

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).

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 11th 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

The crisis in Numsa: The lessons and the way forward

The crisis in Numsa:

The lessons and the way forward

“We, the members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), firmly commit ourselves to a United South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation”

This proud and defiant statement opens the Preamble to the Numsa Constitution, which goes on to assert “that this can only be achieved under the leadership of an organised and united working class”.

The Preamble lists the conditions under which this struggle can be successful, including:

“(a) fight and oppose all forms of discrimination” in the trade union, the workplace and society.

“(c) ensure that all levels of the union are democratically structured and controlled by the members themselves through elected worker committees.”

“(d) encourage democratic worker leadership and organisation in our factories and in all spheres of society.” (“Preamble to the Constitution” at: <https://numsa.org.za/numsa-constitution/>)

And yet, it seems that this crucial trade union has fallen under the control of a dictatorial and corrupt special-interest clique. Union activists claim that this clique imposes its authority in flagrant breach of the principles expressed in the Preamble to the Union’s Constitution.

They complain about the union-linked “3Sixty Life” insurance scheme which has “been placed under curatorship by the court because it was not having sufficient funds to guarantee pay-outs for Numsa members who are policyholders”.

They mention an auditors’ report “which shows how millions were paid out to people for dubious reasons such as undefined services rendered and monies going to a birthday party for (National Secretary Irvin) Jim and a laptop to his daughter.”

They complain about “disruptions of Regional Congress not supporting the re-election of the same Regional Office Bearers and National Office Bearers”, “the sending in of thugs to disrupt and mess up the Ekurhuleni Regional Executive Committee and Regional Congress” and “the violation of the NUMSA Constitution by suspending 53Shopstewards will-nilly” (“Save Our NUMSA” flyer posted on facebook Lindi Lee WaliWorking Class Friends Of Instimbi Ayigobi).

Numsa’s history of struggle

It was the rise of the working class organised in trade unions like Numsa which forced the imperialists and their racist supporters in South Africa between 1990 and 1994 to abandon apartheid and adopt some of the trappings (if not the substance) of an advanced democracy.

The activists who built Numsa strove to mobilise the whole masses to overthrow imperialism-capitalism as the cause of South Africa's subjugation. They expressed their stance in the Workers' Charter (adopted by Numsa in 1987) which explained:

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

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

Foremost among the "conditions for the building of a socialist society" is the matter of revolutionary leadership, an international party through which the masses "can complete the liberation objectives in all spheres of social life".

The advanced workers who framed this charter could only conceive it being carried out by ensuring "that all levels of the union are democratically structured and controlled by the members themselves through elected worker committees" and encouraging "democratic worker leadership and organisation in our factories and in all spheres of society" as we saw above.

SACP and ANC

The officially-recognised liberation movement for South Africa was dominated politically by an alliance between the South African Communist

Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC). The SACP was in turn dominated politically by the line of "peaceful co-existence" between the Soviet bloc and the imperialist world that was promulgated by the USSR under Stalin and his successors. Against the thrust of the "Workers' Charter", Stalinists deliberately confined the struggle against colonialism and imperialism to the achievement of national independence and alleged democratic goals, leaving the fight for a socialist society to some unstated time in the future.

Stalinism's allies in the African National Congress were in turn mainly tribal and middle-class elites and their supporters. They tolerated and even adopted a radical political rhetoric which they never had the slightest intention of following through once they achieved their own, limited class aims.

The SACP-ANC alliance is not and never was under the control of any workers' democracy. This alliance looked for recognition to bourgeois, indeed imperialist, states and international bodies based in Europe and North America. While the anti-apartheid leaders toured the diplomatic circuit on the one hand, the numbers of young fighters who fled repression in South Africa in the late 1970s to the uMkonto we Sizwe (armed wing of the ANC) camps abroad got short shrift from their own leaders. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up after the end of apartheid found that the use of torture by uMkhonto we Sizwe against their own members in these camps was "routine", as were executions "without due process".

At the same time, dissenting voices in the black townships in South Africa were brutally silenced by kangaroo courts and "necklacings".

Prominent leaders associated with the ANC-SACP alliance, like Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa went on to become Presidents of the country. With cold contempt for the working class and the masses, they set about enriching themselves while their country saw growing poverty, lack of service delivery and general instability. Ramaphosa was able to dislodge and replace Zuma because the latter was so blatantly in the pocket of the Gupta business clan, but Ramaphosa himself was exposed when other, less prominent, thieves made off with large sums in illicit cash that had been

concealed in the furniture at his farm.

The whole tradition of the ANC and SACP alliance is one of high-handed contempt for the ordinary workers and their organisations. It was the revolt of workers and young people that made it impossible to carry on with the apartheid regime, but the government of South Africa was eventually passed to the Mbekis, Zumas and Ramaphosas courtesy of the international bodies of imperialism and the mining and other companies which, from Europe and America and elsewhere, still loot the country's resources and benefit from cheap African labour. Soviet and Chinese leaders also stood as godparents to the new state.

(For a fuller understanding of the history and role of the ANC and its relationship with working-class organisations, see at the end of this article, the appendix *The ANC and Numsaby* my comrade Hewat Beukes).

Stalinism and Pan-Africanism

Above all, the new liberation leaders of South Africa were trained and brought up in the tradition of Stalinist politics which prevailed in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death and which explicitly abandoned the international struggle for socialism. In place of that struggle, the leaders of the USSR and the world movement which they brutally dominated looked for "peaceful co-existence" with whatever (capitalist) allies they might find abroad. The specific application of this in colonies and former colonies was to find allies among national elites keen on independence but equally keen on maintaining their privileges.

Organisations like South-West Africa Peoples' Movement (Swapo) devoted great efforts to achieving recognition at the United Nations and elsewhere as the one and only true liberation fighters, meanwhile deliberately slandering and side-lining the genuine liberation fighters in Namibia.

The roots of bureaucracy

In the 1920s, after the Russian Revolution, in the USSR a social caste came to the fore which usurped the power of the working class exercised through the workers' and peasants' soviets and also closed down – often

violently – any debate in the Communist Party. Trotsky described and analysed this development in his well-known study, *The Revolution Betrayed*. What interests us here is what Trotsky says about the character of this bureaucracy and its regime:

“The poverty and cultural backwardness of the masses has again become incarnate in the malignant figure of the ruler with a great club in his hand. The deposed and abused bureaucracy” (i.e. of the old, abolished Tsarist autocracy – BA) “from being a servant of society, has again become its lord. On this road it has attained such a degree of social and moral alienation from the popular masses, that it cannot now permit any control over either its activities or its income” (*The Revolution Betrayed*, London 1967, p.113).

The men and women who led the Russian Revolution of 1917 were members of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (later re-named the Communist Party). They stood out for their steadfast devotion to the cause in the face of Tsarist brutality and dictatorship. They were equally devoted to training themselves theoretically and practically to guide the working class and broader masses. They frequently had to pay with their lives for their convictions.

But after Lenin’s death and once the new bureaucratic caste administering the new state had usurped workers’ soviet democracy, all these characteristics were turned on their heads. Loyalty to the cause of the working class was replaced by blind loyalty to the Party and ultimately the Party leader. The practical and theoretical discipline required to defeat the Tsarist police state was replaced by unquestioning subservience to allegedly infallible leaders.

Already in 1920, during the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin had this to say to certain over-enthusiastic and dogmatic “Left-Communists”:

“...how is the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat 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 firmness, self-sacrifice and heroism. Secondly by its

ability to link itself with, to keep in touch with, and, to a certain degree, if you will, merge itself with the broadest masses of the toilers – primarily with the proletarian, but also with the non-proletarian toiling masses. Thirdly, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard and by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided that the broadest masses become convinced of this correctness by their own experience ... Without these conditions all attempts to establish discipline are inevitably transformed into trifling phrase-mongering and empty gestures". (*Left-Wing Communism; An Infantile Disorder*).

Here are the most deep-rooted origins of the high-handed arrogance of trade union leaders like Irvin Jim, as of "liberation" leaders like Zuma, Ramaphosa, Nujoma and Geingob. Jim has surrounded himself with a clique bound together by self-interest, and this clique is lashing out at anyone who stands in its way. They expel members of the union, close down regions, disrupt meetings and remove the essential personal protection of "dissident" leaders of the union.

This whole monolithic approach to differences and debate is the creation of Stalinism. First, we must say that political parties of the working class require a different set of mutual obligations between leaders and members from what needs to prevail in trade unions, which by their nature must embrace at least the majority of workers in a particular trade, sector or region, irrespective of their ideology and politics. Workers' unity in action can only be achieved through the broadest possible discussion and freedom of expression. That is the significance of the passage written by Lenin and quoted above.

Comrades will – or should – know that in building the party which ultimately led the Russian Revolution to victory, Lenin and his supporters laid enormous stress upon the responsibilities a revolutionary party imposes upon its members. They openly broke (in 1903) from others who had a much more relaxed attitude to this very question. Experience showed that the Lenin faction (Bolsheviks) went on to lead the Russian Revolution and the opposing faction (Mensheviks) attempted to strangle it.

Nevertheless, it is wrong and out of place to impose the constitution of a revolutionary political party onto the functioning of a trade union.

Numsa specifically has a well-established tradition of free and open confrontation between different political tendencies.

In any case, in any part of the world any major action by workers is always prepared by a seething low-level but widespread process of argument and debate at the workplace, in the pub, on the terraces of a sporting event or at home and with the wider family and even sometimes in religious congregations. That is the springboard for the official discussions and decisions at workplace meetings, union branches, regional and national executives, etc. **Nothing could be further from the mark, by the way, than the accusations in the bourgeois media that this or that trade union leader can “call their members out” on strike at the drop of a hat.**

But even in a political party, even a revolutionary party operating under conditions of illegality, as Lenin's Bolshevik Party did for many years, it is a myth that a “line” elaborated by some “lider maximo” was submissively adopted, passed on and carried out by automatons in the ranks. Unfortunately, it is that very mistaken conception that has since then been accepted as “democratic centralism” in many circles, even among groups who claim to oppose bureaucratic methods.

On top of demanding automatic obedience, would-be bureaucrats in the movement skilfully pick on alleged “bourgeois” traits in members and activists who might raise awkward questions or oppose some nonsensical “line” that is being promulgated. All sorts of sly comments and innuendoes can undermine those who are genuinely trying to build the movement and want to question the “line” that is being handed out. Not infrequently false accusations that this or that person is an “agent” can be used to side-line the person concerned and contribute to an atmosphere of paranoia.

Often, activists are driven into huge and fruitless rounds of activity which turn out to be pointless and lead to demoralisation. Such methods have unfortunately become widespread, and are often sanctified as

“Bolshevik”.

This is what Trotsky said about the culture of revolutionary parties in 1936 in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

“The inner regime of the Bolshevik Party was characterised by the method of *democratic centralism*. The combination of these two concepts, democracy and centralism, is not in the least contradictory. The party took watchful care not only that its boundaries should always be strictly defined, but that all those who entered these boundaries should enjoy the actual right to define the direction of the party policy. Freedom of criticism and intellectual struggle was an irrevocable content of the party democracy. The present doctrine that Bolshevism does not tolerate factions is a myth of the epoch of decline”. (*ibid.* pp 94-95).

These profound issues of working-class organisation and leadership may seem to be forgotten details of history. But they assume new significance as the working class around the world awakens after a period of setbacks and defeats to a new round of struggles. It is hard to overstate the scope and significance of these past experiences now, as the economic crisis, openly acknowledged and unresolved for over a decade, lumbers on and both established and “wannabe” imperialist powers square up against each other, beating the drums of war.

One of the very earliest signs of this working-class recovery was the wages struggle of platinum miners at Marikana in 2012, their sharp confrontation with officials of the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa, the planned and coldly executed murder of striking miners by the South African police and the subsequent mass strike wave. It was within the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa that the most positive response to these events was raised. The subsequent development of that initiative, the different tendencies involved and the methods by which they propose to carry forward the struggle, deserve careful thought and attention. Vital past experiences of the working-class movement need to be revived in the process of educating a new generation of fighters.

The meaning of Marikana

The deliberate killing of 34 miners at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana, Rustenberg, North West Province, by the South African Police Service on 16 August 2012, at the instigation of the mine's UK-based owners and with the agreement of the then South African government minister (and now President), Cyril Ramaphosa, underlined in the most dramatic way possible how correct the Numsa Constitution Preamble was to say that the ending of "oppression and economic exploitation" can only be achieved "under the leadership of an organised and united working class".

The former, avowedly "Marxist", and indeed vocal leader in the past of the South African Mineworkers' Union, Cyril Ramaphosa had been one of that leadership of the African National Congress and South African Communist Party who were prepared to accept an end to Apartheid rule and introduction of "one person one vote" in exchange for abandoning any aim of a socialist South Africa. The state murders at Marikana – and remember that Cyril Ramaphosa explicitly signed off for the police violence – laid bare the profound betrayal of the working class and masses which that settlement represented.

Under a "liberation" regime of African National Congress, South African Communist Party and trade union confederation Cosatu, "independent" South Africa had to try to move forward with economic power still vested chiefly in the great imperialist monopolies and banks which had grown rich by exploiting labour of every country and ethnic background and plundering natural resources around the world.

Political democracy and effective administration on behalf of the people of South Africa has remained a fantasy while political power has been exercised by puppets of these monopolies and banks, by the Ramaphosas, the Zumas and the Mbekes. Such politicians can only function as the boot-lickers and facilitators of imperialist oppression and exploitation.

At the most basic level, they have led a systematic looting of the nation's wealth and resources for personal gain. At a political level, they very quickly abandoned any progressive policies for the development of the country and instead adopted wholesale the nostrums of the neo-

liberal International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other imperialist agencies of world governance. Their venal incompetence has added economic chaos and widespread lawlessness to the existing poverty of the majority.

This was what was at stake in the preceding conflict discussed above between Numsa's "Workers' Charter" and the politics of the ANC-SACP.

But as apartheid was dismantled between 1990 and 1994, the issue was fudged. ANC leaders declared that workers' demands could be accommodated within the scope of the Freedom Charter. They assured trade unionists that, for example, South Africa's mineral resources now belonged to the people, although in fact, the imperialist monopoly groups kept a grip of the extraction, refining and export of the nation's wealth, and thus of their enormous profits. Dissenting voices were drowned out in the wave of publicity greeting the new order, and by violence and the threat of violence.

The fudge continued. While the ANC-SACP government moved over more and more clearly to abandon any hope of progressive legislation and towards directly neo-liberal policies, there was opposition from trade unionists. There were angry confrontations, but they were contained within the Tripartite Alliance of ANC-SACP and the union confederation Cosatu.

The real rupture did not emerge until after Marikana, the massacre and the massive wave of strikes across different trades and industries which followed.

Numsa Special National Congress 2013

In the wake of the Marikana massacre, Numsa led a fight within Cosatu to break the trade union federation from the alliance with the SACP and the ANC. For that reason, Numsa was expelled from Cosatu and, alongside a number of other trade unions, established a new South African Federation of Trade Unions" (Saftu). Numsa also worked towards and held a Special National Congress in December 2013 to draw the lessons of the Marikana massacre and chart a new course of independent socialist struggle.

The documents of the Numsa Special National Congress held in December 2013 (after a through debate throughout the trade union) still make

compelling reading:

“2.2 The South African Communist Party (SACP) leadership has become embedded in the state and is failing to act as the vanguard of the working class ...

For the struggle for socialism, the working class needs a political organisation committed in theory and practice to socialism ...

3.2 As Numsa, we must lead in the establishment of a new UNITED FRONT that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities ...

3.3 ... we must explore the establishment of a MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM as the working class needs a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa”.

Also, the union must: “Commission an international study on the historical formation of working-class parties. As part of this study we need to explore the different type of parties, from mass workers’ parties to vanguard parties. (Quoted in *Movement for Socialism! South Africa’s NUMSA points the way*”, Workers’ International, 2014, pp 4 and 5)

While the resolutions and documents of the 2013 Special National Congress clearly name and identify the direction of travel of the SACP, ANC and Cosatu leadership, there is no clarity about the treacherous political tradition underlying it – Stalinism. A weakness of the Special National Congress decisions was that they still expressed illusions in the Stalinist politics of the settlement which ended apartheid and the hope that the Freedom Charter might leave a door open for future progress.

The 2013 Congress documents correctly identified how “In many post-colonial and post-revolutionary situations, liberation and revolutionary movements have turned on labour movements that fought alongside them, suppressed them, marginalised them, split them, robbed them of their independence or denied them any meaningful role”. (ibid p.4).

However, under the sub-heading “ANC has abandoned the Freedom Charter and any change in property relations”, the Declaration of the Numsa Special National Congress says:

“The Freedom Charter as the basis of our existence as an alliance, the glue that brought the alliance together, has not found expression in government policies. In fact the ANC no longer adheres to it. The ANC has not only departed from the Freedom Charter, but also from the Morogoro Conference core values and the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP).

“The ANC-led government continues to ignore and duck the question of how to fundamentally change property relations in the country”. (ibid. p. 22)

It reads as if most comrades had grasped that the liberation regime in South Africa has not brought the benefits which were promised, but had not yet taken on board the fact that the SACP’s Stalinist politics of an alliance with the bourgeois nationalists had always meant that imperialism-capitalism would stay in the driving seat. The Irvin Jim leadership never resolved the contradiction at the heart of the ANC/SACP/Cosatu alliance, that as a “liberation” regime it acts as a caretaker or “Comprador” (local business agent) on behalf of imperialism.

The policy of Stalinism has lived on even after the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union has gone into the dustbin. The departing gift of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy to imperialism was to replace apartheid with a group of politicians in charge in South Africa who were very ready to enrich themselves by selling out the masses.

Stalinism’s afterlife

Stalinist rule in the USSR and her satellites collapsed over thirty years ago. It is dead and buried. How are we to explain that Stalinist methods have been reborn at the very head of Numsa, a trade union born in mass workers’ struggles which has consistently been foremost in fighting in a principled way for workers’ interests against all comers?

Since the 1970s. US imperialism had been wooing the Chinese Communist Party government of the People’s Republic of China. Mao and the leaders who followed him gladly facilitated a massive transfer of industry from North America and Western Europe to China. While this has led to spectacular (and desperately needed) economic growth and development in China, it has deeply damaged the ground on which the US and European workers’ movements stood. Whole working-class communities have been

undermined, weakened, and demoralised as jobs were transferred abroad. It was a movement which had been underway for decades, but the open door into China has accelerated it massively.

At the same time, attempts by the Soviet bureaucracy to self-reform blew up in their faces. In the early 1990s the Soviet Union fell apart. The oppressed and resentful masses in the Soviet bloc “satellites” seized their chance at independence. Many workers had had their hopes in a socialist society dashed by their experience of nearly five decades of brutal rule from the Kremlin through local satraps. Very quickly they were plunged into economic and political chaos as the old links with the disappearing Soviet Union and Comecon were not immediately or easily replaced by new ones.

On top of the industrial devastation of the old working-class centres came a huge deluge of propaganda against socialism which aimed, especially, to discredit the idea that the working class can play a revolutionary role in the transformation of society. This very idea has been bitterly attacked, and those who upheld it marginalised, not least by many former activists in and around Stalinist parties.

All these conditions have combined to keep a generation or more of workers away from socialist politics. This was reflected in the growth of xenophobia amongst workers, and the domination of left-wing politics by middle-class, university-educated people and moralistic or what are nowadays called “cultural” issues and methods. Indeed, it has been among these layers that such obvious signs of the crisis of capitalism-imperialism as the financial crisis which started in 2008 led to a renewed interest in Marx and Marxism. The unemployed and the poor flocked into the squares across the USA and Europe to demonstrate and protest and shake a fist at the rich, without any practical political programme, while the intelligentsia crowded into the libraries to study and write about, among others, Marx.

In fact, Marxism became the flavour of the month, but mainly in quite restricted academic and student circles. And mostly even these circles were interested in going “beyond capital” in peaceful ways. What has become prominent, and had a significant impact at a policy level, is a

warmed-over version of the work of John Maynard Keynes. He and his followers after World War II aimed (1) to curb the tendencies to crisis within imperialist world economy and control business and finance through regulation and (2) through various forms of the “welfare state” to make life tolerable for the working class, at least in the leading imperialist states. Keynesianism fell into disrepute at the end of the post-World War II economic boom in the 1960s. “Supply-side” economists pointed out that many of the safeguards that had been put in place were actually barriers to individual capitalists getting very rich. The new economic doctrines, when put into practice, produced a series of banking and stock exchange crises since the mid-1990s. These have led to public critiques of capitalist economy which have turned away from the fundamental relationships of capitalist society – the exploitation of human labour power in the expanded reproduction of capital and the growing contradiction between the forces of production and the social relations of production. Writers like the widely-acclaimed Thomas Picketty do not trouble their heads about the *source* of capital and its essential nature. Instead, they devote hundreds and thousands of pages to the evils of inequality. They do not consider the class struggle and its outcome, but concentrate on ways to arrange a fairer society without smashing up the furniture. This approach is reflected in some of the most prominent and ambitious socialist leaders – leaders who have a genuine and significant following – like Senator Bernie Sanders in the USA and Labour Members of Parliament John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK.

Meanwhile the passing decades have re-shaped world economy. Parts of the Americas south of the Rio Grande, the Pacific Rim (Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, India and Pakistan), parts of the Middle East (Turkey, Egypt) have considerable industrial bases, and have in some cases become significant financial centres. Russia and her Confederation of Independent States (CIS) partners have become an important source of raw materials, hydrocarbons, and grain (as we know now from painful experience!).

China is now “workshop of the world” with one of the largest economies – second only to the United States. While state power (which includes great power of the economy and banking) lies in the hands of the Chinese

Communist Party, this economy is an integral part of world imperialism. For decades it has depended on exploiting the Chinese working class to an extraordinary degree and on selling the products of their labour on the world market. Chinese businesses are now among the biggest and most advanced in the world.

In today's clash of imperialist rivals, China strives to extend her commercial and economic power in order to engage effectively in competition with the United States and Europe. In the nature of imperialism, behind commerce and diplomacy lurks the threat of war. Imperialist rivals clash over territorial control in order to gain access to raw materials and markets. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch, British and French East India Companies established commercial networks which provided the capital to start the industrial revolution. Although purely commercial at the beginning, these networks soon required the establishment of naval and military bases. Later, these networks hardened into formal colonial empires.

Today, China is starting a similar process based on the "New Silk Road" initiative to set up her own network. Like any imperialist power, China needs pliant customers and willing providers of cheap raw materials in its dependencies around the world, as well as robust logistical links.

In past centuries, Britain extended her imperial rule by "liberating" parts of Latin America from Spanish rule. American imperialism assumed the same mantle of the "liberator" in Cuba and the Philippines in the early twentieth century, and in the name of freedom and democracy supplanted Britain, France and Holland in most of their former colonial possessions after World War II. With remarkably few actual colonies, the USA has been the main colonialist-imperialist power for nearly a century. Now China offers her support to countries chafing under the economic domination of the United States. In all these cases, subject populations need to scrutinise very carefully indeed the credentials of any would-be liberator.

Multipolar World

One feature of imperialism is that formerly insignificant and weak

nations have been able relatively quickly to claw their way to a powerful position at the top table among the great powers. In the 19th Century, previously quite unimportant nations, like Germany and Japan, were able to hurtle into prominence over a comparatively short period, in mere decades. Of course, they could not achieve this by the tried and tested and time-consuming means of a bourgeois revolution and the achievement of modern democracy, as happened in Britain, Holland, the USA and France.

By-passing a final knock-down, drag 'em out confrontation between the rising bourgeoisie and the old feudal rulers, Germany and Japan under powerful central governments cherry-picked the aspects of the technical, industrial and political achievements of the earlier capitalist states that would enable them to become great powers, successfully applying the very latest techniques in all these fields. The achievements which had cost the older states centuries to bring about were absorbed in their latest developments and as a massive transfer of knowledge, science and theory. This could only happen under a very tight central control, which is why some Marxists refer to it as the "Prussian" road to capitalist development.

The capitalist class of the USA was playing with fire when they started to provide the People's Republic of China with access to world markets and specifically the advanced technology on which modern industry is based. Maybe they assumed that the development of capitalism in China would undermine the rule of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army. To be sure, that state has had to change in significant ways to accommodate the changes in Chinese society since the 1970s.

However, China has followed the real logic of the modern imperialist epoch. The Chinese state made it clear in the way it dealt with the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989 and the re-integration of Hong Kong more recently that there is no intention of introducing any measures of democracy. To succeed in an imperialist world, China has to be able to face down the present great powers of imperialism.

The claim that what the CCP is doing is a sort of extended form of the New Economic Policy adopted in the Soviet Union at the end of the Civil War and the wars of intervention in order to restore a national economy

which had been largely destroyed is by the way laughable. A wealthy Chinese bourgeoisie has grown up in the decades since Nixon's first visit. Rule by the CCP, protection by the CCP and support from the CCP have made this a rich class. Its wealth and privileges are tightly bound up with the Chinese state, and depend on how the Chinese state conducts its diplomatic, economic, and political affairs.

There are indeed inevitable contradictions between the interests of that state and the functioning of those Chinese businesses which, for example, would like to trade their shares in US stock markets. Some big Chinese operators with interests abroad who probably hoped they were too big to push around have been brought sharply to heel by the Chinese government recently. But this does not mean that the CCP is about to abolish capitalism in China anytime soon.

The old imperialist powers confront China militarily, asserting the right to send naval battle groups to patrol China's home waters. They confront her diplomatically and politically.

China goes ahead modernising her armed forces and building up her trading networks across the world. These are both elements of hard power, reflecting the weight of China's capitalist economy.

China also deploys soft power, seeking allies and front-men around the world to enhance her image and reputation.

So, money is spent resurrecting the old traditions of Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism and the Bandung movement of "non-aligned" states. In the past, these were deployed in order to win allies for the USSR, while deflecting genuinely revolutionary movements (which only caused trouble as far as official Communist Parties were concerned). Although the USSR no longer exists, the idea of backing China (supported by Russia) as a rival to US hegemony is put forward and finds fertile soil because so many political careerists with a past in the Stalinist movement resonate to this logic of development without a workers' revolution. China presents herself as a friend of the local bourgeoisies in the "Global South", a big sister who will support them against the fatal effects of US imperialism.

What of the masses?

The only problem is the working class and the masses. In China itself, as throughout Asia, Africa and South America, the working class is exploited more ruthlessly and thoroughly than it still is in Europe, North America and Australasia, where there are still remnants of the social gains workers made in the 20th century. The conditions in the rest of the world are such that in many of these countries up to 40 percent of the population are without any access to the means of production – they are unemployed.

Small-scale farming is squeezed out by big agricultural monopolies. The history of imperialism has littered the scene with remnants of national, ethnic and religious groups excluded from modern life. Millions scrape an “informal” living in modern slums. No “radical” alliances with allegedly-progressive capitalists are going to equip these masses with a way forward. **Of all the classes in the “global south”, only the working class is a progressive force able to weld all the other oppressed and exploited groups together and point the way forward.** This is the real meaning of the 2013 Special National Congress of Numsa and the policies that it adopted, even if that was not completely clear to those who pushed ahead on that.

It was clear at the time that Irvin Jim was not rejecting Stalinist politics; he was merely emphasising – often in a striking way – that the ANC-SACP government was “failing to deliver” for the South African masses. He did not go on to analyse the roots of that failure in the persistent influence of Stalinist conceptions.

So, the promise offered by Numsa’s Special National Congress has been frustrated. Building a United Front and an alliance with the impoverished communities never happened. No “Movement for Socialism” was established. There was no clarification of how a mass workers’ party can be built on revolutionary principles, because along the way towards making international allies, Irvin Jim turned away consistently from any working-class alliances and met up with apostles of “multipolarity” and “a new Bandung” such as Roy Singham. The Socialist Revolutionary Workers’ Party that arose from that encounter and which also brings in some

independent “leftists” in South Africa has made zero impact on the masses in South Africa because it has done nothing to overcome the terrible political legacy of Stalinism. Nor have any of the petty-bourgeois socialists who have joined up with it themselves shaken that off, whatever label they identify with politically.

But Numsa members have refused to be limited by the bankrupt leadership of Irvin Jim. As these members of Numsa carry forward their recognised class interests as workers against the current Numsa leadership, they will need to enrich their activity with the theoretical lessons of those revolutionaries who opposed Stalinism at its origins and upheld real Leninism. The Left Opposition in the Communist Party of the USSR, together with its scattered supporters around the world, started the struggle to rescue the real party and international of Lenin. That struggle was later taken forward in the formation of the Fourth International. It is that international which must be rebuilt to that the working class can carry through to the end the struggle for a socialist society.

Bob Archer

9 October 2022

Appendix: The ANC and NUMSA

(from <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/formation-sanncanc>)

“The South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later known as the Africa National Congress (ANC) was founded on the 8 January 1912. At SANNC’s inaugural conference, Rev. John Dube was elected as its first president in absentia. The organisation developed out of a situation of racial exclusion and discrimination under the new Union of South Africa. SANNC aspired to unite Africans in the advancement of their political and socio-economic status. Contrary to its aim of unity amongst its African constituents, SANNC was restrictive and narrow in its membership. Participation was limited in accordance with class, gender and tribal status.”

The formation of the SANNC/ANC

Bloemfontein is the birth place of the SANNC, which became the ANC in 1923, one of the largest organizations in later years to struggle for freedom and justice in South Africa. Between 1908 and 1909, constitutional discussions towards Union took place which prompted numerous meetings organized by Africans, Coloureds and Indians to protest the Whites-only exclusivity of these constitutional discussions.

In 1909, a group of Black delegates from the four provinces attended the South African Native National Convention (SANNC) in Waaihoek, Bloemfontein, to propose ways of objecting to the draft South African Act, and the Union constitution. The SANNC meeting convened by John Dube and Dr Walter Rubusana decided to send a delegation to London to convince the British government not to accept the Union in its present form. The delegation led by former Prime Minister William Scheiner failed in its aims as White supremacy was entrenched under a unitary state.

On 8 January 1912, several hundred members of South Africa's educated elite met at Bloemfontein to establish a national organization to protest against racial discrimination and to appeal for equal treatment before the law. The group comprised of South Africa's most prominent Black citizens: professional men, businessmen, journalist, chieftans, ministers, teachers, clerks, building contractors and labour agents. This meeting was the most significant in the history of Black protest politics as it was the first joint meeting of Black representatives from all four self-governing British colonies and indicated that Blacks were capable of united action.

History of the African National Congress

Although it was not the first African political organization in South Africa, its formation marked a clear break from the past as the focus of Black politics previously centered on electoral activity in the Cape Colony where Blacks with the required property and educational qualifications could vote and stand for office.

Their voice in politics at the Cape was significant. At the turn of the century Black voters constituted nearly half the electorate in five constituencies, which contributed to the belief that the most effective

way of accelerating Black political advancement was to use their vote to influence the election men who would be sympathetic to Black aspirations. But the years succeeding the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902 witnessed the declining force of this argument. The founding of the SANNC marked the realization in middle-class Black circles of the contention that Black interest could best be promoted by action by Blacks themselves and not through sympathetic intermediaries.

Several reasons contributed to this change in opinion. Some members of the Black elite had hopes raised initially by the defeat of the Republics in the South African War and were bitterly disappointed. Despite expressions of imperial loyalty intermingled with polite phrased reproach at the prevalent discrimination against educated Black men with good character and ability, the British government made it clear that its paramount concern was White unity in South Africa.

Hopes that non-racial Cape franchise would be extended to the defeated republics were rapidly dashed as preparations for the Act of Union indicated that existing rights would not be respected in future. The Act removed the theoretical right of enfranchised Blacks to be elected to parliamentary seats which had existed in the Cape and also provided for the removal of the franchise from Black voters through a two-thirds majority vote of both houses of parliament in joint sessions.

By 1912, Black concern moved further than constitutional issues. The first post-Union administration, responding to the mining industry's labour demands and the disquiet of White farmers squeezed between capitalist agricultural companies on the one hand and competitive Black peasants on the other, moved swiftly to safeguard its position with these groups. Regulations were introduced, which made breaking a contract a criminal offence. Blacks were also excluded from skilled industrial jobs. The prohibition of rural land ownership by Blacks, or occupation outside the reserves dispossessed many landowners and leasing or tenant-farming relationships between Blacks and Whites were outlawed.

It was therefore made clear that there was more at stake here than just the interests of a small group who through their education at mission stations had come to form an identifiable petty bourgeoisie. The Land Act

of 1913 and its complementary labour legislation were the tools used to destroy a whole class of peasant producers, forcing them into already crowded reserves or driving them to seek work as farm labourers and mine workers, and later in the least skilled and most badly paid positions in urban industrial, municipal and domestic employment.

The group of men that assembled at Bloemfontein was well aware of the wider dimensions of the social tragedy being enacted around them. But their particular concern, the fear of any petty bourgeoisie at the time of crisis, was being thrust back into the ranks of the urban and rural poor. The main aim of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) was to represent the concerns and anxieties of the small professional middle class which was mainly responsible for convening the Bloemfontein meeting.

Its first President was John Dube; a Minister and school headmaster who studied in the USA and was strongly influenced by the American educator and activist Booker T Washington. Pixley ka Isaka Seme, a lawyer and prime mover in organizing the meeting to establish the Congress was appointed Treasurer. The position of Secretary General was occupied by Solomon T Plaatjie, a court translator, author and newspaper editor who had worked in Kimberly and Johannesburg. These men retained close ties with African aristocracy and the rural chieftaincy, who were conservatives concerned with protecting a moral and social order they correctly perceived to be under attack while at the same time being anxious to promote the general advancement of the Black race in South Africa.

The Congress intended to function as a national forum to discuss the issues which affected them and to act as an organized pressure group. They planned to agitate for changes through the following: peaceful propaganda, the election of Congress sympathizers to legislative bodies through protest and enquiries and finally through passive action or continued movement"

I am sending you this extract from the website "south African history online", in my opinion a very well researched website.

From it the class nature of the ANC was well established by 1912. Its impetus was the Failed expectations of in specific a tribal royalty. Its history until now simply echoes the basic principle that the class nature of an organisation cannot be changed except by total destruction.

The rise of the working-class mass struggles since 1971 in Namibia and since 1973 in South Africa uncovered the basic reactionary and anti-working-class nature of the tribal petit-bourgeoisie represented by organisations like the ANC and SWAPO. The self-organization of the working class was met with hostility, treachery, and violence. The SWAPO in 1971 distanced itself from the general strike in Namibia by publicly condemning its leaders as irresponsible elements. The emerging leadership of the working class were confronted with severe repression from the side of the South Africans and slander by the tribal nationalists. Since 1976 working class leaders that fled south Africa and Namibia were liquidated physically in exile. Inside South Africa the forms of liquidation were necklacing and summary execution facilitated by the South African state, the latter that operated its official liquidation.

The ANC and SWAPO were vehemently opposed to new working-class organisations that developed since 1976 and earlier. They slandered and ostracized the leaders as collaborators, agents and spies.

The Communist Party that developed out of a severely deformed working class, contradictory struggles, and the indelible influence of Soviet Stalinism became the transmission belt for liberal bourgeois politics into the mass struggles and sustaining the ANC and SWAPO.

The period after 1980 saw the replacement of the leadership of the working-class organisations with tribal nationalists especially in the trade union movement. That explains the rapid and frantic privatization after 1994.

A significant exception was NUMSA, a union of the industrial working class that was well outside the influence of the extremely primitive right wing tribal petit bourgeoisie.

The dichotomy in South African politics that arose after 1994 reflected in NUMSA and the ANC must be understood from the foregoing. The attempted

expulsion of NUMSA leaders can perhaps be explained by the strengthening of anti-working class policies by Chinese Stalinism. It is an attack against especially the industrial working class, but it is proof that organised working-class politics is still existing in South Africa. The SAFTU seems further proof of that.

The discussion and understanding needed is about Stalinism and its true class nature in relation to working-class politics in South Africa. It cannot be treated as an ideological current in the working class, but a reflection of degeneration and confusion. But, most seriously the expression of capitalist objectives and political destruction within the working-class movement. Its methodology needs to be dissected and understood as alien and against the methodology of Marxism.

Hewat Beukes

October 2022

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 19th century ended and the 20th century opened as "concentration of production and monopolies"; Vijay Prashad refers to the "finance capital and the financial oligarchy" which Lenin dealt with, and he also mentions the "export of capital". (These are all section headings in Lenin's book).

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

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

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

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

"Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads directly to the most comprehensive socialisation of production; it, so to

speak, drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order, a transitional one from complete free competition to complete socialisation.”(4)

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

He devoted a significant part of the book to a critique of socialist theoreticians, such as Karl Kautsky, who thought that a stable and peaceful form of imperialism could be attained without violent disruption. Lenin had learnt his Marxism at the feet of such Marxists of the Second (Socialist) International as Kautsky, but at the outbreak of World War I they found themselves on opposite sides!

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

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

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

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

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

And yet it was a version of Kautsky's theory which came to dominate in the Communist International after Lenin's death and the defeat of Lenin's followers by the bureaucratic caste which later took control in the Soviet Union.

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

Any analysis of imperialism which does not address these issues is bound to be of limited value because it leaves too many vital questions untouched. Imperialism exists today in the extreme form that Vijay describes in part. But imperialism

has only been able to rot every more deeply because the working class and the masses have been disarmed politically by Stalinism. It was the Stalinist politics of the SACP leaders which led to South Africa's first democratically-elected government being firmly in the hands of big business and big financial groups. And these are precisely the question which were raised by the decision on the part of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) in 2013 to split the reactionary, Kautsky-inspired alliance of Cosatu, SACP and ANC and find a way back to the genuine, Marxist policies of Lenin.

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

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

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

class and the masses by that period.

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

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

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

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

A better way to look at it all might be this: Imperialist policy in the last fifty years has successfully played on its ability to divide workers in the advanced metropolitan countries from workers in the rest of the world, which itself is in no small part caused by the leaderships of mass movements dominated by Stalinist and now post-Stalinist politics. Vijay Prashad gives graphic and compelling examples of how this works out, but not of the political developments which allowed it to happen. The results are that classic and significant weapons of the working class in advanced

capitalist countries, like trade union militancy and parliamentary political pressure, are held in check by the threat (and the practice) of shifting production to underdeveloped countries. Meanwhile the factory owners in many a “developing” country can (and indeed must) impose savage rates of exploitation on their workers under the threat of “losing the contract” if production costs rise. By the way, the current setup frees the Multi-National Corporation, brand or main contractor from the obligation to fund the investment in production in the “developing” country: the local entrepreneur has to scrape that together somehow, further intensifying the pressure to exploit “their” workers.

These workers’ wages are kept extremely low, even to the extent of compromising the reproduction of the labour force and with devastating cultural and social consequences. The tax bases of governments in underdeveloped countries are also eroded, so these governments have to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for permission to borrow money, which is only granted on the condition of sustained cuts in living standards and wages. And so, the “Third World Project” is over. Meanwhile attempts to copy what was achieved in Cuba have resulted in long and debilitating and in the end fruitless guerrilla wars.

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

“Globalisation” is not a completely new period in the history of capitalism, however essential it is to know at any stage “what is going on” and to take that into account when

providing political leadership to workers. The fundamental features of imperialism are continued and intensified and above all unresolved today. The continued existence of capitalism in imperialism and the indeed increasingly absurd forms that takes testify not to the strength and viability of capitalism as a system but to the problems which have arisen in constructing the leadership of the working class.

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

But the class struggle never stops, never goes away entirely until it is actually resolved. The mass outburst of working-class resistance that led to the Marikana massacre and the subsequent wave of industrial action in South Africa lifted a corner of the blanket of "official science" and "killing the works of Marx", and that is what made the 2013 Numsa special congress decisions and the work to establish the SRWP so important, not just in South Africa but on the international stage.

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

These are the matters which deserve to figure most prominently in the political education of SRWP members, when they are preparing themselves to lead the political struggles of the South African working class. SRWP members need to make themselves familiar with all issues around the struggle for working class political power: the fate of the Paris commune,

the Russian Revolution, the split with reformist “Marxism” and revisionism, the struggle to build the Communist International, how and in what way the Soviet Union and the world communist movement degenerated.

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

Bob Archer

23 May 2020

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

2. *Ibid.* p.71

3. *Ibid.* p.118

4. *Ibid.* p.23

5. *Ibid.* p.3

6. *Ibid.* p.111

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

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

race.

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

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

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

Comrades like Balazs Nagy, Miroslav, Radoslav Pavlovic and Janos Borovi had paid the price of resisting Stalinist rule in their home countries. They had been forced to leave behind families and comrades and go into exile or face death or imprisonment. Based on their own experiences and difficulties in the Trotskyist movement, they joined with the insurgent Workers Revolutionary Party members and contacts in Namibia, South Africa and Latin America to set up the Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International in 1990.

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

But the development of the new international collided with the collapse of the workers' states in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the Thatcher-Regan onslaught on all the things workers had

gained in the class struggle. This was also a development which sought – where it could – to drive back the movements against imperialist oppression around the world and to corrupt them where it could not.

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

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

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

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

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

owners with the collusion of ANC ministers marked the outbreak of a political crisis which faced revolutionary Marxists with a serious challenge.

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

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

- the campaign of former TCL miners for their stolen pensions
- various ethnic groups defending their land
- the matter of wholesale miss-appropriation of the assets of the former TLC in the course of official bankruptcy of the company.
- the question of whether German compensation for imperialist oppression, land-theft and atrocities during the occupation of "South-West Africa" would go to the victims' communities or be stolen by government ministers,
- the campaign for a real reckoning over the crimes of South West Africa Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) during the liberation struggle,

- against the theft of people's homes through legal chicanery
- Stood in the 2014 election and won two Assembly seats
- new industrial struggles such as that of the fishery workers.
- This meant that by late 2015, the WRP of Namibia was able to convene a conference with over 100 delegates to re-launch the party

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

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

The precious outcome is a pamphlet: *Why we must rebuild the Fourth International*, which will undoubtedly play a major role in the political training of new generations. It is written in a very straightforward style, using everyday language in a way that makes complex questions easier to understand and does not set up the author as some sort of ivory-tower intellectual.

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

Back in Europe, Mirek keenly followed political event in online discussions. Topics included how Marxists should react

to the discussion around mass migration and a sharp intervention on the outcome of the UK referendum on leaving the EU.

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

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

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

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

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

Sloganeering and coat-tails – A response to some South African activists

John Appolis, Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan have kindly passed on texts they have produced dealing with the current political situation in South

Africa, as well as a contribution to discussion by Oupa Lehulere.

I must apologise for the delay in responding to these texts. It is not easy to orientate oneself from a great distance away.

I have to confess I am still at a loss to understand why the various authors continue to place their hopes for the future in an alliance with this or that faction of the “official” liberation movement, the ANC, when the country has seen major irruptions of the working class into public affairs. The events around the miners’ struggle and Marikana unleashed a huge wave of industrial action. All this was reflected in the December 2013 Special Conference decisions of Numsa and the progress made since then in consolidating a combative new trade union federation.

The fact is I find the arguments presented in these texts unconvincing and misleading.

Ahmed and Shaheen compare the current situation in South Africa with that in Germany in 1932, on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power. On this basis, they recommend that workers and young people in South Africa should fall in line behind the Democratic Alliance, the South African Communist Party, the various anti-Zuma factions of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Malema in the “Zuma Must Go!” bandwagon. To ward off the danger of being overwhelmed by all of that, they append a wordy “socialist” programme and cross their fingers behind their back.

Revolutionary tactics cannot be deduced from a cook-book. Empiricists identify any phenomenon abstractly (that is, they reduce it to a name, a suitable label, leaving out all its complexity, internal and external contradictions, motion, indeed its very life) and place this definition confidently in the appropriate pigeonhole. When another phenomenon arises with superficial similarities to the first, they say: “Ahah!”, sort through their files, triumphantly fish out the label and the attached recipe and tie it to the new situation.

They forget the warning traditionally drummed into medical students: “Therapy is easy; diagnosis is difficult”. Patients who present with apparently similar symptoms may be suffering from very different

diseases, and require quite different treatment

Without writing a full-on history of Germany between the World Wars, it is useful to recall some essential details about the situation in which revolutionary Marxists called for a United Front of working-class parties to stop Hitler from coming to power.

For all her problems, Germany under the Weimar Republic was a highly-developed modern, industrial, imperialist state. There was a very numerous and politically-conscious working class which had built not only its own mass, nominally Marxist, Social-Democratic Party (SPD) but also a the most significant revolutionary Communist Party (KPD) outside of the Soviet Union.

This working class had made enormous experiences of struggle in the course of World War I and the following 14 years. At one point a short lived-socialist republic had been proclaimed. Workers had organised strike waves, military and naval insurrections, a general strike to defeat a right-wing coup attempt, workers' and soldiers' councils in many cities and actual Red Armies in some industrial regions. In 1923, the year of the great inflation, there had been serious moves to prepare, equip and carry out a workers' revolution.

The large German Communist Party was inspired and materially supported by the successful revolution in Russia and the workers' state established there.

The Nazi regime was a reckless, foolhardy (and of course profoundly criminal and barbaric) option forced upon the German bourgeoisie by the rival imperialist powers who prevailed in World War I. It was underpinned by a (fairly) worked-out ideology of blood, soil, violence and conquest. This involved extreme nationalism, racism (towards all allegedly "non-Aryan" races and most immediately affecting the millions of Jews living in Europe), a leadership cult based on utter subjection of the mass, hero-worship, militarism and a simplistic concept of the survival of the fittest. Another aspect of this ideology was utter hatred of all kinds of Marxism and a determination to stamp out Communism in the USSR and everywhere.

We do criticise the policies and actions of the Soviet-led Communist International (CI), and consequently of the German KPD, during the period of “bonapartist” rule by Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher between 1929 and 1933. First of all, these alleged Marxists did not see the real depth of the coming catastrophe. They had a mechanical view of the effects of the economic meltdown of 1929.

The CI of the day saw the Social Democrats (the reformist socialist party) and the Nazi Party as “not antipodes but twins”. After all, a Social-Democratic government inflicted welfare cuts and austerity measures on the working class and sent armed police to shoot workers demonstrating on May Day. A Social-Democratic minister had said in 1919 “someone has to play the bloodhound” and unleashed vicious right-wing paramilitaries on revolutionary workers. Could the Nazis be any worse?

But of course, they were!

The second mistake the CI made, as a consequence, was that they did not anticipate what damage Hitler would inflict on the workers’ and socialist movement, which was comprehensively crushed with the use of extreme violence and intimidation once Hitler was elected German Chancellor. The CI and KPD leaders thought that Hitler’s accession to power would generate enough mass resistance among workers to lead to a Communist counter-stroke: “After Hitler, us!” they said.

The third mistake the CI and the KPD made was to believe that they could win over Social Democratic workers by propaganda alone, just by brow-beating them with arguments. They offered a “United Front from below” to SPD supporters against their own leaders. In effect, they were saying: “if you agree with us, join our United Front on our terms” instead of “let’s see how we can get your leaders to work with ours to stop Hitler”. This attitude let the leaders of the SPD and the trade unions “off the hook”, because it was clearly not a serious attempt to overcome the division in the working class. If they had been sincere about a united front, the KPD leaders would have negotiated jointly-acceptable terms on which to organise one with the Social-Democratic party and trade union leaders. In the face of the Nazi threat, such a workers’ united front could have made sense.

It is worth quoting what Trotsky wrote in 1932 in Germany, *What Next?*, not in order to appeal to some Holy Writ, but to get to grips with how the dynamics of class relations are approached:

“Without hiding or mitigating our opinion of the Social Democratic leaders in the slightest, we may and we must say to the Social Democratic workers, ‘Since, on the one hand, you are willing to fight together with us; and since, on the other, you are still unwilling to break with your leaders, here is what we suggest: force your leaders to join us in a common struggle for such and such practical aims, in such and such a manner; as for us, we Communists are ready.’ Can anything be more plain, more palpable, more convincing?

In precisely this sense I wrote – with the conscious intention of arousing the sincere horror of blockheads and the fake indignation of charlatans – that in the war against fascism we were ready to conclude practical military alliances with the devil and his grandmother, even with Noske and Zörgiebel.”

But there was another side to the question of the United Front, a tactic which the Communist International under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky had adopted: applied incorrectly, it could also become a cover for passivity and inaction. Further on in the same text, Trotsky wrote:

“In the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the policy of the united front became a hue and cry after allies at the cost of sacrificing the independence of the party. Backed by Moscow and deeming themselves omnipotent, the functionaries of the Comintern seriously esteemed themselves to be capable of laying down the law to the classes and of prescribing their itinerary; of checking the agrarian and strike movements in China; of buying an alliance with Chiang Kai-Shek at the cost of sacrificing the independent policies of the Comintern; of re-educating the trade union bureaucracy, the chief bulwark of British imperialism through educational courses at banquet tables in London, or in Caucasian resorts; of transforming Croatian bourgeois of Radich’s type into Communists, etc., etc. All this was undertaken, of course, with the best of intentions, in order to hasten developments by accomplishing for the masses what the masses weren’t mature enough to do for themselves.”

The mistake the CI leaders then made after they had digested the depth of the disaster that Hitler's take-over represented, was to believe that there was a way to prevent the spread of fascism by forming an alliance with "democratic", anti-fascist capitalists in which the interests of the working class were clearly and officially subordinated to the leadership of the bourgeoisie. This policy of a so-called "Popular Front" also enters our story, because it is the entire foundation and backbone of the policy of the CI's successors (although the body itself was wound up during World War II) towards the colonial liberation movement in general and the African National Congress in particular. They dressed this tribal and bourgeois formation up as the main revolutionary force in South Africa and systematically over many years did everything they could to subordinate the South African working class to it.

But it was the black working class which drove the struggle against apartheid forward. Nevertheless in 1990-1994, the ANC, supported by the SACP and in close dependence upon imperialist governments, the mining monopolies and the parties of the white minority, carried out its own form of "state capture". Subsequent history (as many can explain) has exposed what this "state capture" actually meant.

Is Zuma Hitler?

No, Zuma is Zuma.

Since the end of apartheid rule, governments of the ANC in alliance with the SACP and Cosatu have all provided a democratic screen, engaging the support of as many local forces as possible while serving the interests of international capital. Apartheid was ended and majority rule installed by arrangement with the international mining companies, major banks and imperialists governments.

The Triple Alliance was cobbled together from individuals in exile all over the world parachuted into positions of authority in the major institutions, including the trade union movement. "Sections" of the South African bourgeoisie black and white were appeased to various extents to make the Triple Alliance workable, while the commercial headquarters of the big mining companies were prudently moved abroad to major imperialist

centres such as London. It is the imperialists' requirements which have predominated ever since under a veneer of national independence and self-government.

But the Triple Alliance was fragile and it is breaking up, above all under the pressure of the masses, first and foremost the working class.

Now candidates for power in South Africa must demonstrate to the satisfaction of their international imperialist masters that they can directly confront and subjugate that pressure. Zuma is up for the job, equipped with the necessary qualities and eager to enjoy the fruits of such work.

Such regimes practice a level of self-enrichment at the expense of their own peoples which is not merely tolerated but actually encouraged by their international patrons. These regimes were conceived in corruption and live by it. They steal state property with impunity, rob the public treasury and have been known to "nationalise" and then take over (or sell to cronies) traditionally-owned tribal land, etc.

They will play every vile trick to protect their access to wealth, including crushing democratic protests, imprisoning and murdering opponents and fanning ethnic differences into open conflict.

To retain local control over their populations they rely on tribal elites bought with a fraction of the loot often alongside the straightforward rule of gangsters.

Such are the shared characteristics of African "independence" regimes. And for that reason, they are instable regimes of crisis. But although they share some features with fascist regimes (for example, suspension of the "rule of law", crimes against the people, even outright genocide in some cases) they are not as such fascist regimes.

Labelling them "fascist" can be quite misleading. Tony Blair and George W. Bush branded Saddam Hussain a "fascist" in order to justify the second Gulf war. They went to war against the "fascist" Hussain, but it was the Iraqi people they were aiming at and actually hit. You could say the same about their treatment of Libya under Ghaddafi and Syria under Assad, all

in different ways.

Confusing Popular Front and United Front

“The Popular Front”, Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan correctly say “is the main strategic weapon of the bourgeoisie to tie the hands of the working class to the interests of the bosses”. However, they soon go on to urge NUMSA and its allies to plunge straight into – a sort of Popular Front!

They spend five sentences enumerating the forces predominating in the “anti-State Capture Movement” which make it very clear that this is a mass popular movement around a “single issue” (i.e “Zuma Must Fall!”). They then write: “The class character of these movements is not as important to ordinary people as the fact that they are ready to take up the fight practically and immediately”.

Yes, it is good for the masses to get involved in political action. But it is the job of revolutionary movements to point out the things which are really important to ordinary people above and beyond what the bourgeoisie presents as important.

Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen Khan think that the presence of a working-class force inside the movement armed with “its own programme and banner” will magically convert the Popular Front into a United Front. It is worth quoting what they say in full:

“20: The task of the proletariat and its leadership is to join the general movement. However, in doing so it enters the fray under its own programme and banner. It applies the policy of the united front which is ‘unity in action’. March separately. Strike together”.

However, they have just spent more than a few lines describing the class character of the “general movement” in considerable detail, which makes it clear that this movement is NOT a workers’ united front but a cross-class popular front irrespective of whatever programme and banner we Marxists “enter the fray” under.

Comrade Appolis (“Critical Comments on the article: *Platform of the Left Bloc in the Zuma Must Go Campaign* by Comrades Ahmed Jooma and Shaheen

Khan") notes the discrepancy here (which is to his credit). He also sees the need to build a core of politically-conscious leading activists with a breadth of vision which extends beyond the parochial. However, he both turns his back on the main force able to bring about such a cadre (which is NUMSA and the new trade union federation) and proposes a different version of the same popular front which Ahmed and Shaheen put forward:

"The working class and its forces should enter this conflict with its own vision, strategy and demands. It should enter it against the big bourgeoisie and its system of accumulation by calling for Zuma to go. And this call is in line with the sentiments and mood of the masses".

Further on he notes: "the working-class movement exhibits numerous weaknesses – organisationally, politically and ideologically. It is marked by fragmentation, low levels of mass implantation and has a very disperse advance guard who are caught up in the immediacy of its issues."

He is impatient of the developments among organised workers:

"The trade unions are only now in the beginning phase of shaking off the effects of years of false politics, bureaucracy and inertia. Legalism and an excessive emphasis on an industrial relations' approach to class struggle seems to still frame its politics and methodologies. Its social base is not as yet at the cutting edge of anchoring a mass movement. NUMSA/SAFTU have so far express some correct sentiments but have a way to go."

It is true that trade unions cannot solve all the political problems of the working class. The characteristics which John Appolis lists reflect one side of the conditions under which trade unions operate: they deal with the day-to-day problems of their entire membership containing a wide range of men and women with a variety of outlooks; they deal with bread-and-butter issues; they deal with employers; they stand up for their members' rights day by day within with the legal and political framework of class relations and understandably both work within it and work to improve it using established channels.

Trade unions have to have an administrative machine and responsible leaders. If they are doing their job properly they have to spend a lot of

effort on organisational matters. This is their strength as class organisations but at the same time it makes them susceptible to the influence of the employers' class.

What was overwhelmingly striking, following Marikana and the resulting wave of mass industrial working-class action, was that the leaders of NUMSA decided to use their union's resources in order to lay the basis for a political development by their class. The quantity of experiences mounting up of 20 years of majority rule under the Triple Alliance turned into a new quality, the determination to work for a new political organisation which would fight for the interests of the working class, the fulfilment of the promises of the liberation struggle.

The trade union movement is not just some undifferentiated mass. There is a mass movement and there are leaders at various levels. Some leaders were not equipped to draw political lessons from the struggles that broke out. Others were loath to escape their intellectual vassalage to the Triple Alliance. It is enormously to the credit of NUMSA's leadership that the union has taken forward its special conference decisions of 2013 into re-building the strongest possible unity in a new union confederation around new positions in the movement.

Unlike them, Comrade Appolis is looking for a short-cut to overcoming the movement's "numerous difficulties". He says:

"What the demand for Zuma to go offers is an opportunity to unite these struggles, give them a national expression and a connection to a common national cause. The present conjuncture requires this qualitative shift in the struggles of the working class. And the Zuma must go provides the basis to effect such a qualitative shift.

"The unification of these struggles on a national basis will not amount to an artificial manoeuvre. Rather it will organically weave together the thousands of different struggles of the masses into a national stream. This will place the working class in a position to articulate an alternative ideological and political explanation of the political economy of corruption, of the class character of the ANC and its factions, of the nature of the South African social formation and the

position of white monopoly capital therein”.

On this basis, he asserts: “This coalescing and cohering of a nation-wide cadre of militants with their thousands of connections with the concrete struggles of the masses is the key task of the moment”.

To achieve this, he proposes:

“The starting point is to convene a National Assembly of Representatives of the Struggling Formations of the Working Class, especially those at the cutting edge of the anti-corruption struggles, for instance Outsourcing Must Fall movement, Abahlali Freedom Park, Housing Assembly, Tembelihle Crisis Committee, SECC, Black Sash, R2K and many others. It is these formations that must anchor the movement against the Zuma Bloc and white monopoly capital. The coalescing of these formations on a national scale with clarified class perspectives on the political economy of corruption and crystalizing around a common set of demands shall enable the working class to make its presence and imprint felt on the national anti-corruption movement. NUMSA and SAFTU are to be engaged to be part of this initiative. At some point overtures should also be made towards COSATU to come on board.”

However, he proposes all this under conditions where the movement is dominated by the demagogy of various self-seeking sectors and above all of the Economic Freedom Fighters of Julius Malema.

“White Monopoly Capital” and demagogy of every kind

Oupa Lehulere is even more pessimistic about the role that organised labour can play than is John Appolis. But this only becomes clear at the end of a long and rather confusing article, *Cronin and Company harness Marxism to the service of White Monopoly Capital (The SACP and the Cronification of Marxism)*, which foregrounds the significance of “white monopoly capital”.

At the heart of Lehulere’s emphasis on “white monopoly capital” is the idea that the future of the mass movement must involve an alliance with one or another “sector” of South Africa’s black bourgeoisie as a stepping-stone into the political arena; that such an alliance is

essential and possible against the common enemy, “white monopoly capital”.

To put it briefly: The whole basis for the “Zuma Must Fall” agitation is that in robbing the state finances alongside his Gupta associates, Zuma is seeking to (or obliged to) “capture” the South African state, turning it from a democracy of some sort into his own personal fiefdom.

The existence of black capitalists in South Africa is noted and they are classified into two main sectors. The “credit” bourgeoisie are said to be those who were bought off by the big international corporations with credits which enabled them to become shareholders and then branch out into businesses of their own. (One thinks of the former miners’ union leader Cyril Ramaphosa).

The “tenderpreneurs” on the other hand, are those who exploit any kind of relationship with the ruling alliance in order to win contracts to carry out public or government works. Jacob Zuma and his Gupta associates are meant to be placed in this category.

It is made into an article of faith that these are two separate groups who constitute the South African black bourgeoisie. Essentially, all those who call for the South African workers’ movement to advance by joining the “Zuma Must Fall” campaign are arguing for the workers and the masses to support the “credit” sector of capitalists.

Zuma carried out a cabinet reshuffle in March this year, removing Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan and replacing him with the supposedly more malleable Malusi Gigaba. Gigaba appointed as an advisor a well-regarded left-leaning associate professor at Wits University, Chris Malikane.

Malusi Gigaba may have had good reason to believe that Malikane was a Zuma loyalist, but he apparently had not gone into detail about how he (Malikane) rationalised that position. That became clearer when people got around to reading what Malikane actually wrote. Take *How to break monopoly white capital for example* (<http://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/how-to-break-monopoly-white-capital-8779291>).

Malikane starts dramatically by saying: "The class structure under colonialism or apartheid remains intact. The African is at the bottom of the food chain. The darkest skin performs the toughest job at the lowest wage."

He goes on: "Even within the capitalist class, the darkest skin is the lowest in the hierarchy. It should also be mentioned that, within the African capitalist class, the upper stratum which is credit-based is found inside, and accumulates directly through, established white monopoly capitalist structures."

And: "White monopoly ownership and control of state power is even more secured if the government in place is democratic, since the masses believe 'this is our government, we voted for it'. Yet, what cannot be explained is why 'our government' is failing to resolve our centuries-old problem of white monopoly of social power.

"The battle over the removal of the finance minister is the battle waged by white monopoly capital in alliance with the credit-based black capitalist, against the rise of the tender-based black capitalist class, which also has links with the leadership of political parties."

He explains further: "South Africa has now entered a phase of intense rivalry between capitalist groupings. In this phase, it is not possible to advocate political abstention, especially of masses of the oppressed and super-exploited African working class.

"The fight against white monopoly capital and its black/African allies, is an integral part of the struggle to consummate the national democratic revolution."

(The reference to "consummating the national democratic revolution" rings rather hollow in the mouth of a man who asserts that "white monopoly ownership and control of state power is even more secure if the government in place is democratic", etc.)

"The tender-based black capitalist class", he continues, "is not likely to win without the support of the mass of the black and African working class. Unlike its white counterpart, the tender-based black capitalist

class has no coherent historical international backing. Its relationship with the organised working class, which is the only force that is capable of disrupting white monopoly capitalist power at production, is very weak if non-existent.

“Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the objective analysis of the class forces, in so far as the tender-based capitalist class has begun the war against the dominant white monopoly capitalist class, it has to be encouraged.” (my emphasis – B.A.)

And in order to “encourage” that “tender-based black capitalist class”, Malikane took a government job under Zuma!

Apart from that one little detail, his proposals are the mirror image of those of Ahmed, Shaheen, Appolis and Lehulere. They all say that the South African working class is in no state to lead the struggle; its only hope to get into the game is on the coat-tails of this or that “sector” of the bourgeoisie; either sector. Toss a coin ...

Lehulere is so enamoured of the phrase “white monopoly capital” that he uses it nearly sixty times in his article. It is a conception he profoundly shares with Malikane (and many on the radical left in South Africa). It is a phrase which seems to evoke the condition of the black masses, and it does capture one side of the imperialist oppression of the people of South Africa. However, it leaves out so much about imperialism that is easily abused by demagogues.

If it is thought mainly to be the whiteness of the foreign monopolies (which are indeed in the main run by rich white men) which enables them to exploit and oppress the people of South Africa, then the suggestion is left open that black capitalism is a less daunting prospect.

What is startling is that Malikane’s proposals are also barely different from the proposals of Julius Malema and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), proposals which “radical lefts” such as Rehad Desai now laud to the skies in the TV documentary *Julius vs the ANC*! “White monopoly capital” continues to rule South Africa, is the cry. Resources and industries must be taken away from the control of “white monopoly capital” and nationalised.

The fact that Chris Malikané's attitude is simply as it were a photographic negative or reversed mirror image of the attitude of the EFF etc. places Lehulere in a certain difficulty. While he understandably defends Chris Malikané against the cynical sophistry of the South African Communist Party's Cronin, his own adherence to the theory of "white monopoly capitalism" is uncomfortable. Mouthing the catch-phrase "white monopoly capital", one could support Zuma against his opponents, or just as easily support Malema, the SACP, the Democratic Alliance et al against Zuma. It is a formula tailor-made for demagogues.

To put some distance between himself and Malikané, Lehulere drags in a disagreement over the question of the state.

It would of course have been quite enough to say that Malikané's decision to accept a job as an advisor to a minister hand-picked as a crony by Zuma was either misguided or unprincipled. He (Malikané) may have imagined that the job would enable him to advance the nationalisation of the country's resources and their mobilisation to fulfil the needs of the population.

But if Lehulere had merely expressed that simple truth, it would have left open to view how threadbare is the illusion that any "sector" of the South African bourgeoisie is interested in furthering the interests of the working class in any way.

So Lehulere raised his understandable disagreement with Malikané's career choice to the level of a principled disagreement over the nature of the state. Lenin is dragged into the discussion, not to mention Gramsci. We are told to concern ourselves not with "inside the state" or "outside the state" but in a different state. It is wrong not merely to sell yourself for a job on the Zuma payroll, but to direct any demands on the state.

Now whatever Lenin thought about the state (and his works are available for all to study), he never thought the working class (and the broader masses) could ignore it. He encouraged workers to place demand upon the state, to raise their political demands at the level of the government, the state and the legal system, to try to place their own representatives in institutions at that level.

The task facing the South African masses has little to do with individual lefts taking government jobs. What is needed is what NUMSA has put forward: a united front throughout the masses alongside a movement for socialism, enriched by a study of the examples of struggles for socialism around the world and leading to the formation of a genuine workers' party.

There are no short cuts to this. The organised working class in the unions in the new federation needs to be a backbone of iron sustaining this movement. The work has to go forward systematically and soberly. It can only succeed if, alongside a growing mass of conscious support, a cadre is steeled in the course of the struggle. The movement must train itself not to be stampeded or derailed by demagogues of any stripe. The stakes are too high.

Bob Archer, 23 June 2017

May Day Message from the WRP Namibia

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

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

Since 1992 however, these rights were rapidly eroded in rogue

courts, new legislation drafted by corporate business and passed by the new regime, parading as the great liberator.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is the only way forward to redemption!

Paul Thomas
Secretary of Publicity.

WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY TO REBUILD THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

P.O. Box 24064 Windhoek Tel: 061-260647 namab737@gmail.com

What Numsa decided in December 2013

What Numsa decided in December 2013

The Numsa Congress declaration explained: "The African National Congress (ANC) has adopted a strategic programme – the National Development Plan (NDP). The fault of the NDP is not that it is technically flawed, or in need of adjustment and editing ... **Its fault is that it is the programme of our class enemy. It is a programme to continue to feed profit at the expense of the working class and poor.**" (My emphasis – RA)

It goes on to state: "The ANC leadership has clarified that it will not tolerate any challenge" and "Cosatu (the

Confederation of South African Trade Unions) has experienced a vicious and sustained attack on its militancy and independence ... Cosatu has become consumed by internal battles by forces which continue to support the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) with its neo-liberal agenda and those who are fighting for an independent militant federation which stands for the interests of the working class before any other".

Referring to the 2012 massacre of miners at Marikana, the declaration says: **"the state attacked and killed workers on behalf of capital"**. It goes on to outline a campaign to support the victims of the massacre and punish those responsible, situating the massacre in the context of imperialist exploitation: "Marikana was a deliberate defence of mining profits and mining capitalists!".

The declaration notes: "The treatment of labour as a junior partner within the Alliance is not uniquely a South African phenomenon. In many post-colonial and post-revolutionary situations, liberation and revolutionary movements have turned on labour movements that fought alongside them, suppressed them, marginalised them, split them, robbed them of their independence or denied them any meaningful role in politics and policy making."

The declaration summarises a political way forward: "There is no chance of winning back the Alliance or the SACP"; "The working class needs a political organisation"; "Call on COSATU to break with the Alliance!"; "Establish a new United Front"; "Explore establishment of a Movement for Socialism" ("NUMSA will conduct a thoroughgoing discussion on previous attempts to build socialism as well as current experiments to build socialism. We will commission an international study on the historical formation of working class parties, including exploring different types of parties – from mass workers' parties to vanguard parties. We will look to countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and Greece ... This entire process

will lead to the union convening a Conference on Socialism”

The declaration says Numsa will “set a deadline for this process” and “look for electoral opportunities”. It lays down a number of steps cutting ties with the ANC and the SACP.

It goes on to propose a campaign over the rampant corruption of Jacob Zuma’s presidency, pointing out that this corruption goes hand in hand with “the continuation of neo-liberalism”.

A sizeable section of the declaration deals with the crisis within the union confederation Cosatu, outlining the questions of principle involved.

The declaration also re-positions Numsa as a trade union as “shield and spear of workers”, pointing to the need to confront the fragmentation of the workforce through outsourcing and seeking to organise all workers in given workplaces and along supply chains.

A final section outlines a practical campaign, including taking forward the “Section 77” campaign to reverse neo-liberal policies and “address the plight of the working class and poor”. Cosatu had adopted this campaign but failed to pursue it energetically. Numsa pledged to act against the Employment Tax Incentive Act, and organise a “rolling mass action” with a detailed list of concrete demands, for example: beneficiation of all strategic minerals, a ban on the export of scrap metals and the rebuilding of foundries, an increase on import tariffs on certain goods, nationalisation of the Reserve Bank, exchange controls and other demands culminating in the nationalisation of the mining industry.

(For the texts of the congress resolution and declaration plus material to place them in a historical context, see the Workers International pamphlet *Movement for Socialism: South Africa’s NUMSA points the way*, ISBN 978-0-9564319-4-3).

Appeal: Help fund our work in Southern Africa

Dear Comrades,

WE are launching an ambitious Appeal to members and supporters to raise funds for our work in Southern Africa.

It is there that the global re-awakening of the workers' socialist movement is most concentrated and advanced, and where material resources are most needed if the movement is to make the progress which it can and should make.

The Workers Revolutionary Party in Namibia has won a position where all oppressed and exploited groups in the country turn to it for help in their struggles.

This is possible because of the party's thoroughgoing understanding of the role the South-West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) government plays as a caretaker for imperialism, based on corrupt rule by a narrow tribal leadership imposed in a deal between the Soviet Union and various imperialist powers in the early 1990s. This regime is both a mockery of democracy and a copy-book example of milking public assets in collusion with imperialist financial interests.

The heart of the WRP(N)'s work is among the country's miners. The Party's leadership has worked closely over many years with the TCL miners in their campaign to get back the pensions stolen from them when the company which employed them was liquidated. It has united with the most advanced leaders of the current mine-workers with the aim of making their union (Mineworkers Union of Namibia – MUN) an effective and class-

conscious weapon of the country's working class. Meanwhile, the WRP collaborates with other present and former miners and smelter workers campaigning to protect their homes threatened by financial chicanery by former mine-owners in cahoots with the government and in pursuing claims against their employers for work-related illnesses.

The WRP(N) also stands four-square with:

Railway workers trying to track down the theft of state property;

Road workers protesting against bullying, malpractice and neglect of health and safety by their foreign employers contracted to develop the country's road network;

Fishery workers on the Atlantic coast who have been on prolonged strike against diminishing wages, overwork and dangerous conditions. From being the best-paid workers in the country, they have become among the lowest-paid, while government-sponsored corruption lets foreign businesses ransack the rich fisheries around Walvis Bay;

Home-owners defending their homes against collusion between crooked lawyers and financiers who try to dispossess them;

Young people demanding access to homes;

Small farmers protecting their traditional lands against seizure by business interests;

Ethnic groups who suffered under German colonial rule seeking access to the compensation pocketed by SWAPO ministers;

Bushmen too now have a WRP(N) member among their leaders.

Former soldiers seeking access to their pensions, also stolen by SWAPO ministers;

Former Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) fighters

seeking acknowledgment of and compensation for the deaths and other sufferings inflicted on them by the SWAPO leaders during liberation.

The WRP(N) won two parliamentary seats in the 2014 elections, but is denied the official resources which should accompany this electoral success. The party has had to spend a good deal of time fighting off a state-inspired sham “breakaway” which seriously impeded its work.

Nevertheless it held a very successful second congress in 2015 and is now developing a network of branches and conducting a serious programme of theoretical education in Marxism for the new forces coming into the leadership of the Party.

And the WRP is now in touch with the United Front established by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and is preparing to collaborate in its work.

A decisive political break in South Africa

NUMSA launched the United Front initiative in connection with the decisive break with Stalinism in which it is engaged. NUMSA has correctly declared the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) to be bourgeois parties and called for a Movement for Socialism to build a Marxist workers' party.

What they have established is a genuine United Front bringing community groups together with trade unions led by the working class. Its purpose is to stand up for real working class communities in the context of extreme inequality, exploitation of workers, unemployment (especially among young people) and mass poverty.

NUMSA's aim in building the United Front (and a Marxist workers' party) is to transform the National Democratic Revolution of 1994 (which left the working class out of the picture and maintained the imperialist exploitation of South

Africa intact) into a socialist revolution led by the working class.

The United Front has appealed directly to Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International for political, practical and material assistance in standing United Front candidates in South Africa's local elections on 3 August.

We are sure these developments inspire and encourage our sympathisers and supporters as they do us. We have a target of £5,000 and very little time. Please give generously.

How you can donate

1. Use the button on the top right hand corner of the *workersinternational.info* home page marked 'donate', making clear that your donation is for the Southern Africa Appeal.

2. To transfer from your bank account, send donations to:

Unity trust Bank

Account: *The Correspondence Society*

sort: 60 – 83 – 01

account: 20059400

3. Send cheques made out to Correspondence and marked on the back "Southern Africa Appeal" to : PO Box 68375, London , E7 7DT, UK.

Yours in solidarity,

Bob Archer

New edition of The Worker/ Die Werker

IN THIS EDITION

Roads

Marikana support by Namibian miners

Truth & Justice

Letters

Editorial

Available in both English and Afrikaans here!

Issue 16 of the Journal April 2016 out now!

Inside this issue:

Europe:

Who can solve the 'Refugee Crisis' by Mirek Vodslon

How can we build a workers' Europe? by Bronwen Handyside

Draft Programme: A Europe fit for working people (for discussion)

Namibia:

Director of Elections, a letter and a communiqué

Committee of Parents / Truth & Justice Commission demands

Continued Human Rights Abuses

Report of a book launch

MUN Regional Committee supports Marikana inquiry call

Namibian Road authority's reckless roads

Religious ideology:

Discussion Article by Allen Rasek

South Africa:

UF march call