

# What We Can Learn From The Crisis in NUMSA

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa is not just any old union. It was built by black industrial workers fighting exploitation by multinationals keen to use the repressive, racist apartheid regime to secure super-profits. It was built with support and advice from Marxist activists. These workers asserted themselves as an independent revolutionary force, quickly grasped the core ideas of socialism, and fearlessly fought to bring down the whole apartheid system. They established workers' democracy as the working principle of their union.

The settlement which ended apartheid rule in the early 1990s cheated these militant workers of the opportunity to take the road to a socialist South Africa. An alliance between the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) not only dropped any socialist policy (such as nationalising the mining and metal-refining industries, returning the land to the toilers who work it, etc.); it actually forged ahead with a policy of widespread selling-off of public utilities. At the same time, the leaders of this alliance neglected no opportunity to enrich themselves.

For over 20 years, the triple alliance was actually able to ride out any working-class opposition which was provoked as a succession of government policy initiatives failed to provide progress in jobs, welfare and living conditions or in mass black access to education and agricultural land.

Working-class resistance was reflected in internal wrangles within the alliance and the regular-rapid turnover in national

Presidents, with Thabo Mbeki replaced by Jacob Zuma and Zuma in turn replaced by the former miners' union leader, Cyril Ramaphosa. Each successive incumbent became mired in accusations of corruption and incompetence.

Working-class resistance broke out into the open in the middle of 2012 with the shooting by the South African Police Service of thirty-four striking miners at Marikana and the subsequent wave of industrial militancy.

Correctly identifying this as a pivotal moment in the class struggle in South Africa, NUMSA convened a Special Congress in December 2013 which undertook a serious campaign to re-establish a socialist and internationalist workers' movement. The decisions of this Special Congress are summarised at What Numsa decided in December 2013 – wirfi ([workersinternational.info](http://workersinternational.info)).

These Special Congress decisions amounted to a carefully considered understanding of a way forward to revive the workers' movement, workers' democratic organisation and workers' political power as a class.

However, progress along the lines sketched out at the Special Congress has been far from smooth. Old mistakes and embedded illusions have persisted in the very leadership of this trade union. This leadership is quick to point out the failings of post-apartheid rule but has never really taken on board any analysis of the real lessons of these failures. They have therefore neglected many of the decisions of the December 2013 Special Congress and taken the union in quite a different direction from the one chosen by delegates.

Differences over these matters have led to a crisis within the trade union. This came to a head over preparations for the 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Union slated to start on 25 July 2022. An opposition group of political activists alleged serious abuses of democratic process by the national

leadership of General Secretary Irvin Jim in the course of local and regional gatherings to discuss policies and select and mandate delegates. Leading figures in this opposition – all elected office bearers at various levels within the union – went to court and obtained a ruling that the Congress should not go ahead. The majority of the national leadership of the union nevertheless went ahead with the Congress. They obtained a ruling from another court that some slight last-minute changes they made were adequate to meet the terms of the previous injunction.

A Secretariat Report to the NUMSA NEC Meeting held on 28 and 28 October 2022 reveals at some length the attitude, orientation and methods of the current NUMSA leadership. This Secretariat Report makes no direct or systematic attempt to defend this leadership against any of the charges made against it. It is nevertheless worth studying, as it reveals some very basic weaknesses and problematic attitudes in that leadership, as well as underhand ways of dealing with political problems. The underlying roots of the problems in the leadership of the union, the reasons why an opposition had to arise and challenge this leadership can be traced and identified by analysing aspects of this Secretariat Report. This present article delves into some of this.

### **A dishonest slander**

The report comes, in effect, from the office of the General Secretary of the union, Irvin Jim. It is a robust and obstinate attempt to justify the current leadership of the union, but it does not provide any systematic analysis of the crisis in the union and the soil out of which it grew. In the places where it does deal with that background, the report actually reveals the author's own political weaknesses and mistakes, but by then a far murkier objective has been attempted.

From the very start of the report, the opposition within the

union is repeatedly described as “individuals”. It is never referred to as what it actually is: a strong and rooted trend which is an organic part of NUMSA’s history and a source of the union’s strength.

The word “individual” has a very specific weight in a workers’ organisation, especially one allegedly guided by Marxism. To describe opponents systematically and repeatedly as “individuals” is to place them outside of and at odds with the collective of a workers’ organisation. This is doubly deceptive here since all the “individuals” involved have been fighting consistently for nothing more than the collective rights of the working-class membership of the union, enshrined in its constitution and methods. Their complaints have all related to breaches of the constitution and departure from the methods of workers’ democracy on the part of the Irvin Jim leadership.

The opposition has produced various statements, submissions and appeals which present a devastating picture of financial chicanery, abuses and constitutional breaches on the part of the union leadership. The Secretariat Report brazenly reproduces a number of these with barely any comment or analysis and certainly no detailed rebuttal. The only “argument” involved is the kind of subliminal propaganda that the advertising industry has mastered. The unspoken but clear message is: “How dare these ‘individuals’ raise their voices at all! What insolence on their part! What saboteurs and wreckers!”.

As the Secretariat Report goes on, the “individuals” become, bit by bit, a “group of individuals”, and a little later “a group of individuals inside the union”, but working insidiously to undermine it; a “group of individuals” who are feted in various media outlets (and therefore obviously work hand-in-glove with the class enemy), and so on.

One hundred pages later, the Report works itself up into a

climax. The opposition becomes “a loud hailer for anti-NUMSA right-wingers, speaking rubbish about NUMSA and believing that they could change NUMSA policies and constitutional decisions through some Cape Town television studio called ‘Workers World Media’.” It goes on: “To be blunt we have allowed ourselves as the union through our good heart and generosity to be abused by a tiny, loony, racist white left that has no relationship with the working class as a result of being open to everyone who claim to advance the interests of the working class”. (The opposition justifiably points out that they are fighting FOR the carrying out of the decisions of the 2013 Special Congress and that the NUMSA leadership has abandoned these decisions and gone off in a different direction. The accusation of racism a vile slander).

All this abuse is piled on in order to avoid addressing the very serious accusations of wrongdoing which are detailed in the various opposition documents actually copied into the Report. It is all very well to brag about “NUMSA policies and constitutional decisions”, but pointless unless you actually address the reality of the complaints about branch-stacking meetings with unelected “delegates”, sending thugs to disorganise union meetings and so forth.

The slander comes to a spittle-laden climax: “it is important to raise everybody’s level of consciousness about NUMSA as an organisation and refocus our energies towards what NUMSA has always been, a preparatory school for class struggles and fighting against the system of capitalism in pursuit of socialism”. This is bound up with “characterising and deepening our understanding about **the forces that have consistently plunged the organisation, putting it under siege and causing instability**”. Part of such a struggle has to do with being firm and not being liberal and being prepared to call a spade a spade” (My emphasis – BA).

What an insult to the very concepts of “consciousness”, “class struggles”, “fighting capitalism” and “pursuit of socialism”!

The Secretariat Report **implies** that the opposition is guilty of treachery and malice, but utters not a single **political** word or idea in characterising that opposition.

In fact, the Secretariat Report has no political answer to the charges raised by the opposition within the union. The Report is reduced to name-calling in a style that would have made old Andrey Vyshinsky proud – that lying, slandering and cold-bloodedly murderous prosecutor at the notorious Moscow Trials in the 1930s. “A preparatory school for class struggles and fighting against the system of capitalism in pursuit of socialism” is indeed what a trade union can and should be. However, while the methods and conceptions of the Irvin Jim leadership remain Stalinist, that leadership will train and educate not class-conscious proletarian fighters, but sheep with no mind of their own, bleating the meaningless phrases inculcated into them by their leaders.

There is also no direct reply to the allegations that the business interests attached to the union are not serving their intended functions and are instead used for the benefit of individual leaders and to buy influence among union members. Instead, the Report announces that “We can report to the NEC that we have met the necessary compliance and we have made a submission to the Department of Employment and Labour and have committed to respond to the pack of lies championed by faceless people who speak on the basis of anonymity, when clearly their mission is to destroy NUMSA and put it under administration”. So, there is the promise to “respond” to the Department of Employment and Labour, but no proper response to the union delegates and members!

At the same time, the Report announces there will be special training for local and regional officials of the union to keep systematic minutes and financial records, as if they were to blame for the alleged abuses.

**Stalinism a counter-revolutionary force in the working class**

From out of the tomb, Stalinism extends a ghostly hand whose touch threatens to wither the promising green shoots of a working-class revival. The current leadership of NUMSA is making a hash of the course of action established at the union's Special Congress in December 2013 because it does not grasp the problems presented to the working class by the bureaucratic, mechanical and authoritarian methods and conceptions bred under Stalin's rule in the USSR. These are the methods and conceptions which shaped the character of the SACP-ANC-Cosatu alliance which assumed rule over South Africa after 1990. Even three decades after the collapse of the USSR these methods and conceptions still have a remarkable grip on the workers' movement.

The Bolshevik Party built and led by Lenin engaged in a dogged and profound struggle to master theoretical problems in order to provide clear, correct and reliable guidance to workers and the broader masses at every evolving stage in their struggle. That struggle itself presents a constantly shifting and changing picture as different social forces square off against each other. For the Bolsheviks, loyalty to Marxist theory was not at all a slavish and silent subservience to a line imposed from above. Even working under conditions of illegality and the risk of imprisonment, exile and death, Bolsheviks arrived at their political policies and practices in a process of discussion. Those who claim to be Marxist leaders had to – and still must – justify that assertion by honestly accounting for the outcomes of the policies they propose. This is not “liberalism” but a necessary attribute of revolutionary organisation.

A very different relationship between party leaders and strategy and tactics took root after Lenin's death. Once a bureaucracy had usurped state power in the Soviet Union, and extended its grip over the Communist Parties around the world, policies and tactics became subordinate to the needs of the Soviet leadership at any given time. It was in this process

that workers became accustomed, under duress, to adopting uncritically whatever the Party Line might be at any given moment, however much that line contradicted the Party Line the day before and the day after. The methods and practices of purges, frame-up trials and the Gulag had their impact in parties and trade unions run by supporters of the Russian (and later Chinese) leadership across the world.

We have room here for just a few examples of the problems caused by the bureaucratic approach: Finding reliable allies for revolutionary Communists workers in their struggles (and knowing exactly how reliable they are and for how long) is a question of immense importance for our movement. Under Lenin, the Communist International developed the tactic of the United Front in order to overcome the grip of reformist socialist parties on the working class. However, in the hands of the new leadership in Russia in the mid-1920s, the tactic of the United Front became a reckless reliance upon agreements with the more radical trade union leaders in Britain and with Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Guo Min Dang in China, fighting the warlords who dominated large parts of the country. What should have been necessary temporary alliances were kept going even as the right wing of the Guo Min Dang slaughtered Chinese Communist workers in their thousands and the British TUC leaders closed down the 1926 General Strike after 9 days.

At the same time, the Soviet government was prolonging far beyond its shelf-life the "New Economic Policy" which had been adopted as a necessary but temporary path to economic recovery after the terrible destruction inflicted upon Russia during World War I and the civil war following the revolution.

By the end of the 1920s, the richer peasants in the USSR were starting to stir up opposition to the Soviet state in the countryside. Faced with setbacks to its policies at home and abroad, the bureaucracy turned to its notorious "class against class" policies of the so-called "Third Period". The world revolution was proclaimed to be imminent. Reformist socialists

were all denounced as traitors and as “twins” of fascism. War was declared on the entire Soviet peasantry in the form of the murderous forced collectivisation of agriculture. Communist workers in many countries around the world isolated themselves from other members of their own class by adopting a string of sectarian practices and actions.

### **Policy zig-zags**

The “Third Period”, described above, made any united resistance to fascism by socialist and communist workers impossible and led directly to the defeat of the German working class in 1933 at the hand of the Nazis. The response of the Soviet bureaucracy was to switch abruptly to a policy of alliances with “democratic” capitalist states and “popular fronts” with the reformist socialist and radical bourgeois politicians who had so recently been denounced as “twins” of fascism.

Even in the early 1920s, the Stalinist-leadership of the Communist movement had already abandoned any hope of the revolution spreading around the world. Communist policy internationally was reduced to any initiative that might strengthen the hand of the bureaucracy in its grip on its home territory in the USSR and its negotiations with Western capitalist governments. Stalinism had at times a radical, demagogic face and at times a face turned towards the democratic bourgeoisie (or even, at times, to German Nazism). What it never really had was a genuinely revolutionary Marxist conception of really revolutionary tactics.

Each switch to a new “line” led to the expulsion or resignation of some in the party who had believed too firmly in the previous one. Where the Soviet leadership held sway, that could lead to imprisonment and death. The question for those who found themselves in that position was and is: do they understand the political roots of the degeneration which hit them? Many have not. This seems to be particularly the

case with Irvin Jim. He split noisily with other members of the South African Communist Party nearly ten years ago over the obvious failures of the South African ANC government. Now he seems to be keen to patch up differences, and looks to the possibility of working with the SACP on the issues which he raises in the Secretariat Report.

His split was not thought through to the end. The Secretariat Report reveals massive illusions in the revolutionary potential of the SACP and its traditions. It refers to the 1969 Morogoro conference of the ANC, called to deal with frustration in the ranks of the SACP and Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the movement. Chris Hani and others had been suspended for voicing their radical criticism of the passivity of the ANC. At the conference, the protests of Hani and others were headed off with revolutionary-sounding bluster from Joe Slovo, the very Slovo whose rhetoric is quoted approvingly in the NUMSA Secretariat Report to the October 2022 National Executive Committee. Back in 1969, the suspended activists trooped tamely back into the ANC, which adopted a *Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress* document, drafted by Slovo.

While acknowledging generally “an international context of transition to the socialist system”, the text of *Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress* emphasises: “We in South Africa are part of the zone in which national liberation is the chief content of the struggle”. It emphasises the obstacles to national liberation throughout southern Africa at that time (1969), and insists that “The strategy and tactics of our revolution require for their formulation and understanding a full appreciation of the interlocking and interweaving of international, African and Southern African developments which play on our situation”. Thus, the struggle of the masses in the colonies of the time is severed from the movement of the working class in the imperialist powers of the day and firmly placed under the control of middle-class black

liberation leaders. Diplomatic and strategic considerations which are said to be beyond the grasp of ordinary workers and activists mean that only "the leadership" is equipped to judge what strategy and tactics are appropriate.

The section which refers to "Unending Resistance to White Domination" hails the "emergence and development of the primary organisation of the liberation movement – the African National Congress", as well as groups representing "the Coloured and the Indians" and "the creation of economic and political organisations – the South African Communist Party and trade unions which reflected the special aims and aspirations of the newly developed and doubly oppressed working class". This whole schema conceals the fact that "unending resistance" on the part of the black middle-class and tribal leaders not only experienced long periods of slumber, but also had a different aim and social content from that of black worker, which are relegated to "special aims and aspirations".

There follows very extensive logic-chopping about an "armed struggle" which barely ever got off the ground in South Africa itself. Slovo here is anxious to defend the ANC against accusations that "they were not really revolutionary or that it was only in the early '60s that they began to appreciate the correct strategy ... in other words was its policy not a revolutionary one?" Clearly, critical voices in the SACP had said something very much along these lines. Slovo's answer is to explain that "radical changes are brought about not by imaginary forces but by those whose outlook and readiness to act is very much influenced by historically determined factors". He goes on: "To ignore the real situation and to play about with imaginary forces, concepts and ideals is to invite failure. The art of revolutionary leadership consists in providing leadership to the masses and not just to its most advanced elements; it consists of setting a pace which accords with the objective conditions and the real possibilities at

hand". (*Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress*, 1969)

The problem with all these wise words is that the decision about what "objective conditions and the real possibilities at hand" really are, what tactics might be appropriate, and when, is left to the "political leadership" which has already been vested in the African National Congress, and the ANC is what Lenin used to call a 'bourgeois nationalist' movement with its own aims and objectives quite different from those of black workers. Stalinist policy (as expressed by Joe Slovo) had already walled-off "national liberation" struggles from the struggles of workers in developed capitalist countries and now it placed the struggles of workers in colonial countries (as mere "special aims and interests") under the control of a movement expressing the aspirations of a black elite.

And today the result of that is notorious. Thirty years of ANC rule in South Africa have brought all the abuses for the working class that the 2013 Special Congress statements and resolutions and even the current Secretariat Report detail. But the response of the Secretariat Report is to evoke the voice of Chris Hani, who tamely submitted to the terms of *Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress* and returned to the Stalinist fold. One is justified in suspecting that, despite all the bluster, that is exactly what the current leadership of NUMSA is planning to do.

Despite the sharp break with the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance in 2012-13, the current leadership of NUMSA never broke, as a whole, with the Stalinist politics in which that alliance was rooted. The Secretariat Report flays the ANC rhetorically:

" ... the ANC for more than two decades squandered and missed what an opportunity given its revolutionary history of class struggle as the only guarantee for fundamental change".

And:

“At the back of the country’s minerals what the ANC failed to do was to champion manufacturing and industrialisation through a job-led industrial strategy”.

And:

“the African majority has remained economically marginalised pursuing this campaign to influence the ANC ...”.

And, most tellingly about the illusions this leadership of NUMSA still harbours about the whole historic policy of alliance with the ANC:

“This means in our country that racism and apartheid in our country’s economy has continued by other means in that the African majority has remained economically marginalized, landless, and disposed. In pursuing this campaign to influence the ANC which must be understood in its proper context that we were not calling on the ANC to adopt a new revolutionary line, we were simply calling on the ANC to stick to its liberation vision which can be characterised as the true essence of the national democratic revolution as the ANC once claimed it was pursuing. During such a difficult phase when we were being purged by the ANC led alliance, constituted by the ANC, SACP and COSATU, before they expelled us in 2014 we consistently reminded them of the following quote from the Morogoro Conference in 1969. Of course, we knew that Chris Hani, for doing the same, was viciously punished for agitating for convening of the Morogoro Conference of 1969 through the infamous memo which he was extremely hated for penning it which led to him being sentenced to jail for 6 months. Below is what we consistently reminded them of: *‘In our country – more than in any other part of the oppressed world – it is inconceivable for liberation to have meaning without a return of the wealth of the land to the people as a whole. It is therefore a fundamental feature of our strategy that victory must embrace more than formal political democracy. To allow existing economic forces to retain their interests intact, is*

*to feed the root of racial supremacy, and does not represent even the shadow of liberation. Our drive towards national emancipation is, therefore, in a very real way bound up with economic emancipation.'* **Morogoro Conference 1969"**

And yet, in the face of the SACP and ANC leadership at Morogoro, this same Chris Hani could not put any content into the fine words about "the return of the wealth of the land to the people as a whole". He backed down and was accepted back into the fold, as a tame sheep. And that was just an anticipation of the treachery of the ANC, the SACP, and their various backers and patrons at the beginning of the 1990s

After more than sixty years, is it not time to draw the lesson that not only the ANC, but the SACP too, is a busted flush? The SACP never took forward any serious fight of the working class in South Africa that challenged the ANC. The reasons for that lie deeply embedded in the political culture inculcated by Stalinism. The workers' movement needs to actually draw out the lessons of its own history, overcome Stalinism in theory and practice, and on the basis of that re-assessment take a genuinely revolutionary road. The illusions peddled by the Secretariat Report show that nothing essential has been learned from history by the current leadership of NUMSA. No talk of "vanguarding ourselves" has any value; all bragging about "consciousness" is but "a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal", empty noise unless the speaker can understand and deal with the essential nature of Stalinism and its break with Leninism.

Back in 2012 and 2013, NUMSA correctly aligned itself with the growing working-class opposition to the Alliance of ANC, SACP and the union confederation COSATU. Within COSATU, NUMSA pressed for a break with the alliance, stood their ground and only moved to set up the new trade union federation (SAFTU) when they were expelled from COSATU for their principled stance. Now that COSATU too has been pushed by the working class to pass a motion of no confidence in the ANC, the

vacillating top leadership of NUMSA seeks reconciliation with the very same political forces from which it was forced to break in 2013.

Now, unity of the workers' movement in practice is a fundamentally vital issue in the struggle, if we are to talk seriously about strategy and tactics that can lead to victory. NUMSA and SAFTU should indeed be exploring how to find unity in action with trade unions still affiliated to COSATU, and even with supporters of the SACP. At best, this could lead to serious gains for genuinely revolutionary socialists, and at worst (if COSATU etc. will not join or later back out) it will clarify in the eyes of wider groups of workers who they can trust and who they cannot trust.

### **What kind of organisation?**

The real problem with the hand which the NUMSA leadership extends to the SACP is the conception of working-class revolutionary organisation which the current NUMSA leadership appears to have brought with it from its days in the SACP. We saw earlier that at the outcome of the Morogoro conference, Hani and Slovo both joined in the chorus that the leadership knows best and that the "individual" must accept that the "leadership" is the true and correct voice of the rank-and-file members. Irvin Jim appears to be stuck in the same place

In Lenin's hands, strategy and tactics were, first of all, connected with genuine commitment to the revolutionary role of the working class. It is with that aim in mind that it becomes vital to actually know and understand reality as it changes and develops. The "line" – the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary party – was for Lenin grounded in an unyielding determination to bring theoretical knowledge to bear in order to guide the struggle for socialism, not in a bureaucratic desire to protect one's own power and privileges. Strategy and tactics had to provide the party members, the working class and the masses, with an opportunity to test and judge party

policies and decisions. Working-class organisations such as leading and local party committees, trades union workplace groups, branches and districts should not be there just to rubber-stamp leadership decisions but to provide an arena for debate. Support for a particular party and leadership should be based on the test of experience and cannot be imposed by rhetoric and shouted assertions. Strategy and tactics should help equip workers with the consciousness needed to abolish capitalism.

### Political education

At the heart of the NUMSA October 2022 Secretariat Report are empty words, dressed up with rhetorical references to really significant matters and torn-out-of-context. At one point the Secretariat Report makes a fleeting allusion to Lenin's little book *What Is To Be Done?*. Interestingly, this reference comes just before a long series of reports on NUMSA successes in negotiations with employers, as the Secretariat Report lulls the delegates present with encouraging reports, assuring them that industrial matters are not being neglected and that the union leadership is doing a good job in defending members interests.

Anybody who has actually studied the pamphlet in question, *What Is To Be Done?*, will know that in this early work Lenin expressed his concern about "only trade-unionism". At the time Lenin was a leading member of a party that belonged to the Second (Socialist) International. He had learned from the revolutionary leaders of the Second International (whom he respected in their best days) like Kautsky and Plekhanov that in their experience (based largely in western Europe) the opposition to revolutionary politics within the movement, the reformist wing of the socialist party, rested largely upon leading trade-unionists. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin goes to great lengths to argue that the backbone of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party he was helping to set up under extremely oppressive conditions in Tsarist Russia should be

provided by resolute and competent “professional” revolutionaries totally dedicated to that vocation, rather than trade union officials. However, he never expected workers to automatically and passively accept every “line” that was handed down. He also insisted that workers should always be encouraged to set their sights much higher than immediate (and of course essential) questions of wages and conditions and focus on how they can make their political strength and influence felt. In *What Is To Be Done* Lenin frequently expressed contempt for theoreticians who believed that revolutionary class-consciousness arises in the humdrum daily struggle over wages and conditions, without a sharp and conscious struggle for socialist theory. And a real struggle for socialist theory involves a lot more than passively and uncritically absorbing teachings from above.

We must say a word about the way, since the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Communist International, that this pamphlet (*What Is To Be Done?*) has been misused and abused by both Stalinist and bourgeois thinkers. Mistaken ideas about this have had an influence on all parts of the workers’ and socialist movement. The idea has been spread that, without actually earning it and just by virtue of their position, self-proclaimed Communist leaders deserve the right to act like petty dictators, to silence opponents in their own ranks and in the wider working class where they have influence, and to decree and impose this or that strategy, tactic or policy without letting the rank-and file have any say.

This certainly did not reflect Lenin’s own thinking, and in 1920 when he published another pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*), he used the opportunity to correct the impression and explain that Communist leaders can only enjoy the support of the masses to the extent that these masses can see out of their own experience that the leaders’ proposals and programmes make sense.

The Secretariat Report talks a lot about “being the vanguard”, “vanguarding ourselves” and “political consciousness”. It even starts with a quotation of several paragraphs from the *Communist Manifesto* written in 1847 by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the foundation text of the Marxist movement. This long quotation seems to have been placed here purely for show. It seems to be asserting: “We are Communists and we support and uphold the movement that Marx and Engels started”.

In the Secretariat Report there is plenty of rhetoric along the following lines:

“38. The current ANC leadership led by President Ramaphosa and all of them previously failed to understand what does not need to be researched, it is a simple understanding which is understood by everybody that political power without economic power is an empty shell. Regardless of our political party logos, representing black African majority for the liberation struggle. We as revolutionary forces without pursuing an economic struggle where we must affirm into ownership and control the majority of the South African people, who are black and African, we must forget about total emancipation of our people. We must forget about the struggle for socialism. We must forget about winning the battle against crime, corruption, poverty, unemployment and inequalities as the continuing racist capitalist system in our country, as all over the world capitalism will continue to breed all these social ills. The future is socialism!”

For all the talk about “vanguarding ourselves” and “consciousness”, the Secretariat Report deliberately showcases the thoroughly discreditable attitude to party building of Chairman Mao. Here, the NUMSA leadership finds a tradition that they can accept and which buttresses their position. This Response to the NUMSA Secretariat Report has said quite a lot about Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, because the understanding of “consciousness” and “vanguard” which the leadership of NUMSA presents in the Secretariat Report is quite different

from that of Lenin and his comrades.

The current NUMSA leadership has no ammunition with which to attack the actual politics and struggle of the opposition, The Secretariat Report says not a word of real analysis about the abuses about which the opposition complain. It has nothing to say about the actual policies and tactics of building a working-class movement that were adopted at the 2013 Special Congress of NUMSA. The Secretariat Report can list the shortcomings of the South African government and the problems faced by the masses, but the only practical proposals put forward are to seek closer relations with the SACP and COSATU leaders and to pursue a purge of the opposition. With this in mind, the Report evokes the memory of Mao Tse-tung:

“Again, there is no better person than Commissar Mao Tse Tung who articulates the importance of organisational discipline, which is extremely important to a revolutionary, red union that is in the trenches for the struggle for socialism.”

Let us just spend a moment on the nonsense of a “red Union”. The idea of “red unions” was put forward by the Stalinists during the Third Period zig-zag to the ultra-left. Communists, acting hastily, have often enough courted both sacking by their bosses and disciplinary action and expulsion from established trade unions led by reformists, with the result that they could often become isolated from the main movement of their class. During the period from 1929 to 1933, in the expectation of immediate revolutionary struggles and the line of “class against class” Communist workers were encouraged by the Communist International to act extremely provocatively, initiate actions in isolation from the main membership of their unions and set up independent, communist-led minority trade unions. Experience taught serious Communists that this created a serious obstacle to them gaining the support of the majority of class-conscious workers.

It is astonishing enough that the Secretariat Report abuses

the opposition in NUMSA in the same breath as both “loony” left and “right-wingers”. It is impermissible that this Report itself revives the ultra-left nonsense of “red unions”.

But “Commissar” Mao (surely Chair of the Chinese Communist Party was title enough!) is evoked as an authority for a very specific reason. The Report quotes Mao as writing:

“This unity of democracy and centralism, of freedom and discipline, constitutes our democratic centralism. Under this system, the people enjoy extensive democracy and freedom, but at the same time they must keep within the bounds of socialist discipline.”

Now, a trade union is not a political party, still less a revolutionary political party. Its duty is to organise and support workers in their struggles. It should enrol and organise workers without reference to their political, religious or any other affiliations. This union – NUMSA – has decided that a revolutionary political party of the working class is needed, and that is a good decision and the Union already has a road-map towards achieving that goal, without strutting around presenting itself as if it already was that party.

The reason why the union leadership of NUMSA has picked on this quotation from Chairman Mao is, that it purports to give the union leadership powers to act arbitrarily as a handful of National Office Bearers see fit. Under the banner of Chairman Mao, dissidents can be expelled, awkward questions can be silenced and the leaders cannot be challenged. The description of “democratic centralism” quoted above ends with a chilling set of rules:

“We must affirm anew the discipline of the Party, namely:

- i. the individual is subordinate to the organisation
- ii. the minority is subordinate to the majority.
- iii. the lower level is subordinate to the higher level; and

- iv. the entire membership is subordinate to the Central Committee.
- v. Whoever violates these articles of discipline disrupts Party unity."

On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,  
1957

NUMSA did adopt a series of steps towards reviving the South African working-class movement and providing it with a political leadership. This itself arose in a process of discussion throughout the union. The policy was adopted by a majority of delegates at a Congress in December 2013. Some of us abroad were so enthusiastic about the policy that we travelled to South Africa to see if we could help and get involved. Some of us encouraged workers in struggle across southern Africa to approach NUMSA for comradeship and support. That, for us, represented an international duty. All of this went in vain. The leadership of NUMSA did not follow up on the policies adopted by the membership and has not put into effect the measures that members called for.

Members of trade unions have rights. They have the right to shape the policies of their union. They have the right to expect support from their union when they need it. They have the right to call their leadership to account when it does not carry out democratically-decided policies.

Members of political parties have rights, including members of revolutionary Leninist parties. They also have a duty, when their leaders make mistakes and even commit offences, to protest and insist that things are put right.

We in Workers International know this from bitter experience. Even organisations which were committed to a struggle for revolutionary Marxism have become dictatorial sects, exploiting and abusing individual members. Working out and defending a correct political line is half the battle: it

cannot be done without a permanent and devoted struggle to defend the methods and the health of the internal life of the organisation and its connection with the working class.

This is not liberalism. The class struggle requires selfless devotion on the part of conscious political activists – Communists. But these qualities are too easily exploited by proto-bureaucrats to undermine the self-confidence which is also an essential quality in a revolutionary, the determination to stand up on a question of principle.

No leadership can be exempted from the duty genuinely to account for its actions and the proposals which it places before its members and the working class.

Bob Archer

November 2022

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## **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 Prashad 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 19<sup>th</sup> century ended and the 20<sup>th</sup> 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

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**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 economistic 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 150<sup>th</sup> 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% or 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".

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**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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020 nor by the Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni at his budget speech on the 26<sup>th</sup> 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**

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

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## **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 economistic 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*

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# Numsa Views on the state of Class Struggles in South Africa and the Crisis in Cosatu

*"Numsa is calling ALL South African workers, Black and White and African, to join us in our United Front to demand the immediate and radical implementation of the Freedom Charter as the only basis for a truly democratic South Africa and in our fight against all neoliberal manifestations."*

**Numsa Headquarters, Johannesburg**

*"People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the interests of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises."*

**Lenin in "Three Sources and Three Component parts of Marxism",**  
March 1913

***"Nothing demonstrates better the increasing rigor of the***

*colonial system: you begin by occupying the country, and then you take the land and exploit the former owners at starvation rates. Then with mechanization, this cheap labour is still too expensive. You finish up taking from the native their very right to work. All that is left for the Natives to do in their own land at a time of great prosperity is to die of starvation.” (Jean Paul Sartre, 1964)*

#### ***A. The world we live in today and our 20 years of “Democracy”***

It is impossible to deny that the world has seen the most severe crisis of the global capitalist system. And, there is no end in sight, to this crisis.

[threecolumns]More than anything else, what makes the current systemic and structural global crisis of capitalism more dangerous and frightening than in the past is the total intellectual, ideological, political and moral bankruptcy of the world capitalist leaders and their capitalist theorists: they have no answer to what increasingly appears to be the world’s relentless progression towards mass poverty, worldwide unemployment, growing extreme global inequalities within and between nations of the world, vicious and extremely violent civil and international wars, global warming, environmental destruction – all pointing to the eventual destruction of our Earth and all life on it.

The neoliberal “Washington Consensus” has been completely discredited and confirmed dead especially by the 2007/8 global financial capitalist crises.

There is no alternative to discarding the theories and practices of capitalism, if we must save the Earth and its living systems. No amount of cosmetic reforms either in the centre of the global capitalist system nor anywhere in its periphery can hide the most obvious fact today: at a time when humanity has the most profound knowledge and technology, the world capitalist system of private greed risks all our lives

and the very Earth we live on.

Mankind today is faced with one choice: abandon the capitalist system or perish by it.

We at Numsa have no illusion that only a total destruction of capitalism and all it represents can save the Earth and give birth to a new civilisation, a new reordering of common and democratic ownership, production and consumption patterns along a higher human life and Earth respecting human civilisation. Such a civilisation is Socialism.

### ***A.1. The South African “Democratic Transition” and squandered opportunity***

We at Numsa have taken the trouble of reading the South African economic and political history, ultimately focusing on the imported capitalist revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and our “negotiated settlement”, and their impact on the South Africa we live in today.

We have come to the following conclusions, very well captured in our policy papers and resolutions of our December 2013 National Special Congress, also found in the SACP “Path to Power” document of 1989:

- a. The South African capitalist state did not emerge as a result of an internal popular anti-feudal revolution. It was imposed from above and from without.
- b. From its birth through to the present, South African capitalism has depended heavily on the imperialist centers.
- c. Capital from Europe financed the opening of the mines. It was the colonial state that provided the resources to build the basic infrastructure – railways, roads, harbours, posts and telegraphs.
- d. It was an imperial army of occupation that created the

conditions for political unification. And it was within a colonial setting that the emerging South African capitalist class entrenched and extended the racially exclusive system to increase its opportunities for profit.

e. The racial division of labour, the battery of racist laws and political exclusiveness guaranteed this. From these origins a pattern of domination, which arose in the period of external colonialism, was carried over into the newly formed Union of South Africa. From its origins to the present, this form of domination has been maintained under changing conditions and by varying mechanisms.

f. *In all essential respects, however, the colonial status of the black majority has remained in place. Therefore we characterise our society as* “colonialism of a special type”.

The 1994 “democratic transition” was supposed to lay a foundation for destroying colonialism of a special type in South Africa, a form of colonialism characterised by the existence side by side, of the colonial subjects and the local agents of colonialism and imperialism in the same geo-economic and political space.

Today, 20 years after the “democratic transition” nothing best confirms the fact that *in all essential respects, however, the colonial status of the black majority has remained in place* than of the 26 million South Africans who live in abject poverty, 25 million are Africans.

Further, all economic policies since 1994 have been incapable of defeating *Colonialism of a Special Type* and the effects of Apartheid capitalism, which condemned the South African black working class to a life of misery and hardship.

The South African government own 2011 Census so well captures this ugly fact, the fact of the continuing colonial lives of millions of Black and African South Africans, post 1994.

Any shallow class analysis of the “negotiated settlement” in South Africa easily reveals the most obvious fact: the “negotiated settlement” was secured on the basis of abandoning the Freedom Charter and the land and property claims of the “natives”.

These devices of protecting white property rights in the “1996 negotiated constitution” effectively guaranteed white property rights and therefore, white economic dominance, and the logical and inevitable continuation of imperialist economic and political domination of South Africa.

### ***A.2. The Freedom Charter and the Negotiated Settlement***

At Numsa we are convinced that the abandonment of the property clauses of the Freedom Charter by the ANC and the SACP formed the basis for the “democratic transition”.

We now know that while Cosatu was busy putting together the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), ANC and SACP negotiators, together with representatives of South African white monopoly capitalism and their imperialist counterparts were busy stitching together a neoliberal post-Apartheid South Africa.

We are not surprised, therefore, that the RDP was quickly discarded in favour of GEAR, which has now formally become the National Development Plan (NDP).

It was inevitable that in 2012, in the ANC Mangaung Conference, GEAR mutated into the neoliberal National Development Plan, and, in the ANC, the matter of expropriating land and the commanding heights of the economy without compensation was formally buried. Effectively too, was buried any prospects of a worker friendly “National Democratic Revolution” and all hope of a seamless transition to a Socialist Republic of South Africa.

Today in South Africa, black and African poor people must wait

for the profits to grow of white people and their sprinkling of a tiny filthy rich black and African middle class for any changes in their mass poverty and widespread unemployment.

It is this cruel reality, post 1994, and 20 years into our “democracy”, which caused Numsa to hold its historic 2013 Special National Congress, and to take the resolutions it did, prominent among which is the recognition that the ANC led Alliance no longer serves any revolutionary purpose in South Africa today.

### ***A.3. The State of the South African black and African working class***

At Numsa we are, following the class analysis above, not surprised that in all black and African communities there is a state of restlessness, there are widespread protests now increasingly turning violent, against the bitter and cruel conditions of life in these communities.

We are not surprised that 20 years after the negotiated settlement, very little real wealth has been redistributed and as a result, education, housing, water services, sanitation, electricity, distance from quality social and economic productivities activities and so on continue to be disastrous problems for black and African people of this country.

We are not surprised that South Africa, post 1994, has become the most unequal and socially violent place on Earth today.

We are not surprised that the white population continues to dominate in the economy, society and culture, today.

It is against this background that we examine the President of South Africa’s State of the Nation Address of 2014, and the ANC government 2014 Budget Speech. Further, we examine the election promises using this background.

We in Numsa understand the crisis in Cosatu as simply a

reflection of the on-going class struggles in the wider South African society in general and inside the ANC led alliance in particular.

### ***B. State of the Nation Address (SoNA)***

There is nothing in the State of the Nation Address that even remotely indicates that the ANC and its government are embarked upon a “radical transition” for full social justice in South Africa.

Nor does anything in the SoNA remotely signal the fact that the ANC is worried that virtually ALL Black and African communities, 20 years into democracy, are at war inside themselves!

While the SoNA correctly recognizes the ongoing extreme burden of unemployment, mass poverty and extreme inequalities, the SoNA simply treats all these as products of the failure of the South African economy to grow fast enough post 1994, and on the global crisis of capitalism.

The SoNA lamentably fails to locate the real roots and causes of the South African crisis of unemployment, poverty and extreme inequalities – the ongoing economic and social domination of South Africa by white capital and its black and imperialist surrogates.

The SoNA celebrates liberal democracy in South Africa without any shame at the exclusion of more than 25 million South Africans from this system that is black and African.

We see that the 2014 Budget Speech takes its cue from the SoNA, and also wastes time singing praises of the neoliberalism of the past 20 years.

### ***C. ANC's Elections Manifestos: a look at the ANC's 2014 Vision***

In 2004, the ANC launched its “Vision 2014”. The 2004

Manifesto was framed within this vision. We have now reached 2014, and the ANC has produced another Manifesto and yet another vision, which is now called "Vision 2030". It is therefore propitious that we evaluate the ANC's performance in relation to its "Vision 2014" and in relation to its subsequent Manifestos.

In its 2004 Message from the President, the ANC called for ***"A People's Contract to Create Work and Fight Poverty"***.

The combination of some of the most important targets and objectives making up Vision 2014, together with our findings, are as follows:

- Reduce unemployment by half through new jobs, skills development, assistance to small businesses, opportunities for self-employment and sustainable community livelihoods.

***Today, unemployment has in fact increase beyond the 2004 levels today, self-employment has dwindled, and, more dangerously, Black and African communities are reeling from violent crimes and daily violent protests!***

- Reduce poverty by half through economic development, comprehensive social security, land reform and improved household and community assets.

***Precisely because unemployment has in fact increased beyond the 2004 levels, we see today that more than 26 million South Africans are classified as extremely poor!***

- Provide the skills required by the economy, build capacity and provide resources across society to encourage self-employment with an education system that is geared for productive work, good citizenship and a caring society.

***Marikana sums it all: the bulk of the population remains poorly educated, unskilled, living in abject poverty and in a***

***very uncaring society. Today we are being conditioned to accept that every community protest will lead to deaths of some protestors!***

- Ensure that all South Africans, including especially the poor and those at risk – children, youth, women, the aged, and people with disabilities – are fully able to exercise their constitutional rights and enjoy the full dignity of freedom.

***Violent crime and crimes against women and children are still intolerably high. An African child in South Africa today is many times more likely to be borne in a poor household than before 2004.***

- Compassionate government service to the people; national, provincial and local public representatives who are accessible; and citizens who know their rights and insist on fair treatment and efficient service.

***Again, the Marikana massacre speaks volumes about where we are. It is an open secret that the system of local government has collapsed, with very few of them having clean audits. So-called service delivery protests are the order of the day everywhere in the country. South Africa in fact leads in the number of violent community protests in the world today.***

- Massively reduce cases of TB, diabetes, malnutrition and maternal deaths, and turn the tide against HIV and AIDS, and, working with the rest of Southern Africa, strive to eliminate malaria, and improve services to achieve a better national health profile and reduction of preventable causes of death, including violent crime and road accidents.

***While there have been some improvements in these variables, the quality, levels and efficiencies in the health system, especially the public health system, are pathetic. TB cases have actually increased.***

- Significantly reduce the number of serious and priority crimes as well as cases awaiting trial, with a society that actively challenges crime and corruption, and with programmes that also address the social roots of criminality.

*Unemployment is globally recognized as a “significant contributor” to all crimes, including violent ones.*

*The fact that unemployment has in fact increased since 2004 is experienced by black and African communities through the high incidence of violent crimes, today with an increasing incidence of extreme forms of violence even among teenagers.*

*The failure to implement the property clauses of the Freedom Charter is the most profound root cause of violent crime in South Africa, in our opinion.*

- Position South Africa strategically as an effective force in global relations, with vibrant and balanced trade and other relations with countries of the South and the North, and in an Africa that is growing, prospering and benefiting all Africans, especially the poor.

*The xenophobia that has engulfed post 1994 South Africa is the best test of just how badly positioned South Africa is globally, especially in the South. None of the rhetoric on balanced trade and other relations have materialized precisely because the ANC government has no real economic levers, because it has not implemented the property clauses of the Freedom Charter.*

#### *D. The ANC 2014 Budget speech*

Numsa has carried out the only comprehensive and detailed class analysis of the National Development Plan (NDP). Our conclusions are that the NDP is simply GEAR dressed up as a populist document.

Not only does the NDP fail to tackle the economic and social structural and systemic foundations of South African colonial economy and society, it quite pathetically promises wholly unrealistic and totally unachievable goals, just like its father – GEAR.

Numsa has consistently argued that South African National Treasury Department has been post 1994, the home and custodian of neoliberalism in the South African government.

Pravin Gordan's 2014 Budget Speech announces that it locates the 2014 medium term budget in the NDP.

Like the SoNA, the 2014 Budget is littered with some self-praise, and the false promise of jobs, more housing, more water, more social security, better health and so on, all of them to be done within the NDP framework.

It is impossible to ignore Lenin's words in 1913:

***"People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the interests of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises."***

The sweet coated promises contained in this Budget, including the pathetic increases on the social grants do not succeed to hide the fact that this is a budget designed to please South African white capital and its local agents and imperialism and their rating agents.

There is nothing in this budget which signals a "radical transition". This is why the bosses and their political formations have received it very well.

A most blatant betrayal of the Black and African working class is the bribery to white and black capital the budget gives in the form of the Youth Employment Incentive Tax. This has been

done without exhausting the NEDLAC process and actually by contemptuously bypassing NEDLAC.

Rather than abolition the colonial and apartheid wage as demanded in the Freedom Charter, the budget instead bribes capital with free money, to divide the working class!

This budget, more than anything else, confirm the rightwing shift in the ANC/SACP government.

### ***E. The crisis in Cosatu***

We understand Cosatu's launching principles and values as being the following:

- a. Cosatu is a worker controlled and democratic trade union federation.***
- b. Cosatu is a Revolutionary Socialist Federation.***
- c. Cosatu is an anti-imperialist federation; it fights against foreign capitalist domination.***
- d. Cosatu rejects all forms of cultural, male chauvinist and racist prejudices.***
- e. Cosatu is a militant federation.***
- f. It is a transformative federation.***
- g. Cosatu is a champion of working class democracy.***
- h. Cosatu believes in working class power, and advocates worker control not only of the progressive trade union movement, but of society as well.***
- i. Cosatu believes in the revolutionary power and unity of the working class, which is why it champions the formation of one union in one industry and one federation in one country.***

In our opinion, it is these values and their articulation, which is at issue in Cosatu today.

On one hand, there are those among Cosatu leaders who see a Cosatu guided by the values above as a threat to their potential careers in the ANC or its government. These leaders have long abandoned Socialism and are only paying lip service to the struggle for Socialism.

On the other hand, there are those leaders such as in Numsa and the affiliates Numsa is working with, who are determined to defend and advance the ideals for which Cosatu was founded, including defending a Socialist Cosatu.

Given the abandonment of a radical NDR by the ANC and the cooptation of the SACP into the ANC and its government, it is inevitable that Cosatu must be plunged into a crisis by the fight to the death between these two class positions in Cosatu – one for a Cosatu that simply transmits the wishes of the right wing ANC nationalists among the working class and the other which wants to fight for a Cosatu with its original values.

Numsa has thus become the “enemy within” among the Cosatu leadership clique that is imbedded in the ANC and SACP. It so happens that this clique is numerically strong in the CEC of Cosatu.

This pro rightwing ANC and SACP clique in Cosatu wants to engineer the expulsion of Numsa from Cosatu. It has already engineered first the paralysis, and later the suspension of the General Secretary of Cosatu – Zwelinzima Vavi.

This right wing Clique ignores the Cosatu Constitution at will. It has refused to abide by the Cosatu Constitution that demands that when a third of Cosatu affiliates demand the convening of Cosatu Special Congress, the President of Cosatu must convene such a Congress or be replaced by a convener.

This rightwing clique, knowing very well that its positions have no mandates from its own members, is very scared of a Special National Congress because it knows the Special National Congress, besides exposing this right wing, may also trigger leadership removals in their unions.

Numsa's positions are very clear and quite simple:

1. Zwelinzima Vavi's unconstitutional public humiliation, harassment and suspension must be lifted immediately.
2. All mischievous and unconstitutional efforts to frustrate and expel Numsa from Cosatu must stop forthwith.
3. A Cosatu Special Congress as requested by the appropriate number of unions must be convened immediately, to resolve all the causes of the crisis in Cosatu.
4. Numsa will do everything possible to achieve these objectives, including using the courts to stop the violations of Cosatu Constitution.
5. Numsa is calling upon all members of Cosatu affiliates to defend their federation from being swallowed into the ANC/SACP right wing camp.

In the meantime, Numsa continues to run with its section 77 campaigns.

#### ***F. Progress on the United Front and the Movement for Socialism***

In order to understand Numsa, especially in order to understand our resolutions on the United Front and Movement for Socialism, one has to understand what Numsa is first.

***Numsa is a revolutionary formation, a red trade union, playing a leading role in the struggle to defeat capitalism and the exploitation that is associated with it. In that role we are unashamedly Marxist-Leninist, rooting ourselves in the***

*traditions of Marx and Lenin. So we defy the boundaries between nations that are set up to divide workers as we proclaim ourselves as proletarian internationalists. That tradition also gives us democratic centralism, that combination of robust, vigorous and democratic debate with the discipline of marching together when we have made a decision. That combination makes us what we are proud to be – a red union.*

The leadership of the national liberation movement as a whole has failed to lead a consistent radical democratic process to resolve the national, gender, and class questions post 1994. *This leadership is predominantly drawn from the Black and African capitalist class; it kowtows to the dictates of white monopoly capitalist and imperialist interests. It is nothing more than parasitic and crony capitalists.*

*It is half-hearted and extremely inconsistent in the pursuit of a radical democratic programme and has completely abandoned the Freedom Charter.*

It is these circumstances, combined with the worsening situation of the South African working class as a whole post 1994, which has lead Numsa to rethink and revisit its relationship with the ANC and its Alliance.

Work is well underway to mobilise the working class in all their formations, into a United Front for the radical implementation of the Freedom Charter and against neoliberalism.

During our January Numsa Marxist-Leninist Political School we met with the leaders of some of the social movements and community structures, to begin the process of mapping out how we will work together.

In order to reach out far and wide, Numsa shall convene Provincial and National consultative meetings to share the content of our resolutions on the United Front and Movement

for Socialism.

We are happy to note that many social movement organisations and community organisations are joining us in our Section 77 campaigns starting with a national strike on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

During the course of this year, work will be done to assess the state of the world socialist movement and its formations, to inform our work towards the Movement for Socialism. The Numsa Marxist Leninist School in the first week of April 2014 shall receive representatives of Workers and Communist Parties from countries such as Brazil, Greece and Venezuela to share experiences and to lay the basis for our international research.

### ***G. Engineering and Eskom negotiations in 2014 – The Numsa National Bargaining Conference (NBC)***

As always, Numsa has begun our Ear to the Ground Campaign in workplace general meetings to listen to the aspirations of Numsa members with respect to collective bargaining demands in the Engineering industry and Eskom.

In collecting these demands our key and strategic objective is to improve the benefits and conditions of employment. The demands from the 9 Numsa Regions shall be consolidated and tabled for discussion in our Numsa National Bargaining Conference scheduled for 10-12 March 2014 in Saint Georges Hotel, Centurion.

Without pre-empting anything, we must be upfront that we are preparing for the mother of all battles as we shall champion the struggle for a living wage for workers in the Engineering Industry and Eskom in particular.

The union will use this round of negotiations not only for wages but also take up a very important campaign of defending existing jobs and to fight for more jobs. In extending our

work beyond the factories, Numsa shall on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 embark on a national strike to demand the scrapping of the employment tax incentive act or the so called youth wage subsidy. We shall do so in defense of existing jobs as we have reason to believe that the current spate of retrenchments notices across various sectors are directly linked to this stupid incentive scheme.

We refuse that the working class of SA must be forced to pay for the global crisis of capitalism.

That is why we calling on the mining bosses and government to quickly resolved the current strike in the platinum belt. It has become abundantly clear there is a joint pack between government and mining capital to destroy union activity outside of the NUM.

With respect to Eskom, Numsa shall not rest until workers at Eskom receive a fair increase. We view the arbitration award that imposed 5, 6 % as an insult that constitute a wage freeze.

We do need equity of pay. Currently white workers sit at the top of their pay grades while many black workers still languish at the bottom of their grades.

We can no longer tolerate Eskom and Government hiding behind the skirt of Nersa to justify paying lip service to a negotiation process where the power (the only power) of workers to withhold their labour is removed.

We calling on all workers at Eskom to unite behind their legitimate right to demand a living wage if in these round of negotiations Eskom management doesn't move swiftly to make a real offer that will settle workers' demands and hide behind essential service but pay workers peanuts, they would have to take fully responsibility for a load shedding that would come as a result of workers insisting that their demands must be

met.

Eskom now has a shareholder compact with government, but it does not call for fair wages rather it focuses on profit targets. Profit targeting mean Eskom is under pressure to moderate wages.

Our members are victims of high standards of living as a result of administered prices that continue to rise and affecting negatively their basket of food and all aspects of their lives.

They continue to receive low wages as there is no National Minimum Wage that can guarantee them a living wage.

Workers are taking loans from loan sharks in-order to make a living.

There is poor or virtually no assistance from the employers.

Unemployment which makes those who are working to support those not working imposes a heavy burden on our members as a result of the triple crises poverty, unemployment and inequalities.

It is our members who are victims Privatization and Commodification of basic needs/services.

### ***H. What is to be done?***

As Lenin so well said, in 2013:

***“People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the interests of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises.”***

Twenty years into our “democracy”, we the Black and African South African working class are sick and tired of listening to

the same stories about us having to wait for the rich to grow their profits for us to see some minor improvements in our lives.

The working class can only be defeated because it is not united. United, no force on Earth can defeat us.

As immediate tasks, we state the following:

- Numsa is calling ALL South African workers, Black and White and African, to join us in our United Front to demand the immediate and radical implementation of the Freedom Charter as the only basis for a truly democratic South Africa and in our fight against all neoliberal manifestations.
- We are calling on all members of affiliates of Cosatu to demand that their national leaders explain where they stand today, on the ongoing crisis in Cosatu.
- We call on all members of affiliates of Cosatu to stand up and defend their federation from the vultures who want to turn it into a toy telephone of the ANC and the SACP.
- We call on all mineworkers to stand together, united against the mine bosses and the government who are both fighting mining workers in their just struggle for a living wage.
- As Numsa, we fully support the just demands for a living wage for the mineworkers. We remain convinced, however, that with the increasing marriage between the ANC and its government and the mine bosses and shareholders, no just wage will be secured by mine workers.

We therefore call upon all workers to intensify the struggle to nationalize South African wealth, including the mines and land.

Our consistent Marxist-Leninist inspired class analysis of the

world and South Africa today informs us that we have no option but to fight to the bitter end, for a Socialist world and Socialist South Africa.

Issued by: Numsa National Office Bearers

March the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014.

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