

# WORKERS INTERNATIONAL TO REBUILD THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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sectarian propagandists :

**Show Us What You've Got!**

Bob Archer (WIRFI) replies to *The Socialist  
Revolutionary Workers' Party: A major  
distraction*, by John Appolis.

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The forthcoming Launch Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party in South Africa throws down a significant challenge to intellectual Marxists.

Here is an embryo party which assembled over 1,000 activists in a pre-launch congress in December 2018, proclaims that its aim is to lead the fight of the working class against the bourgeoisie and their political allies, and proudly inscribes on its banner adherence to the revolutionary thought of Marx and Lenin.

To show they mean what they say, the forces in the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), which initiated this work, have spent 5 years systematically preparing the ground to launch this party.

It was the state-sponsored murder of striking miners at Marikana in July 2012 which dramatically laid bare the reality of society and politics in post-apartheid South Africa. Up to that point the alliance of South African Communist Party (SACP), African National Congress (ANC) and Confederation of South African Trades Unions (Cosatu) had justified and dominated a liberation (in the early 1990s) which has worked less and less for the benefit of the South African masses and more and more in the interests of a small group of black bourgeois and global capital.

At the end of apartheid in 1990-94, the leadership of Numsa lined the union membership up with SACP policy and the new Alliance regime. They blurred over a significant issue for the union members: many Numsa members supported a Workers' Charter for socialism rather than the ANC Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter, carrying on the line of the Stalinist rulers in the Soviet Union and the various Communist Parties around the world, dictated that liberation must be under the control of the black bourgeoisie and tribal leaders, and that capitalist property relations must remain intact. Militant socialist workers in Numsa were at this point persuaded by their leadership and figures in the ANC that the Freedom Charter could be adjusted to accommodate workers' demands, and that idea carried the day.

However, the Alliance government continued on a capitalist road which left no room for what workers needed and wanted. Adherence to bourgeois politics in the 1990s inevitably led to continuing the neo-liberal reforms which had already been started under the Nationalist regime. The

consequences of these policies brought growing resistance from union members and the masses.

For a long time, leaders of Numsa and some other unions tried to shift government policies from within the Alliance. Under pressure from their members, they fought to align Cosatu on policies that defended workers' rights and conditions. This set them on a course which eventually led to an inevitable collision with the SACP and ANC and within Cosatu itself.

The mineworkers' revolt at Marikana, the state's massacre of the strikers and the ensuing wave of militant struggle were the signal that the collision had matured to a point of qualitative change. The leadership of Numsa grasped what others could not articulate, that a new stage had been reached in class relations in South Africa which demanded a political step forward involving the whole working class. This led to the union's Special Congress of December 2013 and the adoption of a plan to work for a new political party.

Faced with bureaucratic chicanery in Cosatu, Numsa's leadership stood their ground and fought back, sought allies, and tested every possible way to oppose being expelled. Contrast this with the "up and out" tactics common in petty-bourgeois academic political circles.

The result was that, when they could no longer retain their membership of Cosatu, they were able to take a number of other trade unions with them. That led to the formation of a new and independent union federation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu).

### **Dynamics of class struggle**

Quite a few commentators on the left are unable to grasp the class dynamics involved here. How they misconceive the relationship between the Alliance government (whose current President appears to have green-lighted the police attack at Marikana – he certainly publicly excused it), the massacre itself, and the workers' movement and its leaders is quite instructive.

"The Re-Awakening of a People" is a Situation Paper put out by the Eastern Cape branches of the New Unity Movement in October 2017. The authors put the split in Cosatu and the establishment of Saftu on the same level as previous splits in the ANC which led to the formation of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and The Congress of the People (Cope):

"ANC splits have spawned Cope and the EFF; COSATU splits have spawned NUMSA and SAFTU. This has resulted in a weakened Labour Movement, not supportive of worker and community interest, but seeking political footholds to gain parliamentary privileges and patronage."

But the facts speak against this view. Although it claims adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Communism, everything about the EFF shrieks aloud

that it is a second-hand version of the ANC, demagogically denouncing its parent organisation on behalf of a disaffected claimant to a cut of the spoils, Julius Malema.

Cope was formed by supporters of President Thabo Mbeki after his nakedly pro-bourgeois policies, and his obscurantist backwardness over dealing with the aids epidemic allowed Jacob Zuma to force him out of office and replace him. Cope was led by Mosiuoa Lekota, who informed *The Sunday Times* that the ideology of his party would be one that embraces multiracial and multi-cultural participation in governance and promoting the free market. He denied any connection to Marxism and indicated that Cope was willing to ally itself with the (bourgeois) Democratic Alliance.

The comparison the New Unity Movement makes is purely abstract: a split = a split; all splits are the same; in their twilight, all splits are grey. The working class is left completely out of the picture in this comparison, along with any examination of the actual content of the split!

What the move by Numsa actually represents is a development in the long-drawn-out death agony of Stalinist politics and political formations and a step forward in the development of the working class.

However, the New Unity Movement cannot deal with this because they themselves have never systematically broken from the SACP's subservience to the black petty bourgeoisie and tribal leaders.

### **Abstract and concrete unity**

This Situation Paper even says somewhat later:

“What is especially troubling about the confusing NUMSA situation was that it could not have happened at a more difficult time for the working class. In 2012, workers had been butchered on a notable occasion on the Wonderkop koppie near Marikana ... At that moment, union organisation stood at a premium. It was imperative that all the union federations should stand together like one man and organise a worker fight back of historic proportions. This was not to be. Neither COSATU nor NUMSA were equal to the task.”

What chance in Hell was there that a Labour Movement led by that actual Cosatu would “stand together like one man and organise a worker fight-back of historic proportions”? It was precisely for demanding a “fight back” of any proportions at all that Numsa came under the hammer in Cosatu.

One is inevitably reminded of the situation in 1914, when one after another the socialist parties of Europe voted to support their “own” governments’ war efforts and workers in different uniforms and different flags were led into slaughtering each other. At that point, a line was drawn between these socialists in name only and the real socialists who went on to split away

and found the Communist International. **Which side does the New Unity Movement support, looking back?**

May it be remembered that officials of a major Cosatu union – the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) – were swapping bullets and blows with the Marikana strike organisers. The former NUM Secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, was in cahoots with the mining company and the police who carried out the massacre. You have to doubt the political acumen of anyone who can stand aside under those circumstances wringing their hands over “unity”. That ship had sailed!

Establishing working class unity requires concrete steps, action, and sometimes splits with the ones who are trying to hold the movement back. Abstract calls for “unity” only help those leaders and tendencies who betray workers and leave them victim to employer/state violence as at Marikana. The fact is that no significant working-class leadership or organisation at the time was “equal” to the challenge laid down by the Marikana strikers and the mass upsurge of militancy which followed the massacre. One group of workers after another went into action over a period of weeks. All the unions were riding a storm, which of course eventually subsided.

Many political activists, independently or in small left groups, acted bravely and selflessly too, but the effective organised response to Marikana came precisely via Numsa, who fought through a necessary break with the ANC, the SACP and the Cosatu leadership.

Some who were initially enthusiastic about the “Numsa Moment” (the Special Congress in December 2013 and the decisions taken there) have lost hope in the five years that followed. They wanted immediate positive results. When these remained elusive, they started to look elsewhere for a quick fix.

The thing about planned and systematic work is that the struggle takes spontaneous forms: the developments which might be expected often come in an unexpected shape. But without a plan and a strategy around which a cohesive group of activists can work and learn together, there can be no adequate flexibility in dealing with sudden changes and breaks.

Middle-class radicals can change their political affiliations “at the drop of a hat”, as often as they change their shirt. Serious organisations of workers cannot afford such luxuries. They size up the job soberly, calculate the time and materials needed, roll up their sleeves and get to work. Only in this way can they prepare themselves and their organisations flourish and grow in unexpected turns in the situation

So, step by step the Numsa leadership worked through the split in Cosatu, assisted the coming together of Saftu, saw the establishment of the United Front social movement and now anticipates the launch of the new party next March.

Last year a general strike which Numsa organised brought thousands out onto the street in a display of working-class strength.

Nothing about this looks like **playing** at politics or engaging in empty rhetoric.

Every Marxist intellectual worth her or his salt should be queuing up to assist this party by ensuring that its leaders and members have every opportunity genuinely to get to grips with the actual thought of Karl Marx and other great revolutionary leaders, study it and critically make it their own. Together with a serious study of the history of the workers' revolutionary movement and grappling with the current state of the imperialist world we live in, such work will steel the new party's ranks and arm it theoretically, politically and in terms of its human assets to guide and lead the working class and the masses.

### **“No regard to history, context and working-class experience”?**

But there are still groups who are skeptical of this development. One South African long-term activist writes:

“It is my contention that the formation of the SWRP is a distraction and not the appropriate call in the present conjuncture. Also the SRWP is being formed with no regard to history, context and working class experience”: (in *The Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP): A major distraction* by John Appolis.)

He decries the lack of a “position paper that outlines the perspectives of the SRWP”. He points out that the new party's manifesto and constitution lack any “outline of the nature of the present period, the balance of forces, the state of the working class and its formations”. He believes that the statements in the Manifesto about capitalism, socialism, the working class” etc. are “generalities, that could have been written at any stage of the development of the working-class movement”.

We will return later to Appolis' attitude to working-class political parties in general. The point here is: does Appolis himself grasp the character of the period?

Let us here just mention briefly a few aspects of the current situation (the “conjuncture” or “context”):

- we live in the consequences of the decay and collapse of the Soviet Union, which is (wrongly) felt and understood by millions of working-class people to demonstrate the collapse of all hope of socialist proletarian revolution. All working-class organisations – political parties and trade unions – have suffered from crisis and decay, and this has led to widespread disillusionment with these organisational forms;
- therefore, there is enormous confusion among all the masses all over the world; basic conceptions of class struggle which our forefathers would have

taken for granted have withered;

- all that nevertheless intersects with a further catastrophic deepening of the crisis of imperialism which brings down poverty, misery, oppression and the threat of war upon the masses, including workers, together with a frustration of democratic aspirations, forcing them to organise resistance despite and amid the confusion;

Signs of a **political** recovery start to emerge among the confusion wherever class issues start to predominate. For example, in the “yellow vest” movement in France, very broad swathes of the masses react angrily to the shift of tax burden away from big-business and the super-rich onto the shoulders of workers and other “petit peuple” – “small folk”. (They also have a keen class appreciation of President Macron’s arrogant posturing). This is a small but significant step further than the “Occupy”, “Indignados”, “Squares” protests of the last ten years. Similarly, in Hungary, an authoritarian “populist” government tried to give employers the right to exact overtime from workers to an even greater degree than they already can, fanning the flames of a genuinely “popular” revolt over a class issue.

The working class has held on to its trade unions (in some places and by the skin of their teeth). Those trade unions which have resisted class-collaboration (social partnership) and retained their class-consciousness are now a vital source of strength in the regeneration of working-class politics. Numsa is one example, but Unite the Union in the UK, together with the civil and public servants in PCS, are another. And in the US, many teacher unions are spearheading class struggles in defence of education in their “social movement” campaigns.

The negative aspects of all the above are all too real and tangible, but the class struggle continues, and leaders emerge in the working class who are fighting to change circumstances.

The conditions described above are something to be reckoned with, but Appolis accepts them as something fixed and above all intractable. Indeed. He misses the real significance of the events at Marikana: out of all the confusion, **the class struggle emerged as the key issue**. Whoever else spotted the importance of the event, it was the Numsa leadership which was able to do something constructive to take the struggle forward.

Appolis sees Marikana as a “difficult time” for the working class, a “notable occasion”. What Marikana means more profoundly is that the fulfilment of the liberation of South Africa (and elsewhere) must be led by the working class under a genuinely revolutionary programme. For Marxists, that is the significance of the launch of the SRWP.

The December 2013 Numsa Special Congress clearly sided with the working class in class struggle against the bourgeoisie and recognised that the



working class needed a special organisation – a party – to wage that struggle successfully.

### **A distraction?**

John Appolis sees this as a distraction. He says: “The establishment of SRWP takes militants, especially NUMSA militants, away from building existing fighting battalions of the working class and poor”.

But trade unions are big organisations with (relatively) mass memberships. A properly-conducted trade union is always seeking to extend and develop its circle of active members beyond a core of officials and shop stewards. A great range of issues can engage trade union members, once they realise the union offers a field of activity and an outlet for their hopes. Moving into the political field will have its difficulties. Political party practices are different from trade union practices in various ways; there will be a learning curve. But the launch of SRWP will ultimately strengthen the trade union movement and bolster the consciousness and confidence of its members.

### **What political parties can do**

John Appolis goes on: “... what will the SRWP do which other organisations / movements of the working class cannot do?”

Well, at the very most basic level, if it grows properly, the SRWP can and must enter parliament and other elected bodies, push aside the corrupt ANC politicians, the DA etc. and fight to enact policies in the interests of the working people in economy, justice, housing, health, education, power supply, utilities, public ownership and workers’ rights for a start. Single-issue or localised campaigns cannot do this; Trade unions as such cannot do this, but Numsa has decided, as a trade union, to launch a party to unite all the struggles of the South African working class at a political level.

And when it becomes clear that the bourgeoisie will resort to every violent, underhand and anti-democratic trick to maintain its system and its rule, then the Party will have trained a body of vigilant worker-activists who will know how to foil their attacks and what to do next. Unlike the anarchists, we do not think the question of workers’ power can be settled without a workers’ party.

Appolis accuses the Numsa leadership of adhering to an “obsolete schema”: “workers’ parties are for the fight for socialism while mass formations like trade unions are for defensive struggles”. John Appolis refers to Trotsky saying in the 1930s that “in the period of imperialist decay, to fulfil their ameliorative tasks mass organisations that were established for reforms have to take a revolutionary approach to their tasks.”

But does anybody believe Trotsky was saying that specifically revolutionary parties were no longer needed? He was explaining (80 years

ago!) that trade union organisations (like Numsa!), despite the appearance of being “only defensive” were going to have to play a role in building political parties, and in their own properly trade union activities be a school of revolutionary struggle. Numsa turns to set up SRWP. Militant trade unionists in Unite the Union in Britain blow on the apparently dead embers of radical socialism in the British Labour party – and what once looked nearly moribund has come back to life!

In both cases, it becomes evident that there is more to being in a political party than there is to being in a trade union. For Numsa, the wall (between a trade union and a party) is something to be crossed. And they are learning how to cross it.

The dynamics of this period mean that less than ever can the rebirth of the workers’ socialist movement happen in obedience to purely academic positions. Class relations are utterly explosive. Marikana and the spontaneous wave of struggle that followed are surely a case in point. This struggle did not start with an academic person sitting at a desk and studying the situation. That’s not to say that knowledge and study are unimportant – far from it. Knowledge of the history of the movement, the history of socialist ideas and the Marxist method are decisive. Indeed, the founders of the SRWP went out of their way to request assistance in all these matters.

And they are not wrong to do so. It is clear from statements the “party leadership” have made that they have by no means broken with, or even fully grasped, the Stalinist roots of the disastrous politics of the SACP and the Alliance. It is perfectly true that the SRWP, both leaders and activists, have taken on a daunting theoretical and political job as they seek to revive “socialism, as espoused by Karl Marx” as a living force in the working class and masses. **But the fact that the work is underway provides the only hope that it might be successful. Those who claim any mastery of theoretical Marxism should put their shoulders to the wheel and help them.**

The Numsa leaders started their explanations by contrasting what the ANC government has actually done and how it has acted with the promises made before (cf. Irvin Jim’s Ruth First Memorial lecture in 2014). They still bought into the whole Stalinist programme, which dictated that South Africa must first have a “bourgeois” revolution so that the country could develop as a modern capitalist state, and that only after a period of organic evolution would the conditions ripen for a proletarian revolution. Where else could they start? **But start they did**, and this opened up a process in which they invited all and sundry to come and make their contribution. **Why hold back?** Abstractly “theoretical” comrades are left floundering, because it is trade unionists who, in relation to fundamental class-consciousness, for the moment are to the fore in the regeneration of the political movement. Bookish comrades fret over the

lack of “any outline of the nature of the present period, the balance of forces, the state of the working class and its formations” (Appolis). They believe the development of the political movement must wait for them to carry out all the necessary study and resolved the debatable questions. But it will not wait. It is needed now! “History, context and working-class experience” imperiously demand it!

### **Who is the propagandist?**

Appolis accuses those launching the SRWP of “propagandism”, which he describes as: “a type of politics where a group believes that through calls, it can make the rest of the working class leap from where it is politically to the groups ‘profound and more advanced’ understanding ... although conditions for the SRWP are non-existent, it is believed that forming the party would allow the masses to jump from where they are in terms of consciousness to where the party leadership is.”

This mixes up the relationship between the masses and the “party leadership” in this specific situation. The masses have for a long time been putting pressure on “their” leadership in the unions and the alliance government. The working-class revolt in 2012 burst the abscess that the Alliance was.

People were forced to take sides. But not everybody involved was able to take a political initiative, map a road forward. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) certainly was not at the time able to do so.

Appolis’ definition of “propagandism” is in any case a little off-target. He emphasises one aspect of propagandism – belief in the power of the word to solve all problems of the movement. But it is more generally recognised in our traditions that very useful political speakers and writers often fall into two categories.

Propagandists make detailed explanations of general issues. Organisations like the New Unity Movement (c.f. *The Re-Awakening of a People* – October 2017) ask a question like “What are the watchwords of our political movement during this period”, and the average reading might well expect just that – a set of pithy watchwords. But no! This is simply the opening for a disquisition upon the inhumanity of capitalism and the social consequences in terms of growing crime and depravity based on a series of examples drawn from media reports. “What barbarism!”, the authors complain (“What barbarism!” and “Kangakanani?” seem to be the only concrete “watchwords” at the end of the article). But: “We are comforted by the superior social values contained in the socialist system. Here the antitheses to the vulgarities and decay of old social systems have given way to a world in

which science, knowledge and kindness take precedents (sic) in all the affairs of human kind”.

This is pure (and frankly rather mawkish) propagandism, but there are situations where detailed explanations of theoretical points are useful.

“A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people,” as the Russian Marxist, Plekhanov, explained.

Surely a revolutionary movement needs people with both talents! However, a third talent, the ability to organise, is a key element which can have a mighty impact within the working class. The very systematic way in which the foundation of SRWP has been approached means Appolis’ accusation is misplaced. Yes, the party has been formed before its theoretical underpinning have been determined beyond a few generalities, but its foundation has been very carefully organised by a workers’ organisation. It will have an impact on mass consciousness. It has already had a very considerable impact through last year’s general strike.

### **Parties and class consciousness**

“... it is believed that forming the party now would allow the masses to jump from where they are in terms of consciousness to where the party leadership is,” writes John Appolis.

What does he say about “where they are now in terms of consciousness”? Well, he believes that “conditions for the SRWP are non-existent” and for good measure, he accuses the proposal to found the party as having “something elitist” about it. Why? Because, for one thing, “We have not yet arrived at the point where the question of power is on the agenda”. For John Appolis, building a working-class party will have to wait until, after “much effort and struggle”, “the proletariat has begun to replace the ruling class plans with its own”.

This formal understanding of working-class consciousness imposes a rigid strait-jacket upon the way it develops. The great mass of people, which includes the working class, always have “plans of their own”. They may involve the very smallest acts of individual resistance, groups getting together for the purposes of “building and strengthening the defensive organisations” – not only of the working class at the moment, but also of the broader masses left high and dry by the crisis of imperialism, and like the “yellow vests” now in France or some years ago the Poll Tax rioters in the UK. Here in the UK we have groups opposing cuts to welfare, housing and disability benefits, groups opposing the government-led attacks on the National Health Service and on state education.

The huge obstacle to achieving their goals is that government is

everywhere in the hands of political parties convinced that the domination of the bourgeois class is inevitable. Many previously socialist or communist forces have abandoned any hope of a socialist future and at best propose palliative measures to soften the blows which fall upon workers. They justify this by explaining in various ways that the class struggle is over and other issues are more important.

The Marikana miners' struggle, taken forward by the Numsa Special Congress decisions, gives the lie to all that and kicks open the gate to nationwide (and beyond!) united class action. Propaganda as just words does not build class movements, but when the words take on an organisational form, they become mighty indeed.

### **Conception of workers' power**

Stalinism corrupted the politics of the Communist International (CI) as it undermined soviet democracy in the Soviet Union. It was the political outlook of a relatively small caste of bureaucrats who ended up in charge of the fledgling workers' state. The conditions and ways in which this happened are matters which will need to be discussed in the process of defining the SRWP's political stance.

The point to grasp here is that Stalinism was a caricature of Lenin's revolutionary Marxism, the policy and practices of the Bolsheviks.

But the thrust of bourgeois propaganda (eagerly peddled also by many erstwhile "Marxists") is that Lenin and Leninism are to blame for the degeneration and decay of the Soviet Union etc. John Appolis is one of those who says this. He notes (not quite accurately) that Lenin's view of a workers' party was "... not only for political representation but also as an instrument for co-ordination of workers' struggles. He also saw the vanguard party as vital for two other reasons. *Firstly*, Lenin saw a vanguard party as important for synthesising of workers' experiences – i.e. theorisation of struggles. *Secondly*, he saw it as a repository of the class' historical memory".

He continues: "It is common cause that despite the existence of mass communist parties, many of revolutions of the twentieth century degenerated". In his view, the cause of this degeneration was that it was easy for "revolutions to degenerate when all three historical tasks ... (co-ordination of struggle, theorization and ensuring historical memory and continuity) were concentrated in one working class organ".

But there is no evidence that Lenin thought "one working class organ" could adequately embody the political life of the working class. Naturally, following Engels, he emphasised the significance for the revolutionary party of the theoretical struggle. This was far beyond "synthesising of workers' struggles". Lenin knew how essential it is to combat the ideological influence of

the bourgeoisie, who control the main educational facilities and mass media, and understood that overcoming the influence of the bourgeoisie involved critically mastering the achievements of bourgeois science and intellectual life. Lenin is painted by his enemies and false friends as a dogmatist, but that is far from the truth.

He did understand, however, that the revolutionary party is irreplaceable. And he understood that possession of their own party helped workers to raise their political horizon, intervene in the legislative process, get measures adopted which ameliorated their situation, freed the hands of their other fighting bodies (trades unions, tenants' organisations and other campaigns) to organise effectively.

John Appolis needs to stop equivocating and state: does he agree with the preceding paragraph, or has he abandoned Lenin's views on the party completely? There is a good argument to be had about Leninist parties, because his (Lenin's) views on the matter were systematically falsified in the later Communist International, in particular in one-sided interpretations of the book "What Is To Be Done?". This book is presented as if it proposes a hierarchical, top-down and bureaucratic party structure. All this will have to be clarified in discussion. What is not acceptable at all is the view that the working class can exercise its historical interests without its own, revolutionary, party.

### **Only in revolutionary situations?**

"We have not yet arrived at the point where question of power is on the agenda", says John Appolis, under the heading "(4) Conditions are not yet ripe for the SRWP".

Since the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, we have seen endless spontaneous protest movements of resistance in many parts of the world, particularly USA, Europe and the Middle East/North Africa. "Occupy". The "Indignados", the occupation of the Squares in Greece, were all responses to the impact of the crisis on working people, but they were all marked by an extremely low level of class consciousness and political clarity. The Arab Spring brought examples of breath-taking courage as the masses challenged authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, the Gulf states and most recently Syria. However, the best political demand they could come up with was a general thirst for "democracy" and rage at oppression and corruption. Almost everywhere, these movements have either subsided or (in the Middle East) mainly been smashed up. News from the Sudan indicates that a second round is very likely underway.

Why is the "question of power not on the agenda"? Because none of these movements has yet been equipped with an adequate consciousness of

the social and economic motive forces of the crisis which has engulfed them. All have been suspicious of parties and trade unions which came to them with explanations, and indeed prejudiced (because of negative experiences) against Marxist politics. What becomes clear is that (however explicable) this suspicion and prejudice is obstructing the forging of forms of consciousness and organisation which might equip the movement to struggle successfully.

**The objective situation of imperialism is truly not just “ripe” for revolution, but “over-ripe”. The subjective factor – the political consciousness and level of organisation of the masses, working class leadership – lags far, far behind.**

### **The WRP (Namibia) and the trades union movement**

In 1974, working class members of the SWANU Youth, SWAPO Youth League and the VolksParty Youth met in Rehoboth in a clandestine meeting convened by Hewat Beukes. They formed the Socialist Youth movement, recognizing that the tribal and bourgeois nationalist leaderships in Namibia were politically bankrupt and could only lead the country to a new capitalist state under more or less the same colonial and imperialist ruling classes.

This meeting was the almost natural outcome of the working class struggles which exploded in 1971/72 with the General Strike of contract labour nationally in various industries, agriculture and commercial businesses. The reciprocated infusion of the struggle for trade unionism in the massive struggles of the working class in South Africa since 1973 caused not only a pulsation in Namibia but accentuated the political division between the objectives of the workers’ struggles on the one hand and the tribalist bourgeois nationalism of the petit bourgeoisie and the tribal royalties and chiefs on the other.

The socialist group was founded to advance a socialist programme in support of the struggles of the working class and to counteract the bourgeois programme (lack of programme) of the nationalists. They recognized that the country would become independent under a bourgeois nationalist leadership, given the imperialist and Stalinist edifice behind them and the massive disadvantages facing the socialists. They resolved therefore to work tirelessly to prepare the working class for a speedy response to the inevitable merger of the imperialists and the tribalist bourgeois nationalists.

The socialist youth defended the working-class leaders in the great miners’ strikes and struggles after 1978 against the tribal onslaughts of in particular the SWAPO, but they were unable to prevent that leadership succumbing under slander, attacks, using their international connections and co-option of union leaderships. The socialists were now thrust into a new direction of struggle. By 1984. The SWAPO had totally dismantled and

neutralized the union leadership, whose top leader it had coaxed into exile, forced to write a constitution for the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), and then jailed. It replaced the leadership with SWAPO nationalists who drove the union movement into a reckless direction of impromptu wildcat strikes on such demands as the implementation of Resolution 435, which had as its cornerstone the protection of bourgeois private property. Hundreds and thousands of workers lost their jobs.

In 1984, the socialists clandestinely founded the Workers Revolutionary Party: they supported the Namibia Trade Union, a socialist union, wrote its newspaper, and counteracted the *agent provocateur* methods of the NUNW. It fought the tribalization of the workers' movement by the SWAPO and the NUNW.

In 1988 the WRP was able successfully to call out national protests against the illegal occupation of Namibia. The SWAPO leadership and the SWANU leader (who is now a SWAPO member) declined the invitation to make the call.

The foundation and work of the WRP were closely connected to the struggle for union rights and working-class organization.

Now Numsa, too, has boldly raised the banner of Marxism. The South African working class has reminded the world that this is everywhere the class which can guarantee a future for humanity.

Would-be intellectual Marxists can use their talents to the best effect by striving to make good any defects they perceive in the new venture. The problems of the SRWP are not that it is unnecessary; far from it! It is profoundly necessary! The problems with the fledgling party arise from the dismal effects of the political degeneration of Stalinism. But the foundation of the new party offers the best guarantee that these problems can be overcome.

*Bob Archer,*

*on behalf of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International,*

*January 2019*