

An urgent appeal from Polish miners: Don't shoot at workers

Bogusław Zietek, "August 80" free trade union,

12 February 2015.

Don't shoot at workers!

Don't use state institutions against protesters!

On 12 February the courts ruled illegal the strike by several thousand miners at Jastrzebie Colliery Company (Jastrzebie Spółka Weglowa, JSW) in southern Poland. On the same day, a demonstration of miners' wives and children marched through the town supporting their loved ones in struggle.

The authorities will stop at nothing to break this strike, which has already gone on for 16 days. Special police detachments sent against the miners have tried to crush the protest with unheard-of brutality, using anti-riot weapons firing 37mm anti-riot rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas without any good reason.

More than 20 miners have been wounded, some of them seriously. At the same time prosecutors have started charges against the protest organisers, threatening them with financial consequences bound up with "losses" the company suffers affected by the strike. Among those charged are the trade unionist Krzysztof Labadz, one of the leaders of the strike at "Budryk" mine which lasted 46 days seven years ago.

The striking miners are demanding the sacking of the company managing director, Jarosław Zagorski, whose management has brought to company to the very brink. Even though the government holds more than half the shares, it will not give

way. The miners and their families are determined. They are defending their jobs but also the right to protest of all Polish working people.

We call on trades unions and social organisations across Europe to support our struggle and to send us letters of support. Only international solidarity, as with Greece, can force back the diktats of the neo-liberals who rule us. Only together can we face up to their anti-social offenseive in Europe.

Bogusław Zietek,

President of the Free Trade Union "August 80" (WZZ "Sierpen 80").

Send solidarity messages to: darekzal74@gmail.com

Workers' Front Croatia: An interview with DIMITRIJE BIRAC

[threecolumns]

'Yes, we want to abolish capitalism'

One of the founders of Workers' Front says: "Our final goal and the character of the party are anti-capitalist, and our current aim is to show that all the problems we talk about, such as unemployment and the collapse in production, are consequences of the socio-economic system, and not of the success or failure of this or that economic policy".

Q: Worker's Front has been organising for six months or so, but last week you decided to show yourselves in public. Who belongs to your organisation beside the linguist Mate Kapovic and the trade unionist Denis Geto?

DB: Mainly young people, activists, workers, students, unemployed people. We will introduce some of them to show that it's not limited to a tiny group.

Our organisation is working along two lines: The first is to work on the infrastructures in different towns, the second is to form links with working people, to support workers' protest demonstrations and to get in touch with various trade unionists, particularly those who want to put up a struggle.

We are open to all those who are interested in changing society in line with our principles and transitional demands.

Q: You have said the future party will not have a classic hierarchical structure, but is there a formally constituted leadership at the moment?

DB: We think that it is necessary to function in a more democratic way, with rank and file members controlling the leadership. Of course there has to be an organised leadership, but for the moment it's still all coming together.

We still have a lot of work to do on the organisation and structure, but what we can say is that we are preparing a workers' trade union conference where we will try to bring together a number of militant trade unions.

We have meetings where we discuss uniting the workers movement, and in that sense we are in touch with trade unionists like Zeljko Luksic of HZ (Croatian Railways), Zvonko Segvic of Brodosplit shipyard, and trade unionists in the power and chemical sector independent union (EKN) and the "Feniks" Post Office union.

We have also been in touch with Mija Stanic about a referendum over the plans to raise money by selling or leasing off parts of the highway network.

Q: Apart from a few positive comments, most of the media have ignored the appearance of the Anti-Capitalist Party?

DB: Most of the commercial media have ignored us. On the other hand we did get a reaction from alleged adherents of the neo-classical school of economic thought, who have gained a monopoly position in economic science over recent decades. They do everything in their power to depict us as charlatans and try to discredit us by saying we are not real working people.

According to them, only a blue-collar factory worker with a moustache and a spanner in his hand can count as a working person.

The fact that we are getting resistance from these two quarters only goes to show we are doing the right thing.

The origins of the crisis lie in the system itself.

Q: How do you see economic reality, as against these people?

DB: We think that the profound causes of the crisis in Croatian society are that for the last 20 years a political caste which is the product of this socio-economic system caused further social deterioration, the way people are alienated, and the degradation of work.

All the other problems flow from these three main ones, and behind all these processes is the mechanism our economists know nothing about because economic science has dropped the study of reality, whereas this mechanism is the one through which a minority appropriates values created by the rest of society.

If you postulate that it is more essential to satisfy the

needs of capital arising from private appropriation than those of society, then society finds itself removed from all control over work as a whole, over the value created, and then we have a spontaneous process which society cannot control.

Economists who are militant supporters of private capital may well proclaim how rational and efficient it is, but in fact it is a fundamentally irrational system, perhaps the most irrational in the whole of history.

This is the situation: technical progress is greater than ever, but people are working harder and harder and longer and longer for wages which buy them less and less.

Q: So in Croatia there are fewer people working more and more, while the others become surplus to requirements?

DB: It's one more proof that the system is irrational, because it cannot use the social potential that is there to develop society's productive forces. But it is also one of its characteristics, because when you have lots of unemployed, the price of labour power falls and in that way, people accept any wages just to get work. All these contradictions show that the necessary structural change cannot just come from the economic policy of a political party, since the source is precisely in the socio-economic system.

Q: What do you propose?

DB: We propose a cut in the working week from 40 hours to 35 hours at existing wage levels to increase the number of those in work.

We propose to raise the relative wage, or to put it another way, the part of the wealth the worker creates which comes back to that person, to lower the retirement age, and increase pensions and the minimum wage, to cap the spread between minimum and maximum wages at a ratio of 1:4, to place banks under social control and other steps to develop society, not

profits.

We should put a stop to privatisation.

Q: The tendencies you describe are present everywhere. What can the State do to counteract them?

DB: We are not working for some sort of utopian society, but something that flows from the mode of production itself.

We are not enemies of technology, but we are against the capitalist application of technology which means we see the productivity of labour rise, but that is not done for the benefit of society, nor in order to shorten labour time and the proportion of our life we spend at work.

On the contrary, that is getting longer and longer, and the surplus value created is more and more appropriated and more and more used to create new value.

The data shows that while Gross Domestic Product (GDP) keeps rising, globally and in Croatia, wages have risen more slowly than GDP. In that sense we are afraid that you cannot proceed just by redistributing the profits and the value created, since you can introduce taxes, but you cannot by doing so change the system which creates the inequalities.

We see that in periods of economic upswing, capital only grows because it does not pay labour adequately and then, in a period of crisis, the only way capital can get out of it is to reduce the price of labour power so that investments once again become profitable.

We do not say that the state on its own can resolve this problem. Capitalism is a global system, and people should co-operate and organise society in common.

But it is possible to set an example by lowering the working week to 35 hours, so that others can take the question on board.[/threecolumns]

Croatia: Programmatic Principles of the Workers' Front

[threecolumns] See also the Invitation to a conference in Zagreb

1. **The Workers' Front** is a political organization of workers, unemployed, retirees and students, fighting for a radical change of political and economic relations for the benefit of all oppressed and those who live off their work, for realisation of their social demands, and for protection and extension of their rights.

Unlike the existing parliamentary parties in Croatia, including those which in a populist and opportunist way occasionally appeal to workers, the Workers' Front does not aim to establish itself as a traditional political party. Our goal is not to get integrated in the institutions of the system and secure parliamentary seats, salaries and pensions through petty politicking or to advocate only surface reforms, make different coalitions and compromise with those who are responsible for the current situation in the country.

The goal of the Workers' Front is to bring about a radical change of the society we live in through a political struggle, both on economic and political levels. Therefore, participation in elections would only be one of the means to achieve our goals. In order to be able to accomplish this, we must build an organization rooted in workplaces and connected with everyday social struggle of the disenfranchised.

Unlike the existing political parties, our organization will

be truly democratic within itself but act in a disciplined and effective manner. We strive for an organization of activists who would continuously be engaged in trade union, women's rights and students' movement, as well as in the struggle for the rights of all oppressed social groups.

We strive to be a political voice of the social movement which would gather into its ranks 99% of the exploited people in capitalism, and finally, to be an organization that would fight for an essential change of the social order and for transfer of the totality of political power from the hands of the political elite, large capital and banks to the hands of the people.

2. Capitalism and the so-called "free market" are directed against workers and the majority in society and inevitably lead to their exploitation and poverty, both in Croatia and on a global scale. They form an unstable system which exists in the periods between two global crises and in each one of them hundreds of thousands of workers are thrown into the streets, their lives being destroyed, all in order to save the profits of the richest few.

The accumulation of profits on the backs of workers, unemployed, students and pensioners and against the interests of the majority, is the motivating drive of those that rule society, while everything else like employment, food security, housing issues, etc., is just a by-product of the profit economy which may get only partially realized, but never to the full extent and never for society as a whole.

A fundamental characteristic of capitalism is the irreconcilable difference between the two basic classes: capitalists, holding monopoly over the means of production, such as banks, companies, factories, chain stores, hotels etc., and making profit through the work of others, and workers, i.e. all those who rent their labour to survive.

This antagonism cannot be resolved in any other way but by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and its political system, which represents the ultimate goal of the Workers' Front, achievable only on a broader scale.

In Croatia, the newly made capitalists, or *tycoons*, assisted by their political allies, i.e. parliamentary parties, have destroyed most of industry, which is a natural consequence of the drive for private profit, rather than the interests of the entire society, and sold everything that took decades and many generations of workers to create.

The representatives of large capital and the powers that be keep cynically saying to the poor, "you have to work harder and give up more" trying to sell them the twisted logic that they will be better off with lower salaries and fewer rights.

The Workers' Front will uncompromisingly confront that kind of logic and system. We want the exploiters and political elite to know that "the time has come for you to pay". Our principles are that everyone deserves a job that pays a decent wage; the burden of the economic crisis needs to be shifted from the backs of the poor onto the backs of the richest; democracy needs to stop being an empty phrase used by capital to hide its dictatorship and become social reality through which working people can realize their interests; all privatizations and sales of state assets need to be stopped immediately while all basic resources of public interest should be nationalized; implementation of workers' control over the entire industry.

Since the aforementioned is in severe conflict with the principles of the capitalist system, as well as with the interests of the ruling class and political elite, the realization of these goals is possible only with the abolition of capitalism.

3. Although recently founded, the Workers' Front does not

start from scratch. The rich history that inspires and teaches us is a hundred-year-old history of the international trade union and workers' political movement. It is precisely the persistent and devoted struggle of workers organized into trade unions and parties during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that won us the political and material rights we still enjoy today but which have been increasingly under attack, including an eight-hour day, universal suffrage and social protection.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is only the trade union and political struggle of workers that can, as a first step, counter neoliberalism and bring new victories to those who live off their wages alone, and then make possible the realization of a new society in which the currently oppressed working class, together with allied groups, will take power.

In accordance with the aforementioned, the Workers' Front will strive for the workers' movement to return to its revolutionary roots and reintroduce it openly into politics. Populist politics and political trade-offs will be confronted with a clear workers' social program, and preposterous appeals to the common sense and mercy of the ruling class will be replaced with activism, struggle and pressure from below.

Furthermore, the Workers' Front will try to help the development of true and revolutionary trade unionism and support trade union activities while integrating the WF members into them to create the synthesis of political and trade union activism.

We will strive for reforms of current trade unions as well as for transfer of as much influence as possible to the mass of trade union members and their democratization, for the rejection of the current bureaucratic rigidity and accommodationist politics now carried out by the leadership of

the biggest labour unions, so they can become one of the most important tools in the workers' struggle.

4. **The rule of big capital** has long outgrown national borders. The complete domination of corporations and banks, uniformity of neoliberal measures implemented within Europe and beyond, and the most powerful nations in the world that pursue imperial politics and continuously launch military campaigns in order to preserve their interests, influence processes in each country, including Croatia.

It is impossible to fight for the rights of workers, students, unemployed, retirees and other oppressed groups only within the borders of one country.

Therefore, the Workers' Front bases its views and activities on full solidarity with all workers and social struggles in the Balkans, Europe and the world, supporting and trying to actively participate in the global movement of dissatisfaction with capitalism and undemocratic systems, including the capitalist parliamentary system whose rise we have witnessed all over the world, from the USA to Spain and Greece to the Arab world. Furthermore, the Workers' Front believes in the need for unity of all workers and all oppressed people in the struggle against the dictatorship of big capital, which is why it most vehemently opposes all the ideologies and movements (nationalism, chauvinism, racism, homophobia, fascism, clericalism, etc.) that want to divide the oppressed, keep them alienated and turn them against one another.

All the oppressed share the same interests, which can only be realized in unity and solidarity with others. The Workers' Front supports the creation of a strong and coordinated European workers' movement and close connections between all the oppressed in the world. Consequently, the Workers' Front solidarises with all nationally oppressed peoples whose lands are occupied and their language and cultural rights denied.

5. **Above all short term goals**, the fundamental goal of the Workers' Front which determines its activities is the abolition of the capitalist economic and political system and the institution of social ownership over the means of production, built on principles of workers' management of economy and the political power of the working classes, using democratic decision-making to address all questions of direct interest to people across the board – at the level of the workplace, organization, neighborhood, city, and finally, the whole country.

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Necessity of a broad workers' front – Attack is the best defence! Invitation to a conference in Zagreb 31 January – 1 February

[threecolumns]

Workers' Front (<https://-fronta.org>) invites you to attend and give a talk at the trade union conference which will be held in Zagreb at the Centre for Culture and Information

(KIC) 31 January – 1 February 2015 (Saturday and Sunday)

This trade union conference is the continuation of the past two conferences organized by Workers' Struggle under the working title "Workers' resistance to the destruction of companies" in 2012 and 2013, which tried to help create space for discussion, tighter connections and a network for information exchange between trade unionists, as well as social movement activists, and contribute to the strengthening of labour movement in Croatia. The Third Trade Union Conference, "Necessity of a broad workers' front – attack is the best defence!" is organized by Workers' Front, an initiative aiming to become a workers' party which should give additional importance to this conference.

In the light of increasing poverty of a large majority of the population, declining economy and unprecedented social stratification, as well as a joint attack on the workers' rights by all political parties and business elite, we intend to question past strategies of organizing workers' resistance and offer a vision of an alternative model which would unite trade union and political levels of struggle into a stronger entity.

The aim of this conference is to exchange trade union experiences in terms of workers' struggle, forge closer links between militant trade unions and point out the necessity of labour unions for all workers.

We think that it is of essential importance for unionists and activists to join forces in a common resistance against this social and economic system and its supporters – the political elite. Some of the most honest and active Croatian trade union leaders will be present at the conference, such as Mario Iveković (Novi sindikat/New Trade Union), Mijat Stanić (HAC / Croatian Motorways), Željko Stipić (Preporod School Trade Union), Zvonko Šegvić (Brodosplit Shipyard) and Denis Geto

(HEP/ Croatian Electricity Company). Alongside the trade unions leaders will be members of the Workers' Front who will present their opinions regarding political, but also trade union landscape in Croatia. Beside domestic unionists, we have also invited international speakers to the third union conference: unionist Goran Lukič from the largest Slovenian trade union organisation ZSSS (Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia) members of *Združena levica* from Slovenia (the United Left) and activists and workers from Serbia and

We hope to see you at our conference in Zagreb.

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

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For more information regarding the previous conferences, please refer to the following links:

<http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/11/22/sindikalna-konferencija-radnicki-otpor-unistavanju-poduzeca>

<http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/12/03/veliki-uspjeh-sindikalne-konferencije-radnicke-borbe>

[http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/12/12/deklaracija-sindikalne-konferencijee \[/threecolumns\]](http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/12/12/deklaracija-sindikalne-konferencijee [/threecolumns])

South Africa Dossier

The posts below are on political developments in South Africa including a report on steps by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) towards establishing a United Front, a warning of a growing witch-hunt against NUMSA and her United Front allies, with particular reference to a recent speech by the South Africa Communist Party General Secretary “Blade” Nzimande, and responses to recent written and oral statements by Cosatu General Secretary Zwelinzime Vavi and NUMSA General Secretary Irvin Jim.

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

[threecolumns]A fresh wind really has started to blow from South Africa, where the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) has responded positively to the growing resistance of the masses against the African National Congress (ANC) regime and the situation following the massacre of platinum miners at Marikana in 2012.

NUMSA proposes to:

(1) Break the trade unions away from the ruling alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) because

that alliance has been “captured by hostile forces”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A necessary discussion

South African workers and their own leaders in the organisations they control, such as NUMSA, have been trying to force the leaders of the SACP and the ANC to make good on the promises they made in the early 1990s, when government rule in South Africa was peacefully handed over from the apartheid Nationalist regime to the Alliance. The hope was dangled that

the constitutional handover would start a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) which would gradually pave the way for a more radical socialist transformation of society. It seems inevitable that the present positive and necessary flowering of political discussion in South Africa should take the form of trying to hold the political leadership of the movement around the SACP to make good what it promised then.

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

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

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

One strategy, the "two-stage" theory, explained that the first stage was for the country to achieve its independence. In the case of South Africa, which was independent but ruled by a White minority apartheid dictatorship, the first stage was to achieve majority rule and remove the various forms of discrimination under which the Black majority suffered. Action on a "second stage" of carrying out a socialist transformation of society was to wait until the newly-liberated nation could

build up the economic and social resources needed for that task. The Freedom Charter adopted in the mid-1950s lays out this view.

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

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

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

Hopes of a new arrival achieving balanced national development of society and economy today under capitalism are an illusion. The real way forward involves nationalising industry and finance under workers control and socialist methods of planning, and the scope of the plan must be international. The continent of Africa is one sustained essay on this topic from the negative side.

Nevertheless, at the decisive moment, when the apartheid regime faced collapse and a new page was turned, it was the

ANC and the SACP whose policies, based on the Stalinist conceptions underlying the Freedom Charter, prevailed and won the support of the trade unions.

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

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

Lenin the social-democratic leader

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

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

Of course not! Ruth First, like many countless others, died at the hands of the bourgeoisie as a fighter in the class struggle. But the fact that she was deliberately murdered by the other side does not of itself mean that the political line and tactics she chose were correct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lenin against the theory of stages!

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

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

"It means that the democratic reforms in the political system and the social and economic reforms, which have become a necessity for Russia, do not in themselves imply the undermining of capitalism, the undermining of bourgeois rule; on the contrary, they will, for the first time, really clear the ground for a wide and rapid, European, and not Asiatic, development of capitalism; they will, for the first time, make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class."

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

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

After all, he says, in tsarist Russia:

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

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

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

"On the other hand," Lenin went on, "it is more advantageous for the working class if the necessary changes in the direction of bourgeois democracy take place by way of revolution and not by way of reform; for the way of reform is the way of delay, of procrastination, of the painfully slow decomposition of the putrid parts of the national organism. It is the proletariat and the peasantry that suffer first of all and most of all from their putrefaction. The revolutionary way is the way of quick amputation, which is the least painful to the proletariat, the way of the direct removal of the decomposing parts, the way of fewest concessions to and least consideration for the monarchy and the disgusting, vile, rotten and contaminating institutions which go with it."

But the whole point of the handover which ended apartheid and

brought majority rule in South Africa is that it deliberately avoided a revolution! That is why the Black population still suffers from all the aspects of “putrefaction” which Comrade Jim describes in detail in various speeches.

Later Lenin adds:

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

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

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

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

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

leader of the people's revolution."

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

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

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

In South Africa, it turns out that it was the leaders of the ANC and the SACP who were actually "steeped in lifeless pedantry". Rather than trying to "mercilessly crush the counter-revolution", they made an accommodation with the sources of counter-revolution's paymasters in the big mining monopolies and banks. Instead of fighting to "mercilessly crush" the practitioners of apartheid, the SACP and ANC leaders organised "truth and reconciliation" processes to protect them.

That is why South African society continues to be scarred by

inequalities in every shape and form as well as social deprivation and violence, particularly against women.

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

The Fate of Social Democracy

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

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

His pamphlet *Imperialism* noted the end of the:

"... old free competition between manufacturers ... Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads right up to the most comprehensive socialisation of production; it, so to speak, drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order", where "production becomes social, but appropriation remains private".

It was because the epoch thus ushered in is an "epoch of wars, civil wars and revolutions" that the Socialist International entered a crisis and the majority of its parties, having sunk

to the level of “passive onlookers” and increasingly “steeped in lifeless pedantry”, turned out to have been “captured and taken over by right-wing forces” when World War I broke out, followed later by the revolutionary wave that started in Russia.

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

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

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

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

April Theses

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

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

He therefore insisted:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The “socialist” enemies of the Russian Revolution

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

The Communist International

Up until 1914, Lenin had tried to make the revolutionary action which the new situation at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries required fit into the social-democratic division into “minimum programme” and “maximum programme”. He had “stress-tested” the politics of the Socialist International to its limits. That whole organisation and its programmes had become tatters and rags fit only to clothe its hypocrisy.

Lenin, the Bolsheviks and their allies rescued Marxism from the wreckage of the Socialist International and took it forward in the formation of Communist Parties and the Communist International. How these organisations faced up to

the task of world revolution is recorded in the minutes and other documents of the first four congresses of the Communist International, which are now widely available for study and should be carefully studied as part of the movement which NUMSA is setting afoot.

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

Stalinism and social democracy

Lenin died in January 1924. Under a show of continuing his work, his successors in the leadership of the Soviet Union and the Communist International abandoned the struggle for world revolution. They established a bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union and claimed that it would be possible to achieve socialism in that country alone. This happened under specific conditions under which hopes of a rapid spread of revolutionary overthrows were disappointed. It is not simply a matter, as Joe Slovo explained in his *Has Socialism failed*, written in 1989, (and Zwelinzima Vavi repeats today) that Communists in government got accustomed to the harsh practices of civil war and the habit of issuing orders. Trotsky and his followers in the Left Opposition and later the Fourth International analysed and explained the many factors involved in the degeneration of the Soviet Union and above all the reactionary nature of the political line that came to dominate in the Comintern. The crux of the political degeneration was the policy of building socialism in a single country.

From being the world party of socialist revolution, the Communist International started to abuse the huge respect and enthusiasm the Russian Revolution had evoked in working people

to control and dominate the Communist movement. It inculcated into its members unswerving loyalty to the Soviet leaders and the view that the way forward lay in an accommodation with capitalism under the slogan of peaceful co-existence (although there were occasional but devastatingly destructive ultra-left lurches).

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

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

Stalin and his supporters could only justify what they did by actually returning to the "tatters and rags" of social democracy. The policy of building socialism in a single country is itself a social-democratic one. So is the idea that, despite Lenin's insistence that imperialism is a new and final stage of capitalism, there is still such a thing as a benign, non-imperialist capitalism within which working people can reach an accommodation.

Today's activists should study for themselves the history of the movement in China in the 1920s and Spain in the 1930s in order to understand what it meant for the masses in these

countries and the parties of the Communist International to be guided by these “tatters and rags”.

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

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

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

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

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

Bob Archer

January 2015[/threecolumns]

**Unions fight to reclaim
COSATU – FAWU Press Release**

19 November 2014

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

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

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

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

Abrey Tshabalala indicated that rational discussions and robust debates have been replaced by “let’s vote”, and voting is now happening on every issues, including on the adoption of agenda and approval of credentials among others. This, he said, led to NUMSA being expelled without substantive debates on the contents of a 59-page submission delivered over three hours.

Aubrey further insisted that the struggle of the 8 unions plus

NUMSA is about reclaiming COSATU back to its rightful owners, which are workers and not the 33 individual leaders, many without a mandate to expel NUMSA.

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

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

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

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

Participants were allowed to ask questions/clarifications and to make comments and the overwhelming majority were in full support for the immediate re-admission of NUMSA into the federation and encouraged the seven affiliates to keep fighting for such a noble cause.

The underlying key theme in virtually all the questions asked by workers was whether we stay in COSATU or we form another federation. The answers from leaders and from other participants, which ultimately became decisions, were that we

will fight for our COSATU that has NUMSA and return that COSATU to its rightful owners, the workers, with Special National Congress as a platform to achieve those goals.

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

Issued by

Katishi Masemola,

FAWU General Secretary

On behalf of the Seven Unions.

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

[/threecolumns]

Reinstate NUMSA in its rightful place in the leadership of COSATU

Statement by Workers International

[threecolumns]On 8 November, 33 out of 57 office bearers of the South African trade union federation COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) voted to expel the National Union

of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) from their federation.

NUMSA is the biggest, among the most militant, and certainly the most socialist-minded of the South African trade unions. It was a founder union of COSATU.

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

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

The breaking point was 12 August 2012, when the South African police force shot down 34 striking miners at Marikana. Their crime was to refuse to sell their labour for less than a living wage.

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

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

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

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

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

First must come a bourgeois democratic revolution. The class that must lead and take power is the national bourgeoisie, which will introduce democratic reforms – the right to self-rule, democratic elections, and equal rights for all sections of society (before the law, in education, in employment) and so on. This notion is modeled on the formal premise that every colonial and semi-colonial country in the world must pass through the same stages as the developed countries did in the 17th (England) 18th (France, America) and 19th (Italy, Germany) centuries.

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

This ideology, proselytised by the South African Communist Party (SACP) into the ranks of the African National Congress (ANC), and the trade union movement, resulted in an

understanding of the 1994 elections in South Africa as the “National Democratic Revolution” rightfully led by the ANC, and the first stage in the journey towards socialism.

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

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

The deal was made only because the foreign exploiters of the country feared they faced the seizure of all their property, the mines, the banks, the land and the major industries by a mass resistance led by the working class.

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

The Marxist theory of Permanent Revolution maintains that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries the class which must lead any democratic revolution is the working class, and that it must lead an alliance with the poor peasants in a struggle to realise democratic demands. In order to thoroughly achieve those democratic demands (making them available to the working class and poor peasantry) it must carry over the democratic

revolution to socialism. This means starting the overthrow of property relations through the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under workers' control – at the same time as achieving these democratic demands. The theory of Permanent Revolution is also clear that socialism cannot be sustained in a single country, and can only survive if it is carried out on an international scale. This is a key aspect for a working class party in South Africa, which must reach out beyond its borders as it seeks to establish a socialist society.

Crucial for the development of Permanent Revolution is that the working class must be in the leadership of both the struggle for democracy, and for socialism, and the dual processes cannot be separated. The class must have an understanding that it is not challenging one manifestation of capital (like apartheid) but challenging capitalism itself – and this means that the working class must have its own socialist party to fight for the development of that class consciousness. NUMSA (while remaining a trade union) is currently carrying forward the patient and solid investigation necessary for the building of that party.

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

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

income, the more she will suffer from sexual harassment, violence and rape.

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

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

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

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

It is almost impossible to find the Workers Charter on the internet – one of the few places is on our website here:
<http://workersinternational.info//?s=workers+charter>.

NUMSA General Secretary Irwin Jim’s generation arrived after that fight had taken place – and has had to rediscover the class nature of the ANC government at the cost of 34 striking miners’ lives. These leaders still speak as if the two stages of the democratic and socialist transformations can be looked

at as two separate processes and are putting the ANC's Freedom Charter forward as their programme. NUMSA (and the six other unions allied to them) are demanding to implement the socialist second stage immediately – locked in struggle with those who (under the guise of saying that 20 years is not long enough to change things) are determined that the second stage will never appear. In order to make sure of that, they must ensure above all that the working class does not take leadership and take power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

capital.

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

Workers International 25.10.2014[/threecolumns]

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

[threecolumns]

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

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

People's Organisation (SWAPO) in exile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The inhuman conditions built up frustration and resentment to breaking point amongst the vast number of workers housed in

large compounds especially in the urban areas, and in 1971 the anger boiled over into a general strike which started on 13 December 1971 and ended on 20 January 1972.

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

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

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

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

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

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

to hear about the strike

No wonder! The Namibian General Strike defied the largest colonial military force in Africa – one soldier for every 12 Namibians – and shocked not only the colonial administration for its determination and death defiance but the South African regime itself.

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

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

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

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

100% with NUMSA's decision to work towards a new independent workers' party for socialism.

It is now our job to educate and organise!

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