected the depth of the finance crisis and identified its significance for the working class, but even then NUMSA has had to work hard to get the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party off the ground, and to find a way back to genuine Bolshevism.

In this 2020 crisis the working-class emerges directly as the heroes of the whole of society.

And it is not just the working class as an undifferentiated mass of the population, but the working class in its trades unions which has taken the crisis in hand and made its presence known. This is, in any case, the experience in the UK.

Postal workers here have kept up deliveries right through the lockdown (although they are now instructed to deliver only

genuine mail, not the advertising junk-mail they have more recently been obliged to deliver). They emerge as the genuine face of the community where families and pensioners and the chronically ill are penned into their homes. Their union – Union of Communication Workers (UCW) – is engaged in a long-drawn out struggle to defend members' rights and resist the impact of privatisation on Royal Mail.

Unite the Union represents many groups of workers, including bus drivers, who have heroically continued to work so that other "key" workers can get to the hospitals treating virus victims and manufacturing and logistics workers can get to work producing and distributing medicines and equipment.

Employers like Transport for London (TfL) needed to be pushed hard to make sure that drivers are protected from infection and that buses, trains and underground trains are regularly deep cleaned and disinfected. Anger exploded among union members as the death-toll of drivers mounted. The union has won and imposed certain measures of protection for these heroes.

Other Unite members working in sanitation (dust-bin collection) have had to fight for proper Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). From government ministers downwards to local managers, the initial response is always a bare-faced lie, i.e. that the employees have been issued with adequate equipment as laid down in the guidelines and have nothing to complain about. If the equipment wasn't where it was needed, it was on its way. It would arrive tomorrow or the next day. The workers have had to explain each time that COVID-10 isn't "normal" and unless workers have the appropriate emergency PPE when they need it, many of them will get infected and possibly die and another vital service will just collapse.

Workers are starting to stand up and fight this through their unions and they are taking that fight right through the community. And they are often winning because the community is

recognising their worth and importance, which has been concealed by decades of deliberate slander, disrespect and being discounted as insignificant (since the Thatcher government smashed the miners' union in 1984-1985 and brought in class-based laws to take away trade union rights).

Lowly-paid supermarket staff have done amazing work keeping stores open and safe and supervising "social distancing" among customers.

And none are more aware of the lie about PPE than National Health Service (NHS) hospital staff. From senior doctors to nurses and on to catering staff, porters and cleaners, they are in minute-by-minute contact with highly infectious coronavirus patients. So, too, are workers in the care sector who either care for elderly and vulnerable people in care homes or visit such people in their own homes. This group is an undervalued, underpaid and exploited section of the workforce.

They have had to fight tooth and nail to get adequate supplies of PPE, and they have had to face government ministers and hospital managers telling them that it is safe to work with inadequate protection, that they must work with inadequate protection, that fresh PPE is on its way, that the army is rushing PPE to them as we speak and so on and so forth. Many of these key workers have become infected and died. (A recent example of this came in the *Guardian* newspaper, 17 April 2020: "NHS staff told 'wear aprons' as protective gowns run out. Exclusive: U-turn on original guidelines of full-length waterproof gear for high-risk procedures".)

Resistance to COVID-19 has galvanised the mass of society, and "key" workers (and it turns out that large numbers of "mere" workers are "key" to society in one way or another – go figure!) are at the heart of the community response.

Indeed, the right-wing Conservative and Thatcherite Prime

Minister of the UK, Boris Johnson, on his way to a hospital intensive care bed with the virus, came on air to assert that “there definitely is such a thing as society”. (The Iron Lady herself is said to have asserted the exact opposite view! How things change!). More about thatcher and Thatcherism later.

Naturally, social conditions in the “rich” (I.e. imperialist) nations involve certain working-class gains won over centuries of struggle. In the USA and the UK, the various “lockdown” measures mean millions of workers in “non-essential” trades have been thrown out of work and various types of welfare arrangement have been put in place to keep them fed and supplied with necessities during the “lockdown”. We can expect some quite sharp struggles over how this works out; for example, the government promised there would be no evictions as tenants on “lockdown” ran out of cash for the rent. But, actually, there have been many evictions and some vulnerable people have died. Undocumented refugees are particularly vulnerable in all aspects of their lives. By-and-large, however, most people are unlikely to starve, or at least have the conception that society will not let them starve.

But in many parts of the world workers have not been able to win the right to even a bare existence. A report has been published by the “Haiti Support Group” (here in the UK) under the headline: “Garment factories Re-open in Haiti Despite COVID-19 Fears”. The report, which might have come from any number of countries in Latin America, Africa or Asia, explains: “Garment workers at Haiti’s Caracol industrial park are expected to return to work on 20 April, following an announcement by Prime Minister Joseph Jouthe.”

The report continues: “Many have been left with no pay due to cancelled orders and factory shutdowns, or forced to work in high-risk conditions as factories reopen before the crisis has passed.

“When asked about the reopening of textile factories across

Haiti, Georges Sassine, factory owner and president of L'Association des Industries d'Haiti (ADIH), the main organisation of Haiti's manufacturing sector, has said: **'the question was whether to die of hunger or coronavirus'.**"

It is further stated: "In a letter addressed to workers on 3 April, S & H Global informed them that the 50% of their salary promised by the Haitian government had not yet arrived and would only constitute 50% of the already meagre 500 gourdes minimum wage, 5 US Dollars per 8 hour working day (already four times lower than the average cost of living in Haiti)."

"Prioritising profits over the wellbeing of workers" (my emphasis), the Korean textile supplier tenants at the (Caracol) park had originally issued the letter to announce that factory production would recommence on 13 April. While the company stated that government-advised health and safety measures would be implemented (the wearing of masks and hand-washing), local unions and international garment sector NGOs remain unconvinced ..."

The rest of this highly-informative report is available on <https://haitisupportgroup.org/garment-factories-reopen-haiti-covid19/> .

In this, one of the poorest countries in the Caribbean, class struggle is waged and the working class come to the fore as a major social factor.

As we shall see later, "prioritising profits over the wellbeing of workers", and the rejection of this attitude, is a serious matter which engages opposition from workers (and wider society). There can be no doubt at all that a profound shift is underway in the relations between the class of factory-owners and bankers and the working class at the heart of the world's masses.

The coronavirus pandemic is certainly unprecedented in its severity. Its ultimate impact on world economy is difficult to

assess at the moment but it will eventually be hugely destructive: things will never look quite the same again. It is the current social and economic conditions prevailing around the world which have turned this new biological hazard (novel Corvid-19) into a massive crisis for every dimension of human life. The origins of the outbreak thus certainly do lie in the character of modern capitalism-imperialism.

By and large the pandemic has revealed that the real "heroes" are the doctors, nurses, hospital technicians, scientific researchers, paramedics, aides, cleaners, transport, sanitation and logistics workers and the many volunteers who have stepped in during "lockdown" to feed, help and support the vulnerable.

This has produced in the UK at least a different general outlook from the one associated with "globalisation", the pure capitalist Adam Smith view that my individual commercial success is all that is required for happiness in society. "Neo" liberals like Margaret Thatcher are said to have taken this further, proclaiming that "there is no such thing as society". The UK has seen a decidedly Thatcherite Prime Minister – Boris Johnson – assert that there certainly is such a thing as society. He had just been successfully treated by the UK National Health Service for coronavirus, and (he was still a bit woozy from the disease) poured fulsome praise upon his foreign-born nurses.

This may only be a passing effect in Mr. Johnson's case, but it reflects a swing in the general social attitude to workers, and this swing cannot fail to have its effect among workers. The responses of bus and other "key" workers show that it is having an effect. But that effect needs space to develop. It will not be strengthened by calls for "a new Zimmerwald", but it might be expressed first by an improvement in the general activity and level of involvement of trades union branches and regional and national committees and associated bodies.

It could be reflected in workers getting involved in the Corbyn movement in the Labour Party, if the discussion there can concentrate on issues affecting workers.

Marxist and socialist intellectuals can encourage a discussion of principles by encouraging the development of trade union activity after decades of a down-turn in that sphere.

A real development of mass consciousness needs to happen in that context. Attempts to force the issue by promulgating noisy statements will end up in “phrase-mongering and clowning”. But it doesn’t need to be like that. There is a genuine job of work to do. But it can only be done if the working class is a material part of our work, not something separate and abstract.

Bob Archer, April 2020

Shaheen Khan (in South Africa): (1) “The Coronavirus, Capitalism and the Working class” and (2) “Our Perspectives and Tasks”. (See below)

Public Reading Rooms (UK): “No Going Back – The COVID-19 Pandemic: Theses”.

The Coronavirus, Capitalism and the response of the working class by Shaheen Khan, 21/03/2020

The spread of the coronavirus to all countries of the world in the past week has laid to rest any sceptic view that this is but a normal flu and does not require special attention from socialists and the working class. As the pandemic spreads across the globe, the global health emergency is rapidly evolving into a crisis of the entire existing world social order. As the death toll rises, major cities are in lockdown, and hundreds of millions of people are faced with the loss of their jobs and incomes; the social, economic, political and

moral bankruptcy of the capitalist system is being utterly exposed. Capitalism not only creates the conditions for the existence of viruses and pandemics but the failure of the major capitalist governments to prepare for a pandemic is resulting in thousands, and potentially millions, of deaths, "The number of cases is already approaching 300,000 and it is rising rapidly. The number of deaths has passed 11,000 and is increasing exponentially. A pandemic of this character was both foreseeable and foreseen. However, the most basic requirements to secure the health and safety of the population were ignored".

The capitalist system is in deep crisis and the rule of the capitalist class on a global scale is in jeopardy. For the second time in little over a decade, the world economy is in a state of breakdown, this time on a far greater scale than 2008. In 2008, the downturn in real estate—by way of subprime to funding markets and from there to the balance sheets of major banks—threatened an economic collapse. In the winter of 2008-2009, more than 750,000 job losses were recorded every month—a total of 8.7 million over the course of the recession. Major industrial companies like GM and Chrysler stumbled toward bankruptcy, and "for the global economy, it unleashed the largest contraction in international trade ever seen".

It is too early to confidently predict the course of the economic downturn facing the world economy now due to the coronavirus. But a recession is inevitable. The global manufacturing industry was already shaken in 2019. All the elements of a new financial crisis have been in place for several years and the coronavirus is the spark or trigger of the stock market crisis, not the cause. . The stock market bubble is bursting before our very eyes and the *Financial Times* provides an estimate for the three largest investment funds, BlackRock, Vanguard and State Street, whose market value of assets is estimated to have fallen by \$2.8 trillion in just under a month.

With the coronavirus spreading exponentially across the globe, the world's major economies will be shut down for at least several months. Factories are closing, shops, gyms, bars, schools, colleges, and restaurants shutting. Early [HYPERLINK "https://www.epi.org/blog/coronavirus-shock-will-likely-claim-3-million-jobs-by-summer/"](https://www.epi.org/blog/coronavirus-shock-will-likely-claim-3-million-jobs-by-summer/) indicators suggest job losses in the United States could top 1 million per month between now and June. That would be a sharper downturn than in 2008-2009. For sectors like the airline industry, the impact will be far worse. In the oil industry, the prospect of market contraction has unleashed a ruthless price war among OPEC, Russia, and shale producers. This will stress the heavily indebted energy sector. If price wars spread, we could face a ruinous cycle of debt-deflation that will jeopardize the world's huge pile of [HYPERLINK](https://www.ft.com/content/27cf0690-5c9d-11ea-b0ab-339c2307bcd4)

["https://www.ft.com/content/27cf0690-5c9d-11ea-b0ab-339c2307bcd4"](https://www.ft.com/content/27cf0690-5c9d-11ea-b0ab-339c2307bcd4) corporate debt, which is twice as large as it was in 2008. International trade will sharply contract. Investment bank Goldman Sachs announced on Friday that it expects the US economy to contract by an unprecedented 24 percent in the second quarter of the year (April-June), as production and service industries grind to a halt. This would be the largest quarterly contraction in US history, far surpassing even what took place during the Great Depression. The International Labour Organization reports that up to 25 million workers worldwide could lose their jobs over the next several months, but this is a vast underestimation. In the United States alone, 14 million jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector will be affected by mandatory shutdowns. Moody's Analytics reports that nearly 80 million jobs, or half of the US economy, are at risk.

While the pandemic has triggered the crisis, the causes of the economic breakdown lie far deeper. The process of financialization—the systemic and unrestrained separation of the accumulation of staggering levels of wealth from real productive activity—created a massively unstable global

economy, based on the unlimited transfusion of liquidity by the central banks (i.e. quantitative easing) to drive up the equity markets to ever more unrealistic and unsustainable levels. The capitalist system is being exposed as a society that subordinates everything to the obscene greed and corruption of the oligarchy. An indescribable level of selfishness, egotism, and indifference to human life pervades the ruling class, which treats the lives of workers as dispensable.

Social opposition is growing internationally. Wildcat strikes and walkouts in Michigan and Ohio forced a temporary shutdown of the North American auto industry, as workers refused to let the auto companies "kill them on the line" for the sake of profit. There is seething anger amongst the working class and soon we will see mass explosions in different parts of the world. The capitalist crisis and the pandemic will not silence the class but stir its basic instinct to struggle and in the process develop the necessary revolutionary consciousness to deal decisively with the capitalist system.

Capitalist Crisis, the Austerity Budget and the State of Disaster address

In South Africa the Apartheid-Capitalist system is crashing right in front of our eyes. Mining is in shambles, finance under massive attack from digital money and a very weak manufacturing base. The energy sector is barely limping along and the 'negotiated settlement' has lost its legitimacy and has expired.

The State of Disaster address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the evening of the 15th March 2020 was the first serious attempt by the South African state to respond to the Coronavirus which had already infected more than 150 000 people internationally at that time, including South African citizens who were stranded in China for almost three months. Nothing much was said about the virus by the President at his

State of the Nation (SONA) address on the 13th February 2020 nor by the Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni at his budget speech on the 26th February 2020. In fact the budget speech massively cut costs on basic social services in general and health in particular. They did this knowing full well that the Coronavirus would soon be upon us with a public health system that was in a total state of decay.

The budget speech of the Minister of Finance came straight out of the Treasuries 'Economic Strategy Document' which is a rightwing, neoliberal, austerity budget geared to slashing the public wage bill and cutting costs on basic social services in general and the public health services in particular. This was a mean budget directed against the working class and poor! Health services have been hammered by neoliberal austerity measures for a quarter of a century where the South African working class has carried the burden of a range of disease areas like malnutrition, child mortality, Tuberculosis, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. Above this can we forget the devastation wrecked on the population of over 350 000 deaths from HIV and Aids under the Mbeki regime?

This budget which continues to be implemented exposes the hypocrisy of the President's appeal that the coronavirus "will unite us and bring us closer". Behind this appeal for national unity and a common approach to the problems we face as a society lies the greed of the ruling class which is seen in the kind of decisions they have made to address the virus. These decisions threaten the safety of the working class and poor of our society. Cyril Ramaphosa, Tito Mboweni and the entire leadership of the ANC government are responsible for any death of any worker from the Coronavirus!

The Context of our struggle

COVID-19 arrives in South Africa against a public health

system that is in deep and structural crisis.

South Africa has a split health system, one for the rich and one for the poor. Even those working class people who have managed to buy themselves out of the public health system find that the supply of health services is precarious as they run out of benefits on a regular basis, falling back into the collapsing public health system.

The health system of the rich, a private health system has all the facilities needed to respond to COVID-19 – testing facilities for the virus, laboratories that can generate results quickly and efficiently, clean hospitals, access to water, a stable supply of electricity. On the other side we have hospitals of the working class – water that runs on and off, unstable electricity supply, a demoralised and apathetic staff (who themselves do not use these hospital facilities as they have state medical aid), hospitals and clinics with little or no medication, chaotic administration and laboratories that are ill-equipped to deliver reliable services.

The reason for the high burden of disease in South Africa is because we are the most unequal and one of the poorest countries in the world. The South African working class is a poverty stricken class where the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCD's) is three times higher than in countries of similar levels of development. The South African working class had higher levels of precariousness and systemic exposure to poverty than their poorer counterparts in other parts of the world.

South Africa is also a country trapped in deep, systemic and structural violence. This plays out in our townships where gangsters rule and violence is directed not only at communities but more especially on women and girls. Women and girls while in the frontline of these attacks are not the only ones. The 'foreigner' is often used as a cover to face

assault for the austerity measures of the ruling class.

The epidemic of unemployment faces large sections of the working class, where 40% of the population and 50% of the youth are unemployed. This unemployment level is a catastrophe.

The class divisions in our society, in every aspect of life is a result not of any misunderstanding nor of a 'lack of will'. It is a product of the rule of a comprador bourgeois who protect and advance the interests of a white monopoly capitalist ruling class. This comprador bourgeois carried out the massacre at Marikana and is conducting a vicious battle to privatise the SOE's, Eskom, SAA, the railways while at the same time cutting the wages of public sector workers.

It is time for revolutionary politics and a new strategy to meet the social and political needs of the masses. It is time to unite the working class, the employed and unemployed behind the revolutionary party, the SRWP which must be ready to take on capitalism and defeat it.

Our Strategic Perspective

There are times in history when sudden events – natural disasters, economic collapses, pandemics, wars, famines – change everything. They change politics, they change economics and they change public opinion in drastic ways. Socialists regard these as “trigger events.” During a trigger event, things that were previously unimaginable quickly become reality, as the social and political map is remade. On the one hand, major triggers are rare; but on the other, we have seen them regularly in recent decades. Events such as 9/11, the Iraq War, Hurricane Katrina, and the financial crash of 2008 have all had major repercussions on national life, leading to political changes that would have been difficult to predict beforehand. COVID-19, the coronavirus pandemic, is by far the biggest trigger event of our generation. It is a combination

of natural epidemic and economic collapse happening at the same time.

The task in the days, weeks and months ahead is to build a conscious socialist leadership in the working class throughout the world.

Every event of the past week has demonstrated the necessity of putting an end to capitalism and fighting for socialism. The pandemic exposes in concrete form the inability of a society based on private profit, on the endless accumulation of wealth, and on the antagonisms of nation-states, to address any of the problems of mass society.

We must appreciate that the Coronavirus is not a medical crisis but ***it is primarily a social and political crisis!*** While big pharma rush to find a vaccine, which will take a year and a half to test for its safety and veracity in human beings, the working class, particularly its leadership, has to *organise* society so as to slow down and finally reverse transmission of the virus. Even after a vaccine has passed clinical trials we will have to contend with global monopoly capital and its desire to make billions out of it.

The immediate question is raising the **consciousness** of the working class and poor and developing a sense of social solidarity. This is done through elementary interventions like pamphlets, posters, television, community radio stations, loud hailing etc. This must take place at every level of the party and must take place not only at the homes/living quarters of workers but also at schools, churches, taxi ranks etc.

This approach on organisation has to take account of the danger of spreading the virus and must consist of *localised organising* in small groups and meetings of small groups that can address issues. As our influence in the communities grows and more people join up the small groups themselves will grow

both broader and deeper into the class.

The aim is to form Solidarity Action Committees (SAC's) which are local neighbourhood structures. These structures once formed must conduct only small localised meetings in communities so as to protect communities from spreading the virus. The success of our endeavour to build such structures depend on how widespread our organising is and how deep we can reach into the communities in the first place.

The immediate aim of these SAC is to create health structures for anti-coronavirus defence in the working class. We must create social and physical infrastructure that the working class can access in the struggle against the virus. These structures are those we demand from the state and those we set up on our own through our organised communities.

The working class demands:

Immediate and *full access to water and sanitation* – a major defence against the virus is washing hands with soap on a regular basis. We must demand that the state set up thousands if not millions of temporary hand washing facilities across South Africa. This must start with the immediate provision of water to informal settlements, taxi ranks, train stations, shopping malls, clinics, schools, libraries, community halls etc. All places of employment must be compelled to install water/soap points or sanitisers. Our trade unions must monitor this. The armed forces must be organised to deliver water to all areas where there is no water available.

That all *hospitals to be nationalised* and private healthcare facilities to be abolished. – away with the two-tier health system!

A *coronavirus testing system that is free* – we reject the payment of a fee for testing for the virus and it must be free to all people at all facilities, whether they be private or public hospitals and clinics. The immediate roll out of

testing stations to all areas of need, where people can access them within walking distance.

The state must immediately *take command of all laboratories* – this will allow a more efficient and well run system of testing where results will be released timeously.

Production and free distribution of *appropriate masks* – every person in the country must have an appropriate mask to protect themselves against the virus. The state must set up mass production facilities for the production of masks immediately.

The production of *essential medical equipment* – essential medical equipment like drips, protective clothing etc needs to be produced on a large scale immediately. These will be critical for establishing temporary quarantine facilities. This will only be able to be done on the basis that such factories be expropriated as is taking place in many countries of the world to deal with the virus.

Feeding schemes in townships to meet the needs of children who are not any longer at school as well as hungry and malnourished members of the community. Set up key feeding points at churches, community halls and other spaces.

Food parcels for all those people who are ill and in isolation or quarantine.

A *basic income grant* for the unemployed – the working class and their children suffer high levels of malnutrition and are food insecure. In order to fight the virus the immune system must be boosted by nourishing food which the unemployed and poor do not have access to.

The *closure of all non-essential production*, with full income to those affected (initially for one month, but longer if necessary); safe working conditions in industries essential to the functioning of society.

No dismissal or retrenchment of workers who are ill. Guaranteed paid leave for all workers who are ill or for firms that have stopped operating or are on short time. This must not impact the leave due to workers nor the UIF payments . Companies must make extra-ordinary arrangements to ensure that they carry these workers till they can return to work.

The State implement strict *adherence to WHO rules* governing cleanliness and safety in the workplace.

The state make *working class transport safer* – the working class travel in taxis and trains that are overcrowded. While laws governing this has been promulgated communities structures together with taxi associations must monitor this to ensure it is implemented.

Cut interest rates to zero for the duration of the epidemic and cancel all home loan and debt repayments for the next three months or until things get back to normal.

We must defend the working class! The building of Solidarity Action Committees must proceed immediately. We must explain the middle class programme of 'self-isolation' does not defend the working class against infection from the virus. This approach must be replaced by a more holistic approach that focuses on preparing infrastructure that will be needed to deal with thousands of cases that need isolation. With our communities we must identify facilities that can be converted into holding spaces for community members that need to be isolated or quarantined. These facilities include churches, community halls, universities, colleges etc. Some of these like universities already have basic infrastructure like running water, canteens for cooking, electricity etc.

We will work carefully and ensure we do not contribute to spreading the virus. This means we will take special care in the way we organise in small groups, using electronic and social media methods where possible to reduce direct contact.

While we will take extreme care and consider every organisational move we make, we will not be paralysed by fear of the virus nor infection!

We will move from the defence to the offensive in time! The building of SAC's is in line with the SRWP Central Committee resolution to lead the struggles of the working class and build party branches in the cauldron of battle. The coronavirus comes at a time when the capitalist system is in such deep crisis that it is possible to prepare to rid society of it and build a socialist humanitarian society.

Shaheen Khan

21/03/2020

World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) "The Spread of the pandemic and the lessons of the past week", 21/03/2020

(Financial Times, "World's three biggest fund houses shed \$2.8tn of assets" [HYPERLINK "https://www.ft.com/content/438854a8-63b0-11ea-a6cd-df28cc3c6a68"](https://www.ft.com/content/438854a8-63b0-11ea-a6cd-df28cc3c6a68)

<https://www.ft.com/content/438854a8-63b0-11ea-a6cd-df28cc3c6a68> published on 15 March 2020).

A. Tooze, "Is the Coronavirus Crash Worse than the 2008 Financial Crisis?", 18/03/2020

WSWS, "The Spread of the pandemic and the lessons of the past week", 21/03/2020

Banda Aswell, whatsapp message 11/03/2020

Khanya College, "In the Eye of the Storm", 15/03/2020

E. Toussaint, "The Capitalist pandemic, Coronavirus and the Economic Crisis", 19/03/2020

Our Perspectives and Our Tasks by Shaheen Khan 17/04/2020

“Theory, my friend, is grey, but green is the eternal tree of life” (Goethe)

This was one of the favourite quotes of Lenin who combined the science of Marxism with the art of struggle, how to act. Such a moment lies before us today and what we need to do is not to repeat ‘formulas’ but deal with the *concrete* economic and political conditions of the particular *period* of the historical process. In line with this we must not forget that Marx and Engels famously reiterated ad nauseum that “Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action”.

The Capitalist System is in deep crisis

We are not going to deal with an in-depth analysis of the capitalist crisis, its economic, social and political character as this has been done by many analysts and political groups. We wish only to outline some elements which we believe are of decisive importance:

The capitalist system is in its deepest crisis ever and the rule of the capitalist class on a global scale is in jeopardy. What is increasingly becoming clear is that this crisis is more than a mere recession but a deep depression, as even the bourgeois IMFBlog outlines in its April *World Economic Outlook* “we project global growth in 2020 to fall -3 percent. This is a downgrade of 6.3 percentage points from January 2020, a major revision over a very short period. This makes the Great Lockdown the worst recession since the Great Depression, and far worse than the Global Financial Crisis.”

The capitalist class will of course blame the pandemic for the crisis of the system. This is not true as the the pandemic emerged at a crucial turning point in world politics. In 2019 two key developments of historic proportions took place. First, the most severe slump of the capitalist world economy began. And, secondly, a global wave of class struggles and

popular uprisings were taking place in many countries simultaneously and it covered nearly all continents.

The bourgeois are panicking as the world has changed dramatically in three months and "The magnitude and speed of collapse in activity that has followed is unlike anything experienced in our lifetime".

In South Africa the Apartheid-Capitalist system is crashing right in front of our eyes. Mining is in shambles, finance under massive attack from digital money and virtual banking and this on top of a very weak manufacturing base. The energy sector is barely limping along and the 'negotiated settlement' has lost its legitimacy and has expired.

COVID-19 arrives in South Africa against a public health system that is in deep and structural crisis. South Africa has a split health system, one for the rich and one for the poor. Even those members of the working class who have managed to buy themselves out of the public health system find that the supply of health services is precarious as they run out of benefits on a regular basis, falling back into the collapsed public health system. Unemployment has reached epidemic proportions, where 40% of the population and 50% of the youth are unemployed. This is a catastrophe.

The class divisions in our society is a result not of any misunderstanding nor of a 'lack of will'. It is a product of the rule of a comprador bourgeois who protect and advance the interests of a white monopoly capitalist ruling class. This comprador bourgeois carried out the massacre at Marikana and is conducting an austerity programme as seen in the vicious battle to privatise the SOE's, Eskom, SAA, the railways while at the same time cutting the wages of public sector workers.

The Scientific Model is a bourgeois model

The capitalist government of Cyril Ramaphosa has taken the nation into its confidence and placed before the nation the

medical/scientific basis for the lockdown. While this makes perfect sense from a scientific point of view it does not address the social character of the problem. Bourgeois science divides life into separate categories and the outline of the medical team in its analysis fails to address the question in a way that provides social solutions. In fact the epidemiologist concludes that since we are to return to normal conditions of economic and social activity the pandemic is inevitably going to kill thousands of people, particularly the elderly but also those that are immuno-compromised. What he is not saying is that those who are going to die are the black working class who are most vulnerable to the spread of the epidemic.

The lockdown in bourgeois hands is a hydra-headed monster. On the one hand it is necessary to ensure the safety of the population through 'flattening the curve'. On the other hand, because of the capitalist system, the working class and poor have been reduced to high levels of hunger and suffering. The condition of the employed working class is subject to claims and processes from the UIF which has placed the class in a very precarious position. The unemployed who eked out a living through precarious and part-time work have been thrown into abject poverty. The lockdown in its current form is untenable and represents a hell-hole for the working class and poor. The class is beginning to respond to this in the form of food protests and fighting the police who are part of a high-handed repressive bourgeois approach to the lockdown.

The bourgeois is in a tizz, caught between the competing interests of its different fractions. While initially frightened by the prospect of mass deaths of its labour force (and that is the reason why the lockdown took place in the first instance), it has already started non-essential productive activities like opening the mining industry . It plans a phased return to work and releasing the lockdown, even before it is safe to do so, which may cause the rampant spread

of the epidemic and the death of millions of black workers. The cynicism of this is mind boggling – they place profits ahead of people!

A revolutionary and socialist approach to the pandemic

Lenin as well as Trotsky liked to quote Napoleon who said “*On s’engage et puis ... on voit.*” (“First engage in a serious battle and then see what happens.”) Our task is not to wait until things unfold before us but to analyse, understand and intervene to change things in such a way that it serves the interests of the working class and oppressed.

These are difficult times, not only for the bourgeois but also for the leadership of the working class. Many bourgeois economists and NGO’s have been making recommendations to the government to adopt a Keynesian economic approach rather than the neoliberal path they have been following. This is a nationalist capitalist trajectory which does not in any way serve the interests of the working class. The NUMSA open letter to the President is different as it has as its main consideration the effects of the lockdown on the jobs bloodbath that will flow from it. However we think that it fails to address the question from a class struggle perspective and remains an economic approach to the question. We think it is not the approach to follow.

The salient issues we must consider are:

While there may be questions related to the medical/scientific outline presented by Professor Salim Abdool Karim his presentation confirms that the lockdown has been successful in keeping down infections and the spreading of the virus. More so the study indicates that if the lockdown is lifted too soon there will be an exponential increase in the number of infections and consequential death of thousands of people. These thousands of people will be black working class people living in townships and urban settlements. The danger of the

NUMSA open letter is that it may expose the workers in the manufacturing sector to this danger. Already businesses that have been operating are reporting COVID-19 infections, so too prisons, police stations, the SANDF and private hospitals. The big bourgeoisie are very unhappy with the lockdown as seen in the responses of Trump, Bolsonaro and our own Democratic Alliance. They want to return as soon as possible to business as usual through a phased approach. Their concern is the profitability of their system, not the lives of people, particularly the working class and poor.

As socialists we cannot agree with the lockdown in its current form; ours. While we recognise the essential need for physical distancing we also understand the absence of 'social needs' that is causing the working class to experience great difficulty and suffer under conditions of the lockdown. While there are a myriad of social issues to be addressed the immediate needs are that of food, a basic income, healthcare and the question of retrenchments and job losses.

The working class is not taking this lying down. Hunger and the insecurity of life is leading to conditions of revolt brewing in the class. These are the molecular processes where the class is gradually beginning to comprehend the problems arising from the social crisis. Consciousness is determined by conditions.

A revolutionary party basis its tactics on a calculation of the changes of mass consciousness. While the party must impress through its propaganda and agitation (media/newspaper/pamphlets) the dangers of the epidemic and the need for physical distancing we must begin to take leadership of the mass protest movement that is gaining momentum. The working class on its own is fighting and breaking down the parameters of the bourgeois lockdown and we need to direct this anger in the right direction and to the right quarters.

The mass anger must be directed at the ruling class, the ANC government and the provincial authorities to demand a right to a decent life under the current conditions. This must include the following:

'Food for All' – we demand a mass government funded food distribution programme. This must take place on a weekly basis with food parcels allocated and distributed to all people living in working class communities. This must also include all those people who are ill and in isolation or quarantine. We also demand immediate *feeding schemes in townships* to meet the needs of children who are not any longer at school as well as hungry and malnourished members of the community. Set up key feeding points at churches, community halls and other spaces.

A **'Basic Income Grant'** for the working class employed and unemployed, for the middle classes including small business people who are facing the brunt of the lockdown. The funding for this must come from the reserves held by the Reserve Bank and the super-profits from the Mining, Industrial and Banking sector.

The **'Nationalisation of all Hospitals'** –all private healthcare facilities to be abolished, away with the two-tier health system! A *coronavirus testing system that is free* – we reject the payment of a fee for testing for the virus and demand a humanitarian programme of mass testing which must be free to all people at all facilities, whether they be private or public hospitals and clinics. The immediate roll out of testing stations to all areas of need, where people can access them within walking distance. The state must immediately *take command of all laboratories* – this will allow a more efficient and well run system of testing where results will be released timeously. The production of *essential medical equipment* – essential medical equipment like drips, protective clothing etc needs to be produced on a large scale immediately. This will only be able to be done on the basis

that such factories be expropriated as is taking place in many countries of the world to deal with the virus. The immediate establishment of temporary quarantine facilities.

'Full Pay for all Workers! No Retrenchments and No Loss of Jobs' – we insist that only the most essential of services focussed on food production, health equipment production and those workers involved in any other essential activity be allowed to work under safe and hygienic conditions (monitored by labour and health inspectors and the trade unions). The pandemic is caused by capitalism and the capitalist class must bear responsibility for it. Workers must be paid their full salary and responsibility for claiming wages from the special UIF fund must fall on the bosses. This must not impact the leave due to workers nor the UIF payments . We will not accept any retrenchments and all work on hand must be divided between all the workers without loss in wages. Those enterprises that close down must be Nationalised under Workers Control. This must become the clarion call of the trade union movement! Guaranteed paid leave for all workers who are ill.

'Social Responsibility Programme' – there must be immediate and *full access to water and sanitation* – a major defence against the virus is washing hands with soap on a regular basis. We demand the immediate provision of water to informal settlements, taxi ranks, train stations, shopping malls, clinics, schools, libraries, community halls etc. While the state has started such a programme we must insist it be rolled out to every area in the country. The production and free distribution of *appropriate masks and sanitising material*–the state must set up mass production facilities for the production of masks and sanitising material immediately. The state make *working class transport safer* – the working class travel in taxis and trains that are overcrowded. While laws governing this has been promulgated communities structures together with taxi associations must monitor this to ensure it

is implemented. *Cut interest rates* to zero for the duration of the epidemic and cancel all home loan and debt repayments for the next three months or until things get back to normal. *Stop all evictions and rent payments* for the duration of the lockdown. *Immediately reduce the cost of airtime and data by 50% across all networks* – this must be done immediately to facilitate access to online learning for all children. *Stop the brutal repressive tactics of the police and army!* These people must perform useful tasks and not carry out the repressive agenda of the ruling class and the madman placed in charge of them. They can be useful in the distribution of food and water and other essential tasks.

Our Tasks!

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” K. Marx, [HYPERLINK “https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm”](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm) Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852)

What is very clear is that Capitalism is a system in extreme decay; climate change and the destruction of nature is the source of the epidemic and this on top of the biggest depression in the history of capitalism. The capitalist class is in a state of utter confusion and desperation as to how to address this triple crisis, but what comes naturally to it is to shift the burden onto the backs of the working class and poor. Already mass retrenchments, growing levels of unemployment, deepening inequality, impoverishment and veritable hunger of the working class and poor pock-mark our society. The working class and its organisations, primarily the SRWP, must make a choice – either the class is totally decimated and disorganised by these conditions or we fight back and begin a serious and organised defence of the class! The very conditions of existence of the working class is at stake and so too the future generations.

We must immediately organise the following **Campaigns**:

A 'Food for All' campaign – is a call for a mass government funded food distribution programme. The working class and poor are already running out of food and soon their hunger will be criminalized. We must anticipate mass food riots and looting which will be harshly dealt with by the state through a declaration of a state of emergency and or the imposition of martial law.

A 'Basic Income Grant' campaign – the unemployed have no source of income and the salaries of the working class have been cut.

A 'Single National Health System' campaign – a fight for the nationalisation of private health care facilities so that a national health response to the epidemic can be rolled out.

A 'No Retrenchments, No Job Losses, Full Wages' campaign – the working class is under severe attack and the bosses are effecting restructuring of their enterprises through retrenchments and cutting of salaries of workers. The very integrity of the working class as a social entity depends on our ability to win this fight.

A 'Social Responsibility Campaign' – full access to water and sanitation, production and distribution of masks on a mass scale, stop evictions and rent payments, zero interest rates, reduce the cost of airtime and data, an end to repressive tactics of the police and army, use the resources of the Reserve bank and the super-profits of the big Monopolies tied up in the banks for a social responsibility programme.

Our **Organisational Tasks**:

We must defend the working class!

We must call on the working class to form Workers Committees in work places and Solidarity Action Committees (SAC's) in

every township and village. We must explain our programme of demands and get these committees to lead the fight for such a programme. As far as the virus is concerned we must explain that the middle class programme of 'self-isolation' does not work for the working class and poor. We call for **physical distancing and social solidarity!** With our communities we must identify facilities that can be converted into holding spaces for community members that need to be isolated or quarantined. These facilities include churches, community halls, universities, colleges etc. Some of these like universities already have basic infrastructure like running water, canteens for cooking, electricity etc.

We must lead the struggles that are currently unfolding in the townships!

The working class and poor are starving under conditions of the lockdown. While a lockdown is beneficial as far as the spreading of the virus is concerned, it cannot be that people must go hungry and literally starve to death. We must get involved directly in these struggles waged by communities and pose the questions as outlined in our programme. We must also be sensitive to local issues that may arise.

From defence to offense! The coronavirus comes at a time when the capitalist system is in such deep crisis that mass scale struggles of the class may erupt soon. These are the important moments in history when revolutionary parties are tested. The building of SAC's are embryonic forms of Soviets, 'Worker Councils', that spring up as the organised expression of the working class in struggle. While we may be far off from this becoming generalised, we must lay the foundations for democratic working class organisations where our party cadre are leading the fight. This will also allow us to build party branches in the cauldron of battle.

Forward to the defence of the working class!

Forward to the Socialism!

Aluta Continua!

Shaheen Khan 17/04/2020

T. Cliff 'Building the Party'.

IMFBlog "The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression.

RCIT : The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution: What It Is and How to Fight It, *A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle*

ibid

Banda Aswell, whatsapp message 11/03/2020

RCIT: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution: What It Is and How to Fight It *A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle*

New Issue 13 Die Werker out now!

The latest issue (Oct 2019) of Die Werker

Inside this issue:

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 baulk 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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Out Now! Latest issue of Die Werker, June 2019

latest issue of Die Werker

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TCL miners resume their struggle for their stolen pensions.

Adrien Vodslon, My Father: Mirek Vodslon

My father was an upright man. He always tried, when we were together at least, to think positively. He always said of life's minor evils: "It's still better than falling down stairs".

This family saying came from his uncle Paul who survived the concentration camps in World War II.

My father was also at home wherever he went, in Paris, Prague, Namibia or Marseille. He spoke around ten languages. Sadly, I was not able to test how well he spoke all of them. He loved learning languages.

Since he spoke all these languages, he was also open to discussion, to a huge number of discussions. I was often amazed by all the things that he knew. He would talk about energy production with hydrogen or genome research. Copies of

the *American Scientist* lay around our flat for years.

One thing I will really miss is his typically Czech sense of humour, coming from a land which has known so many invasions. He could aim it at himself as much as at others. We had many laughs. Last Monday I passed my driving theory test. He wished: "the best of luck to you ... and all concerned".

Before he died he was reading Broué's history of the German revolution. There were books on mathematics more or less everywhere. He enjoyed them and found them relaxing.

However, his life was dedicated to politics, or rather, he dedicated his life to the working class and the improvement of its living conditions. He lived on nothing, and tried to defend the working class against wind and tide, as we say in French.

My father was an upright man. He tended to have problems with organisations, but I have rarely met such a clear-sighted dialectical fighter. Dialectics was his guideline. In politics he was often one or two steps ahead of everybody else. He always wanted to talk about politics. He expected others to put forward their opinions for discussion, fraternally, fervently and with arguments. The destiny of the working class was the topic of his life. There was no avoiding it ("c'était plus fort que lui").

He saw it as a great waste that so many young people entered the Sozialistische Alternative (SAV), full of the will to fight, but that they were not educated to think for themselves. It seemed to him that the classic works of Marxist became just books without discussion and criticism. But Marxism is living thought, not a statue.

For him it was clear: How could the movement of the working class be built without many heads able to think for themselves?

In the last period he was not very optimistic. There are too many wars and preparations for war going on for that. It is well known that the bourgeoisie has a solution for the current crisis of capitalism: war. So the question of "socialism or barbarism" is still open.

It was also obvious to him that we have no choice: we can fight or ... fight. Against the bourgeoisie and for the unity of the working class, on a national and international scale.

I sometimes found his insistence on knowing everything exactly a little long-winded. But justice, knowledge and workers' democracy all belonged together. He always spoke about the best traditions of the working class, and for him that meant workers' democracy, the will to fight and working-class culture.

He saw no point in standing at a factory gate without political theory and political education.

He used to quote to me the *Bild-Zeitung* slogan (the most popular German tabloid): "Bild dir deine Meinung" ("Form your own opinion!"). And that's why I often contradicted him, and we disagreed. He was often right. I learned so much in those discussions. I will miss them.

He often quoted Trotsky that what matters is "not to laugh, not to cry, but to understand". And to act. He showed us how to act, and I would be glad if people would remember him as an uncompromising fighter for workers' rights, for the revolution.

My father suffered a lot of defeats. Until 13 December, he always stood his ground. My father, this fair-minded and upright person, should live on in us, with his way of thinking and when we are fighting.

WIRFI Message at Miroslav Vodslon's funeral, Berlin, December 2018

Mirek was a comrade in the truest sense of the word; a fighter side by side with us for a socialist future for the human race.

He was a convinced and profoundly thoughtful Marxist. His theoretical stature towered above that of others because he was highly intelligent, very thorough and took Marxism very seriously indeed. He was never satisfied with superficial or half-baked formulations of it.

Mirek also possessed a wry, dry and self-deprecating sense of humour which showed deep appreciation of the contradictions that arise in life and which moreover enabled him to reveal defects in another person's reasoning without massaging his own ego. This is something that we will especially miss.

Mirek came into contact with us UK Trotskyists as a militant of the Group of Opposition and Continuity of the Fourth International (GOCQI), in the late 1980s. Having just dealt with an abusive leadership in the Workers' Revolutionary Party, we were looking for contacts with activists around the world who had gone through experiences parallel to ours and who had similar ideas to ours about the way ahead.

Comrades like Balazs Nagy, Miroslav, Radoslav Pavlovic and Janos Borovi had paid the price of resisting Stalinist rule in their home countries. They had been forced to leave behind families and comrades and go into exile or face death or imprisonment. Based on their own experiences and difficulties

in the Trotskyist movement, they joined with the insurgent Workers Revolutionary Party members and contacts in Namibia, South Africa and Latin America to set up the Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International in 1990.

The GOCQI, including Mirek, quickly showed their theoretical mettle, contributing powerfully to the theoretical publications which prepared for the new foundation.

But the development of the new international collided with the collapse of the workers' states in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the Thatcher-Regan onslaught on all the things workers had gained in the class struggle. This was also a development which sought – where it could – to drive back the movements against imperialist oppression around the world and to corrupt them where it could not.

The workers' movement in western Europe and North America was undermined by de-industrialisation and re-location of industries, automation and the introduction of new technologies and the political collapse of Communist and Socialist parties.

Significant numbers of our already small group left, in some cases abandoning the very idea of an organised Marxist International, in others abandoning political activity completely.

Mirek stood out against the quitters, but for a while was unable to contribute personally to the struggle of the Workers' International.

Nevertheless, physically isolated as he was from other comrades, Mirek instinctively sought out footholds in the revolutionary Marxist movement and in the struggles of industrial workers. He worked within these circles to encourage the study of fundamental questions of Marxism, in particular political economy, and he deliberately participated in the shop-floor organisation of Daimler-Benz trade

unionists.

The international situation for Marxists became extremely gloomy. The first big break in the clouds was the determined struggle of the platinum miners at Marikana in South Africa, followed by a widespread mass-movement of workers in a large number of industries and trades for a big increase in wages. Twenty years after the end of apartheid and the rise to power of the African National Congress in South Africa, the deliberate murder of 35 strikers at Marikana by the South African Police acting under the instructions of the mine-owners with the collusion of ANC ministers marked the outbreak of a political crisis which faced revolutionary Marxists with a serious challenge.

It also brought Mirek back into activity in the Workers International. Together, we fought for the understanding that the way forward after Marikana is work towards the establishment of a socialist party of the country's working class, and that this could not be achieved by isolated sectarian groups, however courageous and devoted. The decisions and resolutions of the December 2013 Special Congress of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) sketched the plans for the re-foundation of the country's working-class movement, and Workers International pledged its support for this process.

Meanwhile the leading comrades of the Workers' Revolutionary Party of Namibia, founded in 1989, had been working for years through the Workers Advice Centre in Windhoek providing legal advice and representation to individuals and groups suffering abuses at the hands of employers and government. They had placed themselves in an excellent position to take forward new (or newly-resumed) mass struggles, such as:

- the campaign of former TCL miners for their stolen pensions
- various ethnic groups defending their land

- the matter of wholesale miss-appropriation of the assets of the former TLC in the course of official bankruptcy of the company.
- the question of whether German compensation for imperialist oppression, land-theft and atrocities during the occupation of "South-West Africa" would go to the victims' communities or be stolen by government ministers,
- the campaign for a real reckoning over the crimes of South West Africa Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) during the liberation struggle,
- against the theft of people's homes through legal chicanery
- Stood in the 2014 election and won two Assembly seats
- new industrial struggles such as that of the fishery workers.
- This meant that by late 2015, the WRP of Namibia was able to convene a conference with over 100 delegates to re-launch the party

Mirek devoted himself to assisting the development of the WRP of Namibia, spending considerable time in the country and brimming with advice to assist its development, both practical and theoretical.

Mirek did all he could to bring a lifetime's experience of political struggle to bear fruitfully in the training of a new generation of political leaders in the continent of Africa. In the process, he designed a series of lectures to try to explain Marxism and the Fourth International to members of a party which contained representatives of pretty well all the ethnic groupings in the country, from bushmen to descendants of German settlers, and certainly all the oppressed groups, rural or urban.

The precious outcome is a pamphlet: *Why we must rebuild the Fourth International*, which will undoubtedly play a major role in the political training of new generations. It is written in

a very straightforward style, using everyday language in a way that makes complex questions easier to understand and does not set up the author as some sort of ivory-tower intellectual.

In a movement which has no lack of flamboyant, even abrasive, characters, Mirek was exceptional for his gentleness (not without firmness!) towards all and for the modesty and simplicity with which he wrote and spoke.

Back in Europe, Mirek keenly followed political event in online discussions. Topics included how Marxists should react to the discussion around mass migration and a sharp intervention on the outcome of the UK referendum on leaving the EU.

Mirek engaged in a lengthy online discussion earlier this year on the question of Catalonian independence.

He was keen to write-up his own experiences of the development of events in Czechoslovakia before and during the "Prague Spring" of 1968, and we were hoping to provide him with an opportunity to talk about this at an event in the UK on the fiftieth anniversary.

Sadly, things turned out otherwise. We were utterly shocked by news of Mirek's death.

We pass on our condolences to Adrien and the rest of the family – Mirek was enormously proud of his son and his grandson – and also to Senta, who has been his companion and bedrock for so many years and whose companionship clearly meant so much to him.

We join with many rank-and-file IG Metall trade unionists, activists in the political movement in the Trotskyist left in Germany, the UK and elsewhere, and above all many Namibians in treasuring what he was worth and mourn his loss.

Why we must rebuild the Fourth International by Mirek Vodslon 14/09/15

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1. The question posed

The Namibian working class – all the active elements in it – is now creating its own party. This party will represent workers and other exploited people in the parliament and soon also in the local authorities. This is already an important step. It will make workers more confident to fight for their

demands.

Several movements of working class resistance against capitalist exploitation now converge under the banner of the Workers Revolutionary Party in order to fight together and achieve important partial improvements.

For instance, banks in cahoots with SWAPO officials have stolen the pensions of former press-ganged SWATF recruits and of miners who worked for the now bankrupt TCL corporation. The thieves must be forced to give back what they stole and be punished! The Southern Peoples have long been oppressed. Their legitimate demands which will enable a real development for them must be satisfied. These are just two examples, but there are many. In fact every oppressed section of society has legitimate demands and for each one there is only one party with which they can hope to achieve their satisfaction: the WRP.

However, a lasting improvement of the material situation of the working class requires a fundamental change in the whole society. All the groups and individuals who are now becoming part of the WRP have already understood that. And they expect the WRP as their party to arm itself with a programme that will allow them to achieve such a fundamental change.

All over the world we live under a regime, capitalism, where a tiny minority appropriates and accumulates the lion's share of the wealth that the vast majority, the toiling classes, produce. But that is not all. The capitalists only allow the toilers to produce anything at all if the products can generate private profit for capitalists. This puts a straitjacket on production of wealth. That straitjacket is becoming ever tighter, as can be seen from the growing number of unemployed.

All these unemployed workers and young could be producing useful things for their own needs and those of others. But not

under capitalism. Modern means of production could assure that the vital needs of everybody in the world are satisfied and his or her individual personality can develop freely and fully. Instead, we live in a world where a tiny minority swims in abundance and the vast majority lives in ever-worsening poverty.

Capitalism has entered a phase of final decline, its death throes, where capitalists find it ever more difficult to serve their purpose in life, the core principle of capital: making profit in order to increase capital. And since production of useful things for the needs of working people is allowed only under the condition that such production serves to increase capital, those needs are ever less satisfied.

The systematic theft of public money and resources, the theft of pensions and other assets of the working class is not limited to Namibia, it is endemic in all of Africa and common also in other parts of the world. A feature of capitalism since its beginning is that its ruling class is composed of an increasing number of criminals who do not respect their own stated sacred principle of private property. In the death agony of their regime they are pushed ever more to open theft and fraud as their opportunities to make legal (according to their own laws) profit diminish.

So the real, historic task is not just to correct the worst abuses of capitalism, the corruption, the oppression of nations or races, the oppression of women. It is not just to stop the ever-worsening wars and the deterioration of the environment which threatens to destroy the conditions of life itself. It is not even just to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.

All these can be achieved only if the working class is able to produce wealth directly both for its collective needs (like, for instance, railroads, hospitals and schools) and for its individual needs (like bread and medicine). Workers themselves

must achieve that situation, nobody can do it in their place. They need to seize the private property of the capitalists, take over factories and other facilities, machines, and raw materials. Workers need to become the collective owner of all these means of production. Then they need to use them to organise production for their own needs as a class and for the needs of all other working people. To accomplish that, the corrupt SWAPO state in this country, like all other capitalist states, must be replaced with a state that belongs to the working class and is fully under its command. Only a radically new state composed of organised workers themselves from bottom to top can be fully a workers' state.

Only such a workers' state can start cleaning up the material and moral mess created by capitalism and building a new society: socialism and communism.

We build the Workers Revolutionary Party under a red flag with an emblem that consists of a hammer, a sickle and the number four. All the elements of that symbol express the foundations of our programme.

Before I get to the main question – why the number four – I need to mention the meanings of the other elements of our flag. Each of them needs to be examined in greater depth than we will be able to do this time. In fact everything we will talk about in this short pamphlet needs deeper consideration. So I hope that there will be many more education initiatives and that every present or future member of the WRP will get a chance to deepen his or her understanding of all of our programme.

2. Productive forces and modes of production

Humans are very special beings. Other life forms just adapt to the conditions that nature offers for their life. Humans produce the conditions of their own life by working in cooperation. They possess productive forces: the tools and the

collective knowledge needed to produce all they need, food, shelter, medicine and nowadays also roads, books, bibles, aeroplanes and computers. Workers themselves are of course the main productive force. People beg the heavenly Father to give us this day our daily bread, but everybody knows that there would be no daily bread without the work and the cooperation of farmers, millers and bakers.

Humanity went through several stages of development of its productive forces. At the beginning, producers lived in small groups that owned their means of production and shared the products. This was the time when the community had just enough tools and knowledge to survive, but only if everybody worked for it all day. Such communities still live in some regions of Namibia. Anybody who wants to talk to such a community must bring enough food to feed everybody while they are talking, because during that time they can't be searching for food, as they would do normally.

But people invent ever better tools and eventually, starting with some areas of the world like the Middle East, they were able to produce more than they needed to survive. This is when the big separation became possible. Some could stop working and have leisure to think and rule. The others worked to maintain both themselves and the rulers. Society became divided into classes, and the first "class society" was born. Each class had a very different position in production than the other. Some classes ruled and organised production, others were the actual producers. Human society was turned around completely. The result of this first social revolution was that the original equality of all people was replaced by inequality. At the same time, the division of work between man and woman developed into a domination of woman by man.

Further developments brought several successive types of class society. For instance, the mode of production of the ancient Roman republic and later the Roman empire divided society fundamentally into slaves and slave owners. This was replaced

with the feudal mode of production, where the ruling class were the feudal lords, the owners of land. With the land, they also owned the peasant population settled on that land. Each type of society corresponded to a specific degree of development of the productive forces, each was based on a distinct mode of production, and each was brought about by a social revolution that had to destroy the previous society.

3. Capitalism and democracy

Finally, the development of industry and the democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th century brought a type of society whose members are all traders, people who buy and sell goods for money. Those who have no money are not fully members of human society. The only way to cooperate in this society is by buying and selling privately produced goods. Where this type of society is fully realised, all its members are equal (as traders) and therefore also have equal rights in the eyes of the law. This equality in the eyes of the law is, as we know, a democratic ideal. Its highest expression is political democracy in which the people, by means of individual votes, choose their government. In most countries this ideal is not fully realised and in countries like Namibia it is mostly an empty pretence.

But for all its formal equality, even where it does exist, this society generates profound and increasing social, that is real, inequality. The reason is that it separates producers from their means of production. The baker, for instance, no longer owns his kneading trough. He or she works in a huge bread-producing factory that belongs to somebody else, the capitalist. While the worker works, he or she has no freedom at all. In exchange for a wage, every worker must surrender his or her freedom for the whole working day and must follow orders given by the capitalist or usually a lieutenant of the capitalist. In summary, the worker becomes a slave under the dictatorship of the capitalist for the duration of every working day.

The capitalist starts with some money. With that money he buys means of production and labour power. Having bought them, he becomes the owner of both. The product of labour – bread in our example – therefore also belongs to the capitalist, although he did not make it – and this is what he sells. As a result, he gets more money than he had at start. The difference is called the profit. Then he uses most of the money he now has to buy more means of production and more labour power, in order to produce even more products and sell those, again with a profit. So the capitalist accumulates enormous wealth. This seemingly self-increasing wealth is called capital.

Of course it is the workers who produce capital, all of it. The capitalists only owns and therefore commands it. But he cannot do with it as he pleases. In fact, any capitalist who does not do his best to increase his capital, will be overtaken by other capitalists. So in fact it is the capital that commands the capitalist, telling him what to do in order to increase the capital. So, in effect, workers are being bossed around by the accumulated results of their own work!

Being owners of the whole product of the society, capitalists form the upper class. This type of society is therefore called capitalism. Capitalists are often called “bourgeois”. That is a word borrowed from the French. Originally, it meant simply inhabitant of a town. That is where the capitalists developed. Accordingly, the class of capitalists is often called the “bourgeoisie”.

Capitalism with rule of law equal for all and with democratic rights and freedoms is much better for the working class than capitalist rule without them. In a democracy, the working class can organise openly in trade unions and parties. Without it, working class organisations become illegal and have to go underground.

But among all its rights and freedoms, the only one which this

regime enforces ruthlessly is the right of capitalists to own the means of production, that is the right to exploit the working class. This right of the capitalists takes precedence over all other rights and freedoms. This democracy is therefore not just "democracy" for all people. It is limited, bourgeois democracy. Its essence is the dictatorship of the capitalists. So this democracy is only the best form of a bad thing: the dictatorship of the capitalists.

4. The red flag and the hammer

The hammer symbolises our class, the working class.

But what exactly is the working class? It is not all toilers. It is the class of those who need to buy their means of subsistence – food, shelter, education, health care – for money, in order to live and raise children, but own nothing that they could sell – except one thing: their own capacity to work, their labour power! This class is also called the proletariat and wage-workers are called proletarians. That word is very old and meant originally people whose only wealth consisted of their children.

Labour power (the capacity to work) is a very special commodity. The worker goes to the factory and surrenders eight hours or more of his daily life to the capitalist. The capitalist pays the value of that labour power as a daily wage to the worker. That value is determined by that of all the products needed to sustain workers' life and reproduce their labour power, not only for the next day or month, but also to enable them to have children, the next generation of workers.

The capitalist consumes the worker's labour power by employing him or her to do actual work – and there something strange happens: that work produces much more value than that of the worker's wage. This is why the owner of the bakery can sell the bread produced by the bakers at a higher price than the sum of the prices of the flour needed to make the dough, the

electricity needed to bake it, the amortisation of all the machines and buildings and the wages of the bakers. The profit of the capitalist comes from this difference. This is the basis of capitalist exploitation. We owe this discovery to Karl Marx.

There is much more to learn about this. Marx lived in the 19th century at the time when capitalism developed. He lived mostly in the country that pioneered that development, England. Marx wrote several books about capital. The main one is called simply: Capital. I hope that we can have more discussions that make clear to every member of the WRP how exactly capitalist exploitation comes about in this organisation of society which is called the capitalist mode of production – the society we live in.

Wage workers form the principal lower class in society. That class has existed for over 180 years in Europe and for at least 100 years in every country of the world. The capitalist organisation of society constantly produces both classes, the capitalist and the working class. Formal equality of rights cannot hide this increasing social inequality.

As long as it has existed, the working class had to fight against the capitalist class for such conditions of exploitation as allow it to survive. The capitalist's interest is to increase its profit by paying ever-lower wages, making workers work ever longer hours and always speeding up the pace of work. So capitalists and workers have fundamentally opposed interests. Each class must fight the other. Therefore, never believe a capitalist who pretends that he and his workers "are in the same boat", as capitalists often say. On the contrary, workers must unite against their own employer and against all capitalists.

If workers don't unite, each worker remains just an individual trader who trades their labour power. All those worker-traders compete against each other and, even worse than that, they

compete against an army of unemployed workers ready to take up any work in any conditions. Disunited workers undercut one another on wages and other working conditions.

So workers must unite, form trade unions and fight collectively for their working conditions simply to prevent capitalists from starving them and from working them to premature death.

In the past and in some countries like Germany, where I live, workers' organisations were quite successful in this everyday struggle, so there are well-off workers who may possess a house or a car and have enough money to be able to send children to university to let them become skilled workers. But even a house, a car or university education are still only means of reproduction of labour power, be it at a much higher standard than the means available to the inhabitants of the shanties of Windhoek. Even a well-off German worker is therefore still just a wage-worker. He does not belong to the middle classes as some people pretend. He belongs to the same class as a super-exploited Namibian miner because he has the same fundamental interest in defending his working and living conditions against the capitalist class and in replacing the whole capitalist regime by a society without exploitation of human beings by other human beings. Being wage-workers is the solid foundation of workers' solidarity; regardless of important differences in living standard and even regardless of whether they actually have work at the moment. It does not matter where they live, what skin colour they have, whether they are men or women, which beliefs or faith they hold or which local customs they follow.

Moreover, the capitalist class all over the world has started a huge attack on the living standards, working conditions and rights of the working class with the objective of aligning them with the worst of existing conditions, those of super-exploited workers without rights in many countries of Asia and Africa.

Even in Germany, the past conquests of the working class are threatened and a growing part of the working class sinks into the uncertain existence of contract labour and unemployment. Most unions traditionally unite only the fully employed in the fight for their wages and conditions. They are losing this battle everywhere because of the downward pressure of competition from the growing crowd of defenceless precarious and unemployed workers.

So unions must change in order to unite all layers of the working class. Some unions are becoming conscious of this necessity and as they try to realise it, they also start to realise that they cannot defend the working and living conditions of the working class with any prospect of a lasting success – and keep capitalism. So they must support the struggle to overcome capitalism itself. Workers must unite to defend themselves and fight off the multiform divisions constantly introduced by capitalists. But all experience shows that it is a losing fight unless the unity has the goal of uprooting the whole system of exploitation of humans by humans. This is a political goal which requires workers to form their own political party.

The workers' party cannot replace unions, which are vital for the everyday struggle. But neither can there be a tight barrier between trade unions and the workers party. The political struggle must be rooted in everyday struggles and many everyday struggles can only be won on the political level. For instance, capitalists more and more often break the resistance of their workforce to a worsening of its conditions by forcing large sections of that workforce out of the enterprise and into a new one, where they do the same work and produce the same things under much worse conditions. Unions have to fight against this so-called "outsourcing". In some cases they manage to fight off an "outsourcing" attack. But "outsourcing" is a right of capitalists, flowing from the fundamental right to private ownership of enterprises which is

guaranteed by all capitalist constitutions. So without a political change, any particular success against “outsourcing” is short-lived.

Since its origins, the most far-sighted elements of the working class have seen beyond the never-ending elementary struggle for survival. They have understood that a definitive liberation of their class was necessary and also possible by overthrowing the capitalist class and its state and making the modern, large-scale means of production the property of all those who work. They have also understood that the only way for workers to become owners of today’s means of production is to own them in common, as the working class. These workers have therefore called themselves “communists” and for a very long time they have organised in international communist associations and parties. Their only difference from the rest of the working class is the clear understanding of this overall aim and that the international unity of the whole working class must take precedence over national or particular interests. In all struggles of their class they have promoted these principles.

The red colour of our flag symbolises the workers’ blood which has been shed in all those struggles over many decades.

5. The sickle

As indicated before, besides the working class, there are other toilers. Some belong to intermediate layers. Some work for a wage but all they do is manage production on behalf of some capitalist. Top level managers have very large “wages” that are in reality parts of the capitalist profit, bribes. Moreover, they own large shares of capital, so they are capitalists. Others administer the top level of the capitalist state on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole in order to maintain the overall conditions for the capitalist regime to persist. All these belong to the capitalist class.

Still other toilers do produce commodities, or work in the distribution of commodities, but not as wage workers. They work, but are different from wage workers in that they possess their means of production or of other work. They are craftsmen and small retailers in cities who still possess their workshops or shops.

Yet others, most important in a country like Namibia, are peasants in the countryside who possess their plot of land.

All these latter classes are often lumped together and called "petty-bourgeois". That means simply that they may be owners of some means of production or just wish to become owners of some means of production, but those means are so small that they do not constitute capital.

Most of these classes are being squeezed out by large capitalist production. The peasants especially, all over Africa, are being starved, forced off their land and obliged to look for a living in the cities, usually as the lowest layer of the working class.

New urban layers that are intermediary between the capitalist and the working class are still created. Many are self-employed but their social condition differs from that of the working class only in their imagination, where they deem themselves superior to the working class.

The peasantry still exists. Like the working class, the peasantry too must struggle for its living and working conditions.

Some peasants' land doesn't provide enough for them to live, or they may have no land any more. They have to work for a wage for richer farmers or in factories. In fact they are already part of the working class. They have the same demands as we have, such as higher wages and better working conditions. Of course we support these demands.

Poor peasants usually want to get enough land to sustain themselves and their families. The working class supports the demand for the expropriation of landlords possessing large amounts of land – and sometimes not even exploiting it. Such land must be distributed especially to landless peasants. They themselves should decide if they want to use these lands collectively as a cooperative or individually.

The life of the poorest layers of peasantry mostly lacks even the one relative freedom which capitalism affords to the urban worker, that of choosing his or her master. Instead, a poor peasant often depends on a powerful, irremovable master, a landlord, a capitalist or, mostly, both. That master appears irremovable because he is supported by a corrupt, autocratic state. This is true even in countries like Namibia, which is formally a republic and a democracy, but its state is not a normal capitalist state. It is a corrupt autocracy like the old kingdoms were, except that the role of the autocrat at the top is taken by anonymous, foreign representatives of imperialist powers, like the bureaucrats of the International Monetary Fund. It is they who make sure that peasants and other poor classes at the bottom of society are forever imprisoned in rotten dependency relations. The whole SWAPO state, including its “parliament”, its president and its “Father of the Nation”, are the local executive apparatus of imperialist (international capitalist) powers that loot the country.

Capitalists exploit peasants by forcing them to sell their products too cheap and by selling the necessary machines and tools to the peasants at too high a price. Banks deny them the necessary credit. This can change only if the “commanding heights” of the economy – big industry and all credit institutions – belong to the working class.

But to the peasantry the question often appears as that of gaining a true democracy, of removing their immediate masters and becoming full citizens equal to others. This is not

limited to the peasantry. The working class, especially its lowest layers, are also deprived of their elementary democratic rights by a regime like that of SWAPO in Namibia.

Imperialism foisted a capitalist constitution on Namibia. It made sure that it guarantees the irremovable principle of private ownership of the means of production. This made the constitution undemocratic as it creates a barrier to making land available to those who work on it or need it to live on it and so it maintains peasants and poor people in towns and cities in dependency. By instituting the principle of a "unitarian state" it violates the democratic right of peoples of Namibia, such as, Caprivians, Herreros, Basters and Namas, to self-determination. For example, Caprivians who tried to practice that right have been in prison for 15 years. A real unity can be only voluntary but the peoples concerned were not asked. The whole constitution was concocted by capitalists using a ready-made template elaborated by imperialist powers, acting behind the backs of the people of Namibia. Therefore the immediate demands in any revolution must include that of a Constituent Assembly to install a democracy in a truly independent Namibia.

Since peasants live in small communities disseminated over large distances, it is very difficult for them to organise as a class on their own. Sometimes they do succeed in that. They form a party or an army to push their demands. But very soon they find out that they cannot formulate a programme for the whole of society. So they have to ally themselves with one of the two main urban classes, either with the working class if the working class is able to organise itself and become strong, or with the bourgeoisie.

The latter alliance was the only possibility in the epoch of the great bourgeois revolutions in England and France in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the modern working class had not yet been developed by capitalism. During the French revolution of 1789, activists of the bourgeoisie visited peasants in

their villages and helped to write up their demands for independence from aristocratic and ecclesiastic landlords, for equality before the law and for a Constituent Assembly to realise those demands. The bourgeoisie of that epoch had genuinely common interests with the peasantry.

This is nowhere the case today, and has not been for a long time. The bourgeoisie cannot be a genuine ally of the peasantry and where it lures the peasantry into such an alliance, it will betray them. Only the working class can help the peasantry to realise its social and political demands. Only the working class, if it takes power, will be able to offer peasants acceptable conditions for the sale of their products, and credit for the purchase of their tools and machinery. Only the working class can help realise full democracy but the only way to do so is not to stop at formal, limited, bourgeois democracy, which leaves the capitalists in control of society and still running things in their own interests. The working class must carry on to expropriate the capitalists and install a workers' state. So the Constituent Assembly of all classes in society will necessarily and rapidly give way to the rule of councils of workers and poor peasants.

The hammer and sickle in our emblem symbolises the alliance of the working class with the peasantry in struggle against the capitalist class and against the remnants of old oppressive relations that flourished before capitalism.

But alliance does not mean fusion! We build a party of one class, the working class. This does not mean only that we aim for a party composed mainly of workers. It means above all that its programme is the programme of the working class and any person, worker, peasant or intellectual, who wants to become member, has to accept all of that programme. Moreover this programme stipulates which of the two classes must lead the alliance. That leading class is the working class.

6. The number four: the International

This number stands for the international character of our party. It may seem strange at first that the International can be symbolised by a particular number. There is a powerful reason for it but it can be understood only in connection with the history of all the efforts to build the International. So I am forced to make yet another long detour.

The working class has, since its origins, understood that it is fundamentally an international class. Its fight starts on a national level but can be won only if it becomes international.

It is impossible to achieve socialism in one country. Especially in a small (by population), entirely dependent country, like Namibia. Greece in Europe is another obvious example. But it is in the long run impossible even for a large country or a group of countries. The experience of the USSR shows it.

Because socialism and communism are possible only on the world scale, the social revolution of the working class must be a world revolution. This does not mean that the revolution can happen at the same time everywhere. But the working class itself is international; therefore so must be its party.

What we call the International is not a corrupt club that exists only to concoct or cover hideous plots against the working class and oppressed peoples, like the so called Socialist International to which SWAPO and ANC belong. Neither is it a federation of national groups which pursue their own independent, often conflicting policies and meet only to proclaim a token unity from time to time. There are many of these but often they hide their true nature quite well.

The International the working class needs is one international party. Of course it must have national sections able to decide how to tackle quickly national and local issues as they arise.

As the Communist Manifesto puts it: "Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie."

The International must have an international life involving all members directly, a unified internal discussion process on the most important issues of strategy and tactics, both on international and on national issues.

7. The Manifesto

The efforts of the international working class to organise as such, that is as an international party, have a long history full of rich lessons. The first thing to understand about it is that it was determined by the development of capitalism itself. Capitalism, as I said, produces the working class. During the nineteenth century the capitalist mode of production went from strength to strength and it produced a mighty working class, above all in Europe.

This working class was from the start a danger for the capitalists. In 1848 several revolutions shook Europe. They were all democratic revolutions led by the bourgeoisie. Through them, the bourgeoisie wished to exert political power in the name of the people, instead of leaving it in the hands of emperors, kings and lords. But in the most important country of that time, France, the revolution was, at its highest point, already a workers' revolution. In all countries of Europe, the working class existed already and threatened not only the kings and aristocrats but also the bourgeoisie. Therefore the bourgeoisie preferred to stop and betray all these revolutions, and renounce political power, rather than risk that this power be contested from below by the working class.

Just before that revolution, in 1847, German workers who had

emigrated from the oppressive regimes of that country formed an international association, the League of the Communists. Two young German intellectuals, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were members of the League and were charged with writing its Manifesto. It was published in February 1848, just before the revolution started.

It was not the first programme of the working class. Previous programmes had already established the goal: a society without exploitation, a society where the means of production are common property of the workers. But these programmes were not scientific. They were projects based on the clever ideas of some inventor who thought out in his head a proposal how society might be organised better. Then he usually submitted his project to influential people of the ruling class, appealing to their supposed benevolence. Such projects go by the Greek name "Utopia", meaning an imagined organisation of society that exists in "no place".

Marx's and Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party was the first programme with a scientific underpinning. It made clear that this new form of society, communism, was the necessary next step for humanity not because it was a better idea than the existing society, but because it was a step required by the material productive forces developed by capitalism itself. It made also clear that capitalism was creating a whole class of people, the working class, who had to lead a new social revolution in order to make communism happen. Capitalism itself started a process which would enable this class, through its own movement and education, to rise to this historic task. So everybody should read the Manifesto, it is still our programme! There is no better, more forceful or more beautiful explanation of our overall aims. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

But of course capitalism has developed further. The situation has changed a lot in the 167 years since the publication of

the Manifesto. Our programme has had to be adapted and specified further. Our programme is a living thing that has to evolve.

The League of Communists was only a precursor of the International. The working class itself was not yet fully developed and accordingly the League consisted not of industrial workers as we know them but mostly of skilled craftsmen.

8. The first and the second Internationals

8.1. First International

In 1864, the first real international party of the working class was constituted in London: the International Workingmen's Association. The police of every state kept them under close surveillance and estimated that they had five million members. But the International itself counted eight million. Many of them were already industrial workers in big factories.

This International played a leading role in the most important revolution of the 19th century, the Paris Commune of 1871 which for the first time in history brought the working class to power, although only in one city. The Commune was defeated and the International did not survive that defeat for long. It split, became weak, and in 1876 it dissolved itself.

But the First International left a legacy on which we build today. Marx and Engels were part of it and they were able to persuade the majority of the other members of their programme and of the scientific foundations of it. It was not easy, they had to have many discussions especially with the anarchists who at the outset had had the majority in the International. Anarchists were communists who thought that it was possible to install communism immediately, without having to build it first. This is because their idea of communism was in fact a return to some long forgotten age of small communes that would

function in completely autonomous ways, without the need for any centralisation. This backward-orientated idea ignored the centralised nature of modern industry. Consequently, they saw no problem in replacing the capitalist state immediately by a regime of no government at all. Such a regime is known by the Greek name "anarchy" and that is why this current in the working class are called "anarchists".

But we know that the working class will have to do the opposite of anarchist notions. It will have to redirect existing industry towards production for human needs and develop it further. That means, among other goals, that the working class will have to establish democratically a plan of development and correct it frequently and democratically according to an honest evaluation of its results. Only through this path of development can real, modern Communism be achieved, an organisation of society where everybody is entitled to the satisfaction of his or her needs and everybody contributes to production according to his or her ability. This presupposes that the productive forces of humanity are so developed that lack of basic means of subsistence will be replaced by their abundance. Only then will the need for the state as the guardian over scarce means of subsistence gradually disappear. The final result will be that there will be no rule of humans over other humans. In this final goal, Marxists and anarchists agree.

Marxism prevailed but anarchism persisted, especially in Italy and in Spain. Much later, during the workers revolution in Spain, in 1936-1937, it got an opportunity to make political proposals to the working class in order to defeat fascism and overthrow capitalism. Anarchists saw that their conceptions were not workable, and they had then no better idea than to become part of a government of the capitalists in Barcelona in 1937 and so to help protect the capitalist state against the insurrection of the workers, whom they helped to disarm and demobilise. This final lesson about anarchism can and should

be studied in the works of Leon Trotsky and other Marxists who participated in that revolution.

Through its participation in the Paris Commune of 1871 the International gained a very important insight: the revolution of the working class cannot use the old state of the capitalists and just fill its parliament, its government and other organs with workers. To that extent, the International agreed with the anarchists. But the International under Marx's guidance drew a positive lesson completely opposite to the notions of the anarchists. Namely, the working class must install an entirely new, workers' state in order to start building communism.

Dutifully, Marx and Engels acknowledged this lesson. They did not change the Communist Manifesto which by that time had become a historic document, but all subsequent programmes of the working class had to include that lesson.

This example of Marx and Engels teaches us another important lesson. Their teaching cannot be considered as finished. We must develop it on the basis of experiences of the working class. We must acknowledge inaccuracies and errors, in order to be able to correct them, like Marx and Engels did in their lifetimes.

8.2. Second International

In 1889 the Second International was founded. This was an immense advance because it was based on mass revolutionary workers parties in Germany, in France, the Austrian empire and in many other countries. They were called socialist or social-democratic parties. But they were revolutionary parties, quite unlike most of the parties that use the same names today.

These parties were linked to trade unions. In most cases the parties promoted or founded the unions, like in Germany and France. In Great Britain, it was the unions who came, a bit later, to the conclusion that they needed a political wing and

so they founded a Labour Party. The Second International led great, victorious struggles, for instance for the eight hour working day or for the universal right to vote. It gave its support to the struggle of working class women for equal rights with men and so contributed mightily to the first advances in that field. Among other conquests, it established the First of May as the international day of struggle of the working class.

These material conquests of millions of workers in the developed countries could never have been achieved if the working class had limited itself to purely "economic", day-to-day struggle.

What made them possible was that the Second International allowed them to understand and adopt the programme of scientific socialism and communism.

In other words it was a Marxist International which educated millions of workers as Marxists.

But there were flaws.

Its leading members tended to forget the most important lesson from the experience of the First International – the one about the state! The Marxism of the majority of the leaders of the Second International was not quite the original teaching of Marx and Engels. It was distorted in that its revolutionary consequences seemed far away and abstract.

8.3. Imperialism and its impact on the Second International

During this period of rise of capitalism in Europe and also in the United States of America, the whole world was increasingly subjected to capitalist conditions of exploitation. Capitalist exploitation was introduced into huge countries, like Russia, India and China and to whole continents like Africa, through colonisation.

Most people in the Second International saw the enormous exploitation of the colonies by their colonial masters and protested against it. But they also expected progress to come out of it. Many thought that colonies and other latecomers to capitalism would soon follow a similar path of glorious capitalist development as Great Britain, France, Germany, the USA and Japan had done.

In fact world capitalism entered a new stage: imperialism. This is the highest stage of capitalist development. In it, a new entity emerged: finance capital. This results from the merger of financial institutions (such as banks and other money lenders and money makers) and industrial capital under the leadership of the money lenders. Finance capital dominates over all smaller capitals, limits them or squeezes them out. Imperialist countries export goods and capital and exploit natural resources, including cheap labour, from the rest of the world. This is called the imperialist relationship. For instance, Great Britain had an imperialist relationship with India and later also with South Africa, among others. Germany was able to establish an imperialist relationship with South-West Africa. Around the beginning of the twentieth century it became apparent that the imperialist relationship in general did not allow the dependent countries to develop. This is still the case, even though most colonies liberated themselves politically. The imperialist relationship persists. Under it, Africa's natural resources are being plundered as savagely as in previous periods. Its masses are descending into horrible poverty, and are subjected to barbaric dictatorships and barbaric wars. Capitalism itself has become an absolute barrier to the development of humanity, which means to the development of its productive forces. Therefore the imperialist stage is the last stage of capitalism.

All humanity is faced with the choice between passing to a new, socialist and communist mode of production, or a long descent into ever more barbaric conditions of life. This

alternative was already formulated by Friedrich Engels in 1878 and then again in the middle of the first world war by the Polish comrade Rosa Luxemburg who wrote: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism". All subsequent history has confirmed this prediction. Both world wars and fascism represented huge outbreaks of barbarism.

After the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991, which (especially in its beginning) had represented the hope for a socialist future, we are already experiencing an acceleration of the worldwide descent into ever-deeper barbarism. For over a hundred years the working class has been trying to make the transition to socialism. In the present period of a new rise of the working class we have perhaps the last opportunity to do it. But already some revolutions in the Middle-East, and in northern Africa have been defeated. This has favoured yet another big slide into barbarism not just there, but also, in Central Africa for example. Europe is also sliding rapidly into mass poverty, authoritarian rule and wars. So we do not have much time. The working class must now learn quickly and act, or perish.

In the late 19th century, capitalism was still in its ascending phase. A thin layer of relatively well off workers developed at that time in the leading capitalist countries of Europe and a little later also in the USA. They had won relatively high wages and good working conditions. The capitalists of these countries were able to afford these conditions to some of "their" workers due to the extra profits they were making by exploiting the rest of the world, especially colonies. This thin layer is called the "labour aristocracy". The labour aristocracy had an enormous influence on the parties of the Second International. A bureaucracy expressing the contentedness of the labour aristocracy developed inside these parties and in the unions. This was (and still is) a layer of leaders who did not object to others

talking about the social revolution in some far future. Sometimes they themselves made such Sunday speeches. The socialist revolution was the so called "maximum" programme of social-democracy. Words are cheap. But in everyday life they were content with what they had and wanted to keep capitalism, with some improvements. Such improvements, like the eight-hour working day, were called "reforms" and they were the contents of the so called "minimum" programme. The people who limited the movement to the minimum programme were (and still are) called reformists.

But there was a strong left wing in the Second International around such people as Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and the Russian Vladimir Ulyanov. Ulyanov had to hide from the police of his country and therefore adopted another name: Nikolai Lenin. Later he became known as Vladimir Lenin.

Unfortunately, the left wing was not well organised. That was a big mistake because the reformists held the leadership of most of the parties of the International. Only in one country did the left wing organise strongly. That was Russia. The left there called themselves "Bolsheviks". Bolsheviks organised themselves into a faction and shortly before the world war that faction became in fact a party independent of the reformists who were called "Mensheviks". I omit the explanation of those strange names because the origin of the names is rather accidental. The origin of the Russian factions themselves is not accidental. I'll come back to it.

9. The failure of the Second International

In 1914 the first world war started. The world as prey of imperialist powers had become too small for their expansion. The main imperialist powers of that time: Great Britain, France, Japan, Russia and the United States allied themselves on one side, Germany, Austria and the Ottoman empire (Turkey) on the other side. Each alliance tried to win a greater share of colonies as markets for its goods, sources for its raw

materials and targets for profitable investment.

During the war, in 1916, Lenin published a pamphlet to explain to workers what imperialism is and why it is the highest and last stage of capitalism. The title of the pamphlet declares this insight. It is called: "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism". Members of the WRP should study this pamphlet, too, it is still valid.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>

Millions of workers killed each other in this war in the interests of "their" capitalists. The international working class could have prevented this. That would have required defying the marching orders, calling a general strike and taking power in every country. Before the war, congresses of the Second International had decided to call a general strike in the event of a war. But its reformist leadership had not prepared it at all for such an eventuality. When it came to doing it, they did the contrary: each national party took the side of its own capitalists. The Second International collapsed. Its leaders went over to the capitalist enemy.

The left had to do under terrible war conditions what it had failed to do in peacetime: organise. It started to propagate the idea of a new, Third International.

10. Russian Revolution and Bolshevism

Then, after three years of terrible suffering during the war, the Russian working class overthrew the old rotten imperial state of the Tsar in February 1917. Unfortunately, the Russian bourgeoisie was able to take power. In only a few months it completely revealed its reactionary character by refusing to stop the war or to distribute land to the peasant masses. In October, the working class led the masses to get rid of the bourgeoisie and install a completely new, workers' state. It was based on workers' councils in the cities and on councils of poor peasants in the countryside. These councils decided

everything in Russia. One of the first thing they did was to stop the war unilaterally, nationalise all the land, hand it to poor peasants for long-term use, and expropriate the whole capitalist class. Because the Russian word for "council" is "soviet", the new state was called the "soviet state". The Soviets immediately held a congress, and appointed a new government. Lenin became the head of the new state, and another well-known revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, was charged with forming a completely new army, the Red Army. The capitalist governments of 14 countries sent armies to destroy the republic of workers' councils in Russia and reintroduce a dictatorship of the capitalists. They fomented a civil war. But all these enemies were defeated by the new revolutionary army.

We speak of the Russian revolution but in fact it was victorious in a much larger area than Russia. It included most of the countries of the old Empire of the Tsars; for instance, Ukraine, several large countries of central Asia and smaller countries in the Caucasus region. All these countries soon federated to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR. When it was founded, this Union was not strong because of coercion exerted by its largest member, Soviet Russia on the other republics, but precisely because it was a free Union. The Bolshevik Party and the Third International under Lenin's leadership made the right of self-determination of all peoples, up to and including their right to separation, into a principle.

For the first time in history, the working class of a whole country, and a very large one at that, was able to get rid of the rule of the capitalists, install its own state and start with the practical realisation of the socialist programme. The imperialist war, the intervention of the 14 states and the civil war left the country exhausted. Almost all industry, railways and other infrastructure were destroyed. As in other countries, it was the working class – who else? – which had to

rebuild the country. But in Russia it could do it on a completely different basis. It no longer worked for capitalist profit. It worked for its own needs. That was the main achievement of the revolution in Russia. This conquest brought social advances, like a free health service, free access to education and many others. Superficially, these social conquests resemble some partial conquests later achieved by the working class of some capitalist countries, like Great Britain. But in reality they were socialist conquests because they set the whole working class of a huge country on the path to build socialism. That path could not be followed to its end without an international revolution. There can be no socialism in one country. But the international working class was encouraged to follow the Russian example. Rightly, the international working class considered the Russian revolution and its socialist conquests as its own and the Russian working class considered its state as just the first success of the world revolution.

In 1991, after 74 years, the October Revolution was finally defeated. The USSR collapsed under the pressure of imperialism, because of its isolation. That was due to an enormous delay in the world revolution, itself due to a series of defeats and betrayals over many years. Capitalists, their politicians, their press, their historians and other ideologists heap slanders on the achievements of the October Revolution. But these achievements will never be forgotten. The working class will always learn from them.

Many books have been written about the October revolution. Leon Trotsky himself wrote one, "The History of the Russian Revolution". Everybody should read that book and we should discuss all the rich lessons of the Russian revolution as part of the building of the WRP and formation of its members. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/>

Here just a few of the main points about the Russian Revolution.

The victory of the Russian October revolution was only possible because there was a well organised party of dedicated and well educated workers who understood what Capitalism-Imperialism is, the concrete situation of the masses in Russia and were able to act in unity to propose the socialist revolution to the masses as the way out of their plight. In other words, the Bolshevik party was a genuine Marxist workers party.

Here is where I have to come back to its origin in 1903, because such a party is the necessary condition for the working class to be able to take power even today. So we must look carefully at the only example of such a party in history.

The Russian social-democratic party really formed only at its second congress which had to be held outside Russia in Brussels, then in London, because of police repression. At the congress, suddenly there appeared a difference about the conditions of membership. Mensheviks thought that party members should be those who accepted the party programme and supported it by regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party's organisations. Bolsheviks, with Lenin, demanded that members "recognise the Party Programme and support it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party's organisations". So Lenin and his followers in the party required a much more serious engagement of party members than the others, but was that so important? Everybody, including Lenin, was surprised that the two factions could not unite because of such a seemingly small detail. After all, both factions were followers of Marx's school of scientific socialism/communism. But later history proved that the difference was indeed fundamental. In fact, the laxness of the Mensheviks in this question was just the beginning of the influence of petty-bourgeois ideas. Later, this became apparent, as the Mensheviks became a particular kind of reformist. In 1917 the socialist revolution became an immediate task and the Mensheviks refused to accomplish it.

We are against petty-bourgeois laxness. The conditions of membership in the Workers International and in its Namibian section, the Workers Revolutionary party, are those written down by Lenin: "recognise the Party Programme and support it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party's organisations". We want to build a fighting organisation with a clear shape, not a soft cloud. There is much more to be learnt from the history of the Bolshevik party and members of the WRP should study that history.

Another point: the October Revolution was only the first victory of the international, world revolution. The Bolsheviks understood that, the masses in Russia understood that; and what is more, very soon the majority of the working class of the world understood that! Old parties of the Second International began to break up because workers, their members, wanted to imitate Russia. Outright revolutions broke out in Germany and Hungary. In several other countries, there were revolutionary movements.

During most of the war, the Third International was the proclaimed aim of a small minority of courageous opponents to that war. After the October Revolution, in 1919, the Third International was actually founded. In several important countries, big chunks of the old social democratic parties demanded to be part of the new International. In Germany, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia it was even the majority in those parties!

11. Third International

The Third International had a huge task on its hands. In the epoch of imperialism, the world revolution has become the immediate task. But the leaders of the working class were not up to that task. Even the leadership of those parties who were sincerely in favour of the revolution were not up to it.

Some of them continued to preach socialism in Sunday speeches

but in everyday life they remained reformists. They remained prisoners of the distorted version of Marx's teachings that was current in the Second International. Already in 1917, Lenin published a pamphlet to correct that, above all to refresh and develop the lesson drawn by Marx from the Paris Commune, that the working class cannot take over the bourgeois state but must sweep it away and install a new, workers' state. The title of the pamphlet is "The State and Revolution". It should be read and understood by every member of the WRP.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>

In order to make clear how different it was from its predecessor, the Second International (which called itself socialist), the Third returned to the old name used in Marx's and Engels' time: "communist". It called itself the Communist International. Russians at that time liked abbreviations a lot and called it simply the "Comintern".

Other factions of the Comintern ignored the fact that the socialist revolution must be an act of the whole working class. They were so impatient that they started minority actions all of which ended in disaster. They called themselves "left-wing communists". They wrote up whole theories that communists need not bother to go into bourgeois parliaments or work with workers in trade unions because of their rotten leadership.

In fact, both factions operated with the old notions of a minimum programme and a maximum programme. For both there was no connection, no bridge between the two programmes and so some stuck to the minimum programme and ignored the maximum programme, while others did the opposite.

The true task of the communists is to raise the level of comprehension of the whole of the working class until that class becomes capable of taking power into its hands. That requires a programme that combines both the minimum (reforms)

and the maximum (revolution). It must contain intermediate, transitional demands that lead from reform to revolution and in the process help the masses to acquire experiences with struggle and draw the right lessons from them.

In 1920, Comrade Lenin published a whole book to explain that and to criticise the "left-wing communists". It is called "'Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder', and is yet another very important book that every member should read. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/>

So the situation was that the new, imperialist epoch required a completely new approach to struggle. But none of the new communist parties was prepared for it. Despite their best intentions, all were still fraught with conceptions and habits acquired in the calmer previous epoch of rising capitalism. All parties except one: the Russian party of the Bolsheviks. That party, because of the peculiar conditions of Russia, had understood what was required for a revolution to succeed. Indeed, it was the party that had led the October Revolution to victory. But it is important to know that even that party had followed a line of supporting its own bourgeoisie at the beginning of the year 1917. Fortunately it had a very good leader, Lenin. Lenin had formed the party and the party had formed him and many other thoughtful revolutionaries. The party listened to Lenin and so was able to rearm itself to become the leading party of the revolutionary process that was already taking place.

In effect, the whole Third International needed to start a political formation of millions of socialists (who now called themselves communists) to rearm them theoretically and politically. Only in this way could they become really fit for the period of imperialism and of world revolution. They could not simply learn what to do by reading books and taking classes, they had to learn by doing. During the process many mistakes were made which had to be theoretically understood and practically corrected.

The necessity of a transitional programme was one major difference between the Second and the Third International. The other was a concrete understanding of the world revolution as a living process. The majority of the Second International had assumed that socialist revolution would be victorious first in one of the countries where the working class was most numerous and powerful because their capitalism was most mature: Great Britain, France or Germany. But the Russian Revolution proved them all wrong. It was victorious in a backward country which had not attained full capitalist development, whose immense majority of toilers were peasants and whose working class was a tiny minority. A country which had not even arrived at the stage of a bourgeois democracy. In the history of Europe, the class "normally" responsible for leading the democratic revolution to overthrow kings and other tyrants, was the bourgeoisie. Yet in Russia the bourgeoisie proved completely incapable of accomplishing that task. The working class had to take power in order to achieve bourgeois democratic rights and freedoms. Then it would not and could not stop at this. It went directly on to expropriate the capitalists and advance towards socialism.

The imperialist relationship between advanced capitalist countries and dependent, backward countries produces this situation where the capitalist class proves incapable of realising its task of installing democracy. So the working class has to take up both the democratic and socialist tasks in one and the same revolution. Leon Trotsky recognised this necessity well before the October Revolution of 1917. For this process of advancing from democratic to socialist revolution in one movement he used the term "permanent revolution" which had already been used by Marx.

Permanent revolution characterises the whole process of the world revolution in our epoch of imperialist relationships. At the time of the growth and enthusiasm of the Third International, Trotsky's theory was known as such, under this

name, only to a minority. But the International was aware of the fact of permanent revolution, if not of the term. It turned towards the dependent, oppressed countries which had been almost completely neglected by the Second International. Communist parties were set up in backward countries such as China.

Unfortunately, all the promising developments of the Third International were stopped after the Comintern's Fourth Congress in November 1922. Our comrade Balázs Nagy of the Workers International wrote an article which shows the limits of the work of both of the Third International and the Fourth International and how we, Workers International, must take up these unavoidable tasks. The article's title is "Some Problems of the Fourth International – and the tasks involved in rebuilding it". I suggest that we read and discuss it in one or more training sessions dedicated to these problems. <http://workersinternational.info/2014/08/some-problems-of-the-fourth-international-and-the-tasks-involved-in-rebuilding-it/>

The reason the Third International's work could not be completed is that the Russian revolution remained isolated. The process of German revolution of 1918-1923 ended in a defeat. That happened because the leadership of the German communist party felt uncertain, became indecisive, hesitated and that hesitation of the leadership weakened the whole party of a million members. After that, Capitalism was able to stabilise for several years. It had been shaken by the war and the revolutionary uprisings after the war. But since none of these uprisings had led to the working class taking power in one of the advanced countries, the capitalists prevailed globally.

12. Stalinist bureaucracy

The Russian working class, though victorious, was exhausted by years of war, revolution and civil war. Its international isolation led to the development of an uncontrolled caste of

parasites that came to rule the country in the name of the working class. It first appeared through an alliance between the party apparatus of the Bolshevik party and the well-off peasants and other smaller capitalists that the Bolsheviks had to allow because of the international isolation of the revolution. Then the caste consolidated into a real monster that ruled not only in the name of the working class but more and more over the working class and against the working class.

The foundations of the workers' state installed by the October Revolution still persisted. There was still no capitalist ruling class. Workers still produced for human needs instead of producing for profit, as they must in capitalist countries. But the ruling caste controlled both production and distribution and directed both to satisfy above all its own needs. The whole apparatus of the state no longer consisted of councils (soviets) of workers. Its organs were still called soviets, but they were entirely in the hands of the ruling caste. So it was still a workers' state but a deeply damaged, degenerated workers' state.

This ruling caste is known as the Kremlin bureaucracy after the old imperial palace in Moscow from where its leaders ruled the whole country. More frequently, it is called the Stalinist bureaucracy because its leader was an old Bolshevik named Stalin. He was not a remarkable man except that he was an outstanding schemer and able to rule with an iron fist. But the new caste needed no great leader and educator of the working class like Lenin had been (he died in 1924). It needed an unscrupulous dictator and Stalin exactly fitted the job description.

Soon, after 1933, this caste became great friends with the bourgeoisie of France and Great Britain. Then with that of Hitler's Germany. Then again with that of France, Great Britain and the USA. Stalin and his caste became sworn enemies of the working class of the world. They did not allow the working class of any country to take power. After the 2nd

world war, the working classes of Yugoslavia and of China were able accomplish social revolutions in their countries only against the will of the Kremlin.

But at the same time, though this reactionary bureaucracy wanted to be friends with the capitalists abroad, the capitalist were never friends of the workers state, the USSR. Soon after the war, the British and American capitalist "friends" of the Kremlin put so much pressure on the USSR that the Stalinist bureaucracy felt it had to allow the communist parties to carry out social revolutions in several countries of central and eastern Europe. Because of this, some people started to think that this bureaucracy could not be entirely reactionary. They were completely wrong.

In fact, it was the beginning of a period of systematic worldwide collaboration between the Kremlin and the leading imperialist power, the USA. This collaboration had two names, "peaceful coexistence" and "cold war", but both are wrong. The coexistence was not peaceful, nor was the war always "cold". The aim was to maintain the rule of imperialism globally. Therefore, all movements of the working class, of other oppressed classes and of oppressed peoples against imperialism had to be terminated and their leaders either corrupted or killed. The real, comprehensive history of this horrible collaboration has yet to be written.

It is of great importance also for southern Africa. It was Henry Kissinger, an envoy of the USA-Imperialism, who orchestrated the reining in of all the bourgeois liberation movements, such as those led by the ANC, SWAPO, MPLA and FRELIMO in the 1970s. This entailed the massacre of leaders and militants whose democratic and socialist goals were incompatible with the continued rule of imperialism in this region. But Kissinger was able to do his bloody work only with the collaboration of the Kremlin bureaucracy. It was all part of the functioning "peaceful coexistence" or "cold war".

At the time it formed, in the 1920s, the Stalinist bureaucracy took advantage of the great prestige of the USSR among the workers of the world to take over the leadership of the Third International. From 1929 onward, all leaders of the communist parties were hand-picked by Stalin for their obedience to all his directives, sudden turns and whims. Neither Stalin nor these local lieutenants of his were able or willing to get on with the great historic task of the Third International. Instead, they used it as an instrument of pressure in the service of their diplomacy. In 1943 they dissolved it but by then it had been dead for ten years as a workers' organisation.

With some exceptions, Stalinist parties remained workers' parties. Apparently, these parties remained "communist", continued to propagate Marxism as the scientific theory of the working class and above all, defended the heritage of the October Revolution. So millions of workers remained their enthusiastic members because they thought these parties still represented the interests of the working class. But this appearance of Stalinist parties did not agree with their true nature at all. This "Marxism" of the Stalinist bureaucracy propagated "socialism in one country" (the USSR). That was in complete contradiction to the real scientific insights of Marx and Lenin. It was however very suitable for the purposes of the Stalinist bureaucracy whose very existence was based on the isolation of the USSR. But critique and discussion was not allowed in any of these parties and so the real nature of Stalinism has remained undiscovered for the majority of members of the Stalinist parties to this day.

13. Left opposition and Fourth International

The decisive point of no return in this negative development of the Third International was the year 1933. Hitler came to power in Germany. The Stalinist party in Germany had helped to divide the working class and prevent its resistance to Hitler's fascism. Even after the defeat, the Stalinist

Communist International drew no lessons from it. This International, completely dominated by the Stalinist bureaucracy and its international apparatus, was dead for the purposes of the working class.

So the Third International degenerated, was later even formally dissolved and left behind a reactionary international apparatus with its centre in the Kremlin. But this did not happen without resistance. Almost immediately after the Stalinist bureaucracy began its rise in 1923, a Left Opposition arose against this bureaucracy, first in Russia, then internationally, in most parties of the Communist International. Lenin himself gave the first impulse to resist Stalin's takeover of the Bolshevik party. After his death, it was the other most prominent leader of the October revolution who led the Left Opposition: Leon Trotsky.

The Left Opposition recognised after 1933 that it had to build a new International, the Fourth International. It was proclaimed in 1938 in France on the eve of the second world war. It inherited all the positive experiences and insights of the Third International before its capture and destruction by the Stalinist bureaucracy. These experiences and insights are gathered in the Programme of the Fourth international. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/>

It was written by Leon Trotsky after many discussions with other members of the Fourth International. Trotsky conceived it consciously as the programme of the imminent revolution which he predicted to come after the second world war. Its main idea is that capitalism-imperialism attacks the very existence of the working class – the only class in this society capable of opening a positive outcome to the crisis of the whole humanity. But to do so, this class needs a programme of demands leading to this revolution, a programme of transition.

For instance, ever-growing unemployment throws whole layers of

the working class, especially the youth, out of the production process, with no hope of ever becoming part of it again. This divides the working class and puts pressure on all working conditions, both wages and working hours, of those who still have work. So on the one side, there are those who are not allowed to work at all, on the other side those who work must work ever longer hours and ever more quickly.

The Programme of the Fourth International seeks the unity of both parts of the working class by demanding the distribution of all available work among all capable hands without loss of wages. On the one hand, this demand must be satisfied in order to stop the destruction of the working class. On the other hand it runs dead against the need of capitalists to make a profit. So it is both indispensable and not realisable under capitalism. It is in fact a demand to overthrow capitalism and start building socialism, but it makes this theoretical necessity accessible as a result of the experience of millions of workers in their practical struggles for their very existence. The programme of transition is a whole system of such demands both economic and political, leading up to the socialist revolution. Those demands cannot be just thought up by a clever person at his or her desk. They originate from the deeply felt needs of the masses, and often are formulated by the masses themselves.

This is the programme of the Workers International adopted at its founding conference in Budapest, 1990. Its full title is "Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Mobilisation of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power."

Every member of the WRP must read and understand our programme.

So this is how the number four in our emblem represents the International. It does not represent an abstract appeal or desire for an International but the engagement to rebuild the

Fourth International.

Now the question arises: where is this Fourth International, 77 years after its foundation? Why must it be rebuilt?

14. The fate of the Fourth International

The Fourth International was proclaimed and founded on the eve of the Second World War out of a historic necessity. The Fourth International predicted that this world war would be even more terrible than the first one and that it would be followed by mighty revolutions. The task the International set itself was to build the parties that would lead these workers revolutions to victory over capitalism. These revolutions did take place but it turned out that the International was not ready to lead them.

Sections of the International were part of the resistance against fascism in occupied Europe and promoted the internationalist line in it against the dominant nationalism propagated by all Stalinist parties. But the International ceased to function as a world party. The Stalinists and Fascists assassinated many of its leaders during the war.

The most experienced section of the Fourth International was the soviet section. All of its members knew and used Marx's scientific method and many had learnt how to apply it in practice in the Russian October Revolution of 1917. So it was mainly this section and its leader, Leon Trotsky, that could teach the other sections all the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired by the Russian communists before and during the October revolution of 1917.

Unfortunately, in the the 30s almost all members of this party were incarcerated in Stalin's prisons and concentration camps. They organised clandestinely inside the camps, but around 1940 Stalin ordered their physical liquidation and that of Leon Trotsky himself, who lived in exile, in Mexico. Only a few survived and were not liberated until 1953. By this action and

by lies and slander, physical violence and murder, Stalin's international apparatus deliberately isolated the Fourth International from the workers' movement. This damage inflicted by Stalinism on the Fourth international led to an unhealthy isolation and lack of growth and ultimately led to the emergence of sects acting in the name of the Fourth International but unable to learn the lessons of Leon Trotsky.

So it came about that after the war, the International did not understand its task – which was to lead the revolution. Its leaders had not understood the main lesson of Marxism: that there can be no revolution without the leadership of a revolutionary party. Instead they observed how the revolutionary movements that took place in Italy and in France at the end of the war were led to their defeat by completely counter-revolutionary Stalinist parties. After that, a majority of these leaders declared that the prediction of revolutions was proven wrong and turned their backs completely on the task of building revolutionary parties. They themselves fell under the influence of Stalinism.

However, as a result, there have also been continual efforts by the most conscious elements of the class to resist Stalinism's dead end diversions of the march towards socialism. That resistance organised itself in 1953 to rebuild the Fourth International. But even inside this resistance the influence of Stalinism was strong and all the stronger for not being conscious. As a result, the movement is now in a state of dispersion with a myriad of sects all claiming the "tradition" of the Fourth International for themselves and all pretending to grow at the expense of other such sects and, most importantly, at the expense of the living movement of the working class, whom they all consider as just building material for their own sect, just like the Stalinist parties did. Most of them have undemocratic internal regimes and this is another aspect of the unconscious influence of Stalinism on them. Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky never favoured such

attitudes and behaviour which do not belong in the working class movement. Our organisation, Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, was founded in 1990 as the continuation of the ongoing organised effort to overcome these problems. Some of us have been part of it for decades.

To learn more about the crisis of the Fourth International, comrades should study Balázs Nagy's book "Marxist considerations on the crisis" and his already mentioned article "Some problems..."
<http://workersinternational.info/2014/08/some-problems-of-the-fourth-international-and-the-tasks-involved-in-rebuilding-it/>

15. The defeat of 1989-1991

In 1991, the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union. In each of its constituent republics, the national branches of the Stalinist bureaucracy stole most of the state's assets, in fact anything that could be transformed into capital. The current capitalist classes in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the other republics formed on the ruins of the USSR originate from this theft. The state founded by Lenin, Trotsky and by millions of revolutionary workers and peasants in 1917 was lost. So were the workers' states in Central and Eastern Europe, with the same methods (theft) and results. The worst aspect of this bare-faced theft was that the working class was unable to oppose it, because it no longer recognised that these states belonged to the working class. Generations lived under the oppression of the Stalinist bureaucracy in a degenerated workers' state in the USSR. Similar states in Central and Eastern Europe even came into existence with that oppression and with the deformation of the state. The social revolutions that installed them in 1948-49 were themselves deformed by their Stalinist leadership. In the end, the workers' nature of these states became unrecognisable even to their rightful owners – the working class. But when these states disappeared, all the other, more palpable socialist conquests also disappeared! Suddenly, state enterprises went

bankrupt and stopped paying workers. Unemployment and humiliating poverty appeared, access to health care and education became difficult and so on. Workers fought against some of these consequences but they lacked a party that would unify all these struggles in a mass resistance to the cause – the restoration of capitalism.

This defeat was not only that of the working class of the USSR. The working class of the whole world suffered a historic defeat. Everywhere the capitalist classes were encouraged to deepen their so called neo-liberal “reforms” whose meaning is to increase exploitation in order to save their profits. At the same time, they were able to restrict the rights of the working class to resist through its unions and politically through its parties. Social democratic and Stalinist parties were thrown into disarray and most responded by becoming bourgeois parties and striving to resemble other bourgeois parties as closely as possible, officially renouncing their working class origin. So the working class of most countries was deprived of its own political expression: representation on the political arena and leadership in political struggles.

Imperialism felt triumphant. Its leaders proclaimed socialism dead and the leader of these leaders, George Bush senior, the president of the USA, even proclaimed a capitalist “new world order”. But it became apparent very quickly that capitalism-imperialism had reached a degree of decomposition where the only “order” it had to offer was in fact chaos and increasing barbarism.

In South Africa this negative turn was represented by the transformation of the South African Communist Party into an openly bourgeois party, although recent events there show that sincere communists will resist these reactionary developments.

16. Turn to new workers' parties

Some of these sincere communists have now recognised the

nature of the SACP and were initiators of the turn of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) in December 2013 to start exploring ways to build a new socialist party of the working class and to constitute its true programme. NUMSA is the largest union of South Africa and perhaps of the whole continent. It sets an example to be followed by the working class in the whole world. There is now a new uprising of the working class of the world. There were revolutions in North Africa and the Middle-East, led by inexperienced and unorganised youth. They stalled or were defeated. But the working class in several countries now tries to rebuild its unions and re-found its political parties. NUMSA's turn in this direction is not isolated, it is only the most decisive part of a worldwide turn.

In Namibia, the working class must participate in NUMSA's turn but the situation here is different in two ways: there has never been a workers' party in Namibia and the Namibian working class is now seizing the opportunity to build the Workers Revolutionary Party, section of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, as that much needed and overdue workers' party.

So the working class of Namibia can make an original contribution to the world turn towards new socialist parties of the working class initiated by NUMSA. The main contribution is that these parties must be built as revolutionary parties in the process of rebuilding a world party, the Fourth International. This is a very important contribution not only for Africa, but also for countries at the other end of the imperialist relationship. Especially in Europe, where several of the new parties of the working class that have formed during the last decade are now arriving at a crossroads. Recent events in Ukraine and the Balkans tested their reformist conceptions and proved them wrong. A large international debate has started as working class activists are looking for alternatives.

17. The International that must be built

The defeat of 1991 created a very new situation for the international working class. Its oldest and most experienced section, the European working class, has lost its leading role. It was weakened by deindustrialisation in the old imperialist countries of Great Britain, France and Italy. Its long domination by Stalinist and reformist ideas produced a limited and unsuccessful resistance to the capitalists when they moved industries and diverted investments to countries providing cheap labour on other continents.

Everywhere in the world, the working class became divided into the unemployed, precarious contract workers and the dwindling section still in permanent employment. These sections have been pitted against each other and against workers of foreign origin. Workers became less conscious of their immediate interests as unions (with a few exceptions like Unite in the UK) failed in their task to unite all these parts of the working class. The political consciousness of being one international class with the historical mission to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism declined even more.

So, to a large extent, the educational work of the four Internationals (First, Second, Third and Fourth) was undone and has to be recommenced. To some extent, we are back in 1864 when the First International was formed. As then, the working class now needs to form an International with all genuinely working class currents, and Marxists have to do as Marx did: patiently argue for the scientific method and programme.

Some people draw from this the conclusion that we must really build a new edition of the long defunct First International, as if the history of the working class of the last 151 years had not taken place.

Others express the same desire to erase history by wishing to build a Fifth International without even bothering to draw a

serious balance-sheet of the so far unsuccessful efforts to build the Fourth International. A prominent representative of these was the late President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who even called an international conference to debate this idea a few years ago.

Still others go as far as proclaiming that the working class has to build an International without a number. By saying that numbers and labels do not matter, they express the most radical negation not just of the necessity to learn from history, but even of the fact that the working class has a living history. We know that there is no other way than to continue that history by learning its lessons so we can overcome our weaknesses. The number 4 in our emblem symbolises the responsibility we take towards our own history as the working class!

Concretely, all those who reject this approach have in common that they propose some "International" that will – permanently or for the time being – ignore the main theoretical achievements of the Third and Fourth Internationals: the theory of permanent revolution, the need for a programme of transitional demands and the knowledge of the nature of imperialism as the latest stage of capitalism which is the theoretical basis of the first two. By running away from history such people immediately fall into the traps of reformism and Stalinism. They prove the truth of the saying: those who have no past, have no future.

The number 4 in our emblem stands concretely for all these theoretical achievements. These achievements are precisely the main subjects of the great and very positive discussion about the way forward which is now taking place among worker activists in this country, in South Africa, in the USA, in Greece and in many other countries. We would be great fools to drop these achievements by dropping our goal to rebuild the Fourth International.

Even more profoundly, without the political and theoretical achievements of the Third and Fourth Internationals, there would be no material conquests of the working class. All these conquests were, in the last analysis, only won as products or by-products of the struggle for the proletarian revolution. If many of these material conquests have now been destroyed, this has been possible only because the theoretical achievements have been forgotten or falsified by organisations of the working class in a retrograde movement on both fronts, theoretical and practical. But the working class now defends itself. We are part of this resistance. Our task is to inform it with Marx's, Lenin's and Trotsky's school of thought and of workers' politics.

In conclusion: To fully understand all the symbols of the flag, we have to understand our programme. The programme is not just a collection of demands plus an overall aim. That would just reproduce the old division between a maximum and a minimum programme. Our programme is the summary of what the working class is and how it fights. It summarises the aim of our class, the conclusions it has drawn from its dearly bought experiences, its disappointments in the past and its hopes for the future. This is why the programme cannot be declared finished once and for all. The conditions of working class struggle have changed a lot since 1990 and we need a programme taking into account all those changes. It will be based on the old programme of 1938 but at the same time it will be a new programme. The programme that the WRP of Namibia will elaborate in preparation for and during its special congress will be an important contribution to this new international programme of the Fourth International.

18. References to literature mentioned in the talk

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May Day Message from the WRP Namibia

The WRP Political Committee greets the workers of Namibia, Southern Africa, Africa and the world on this 1st day of May, Workers' Day, which symbolizes the bloody struggle for workers' rights over many, many decades. These rights included the right to organize and belong to unions, the 45 hour week, the right to withhold labour etc.

For Namibians this struggle culminated in the labour rights contained in the 1992 Labour Act.

Since 1992 however, these rights were rapidly eroded in rogue courts, new legislation drafted by corporate business and passed by the new regime, parading as the great liberator.

The Marikana Massacre on 16 August 2012 exploded the Southern African myths of the 'liberation movements' defending and furthering the rights of the working people.

NUMSA, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa, formalized the concrete fact that the regimes like SWAPO and the ANC were agents of the capitalists against the working class. They stated, **“that unless the working class organises itself as a class for itself it will remain unrepresented and forever toil behind the bourgeoisie”**.

Now that these regimes have devoured the crumbs thrown to them by finance capital, mining, and commerce to pose as states, the SADC States have declared that they are on high alert after self-manufactured evidence surfaced of imperialist tendencies to destabilize them by regime change. Their trigger fingers are itching for a few more Marikanas to earn bale-outs from their masters.

But, the peace and stability which they claim is being threatened, is threatened by the unrelenting attacks on employment, labour and union rights, which these regimes are spearheading on behalf of the capitalists.

Their paranoid and neurotic threats underline in red the NUMSA declarations and should put the regional working class on high alert.

The Namibian regime is totally bankrupt as can be seen from the abandoned construction projects one month into the new financial year; from the piecemeal payment of teachers at the end of April, etcetera, etcetera.

They wish to make their crisis, the crisis of the working class. Oh!, how they wished they could have made it a tribal

conflict of the working class!

The WRP's message is, dedicate this May of the year of the Great Workers' Revolution, 1917, to the Unity of the Working Class and to stay alert to build their independent fighting organs to defend itself and the Working People from the Ruin the capitalist ruling classes wish to bring upon the people.

March forward to working class unity in the Southern African Region, Africa and the World.

It is the only way forward to redemption!

Paul Thomas
Secretary of Publicity.

WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY TO REBUILD THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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