

IZWI

LA BASEBENZI

MWP ISSUE NO.4

AUTUMN 2022

PRICE R10
OR SOLIDARITY
DONATION
R20-R50
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— LAUNCH THE — **WORKERS PARTY**

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BUILD FOR THE WORKING CLASS SUMMIT 25-26 JUNE 2022

UNITE ALL STRUGGLES AROUND WORKERS PARTY LAUNCH DATE

Momentum towards convening a second Working Class Summit has been regained. The first Summit, convened by the Saftu trade union federation, took place in July 2018 and was attended by 1,000 delegates representing trade unions, communities, youth and other organisations. Most importantly the Summit "...agreed on a need to build an independent, democratic and revolutionary working-class political party, which will be strong enough to conquer social, economic and political power, abolish the capitalist system and replace it with socialism." However, the process toward implementing this resolution by launching a workers party has repeatedly stalled.

The Covid-19 pandemic enormously complicated the reconvening of the Summit over the past two years. But this has not been the most important factor. The ongoing factional struggle within the Saftu leadership is at the heart of the nearly four-year delay. This struggle exploded into public view with the attempted suspension of Saftu general secretary Vavi by Saftu leaders aligned with the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (see pp. 8-9). Shortly after, the Saftu NEC dismissed Vavi's suspension as "unconstitutional" and suspended the four National Office Bearers who had tried to suspend him.

Comrade Vavi has publicly confirmed that central to the divisions in the Saftu leadership is the question of the SRWP and the workers party. This is something that the Marxist Workers Party has long pointed-out in explaining the repeated de-railings of the WCS's re-convening. The SRWP was created by a section of the Numsa leadership led by comrade Irvin Jim – which we have characterised as the SACP-2.0 grouping – to cut across the WCS workers' party process (see pp. 8-9, our website and *Izwilabasebenzi* No. 3).

At the beginning of 2021, in a previous attempt to build momentum towards the re-convening of the Summit, five discussion papers were commissioned. These are now being widely circulated in the movement. One of them deals with the workers party and makes proposals on the way forward for the implementation of the 2018 Summit's decision. Provincial summits were planned where these papers were to be discussed. At the first of these, in June in the North West, SRWP-supporting Numsa members objected to the presentation of this paper after all others had been discussed. The writing team's lead author, Weizmann Hamilton, general secretary of the MWP, was banned from attending the summit.

This paper, in addition to dealing with the programme, ideological and political foundations, principles and methods of building the workers party, also ties together and gives a way forward to the other four papers which deal with various manifestations of capitalism's crisis. We are publishing the workers party paper, starting on page 3, to assist in its widest-possible circulation as we believe it can help clarify many of the issues in the Saftu crisis.

It is good that the wrecking-role of the SRWP is finally in the public arena. It is unfortunate, however, that it was forced into the open by the escalation of the factional struggle within Saftu to a full-blown crisis. It would have been far better if this issue had been placed before the Saftu membership in an open and systematic way. Instead it has been largely hidden-away in the summits of Saftu's leadership structures where bureaucratic manoeuvres by *all* groupings has dominated over *open* political debate of the *real issues* in front of, and involving, *Saftu's members*. We warned about the consequences of this in our 2020 *Open Letter to Saftu Members* (available on the MWP's website).

The result is widespread confusion about what exactly is being proposed about the workers party, its relationship to Saftu, the place of the SRWP, its link to struggle, parliament and questions of programme, structures etc. Especially in Numsa this confusion has been consciously sown by the SACP-2.0 grouping, for example counterposing the "vanguard" SRWP to a "reformist" and "counter-revolutionary" "mass" workers party, exaggerating the role of NGOs in the 2018 Summit etc. The vacillations of a number of other individuals

and organisations in the WCS, blowing hot and cold on the 2018 decision to create a workers party, has deepened the confusion. For example a *campaign* for a workers party has been counterposed to setting a *date to launch* a workers party, WCS participants create new 'umbrellas' for struggle rather than promote the WCS etc.

The workers party paper proposes a way forward that answers this confusion. Of heightened relevance is the paper's analysis of the anti-working class 'Radical Economic Transformation' forces. Their influence is clearly a factor in the Saftu crisis. Not only is the SRWP blocking the unfolding of the workers party process, but Numsa's finance-capital-wing, its Investment Fund and subsidiaries – increasingly the tail that wags the dog – controlled by the SACP-2.0 grouping has been funding anti-working class political parties, especially those from the RET stable. We appeal to SRWP members to reject the strike-breaking role of the leadership and support the Saftu/WCS workers party process.

The broader political analysis in the paper, although a year old, has been further confirmed by events. The ongoing crisis of capitalism, already deepened by the pandemic is now worsened still further by the war in Ukraine. The ruling class continues to win battles in its war against the working class. There has been another austerity budget. The Concourt's upholding of the government's theft of the 2020 public sector pay increase has now clearly become an attack on collective bargaining itself as government announces in advance of negotiations wage cuts in real terms. Mass retrenchments in the private sector epitomised by the brutality of the Clover/Milco bosses are set to continue as the world economic crisis deepens.

The November 2021 elections, in which the ANC's vote fell below 50% for the first time, confirmed the overwhelming rejection of the capitalist parties by the working class and poor. The search for an alternative was again on display in the explosion of independent candidates and proliferation of community-based parties. The 'July riots' and the emergence of Operation Dudula and other organised right-wing xenophobic forces (see pp. 10-13), confirms that reaction stands ready to occupy the political vacuum. All of this demands a political response from the working class.

As a process of discussion and debate re-starts through WCS structures we encourage all Saftu members to read the workers party paper and all Saftu structures and affiliates to debate it. This is vital. Another of the consequences of the delays in reconvening the WCS has been the weakening of participation by *workers*. Trade unions, worker and community organisations are under-represented compared, for example, to NGOs and other petty bourgeois single-issue 'campaigns'. The involvement of the organised working class needs to be strengthened. To assist this trade union delegations attending the Summit should base themselves on workplaces, not union head offices alone, and prioritise shop stewards and other rank-and-file worker-activists over officials. It is the social-weight of the Saftu membership that will make the re-convened WCS a success and a breakthrough for the workers party possible.

The events of the past year have confirmed the political and economic perspectives outlined in the Workers Party discussion paper. Let discussion and debate finally begin. The discussion paper can only be enriched by such a process. But let it be about what is *actually* on the table and not the straw-men that have been mischievously created. **The Marxist Workers Party fully endorses the workers party discussion paper – forward to a socialist mass workers party!**



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WORKING CLASS SUMMIT DISCUSSION PAPER

Why the 2018 WCS Resolution to Establish a Workers Party was Correct - the Way Forward

"The Working Class Summit unanimously agreed on the need to build working class power in all workplaces, communities and society in general.

A clear majority agreed on a need to build an independent, democratic and revolutionary working-class political party, which will be strong enough to conquer social, economic and political power, abolish the capitalist system and replace it with socialism.

It was agreed that the working class is decisive in bringing about a radical socialist change, because of their role in the production of wealth, but that it needs to draw behind it, and into the struggle, all the oppressed people. The party must be a voice for the working class, but it must also unite all those involved in the anti-capitalist struggles that seek to bring about socialism.

In this regard, such a working class party must work to unite the broadest possible front of existing working class formations, which will lead to unity discussions and joint programmes.

A revolutionary party requires not just strong leadership cadre, but it must also be democratically owned and controlled by workers and not built from the top so that workers and communities become foot-soldiers rather than architects of the new party."

Declaration of the Working Class Summit, 2018

The decision at the 2018 Working Class Summit to move forward with the creation of a workers party was historic. Saftu must be applauded for convening that initial Summit and for re-convening it now.

The Declaration adopted by the 2018 WCS provides clear principles to guide the creation of a new workers party. The new party must be built on solid working class foundations and it must be led by the working class. The new party must defend its class independence from the influence of other classes and their organisations and political parties. Its programme must have at its heart the revolutionary struggle for the abolition of capitalism and its replacement with socialism.

In the two years since the 2018 Summit the world has been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has piled further hardship on the backs of the working class. Not only illness and death, but growing hunger, homelessness, poverty and unemployment. The pandemic has accelerated all of the underlying contradictions of capitalism. The economic dislocation has accelerated the looming sovereign-debt crisis. The response of the ruling capitalist class has been to intensify the war on the working class through attacks on public sector pay, the erosion of social grants, privatisation and cuts across the board to health, education and service delivery in general.

The deepening crisis in the ruling class is revealed in the intensified factional struggles in the ANC and the DA. Looting and profiteering has continued through the pandemic. This is an admission that there is no way forward for society on the basis of capitalism. But as Marx explained no ruling class ever leaves the scene of history voluntarily. Nor, as Lenin explained, will capitalism collapse on its own. It has to be overthrown by the conscious action of the organised working class. The death agony of capitalism will continue to engulf society, as the ruling class intensifies attacks on the working class. In attempts to divide it, it will encourage the creation of reactionary, racist, ethnic and xenophobic formations. This will continue for as long as the vacuum created by the absence of a workers party remains. The preparation for the building of a workers party to prepare for the conquest of power is an urgent necessity.

Consciousness

The working class is ready to begin this task. The period of mass illusions in the ANC has long-passed. It began to breakdown the day after the 1994 elections. The aspirations of the working class and poor masses for a radical improvement in living standards and a better life immediately collided with the reality of a government committed to the defence of capitalism. This basic contradiction has shaped

working class consciousness over the past 27 years. It is a process that has sometimes developed below the surface. At other points it has exploded dramatically and seized the attention of society. But the direction of travel has been clear – towards breaking the shackles of class collaboration and establishing the working class's political independence. Like an unstoppable incoming tide, the ebbs become increasingly shorter, and the flows become a flood.

As early as 1998, Cosatu's survey of shop stewards' political attitudes indicated 30% support for a workers party after only one term of ANC government. In 2005, Cosatu's CEC decided to establish Coalitions Against Poverty. Despite a boycott by both the ANC and SACP, 1,300 representatives from 70 organisations, including a sizeable delegation of Cosatu shop stewards, came together to fight job losses and poverty. Scared of its own success, and under pressure from the ANC and SACP, the Cosatu leadership wound-up the initiative.

The 1999 elections were the high-water mark in voter turnout. The struggle for political rights was won by the working class at the cost of enormous sacrifices. The steady decline in turnout reflects the growing bitterness of the working class and poor that so much was sacrificed for so little material progress. It has underlined that for the working class "democracy" is not an abstract principle. It is understood as a weapon in the class struggle. When that weapon is blunted because of the lack of a clear class alternative – i.e. a workers party – large sections of the working class see little point expending energy to wield it. But this has not meant passivity. Working class anger found new channels. Most notably the growth of service-delivery protests which have grown in breadth and intensity as electoral turnout has declined.

By 2012 Cosatu's shop steward survey found that fully 67% of its shop stewards supported the establishment of a workers party. The significance of this is magnified by the fact that this survey was completed *before* the Marikana massacre. It was this event, like no other, before or since, that drew a line in the sand, dividing the democratic-era into two. It transformed the working class's growing anger into a decisive realignment in the landscape of working class organisation – a decisive change of quantity into quality.

The NUM plummeted from the position of Cosatu's largest affiliate to fifth place as mineworkers', especially in the platinum and gold mines, abandoned it. This led, in time, to the rise of Amcu. Taking Marikana as its reference point Numsa's 2013 Special National Congress withdrew support from the ANC, called on Cosatu to break with the Tripartite Alliance and committed to explore the possibilities for creating a workers party. As a direct result, over the next two years, Cosatu split,

4 DISCUSSION PAPER

expelling its largest affiliate, Numsa. This led to the creation of Saftu in 2017. At its founding Congress Saftu picked-up the workers party baton and agreed to continue running with it. This led to the current Working Class Summit process.

What remains of the ANC's base amongst the organised working class in Cosatu's public sector unions is under severe strain as a result of the government's attacks on public sector pay. A further split is very possible. The creation of a workers party would almost certainly accelerate this process. The ANC's 2019 election results fell below 60% for the first time since 1994 posing the possibility of it not being able to form a government on its own in 2024. This would mean a pro-capitalist coalition between the ANC (or the CR faction if there is a split), the DA as Steenhuisen has already intimidated, and other smaller parties. It is not excluded that the EFF could join such a coalition. However it is constituted, its aim would be to preserve the current capitalist order. The fact that 9 million did not register means the ANC retains the active electoral support of only 28% of those who have the right to vote. What the ANC retains of its electoral support is not based on enthusiasm, but due to historical inertia that only continues because of the lack of a credible alternative.

Political

Since the birth of the South African working class the question of creating a workers party has repeatedly surfaced. There is no space in this paper to re-visit, for example, the creation of the CPSA in the 1920s, how the question of a political alternative was contested in the 1950s in response to the imposition of apartheid, or the debates that regularly gripped the reborn trade union movement from the 1970s in what is often remembered (and caricatured) as a struggle between "workerists" and "populists".

The post-Marikana re-alignment of the trade union movement – which is by no means complete – gave birth to two different working class party-initiatives. The first, the Workers and Socialist Party contested the 2014 elections; the second, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party contested the 2019 elections. Neither initiative achieved an electoral breakthrough. It is unclear if the SRWP intends to continue contesting elections. The experience and lessons of both initiatives should be brought into the WCS workers party process for discussion and debate by the activists that participated in them.

What marks-out the WCS process from these two initiatives is the broader working class forces already involved. Not only are there the community and youth organisations, working class campaigns etc. assembled by the Summit, but, crucially, a trade union federation, Saftu, organising workers across the different sectors of the economy as its anchor. This immediately places the WCS workers party process on a qualitatively higher footing than what has gone before and poses the very real possibility of the working class finally achieving a significant breakthrough on the political front.

Ideology & Programme

The 2018 Declaration's clear statement that the task of the new workers party will be to "...conquer social, economic and political power, abolish the capitalist system and replace it with socialism" is an excellent ideological and programmatic starting point for the new party. The struggle for the socialist transformation of society is clearly posed as *today's* struggle.

Implicit in this is the rejection of the SACP's 'two-stage' National Democratic Revolution (NDR). This theory argues that in the neo-colonial world a first 'democratic' stage of the revolution must precede a second 'socialist' stage. The postponement of the second, socialist stage means in practice, the prolongation of capitalism and the exploitation of the working class. Since 1994, the beginning of the democratic stage, this theory has been on trial. After 27 years it has been disproved. In neighbouring Zimbabwe, the NDR's trial is in its forty-first year with even worse results!

Instead of seeing the emergence of a 'patriotic' black bourgeoisie predicted by the NDR, that would be capable of developing society, a *parasitic* black bourgeoisie has emerged. The corruption in which this new 'faction' of the capitalist class is mired, indistinguishable from that of the predominantly white capitalist class under colonialism

and apartheid, has filled society with disgust precisely because it has occurred under a government democratically elected by the black majority. For the black bourgeoisie 'majority rule' meant dominating the summits of a capitalist economy. To fulfil their historic aim to dislodge 'white monopoly capital' from the summits of the economy, this weak upper class segment of the black population would have had to mobilise the black predominantly working class majority. Fearing that this would arouse the socialist aspirations so pronounced amongst organised workers and youth, and thus pose a threat to the very capitalist system into which it aspired to be absorbed, the ANC leadership prostrated itself before big business at home and imperialism abroad, abandoned the Freedom Charter and adopted the neo-liberal Gear policy.

Corporate tax cuts, and the consequent reduction in tax revenue led to the closure of teacher and nursing training colleges, commercialisation of basic services, and a decline in investment. This has led to catastrophic levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality more extreme than under apartheid. Thus the ANC has presided over de-industrialisation in favour of the easier option of opening up the public service and SOEs for self-enrichment through the creation of a highly paid privileged bureaucratic elite, and looting the public sector for tenders. Ironically for the NDR's 'democratic' stage, society is becoming *less* democratic. The police are increasingly used to suppress protests and even kill protesters. The right to strike has been curtailed and the unelected judiciary plays a growing role in defending anti-working class government policies from the pressure of the working class.

In reality the NDR was a Trojan Horse in the working class movement. Under the cover of revolutionary rhetoric it defended the interests of the aspirant black capitalist class. Its organisational expression in the Tripartite Alliance was designed to strip the working class of its independence and remove it from the national stage as an organised political force by mobilising the working class, via Cosatu, to support the ANC, a party committed to the preservation of capitalism and therefore of working class slavery.

Fast-forward to today and supporters of the NDR ultimately occupy the same ideological ground as the various 'Radical Economic Transformation' forces, including the Zuma/Magashule faction of the ANC, the EFF and others. The RET forces want to carve-out a bigger space for the self-enrichment of a 'black elite'. In practise this means defending their right to loot the public sector via the tender system, or various schemes to expand BEE, create 'black' state banks etc.

The ideological and programmatic step-forward taken by the 2018 Declaration that turns its back on these anti-working class ideas needs to be consolidated in the next phase of the WCS workers party process. The drawing of the ideological class lines needs to be deepened, making clear the working class's rejection of all wings of the capitalist class, black and white. This must include emphasising internationalism – socialism's lifeblood – to counter the xenophobia and racism of different political formations. This will become of even greater importance as the crisis in the southern African region intensifies and the need for working class international solidarity becomes evident.

For a socialist economy to meet the needs of the working class majority.

- Nationalise under democratic working class control the biggest companies in all the key sectors of the economy: agriculture, mining, construction, transport, manufacturing, telecommunications, wholesale, retail and distribution.
- Integrate nationalised industry according to a democratic socialist plan of production to raise wages – including a R12,500 p/m minimum wage – protect and create new jobs and end poverty and unemployment.
- Develop the trade union struggle for control in the workplace over wages, shifts, health and safety, job losses etc. into a struggle for workers' control of the production process itself.
- No to the privatisation of SAA, Eskom and the other SOEs! Re-structure the SOEs on the basis of socialist nationalisation and democratic workers control.
- Abolish all tenders and outsourcing in the public sector and SOEs. Kick-out big business 'consultants'. Bring workers and services in-house. Absorb all workers on EPWP, CWP, CHW and other slave-labour programmes.

Agreement with these ideas should be the basis for participation in the WCS workers party process.

Vehicle for Struggle

The new workers party must not be treated as a 'separate project' to the struggles being waged by the working class in the workplaces, the communities and by the youth in the schools, colleges and universities. The new workers party must first and foremost act as the unifier of working class struggle. This must happen organisationally but also politically and ideologically by the party generalising the experience of different working class struggles into a common programme creating a national reference point for the entire class.

The opening-up of a clear political front in the class struggle will strengthen existing campaigns and struggles. There is a long tradition of revolutionaries using hard fought for democratic rights and the structures of the capitalist state as an auxiliary to the struggles being waged in the workplaces and on the streets. The public sector workers are currently in the frontline of the class struggle. It is upon them that the fire of the entire ruling class – the government and the judiciary marching in step – is concentrated. They wish to break the power of the public sector workers and cow the rest of the working class into submission to save their system. The working class counter-offensive needed would be enormously strengthened if backed-up by a party mobilising the working class and youth throughout society behind them and promising to reverse and back-pay the cancelled final-leg of the 2018 pay agreement upon coming to power. The initial groundwork for this can be laid by EPWP workers acting as the frontline for the workers-party-in-waiting by standing one of their own to replace the corrupt councillors hiring and firing them at whim. Participation in elections can be an important tactic to take struggle forward.

Likewise there is a long tradition of revolutionaries using the platform of elections to expose the economic dictatorship of the capitalist class that lies behind the democratic façade. By for example basing the election of MPs on the principle of the right of immediate recall and of a worker's MP on a workers wage, the understanding of the entire working class about the tasks necessary to abolish capitalism can be raised.

This should be the understanding of the relationship between working class struggle and elections that the new party bases itself upon. Two fronts in one class struggle.

Campaigns

It is not only to existing struggles that the new party must look. For every group of workers that have organised together to find a trade union, or for every community that has created its own crisis committee, there will be another dozen that will do so if given a clear lead. The new workers party must help create its own constituency by leading campaigns out of which the structures and working class leadership of the party will be constructed. These could include:

- A campaign for R12,500 p/m minimum wage, linked to organising the unorganised in Saftu trade unions.
- A campaign to pay the withheld public sector pay rise and lift the pay freeze, again linked to building Saftu's public sector unions, with the goal of a public sector general strike.
- A campaign to repeal the LRA Amendments Act linked to agitation for a Trade Union Freedom Bill that the new workers party will table if represented in parliament.
- A campaign to organise all workers on EPWP and other slave-labour programmes to struggle for permanent jobs.
- A campaign to organise the unemployed to fight for massive job creation, linked to demands for increases in social grants, a basic-income grant and the massive extension of training via the TVETs
- A campaign for the nationalisation of the big construction companies and a massive public works programme to clear the housing backlog with decent houses for all in need.
- A campaign for free quality education, health and social services for all

These are suggestions. It would be prudent to ensure the platform covers the most critical demands and not be expanded to address

every ill in society. Additional demands can be included in the manifesto that must be developed as part of the process of building the party. The exact campaigns and their details should be finalised in discussion at the June Summit.

Interim Structures & Way Forward

Building the workers party will be a *process*. The initial structures used to *begin* that process will almost certainly not resemble the 'finished product'. It is pointless at this early stage to build elaborate castles in the sky.

The most basic work of assembling the raw working class material to make the new party a success must be the first priority. The basic socialist political programme outlined above should be used as the basis for engagements with other working class organisations that are not yet part of the process with the hope of winning them to participation.

To create momentum and interest for this a launch date for the party should be announced immediately. Workers Day 2022 [this should now be pushed to Workers Day 2023 - /zw/] would be an appropriate date for the launch date. A date would act as countrywide point of reference, end the sense of isolation of individual struggles and provide a sense of unity in struggle around a common purpose. The intention to contest the 2024 elections should also be declared. At the launch, decisions about the name, logo, manifesto and the further development of the party's structures and leadership can be taken. Before then, debates should be organised to build the maximum unity on all the key questions and to tease out points of disagreement for example.

A national steering committee should be elected at the WCS tasked with (1) carrying the process to the launch, (2) organising the necessary debates to prepare for the launch, (3) leading engagement with other working class organisations, and (4) overseeing the launching of campaigns to swell our ranks with the working class.

The WCS workers party process will rely enormously in this first phase (and probably beyond) on Saftu. This is as it should be. In taking this step Saftu has clarified that the independence it wishes to preserve is from the alien class pressures of the capitalist class. Intervening in the building of a workers party through its direct participation in its construction, the development of its programme, and its members and shop stewards occupying positions within and acting as its anchor while remaining organisationally separate from it, is the most effective way of supplementing the role of the federation as the guardian and champion of working class interests in the workplace, on the political plane.

As the 2018 Declaration correctly states "...the working class is decisive in bringing about a radical socialist change, because of their role in the production of wealth". As the basic organisations of the working class, the trade unions must be the backbone of the new party, and, as the Declaration continues, "...draw behind [the working class], and into the struggle, all the oppressed people." Saftu and its affiliates must have representation in the steering committee that corresponds to their social weight.

The development of Working Class Summit provincial structures must continue. These should be given the main responsibility for taking the agreed campaigns to the working class, striving to develop themselves into local centres of co-ordination for working class struggle. They should become centres of debate with different ideological tendencies supporting the process given the freedom to publish and distribute their views. There is absolutely no reason why the important and necessary ideological debates that will be a feature of developing the new party should paralyse action. It must be understood that WCS structures will become structures of the new party following the launch.

The working class is yearning for a democratic and unifying party that is capable of campaigning and giving leadership on all the issues that will make a real difference in their lives. It falls to Saftu and the forces assembled around the Working Class Summit to initiate it. Let us move forward in unity!

6 LOCAL ELECTIONS

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2021

Working Class DEMANDS a Political Alternative

The local government elections marked the end of an era. For the first time since 1994 the ANC, the so-called “party of liberation”, crashed below 50%. It was not only the ANC that was hammered. The working class, the poor and the youth saw these elections as an opportunity to show their rejection of the entire capitalist political establishment. Overwhelmingly this took the form of a stayaway, or abstention. Turnout sank to its lowest level ever. Across the country turnout in townships and industrial areas was down. Less than one in three eligible voters cast their ballots.

For Marxists, this was no huge surprise. The working class has suffered enormous hardship during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unemployment has increased to sky-high levels and poverty has deepened. At the same time the ANC’s so-called ‘cadres’ have indulged in a shocking orgy of looting. Billions have been stolen through corrupt PPE and sanitisation tenders, Digital Vibes and other scandals. The orchestrated sabotage and looting of the July riots demonstrated with fresh brutality the contempt that all ANC factions have for the masses.

Then, as if a further reminder of the ANC government’s incompetence and corruption was necessary, in the week before the elections, Eskom implemented the worst electricity power cuts in over two years. There is a sullen anger towards the political elite and a pervasive sense of futility towards voting for them yet again.

But many in the capitalist media, and even some on the left, are despairing over so-called “voter apathy”. However, Marxists have always understood that for the working class the right to vote is not divorced from the question of jobs, wages and services – the democratic and social questions are intertwined. It is at local level, in the bankrupt municipalities and the crisis of service delivery, that the working class sharply experiences the complete failure of voting to make any substantial difference to their lives. Again and again, when asked why they are not voting, people answer in terms of the lack of jobs, lack of housing and poor service delivery.

It is a mistake to describe the unprecedented rejection of the capitalist parties through mass abstention as “apathy”. Millions of working class people understood that voting for any of the capitalist parties, and especially the ANC, could not transform their living standards – they are right!

Alongside anger over disastrous service delivery, another powerful mood was the desire to punish the ANC by withdrawing the vote and refusing to help keep it in office. In the absence of a genuine working class alternative *not voting* for the ANC was the best available weapon to remove it from power. It is to the ANC’s deep shame, that a weapon last used against the apartheid regime’s puppet Tricameral parliament and black local authorities, has now been used against the so-called “party of liberation” itself.



CAPITALIST PARTIES FAIL TO INSPIRE

Ruling Class Political Crisis

The ANC’s electoral decline did not come out of a clear blue sky. It had been warned and punished in the 2016 local elections, losing its majority in three of the country’s most important metros – Tshwane, Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay. It was given a last chance in the 2019 national elections as many ANC voters’ hoped against hope that Ramaphosa, who had deposed Zuma, would keep his promise to clean out corruption. But its vote still fell below 60% for the first time and it only clung on to Gauteng by its fingernails.

Now the ANC does not control a single metro in Gauteng. It was only in Mangaung and Buffalo City that the ANC kept its majority, but with less votes than in 2016. In eThekweni the ANC managed to secure the mayoralty only after disrupting the previous day’s council meeting to give them time for arm twisting and corrupt horse trading. Across KwaZulu-Natal as a whole the ANC was brutally punished for the July riots. Their vote fell to just 41% of the votes cast.

These elections show that the ruling class’s political crisis is accelerating under the blows of the pandemic and economic crisis. In 2016 the DA and the EFF were able, at least partially, to attract some of the voters abandoning the ANC. But post-Marikana, this was more a vote *against* the ANC than *for* the DA and EFF. The fact that neither was capable of taking advantage of the ANC’s factional crisis shows that they are not considered as an alternative by the working class.

The DA lost nearly three million votes nationally compared to 2016, including huge losses in its Western Cape base. Even in the metros where they ended-up with mayors their vote crashed. The EFF nudged forward two percentage points compared to 2016 but scored a *smaller* vote share than in the 2019 national elections. Their vote

Only 31%
of the voting-age population cast ballots

12 million
voted

14 million
registered but did not vote

13 million
did not register

was down significantly in previous strongholds such as Gauteng and Limpopo. Wherever the EFF played a role in the post-2016 metro coalitions – in Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay – it lost support. A party established to exploit the legitimate grievances of the masses by posturing left, has been just as incapable as the unapologetically right-wing neo-liberal DA, of profiting from the ANC's losses. Combined, the ANC, the DA and the EFF have the active electoral support of only 30 out of every 100 people.

The idea of a resurgent Inkatha Freedom Party in KZN is also utter nonsense. The IFP's vote in KZN increased by just 48,000. The ANC in KZN by contrast *lost* 1.6 million votes. Clearly these *did not* transfer to the IFP. The IFP's real electoral support in KZN is barely 9%.

The remaining votes scattered to the wind and the over 400 parties that contested these elections. Of these only two won more than 1% of the vote – the Freedom Front Plus and newcomers ActionSA. The small capitalist parties, including even the EFF, are the tiny bubbles created in the electoral waters as the large stone of the ANC and the small stone of the DA sink. The emergence of the working class as an independent political force will wash them away. However, until that happens, these tiny bubbles can play a role in the manoeuvres of the ruling class out of all proportion to their actual levels of support. This has been confirmed in the arrogant demands made by the EFF and ActionSA leaderships in the coalition negotiations. In eThekweni, the two councillors from the new reactionary Zuma-aligned Abantu Batho Congress, were able to ensure the election of an ANC mayor despite the collapse in its vote.

The results of these elections have massively worsened the ruling class's headache. The post-2016 coalitions, especially in the metros, were unstable. A fresh period of local government instability now lies ahead in the 66 hung municipalities. Where the main parties have been able to negotiate coalitions it has entailed the most disgusting and opportunistic horse-trading. This included the ANC voting for a convicted child rapist as mayor in Kannaland and for a convicted fraudster as speaker! Clearly, however hostile political relations may have been between the parties during the election campaign, the ANC, the DA, the EFF and their smaller competitors have no fundamental differences. This will further deepen the working class's disgust at the entire political establishment.

However, it is what these elections signal for the 2024 national elections that will be transforming the ruling class's headache into a migraine. Reversing the decline of the ANC seems ruled-out. But the outcome of these elections has also made the ruling class's reserve option of an ANC/DA coalition government more problematic. The collapse in turnout and bleeding of votes by both the ANC and the DA makes it highly unlikely already that they could command the active support of a majority of the population. A future national coalition government composed of unpopular parties resting on dwindling social bases would be no guarantee of political stability. Such a government would be one of crisis.

Working Class Search for an Alternative

Ultimately however, all of the ruling class's scenario planning – working out which combination of capitalist parties can govern on its behalf – will be made irrelevant by the emergence of the working class as an organised and independent political force.

The complete absence of a credible working class alternative was decisive in the working class's anger being expressed through a stayaway. Nevertheless, these elections conformed that where the working class *can* see a clear way forward electorally they will seize it. These elections were in fact historic for the widespread search for an electoral alternative that took place.

Over 1,500 independent candidates stood, 51 of whom were elected. This is nearly double the number of independent candidates who stood in 2016. If the independents were a party they would have finished seventh nationally. Although these candidates were a mixed bag, many were genuine activists looking to offer their communities an alternative.

Even more significantly, of the 400 parties that contested, 120 were various local-community movements, forums and ratepayers associations. A number of them achieved significant votes and won

REAL SUPPORT FOR CAPITALIST PARTIES

18%	8.5%	4%
ANC	DA	EFF

seats. In some municipalities they emerged as the second largest party! These parties are also of a mixed character. They generally lack any political programme beyond being anti-corruption and pro-service delivery. The idea that 'clean government' would be adequate to transform the lives of their communities appears dominant. Given their social character, local horizons and isolation, these limitations are virtually inevitable.

This explosion in independent parties and candidates is one of the most significant features of the 2021 local government elections. It reflects the yearning of the masses for an alternative, even if only a minority are actively seeking it at this stage.

Workers Party

The organised working class has the social weight to give the search for a political alternative programmatic and organisational cohesion. The responsibility for helping to bring a mass workers party into existence remains with the Saftu trade union federation and the forces assembled around the Working Class Summit. What these elections tell us about the mood within the working class should fill Saftu members and Working Class Summit participants with enormous optimism.

We have seen a widespread rejection of *all* the major capitalist parties and an historic number of independent candidates and community-based challenges. This is a clear answer to those who claim that the working class is "not ready" for its own political party. The stagnation of the EFF vote and its loss of support also answers those who see the EFF as an obstacle to building a workers party.

The Working Class Summit is now scheduled to go ahead in 2022. The activists and community organisations that contested these elections must be brought into the process. The activists and shop stewards of Saftu's affiliates are best placed to identify on the ground which individuals and organisations are genuine. The struggles that pushed them to contest must find a home in a new workers party. A workers party must unite struggles and lead campaigns that can make a real difference in the day-to-day lives of communities.

The ruling class and the capitalist parties will be despairing at the outcome of these elections. They are filled with fear and uncertainty for the survival of post-1994 capitalist democracy. The working class political vacuum is now extreme. The emergence of reactionary parties like the xenophobic ActionSA, and the Patriotic Alliance and the Cape Coloured Congress, seeking to inflame racial tensions, are a warning to the working class.

Saftu and the Working Class Summit must finally seize the moment and push ahead with the creation of a mass workers party that sets as its goal the struggle for a socialist South Africa, a socialist Africa and a socialist world.

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SAFTU CRISIS What was behind the attempt to oust Comrade Vavi?

The attempted suspension of Saftu secretary general, Zwelinzima Vavi, by National Office Bearers who are members of the Numsa-sponsored Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP), threatens to throw Saftu and the entire workers movement into an even deeper crisis than it is in already. It is not just an attack on comrade Vavi, but on Saftu as a whole. This is a matter for all trade union members, activists in the working class movement and socialists. It is not, as has been suggested on social media by leading Numsa members, a matter for Numsa members alone.

There has never been a greater necessity for the working class to unite. The capitalist class and their ANC government's attacks have been escalated to a qualitatively new level. Whilst the ruling class is united in a common purpose, the Saftu NOBs are sowing division in the working class at the worst possible time. This is why the capitalist media has seized on Vavi's suspension with glee. It takes place against the background of the capitalist ruling class' most serious attack on the working class since the dawn of democracy.

- Its executive arm, cabinet, has passed a budget of savage cuts in social spending, in health, education, housing and social welfare, whilst gifting the bosses a R6bn corporate tax cut.
- Its judicial wing in the Constitutional Court has upheld the government's decision not to pay the salary increases due to public sector workers in 2020.
- In the private sector Clover/Milco has contemptuously torn-up the Competition Commission merger agreement to create jobs. They are retrenching 800+ workers and threaten 30% salary cuts.

In language dripping with class antagonism, the ConCourt echoed the views of the neo-liberal capitalist anti-working class think tank, the Free Market Foundation, denouncing public sector workers for getting "illicit" increases at the expense of the poor. Its judgement has stripped collective bargaining of all meaning. The government has announced in advance of this year's collective bargaining that workers will get no more than the insulting increases they received in 2021 – cuts in real terms.

The world economy, still struggling to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, is now faced with the possibility that it might be tipped into a global recession by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. All the assumptions Godongwana's 2022 budget were based on – the projected world fuel price, global interest rates, and commodity prices – have gone out of the window. Beginning with a second interest rate hike by the Reserve Bank this coming week which will increase the indebtedness of the 19 million 'credit impaired', leading to more house, car and furniture repossessions, the government is bound to deepen the social spending cuts in the coming period.

The actions of the Saftu NOBs are, from the standpoint of the working class, absolutely criminal politically. They are acting, as Trotsky explains in his pamphlet, *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, as the "lieutenants of capital in the labour movement". The Saftu NOBs leading this attack on comrade Vavi are experienced trade unionists. They are, moreover, as was pointed-out at the Saftu-affiliate's press conference, custodians of the Saftu constitution. They know that only the National Executive Committee has the power to suspend NOBs. Why proceed with this action knowing in advance that it has no legal force or effect? Comrade Vavi had an answer in his interview on NewzRoom Afrika on 21 March. It was a bureaucratic manoeuvre designed to present the Saftu NEC taking place in a few days' time with a *fait accompli*.

Distraction from Numsa Corruption

The Saftu affiliates and comrade Vavi are correct. This is not a simple constitutional mis-step. It is a cynical attempt, ahead of Saftu's



DELEGATES AT THE JULY 2018 WORKING CLASS SUMMIT

May congress and especially Numsa's June congress, to distract attention from the revelations of eye-watering corruption in the Numsa Investment Company (NIC) whose insurance and funeral underwriter subsidiary, 3Sixty Life, has been placed under provisional curatorship. It is an attempt to ensure comrade Ivin Jim's re-election within Numsa, and, through Vavi's ouster in Saftu, ensure his control of the federation's NOBs.

Court documents reveal shocking findings by the Prudential Authority (the body responsible for oversight of financial institutions) that, amongst others, the NIC's funds have been used to buy a laptop for comrade Jim's daughter and fund a birthday party for himself. Outrageous as this is, the amounts involved, R15,578 and R40,430, respectively, are small change compared to the regular monthly payments of R200,000 to a "Numsa Benefit Fund" that does not exist, or the more than R2 million in donations to political parties disclosed by the Independent Electoral Commission in February.

amaBungane reports that "the disclosures show that 3Sixty Health Solutions, a subsidiary of the investment company, was a significant donor to multiple parties. The IEC report for the third quarter of the last financial year revealed that ... Health Solutions paid R800,000 to the ANC, R600,000 to the EFF with an additional R150,000 "in kind" contribution, and R200,000 each to the African Transformation Movement (ATM), Patriotic Alliance (PA) and Good." (*Daily Maverick* 02/03/2022). As amaBungane points out the relatively small 3Sixty Health Solutions' donations are on the larger end of the amounts declared. Even JSE-listed Naspers, which dominates the exchange, donated only half that amount.

Turning reality on its head, the pretext for the NOBs' attempted suspension of Vavi, is misuse of a Saftu credit card for relatively small purchases of airtime and e-hailing services. No amount of financial mismanagement is of course too small to be accounted for in the labour movement. But comrade Vavi has since published all his credit card transaction on social media and there appears to be no wrongdoing. It is comrade Jim who should account to the Numsa members and SRWP members for how a union and a party that stands for socialism can hand over workers money to avowedly capitalist parties. The ANC, the main instrument for post-apartheid rule, the EFF, ATM and PA leaderships are either riddled with corruption or have criminal origins and are openly promoting xenophobia.

In a 2020 letter to all affiliates following a previous attempt by comrade Jim to recall Vavi, as if he was a Numsa deployee, comrade Vavi asked which class forces does comrade Jim's grouping represent? The same question should be asked about this attack. Which class interests does it serve? The answer to this question is that it serves those of the more corrupt of the two factions fighting to retain control the ANC

– the Radical Economic Transformation faction (RET) of which comrade Jim is a public supporter on Twitter. It is a two-pronged strategy of destabilising and paralysing Saftu on the trade union front and, through the SRWP, on the political plane.

“...3Sixty Health Solutions, a subsidiary of the [Numsa] Investment Company, was a significant donor to multiple parties... [it] paid R800,000 to the ANC, R600,000 to the EFF with an additional R150,000 “in kind” contribution, and R200,000 each to the African Transformation Movement (ATM), Patriotic Alliance (PA) and Good.”

– Daily Maverick, 02/03/2022

Origins and role of SRWP

These donations to the enemies of the working class underlines what the MWP has pointed-out are the real reasons why the SRWP was created (see our *Open Letter to Saftu Members* on the MWP website). The SRWP was created to thwart the formation of a genuine workers party as resolved by Saftu's 2017 founding congress. It is for this reason that SRWP-supporting members attempted to collapse the 2018 Saftu-convened Working Class Summit attended by 1,000 delegates representing 147 trade union, youth and community formations. Comrade Jim threatened to lead a walk-out of the Numsa delegation from what was potentially the most important political gathering of working class formations since 1994.

It is to his great credit that comrade Vavi saved the WCS from collapse by warning comrade Jim that history would judge him harshly should he walk-out. The Summit went ahead and adopted a declaration to establish a mass workers party on a socialist programme. Since then, the Saftu NOB SRWP members, under the direction of comrade Jim, have attempted to paralyse the implementation of both the Saftu and WCS resolutions.

The SRWP contested the 2019 general elections. Its failure to win even a single seat represented an emphatic rejection by Numsa members of a party that contested the elections in their name. An historic opportunity was lost. With all the main capitalist parties in various states of crisis, and the ANC itself increasingly rejected by working class voters, the SRWP could have won at least ten seats on the strength of Numsa's 340,000 members alone; with their families and that of Saftu's members and their families it could have emerged as the biggest opposition in parliament.

Saftu's Political Position

In the wake of these attacks, Saftu has resuscitated the Working Class Summit process and a date for the convening of a second summit will be decided upon soon. The MWP welcomes this development whole heartedly.

Whilst it is true that the attack on comrade Vavi and Saftu has the potential to create a new crisis, it must also be recognised that Saftu has been treading water. Saftu has not met the working class's expectations of its launch five years ago. Saftu's membership has not outgrown Cosatu's. Many affiliates are weak, and this problem is aggravated by affiliates competing for members in the same sector, determined to hold on to their positions as presidents and secretary generals at the expense of workers unity. A systematic federation-wide campaign to organise the unorganised in both the public and private sectors has not been undertaken. Yet, such a campaign, seriously embarked upon, could rapidly swell Saftu's ranks in a short space of time. Saftu leaders must recognise that it has no God-given right to exist. It must earn it through struggle, through organising and returning the working class movement to its ideological socialist roots of its birth in the struggle against apartheid.

The reason for the federation's weaknesses are primarily political. Saftu has not yet offered the working class more broadly an alternative on the political plane. For example, the MWP has criticised comrade Vavi for his reformist position on the capitalist crisis in SA. He counter-poses a social-democratic heart transplant on decayed capitalism to Irvin Jim's RET-inspired capitalism with a black face.

Saftu's leadership, across all affiliates, appears not to have understood that the birth of the new federation was a political event. It arose out of the Marikana massacre, an event that underlined the inseparable connection between the struggle in the workplace and

the political arena. Marikana drew a line between a period of political illusions in the ANC and the more conscious and active search for an independent working class political alternative.

The MWP believes that Saftu's "independent but not apolitical" policy is a one-sided reaction to the Tripartite Alliance experience where Cosatu surrendered its political, ideological and class independence to the ANC. The problem, however, was not the alliance with a political party in and of itself, but that it was in an alliance with a *capitalist* party.

The only way Saftu can insulate itself from the influence of capitalist parties is to contest the political arena by taking the lead in creating a workers party. There is no contradiction between Saftu retaining its independence as a trade union federation even as it plays midwife to a new party. Such independence would be crucial to hold such a party to account.

Saftu's founding congress resolution to establish a Political and Ideological Commission led to a clear recommendation in March 2018 to create a workers party – the obvious wish of the delegates at the Saftu congress. This overtook the "independent but not apolitical" slogan. But the blocking of the implementation of these, and later, resolutions by Jim's grouping has meant Saftu has a confused, often contradictory, political position. This is reflected in the low level of Saftu affiliate participation in the Working Class Summit. It is also reflected in the failure to build Saftu locals where an organic connection between working class community and workplace struggles severed under Cosatu should be re-established. In the absence of the social weight of the organised workers, the WCS process has come to be dominated by academics and NGOs. There is confusion over, and even opposition to, a workers party amongst them.

Working Class Summit Reconvening

The capitalist class' main political parties are in various states of crisis. Their strategists are preparing contingency plans in case the ANC's vote falls below 50% in 2024 as in November 2021. They are sponsoring new formations like ActionSA preparing for a pro-capitalist coalition. The working class must prepare for this by creating its own party.

The attack on Vavi must be answered by Numsa members reclaiming their union and restoring its revolutionary socialist traditions. Saftu members as a whole must assert that the federation is their organisation. All issues must be placed before the membership. The members will decide who is to lead it and what its policy, including on the question of a workers party, should be. There is an urgent need to create a more organised 'left-opposition' within Saftu – openly declared – that stands upon clear socialist political foundations and in defence of worker-control and democracy.

The attacks from the capitalist class and the ANC-government must be answered with mass action as a counter-offensive against the savage austerity budget and the ConCourt judgment. It is vital that the reconvened summit should set a date for the launch of a mass workers party, e.g. Workers Day 2023, one year from now. Setting a date for the launch a workers party well in advance would provide time for all the structures to be created on the basis on uniting all struggles in the workplace, communities, and in education institutions around a common political programme. The launch of mass workers party on a socialist programme would alter the political landscape decisively not only in SA but throughout the continent and worldwide.

OPERATION DUDULA & CAPITALIST REACTION

How should the working class understand and respond to organised xenophobia?

The majority of people have reacted with horror at the violent death of Elvis Nyathi, stoned and burned to death by a murderous mob in Diepsloot. According to his wife the mob had broken into their dwelling and demanded R300. When she offered them the only money she had, R50, they turned on him, pursued him as he fled, cornered him and took his life. The MWP condemns this act of unbridled barbarism. We express our sympathy and solidarity with his family and indeed the entire Diepsloot community amongst whom he had lived in peace.

Nyathi happened to be Zimbabwean and was of course killed for that reason. But he could easily have been South African. In the 2008 outbreak of xenophobic violence, of the 63 who lost their lives, 21 were South African. Of course, the lives of the other 42 immigrants were no less valuable than those of the South African killed. This wave of xenophobic violence, which has only just begun, is taking place under even worse social conditions than those of 2008 when capitalism first exposed its barbaric underbelly.

It is a warning particularly to the black working class amongst whom these events are so far confined, but which can break out into other racial and ethnic communities in future. The events in the predominantly Indian town of Phoenix during the July riots are a warning of what is possible. Inherent in it is the possibility of not only even worse pogroms against immigrants, but of inter-ethnic and even racial conflict amongst South Africans themselves.

As the July riots also showed, criminal gangs lurking in the crevices of a capitalist system in crisis, which have no particular political agenda, are always poised to take advantage of such upheavals adding to the mayhem.

Working class people have absolutely nothing to gain from such reactionary developments. The majority of working and middle class people, even those susceptible to the appeal of the xenophobic messaging, do not support the violence and recoil from it in revulsion. But in the climate created by the xenophobia, and the social conditions in which it breeds, it requires only a small minority to act. As the violence and mayhem is unleashed, the majority look on horrified but passively, paralysed by a lack of leadership.

As we explain below, responsibility for this wave of social and political reaction lies squarely on the shoulders of the ruling economic and political elite – the capitalist class and their servants, the ANC government. To their criminal role has now been added, with greater stridency, the voice of opposition parties old and new. The leaders of some of them, just like their political antagonists in the ruling ANC, are directly or indirectly implicated in the rampant corruption that has aggravated the economic and social crisis.

Only the working class can halt this xenophobia. These events are a warning to the working class to organise to combat this phenomenon and the social and economic crises the capitalist system has created. The even worse pogroms that may come will induce greater paralysis, deepen the sense of helplessness and divide and weaken working people even more. Most important of all, xenophobic attacks will solve absolutely nothing. A divided working class will be even weaker in the face of the attacks by the capitalist class and their government that the crisis of their system obliges them to escalate.

How is xenophobia connected to the social, economic and political crisis?

Over the last seven years SA capitalism's stagnation has continued. Two 'technical' recessions preceded the biggest collapse in economic output since 1945 under the blows of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. Two years later and the economy is still smaller than before the pandemic. Since 2015 GDP per capita has decreased – people have gotten poorer. Unemployment has headed only upwards.

During the last explosion of xenophobic violence in 2015, Jacob Zuma was in power. The 'Radical Economic Transformation' faction and its 'state capture' project was only just beginning its descent from power. Since then the ruling class's political crisis has gone from bad to worse. Ramaphosa's 'new dawn' came to nothing. Seven years of debilitating factional conflict within the ANC, but increasingly spilling out of it, culminated in the unrest of July 2021. This revealed like never before that the RET faction had gathered around itself, to borrow a phrase from Trotsky, "all the putrid vapours of disintegrating bourgeois society". It mobilised criminal networks and mafias posing as so-called "business forums"; the xenophobic murderers of the All Truck Drivers Forum; the tribally-based criminal networks of the hostels and supporters within institutions of the Zulu monarchy; thugs masquerading as MK veterans; the SANDF "Cadres" group within the army; and the anti-democratic 'rogue' elements created in Zuma's 'deep state' centred on the State Security Agency.

Corruption has continued unabated. The pandemic itself became a new license to loot. The masses' anger and frustration with all the capitalist politicians and parties has grown relentlessly. In the November 2021 local government elections quantity transformed into quality. The ANC's vote sank below 50% for the first time in the face of massive voter abstention. The DA and the EFF were incapable of capitalising on the ANC's losses. They shed huge numbers of votes themselves. The established capitalist parties are panicking and growing more and more desperate. A new crop of political opportunists is growing-up in the likes of ActionSA, the Patriotic Alliance etc. The crisis of the main parties and the huge vacuum of working class politics rewards them with a role out of all proportion to their real social support.

These are the processes that have both created Operation Dudula and set the stage that it has emerged on to. Its xenophobia is repulsive. But under the pressure of the ever-deepening crisis of capitalism and the political crisis of the ruling class the reactionary role that Dudula could play is not automatically limited to potentially spearheading a repetition of the 2008 and 2015 explosions of xenophobic violence.

Operation Dudula Politically Exploits Poverty and Destitution

The capitalist ANC government's "solution" to the crisis has only deepened it. It placed the burden of the crisis on the shoulders of the working class by intensifying austerity with eye-watering cuts in social spending, on education, health, social services and housing especially, whilst cutting taxes for the rich. The result a mushrooming of informal settlements in the face of a growing housing backlog and collapsing local government and infrastructure. The services it should provide to communities are missing in action. The police forces are dysfunctional and riddled with corruption. In the vacuum crime, drugs, gangsterism and gender-based violence have become epidemic. Across the board there is a growing social collapse.

The relative success of migrant small businesses is due to the cheaper goods compared to the supermarket chains and mega stores in urban and rural areas, longer opening hours and even credit to customers. This has created conflicting class attitudes towards them within communities. The poor prefer the custom of foreign-owned spaza shops whose businesses consequently flourish. Small entrepreneurs on the other hand, often the victims of predatory pricing by big stores, extortionate interest rates by financial institutions and a lack of state support despite the establishment of a ministry dedicated to small business, suffer a high business failure-rate and look upon foreign-owned businesses with envy. Despite their widespread presence in working class communities, foreign migrant communities are not integrated with the local communities, socially, economically or politically.

In these conditions, Operation Dudula is able to falsely blame foreigners for mass unemployment and crime, especially drug dealing. It demands that foreigners must be expelled from the country so that 100% of jobs and informal and small business opportunities can go to South Africans. Over this 'core message' is peppered anti-establishment and even semi-class rhetoric that appeals to people's enormous anger at corruption, the ANC-government and all capitalist politicians in general.

Operation Dudula criticises the police for inaction against criminals and 'illegal' foreigners but claims its intention is only to 'help' the police by reinforcing them with Dudula activists and 'operations'. This posture as defenders of 'law and order' is mixed with nationalist rhetoric about reclaiming South Africa's "sovereignty" from foreigners. Operation Dudula explains the misery and desperation of the masses as a result of South Africans being disenfranchised in their own country. Locals are, they claim, forced to the back of the queue for jobs, housing and services by foreigners who enjoy more rights than them.

In longer interviews Dudula's leader, Nhlanhla Lux, mixes this right-wing populism with the *cause célèbres* of the black petty bourgeoisie. This includes 'radical' posturing on the 'return of the land' and calls for the unity of black people. This reflects the petty bourgeois class character of the Operation Dudula leadership. They are entrepreneurs and small business people. Lux himself is an avid golfer and claims to be a trained pilot. His family background is that of the so-called "comrade tsotsis" of the 1990s – the same pro-ANC criminal networks that evolved, particularly in KZN, into the RET faction's main base. Descriptions of Lux as a "toy soldier" or a "political entrepreneur" sums-up the Dudula leadership.

Tapping into an inchoate anti-party mood Operation Dudula styles itself a grass roots "movement". In contrast with the inaction and broken promises of out-of-touch politicians and unresponsive political parties Operation Dudula is on the streets promising immediate solutions to burning problems – anti-foreigner marches, door-to-door checks on foreign-residents' documents, evicting foreign traders from malls and markets and marches to large workplaces pressuring managements to disclose the number of foreign-workers they employ and demanding plans for their replacement with South Africans.

Capitalist Parties Stoke Xenophobia to Reverse Electoral Decline

Although Operation Dudula rejects the idea of being a political party, its actions have fed into and been adopted by the ruling-ANC and the more prominent opposition parties even as they hypocritically pose as opponents of Operation Dudula's violent 'excesses'.

Capitalist politicians from all the parties have repeatedly played with the dangerous fire of xenophobia over the years. Today, lacking any solutions to the economic and social disaster their policies have created, the main capitalist parties are trying to shore up their electoral sport by supplementing the economic and social exploitation of the working class with political exploitation. The temptation to do so by scapegoating foreigners is irresistible across the capitalist political spectrum. The ANC government itself has been stoking the flames anew with proposals to remove the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit and to amend legislation further restricting the rights of foreign-nationals to work and own businesses in South Africa. ANC spokesperson, Pule Mabe, has described Operation Dudula as "a constructive and progressive" community forum. Several other ANC leaders, including ministers, have also indicated their support.

The DA tolerated Mashaba's xenophobic outbursts for years when he was the DA City of Joburg mayor. Now the DA is competing with their ex-member in that space, demanding that governments of foreign nationals should pay for their medical treatment in SA. The climate for this was inflamed by Home Affairs Minister Aaron Motsoaledi during his stint in his previous portfolio as Health Minister, spreading fake news that foreigners are overwhelming public hospitals. The flames of xenophobia the EFF fanned through its highly publicised foreigner-quota workplace 'inspections', licked the party itself as Operation Dudula vigilantes violently raided the home of one of its

There is a real danger that the orchestrated and coordinated methods of the July unrest will be used to initiate a new wave of xenophobic violence far exceeding the severity and scope of 2008 and 2015.

own members in Soweto.

But none of this has done anything to arrest the capitalist parties' decline in support. Even to those parties that enjoyed some relative successes in November's election Operation Dudula appears to be tapping a mood that even they could not. ActionSA, the Patriotic Alliance and even Azapo are opportunistically falling over each other to associate with Operation Dudula. All the capitalist parties are attempting to shore up their electoral support by exploiting the despair of the destitute and the marginalised. All the capitalist parties have reinforcing each other's xenophobia.

The capitalist class, alarmed over the decline of their main parties are making contingency plans for a pro-capitalist coalition government given the possibility that the ANC may not be able to form a government on its own in 2024. Former *Financial Mail* and *Business Day* editor, Peter Bruce reflects the ruling class's priorities – to stabilise capitalist rule. However distasteful Mashaba's xenophobia may be Bruce confesses, "Mashaba is not my favourite guy but he's a capitalist who wants to create other capitalists, a free marketeer...".

In similar vein, *Financial Mail* columnist Justice Malala, reveals the despair gripping the capitalist ruling class. "The ANC has lost its way ... its leader has chosen the appeasement of his comrades above a strong stand for SA," Malala paints a scenario of the RET seizing control of the ANC, losing the 2024 elections, rejecting the outcome, capturing the IEC and rigging the elections. For that reason he makes a plea for ActionSA, despite its internal bickering, not be allowed to fail. "I find ActionSA's utterances on immigration deplorable and xenophobic, but that does not mean this party is not key to the strengthening of our democracy... Mashaba has at the very least shown himself to be a strong proponent of the rule of law, non-racialism and economic prosperity."

By pitting the poor against the poor, xenophobia can be regarded with benign neglect by big business. It is after all but a modern incarnation of the divide-and-rule policies that had served capitalism so well under colonialism and apartheid. This is why ActionSA is raking in millions in big business contributions. Bruce wishes that Mashaba could one day determine the country's political destiny.

Reactionary Pole of Attraction

Nor is big business the only social force with a vested interest in the success of these reactionary formations. The IEC report on party political donations reveals that the Numsa Investment Company, under the influence of its RET-supporting secretary general Ivin Jim, has betrayed every principle of working class solidarity and internationalism by donating R-hundreds of thousands to the ANC, the EFF, the ATM and the Patriotic Alliance thereby allowing workers funds to finance xenophobia. These are all different electoral vehicles of the aspirant black capitalist class. The connection between this and the attempt to retain the capture of Numsa by these forces, even at the cost of the destruction of the country's biggest union and that of Saftu, is not coincidental. It is located within the logic of capitalism, whatever variety the RETs inside and outside the ANC prefers.

Operation Dudula is also acting as a pole of attraction for elements of the coalition of RET forces behind the July riots. The All Truck Drivers Forum for example has supported Dudula's marches. The sinister use of social media to try and whip-up moods, set the terms of debate in the media and spread misinformation was a hallmark of the RET faction as far back as the Zuma presidency. It was used again in the July unrest. A campaign is again underway around the #PutSouthAfricaFirst hashtag and others such as

12 PERSPECTIVES

#WeWantOurCountryBack and #ForeignersMustGo. News24 reporters investigating the July unrest identified that “seeding violent conflict within easily splintered communities was part of the master plan...”. The circulation of anonymous WhatsApp voice notes threatening to attack Indian families, for example, was part of the background to the Phoenix massacre.

There is every reason to think that the RET faction would seek to harness Operation Dudula to their agenda. In the July unrest the “master plan” was to create anarchy to portray the government, and Ramaphosa in particular, as weak, helping to clear the way for his removal and their return to power. The furore around Operation Dudula has already prised open cracks in the Ramaphosa camp with key allies such as Thandi Modise putting forward positions on foreigners at odds with Ramaphosa’s. Thandi Modise is Defence Minister. The Cadre Group in the SANDF stands for the deportation of all foreigners within 90 days. Operation Dudula does not have to have been created by the RET faction, or be controlled by it, for it to serve such an agenda. The fact that Lux achieved national prominence defending Maponya Mall in Soweto *against* the July unrest is entirely irrelevant.

With the weeks ticking-down to the ANC’s December conference a new attempt to destabilise the country is a possibility. There is a real danger that the orchestrated and coordinated methods of the July unrest will be used to initiate a new wave of xenophobic violence far exceeding the severity and scope of 2008 and 2015. Instigation and organisation of xenophobic violence is nothing new. But up to now this has been limited to localised political and patronage networks. But Operation Dudula, regardless of the intentions of Lux, can potentially become a vehicle for the instigation and organisation of xenophobic violence on a national scale whilst serving as a front for other reactionary organisations. Dudula’s provincial launches do not need to attract thousands to lay the foundations for networks of the type that seeded chaos in July 2021. Against the background of the accelerating social collapse, the conscious whipping-up of xenophobia, and the absence of any alternative, matches can again be thrown on to the wells of anger and discontent in impoverished and desperate communities.

Consciousness & Crisis

The conditions for reaction to build its potential social base are being strengthened by disintegrating capitalism. The economic and social crisis also tells a story of the declassing and lumpenisation of growing sections of the working class. The capitalist workplace demands a collective response to exploitation against an enemy defined first and foremost in terms of class. Ejected from the workplace however, or never having been allowed to enter it, millions are forced into the struggle for survival as individuals. Who is to blame for their suffering is no longer as straightforward. In such a state, as the July unrest vividly demonstrated, this social layer is vulnerable to manipulation and of being mobilised behind anti-working class political agendas.

Operation Dudula is exploiting a mood amongst a layer of the working class and poor, borne of utter desperation, that something, anything, must be done and it must be done NOW – “we cannot suffer another day!” The furious rejection of the label “xenophobic” at Operation Dudula ‘operations’ reflects the crude idea that, “Yes! Of course we understand all of our problems cannot be reduced to foreigners, but the quickest way to ease the immediate pressure on jobs, housing and services, for us to get *some* relief, no matter how small, would be for these people just to go home!”

The anger at capitalist politicians is also increasingly felt toward the trade union leaders. The enormous frustration at the lack of leadership and outright betrayals is becoming palpable. New corruption scandals have been revealed. Absolutely nothing was done during the pandemic to arrest the jobs bloodbath. The two ‘general’ strikes called in 2020 flopped miserably. The attack on public sector pay was surrendered without a struggle undermining the entire collective bargaining system. Anti-working class court precedents have reinforced other anti-trade union legislation introduced with the cooperation of the majority of trade union leaders. The trade union leaderships are unwilling to lift a finger to organise serious solidarity action with the strikes that do take place –

Clover, Sibanye etc. The bosses dig in because they can, weathering damaging strikes to break the back of trade union organisation.

On the political front, the Cosatu leadership calls on workers to vote for the ANC. The Saftu leadership has squandered the momentum created out of the 2018 Working Class Summit towards the creation of a mass workers party. The SACP 2.0 grouping in the Numsa leadership has consciously sabotaged this process. Now they have been exposed as funders of anti-working class political parties, including xenophobes cheering on Operation Dudula!

The tectonic shifts that have taken place in society since the last wave of xenophobic violence, and the confused and complex consciousness this has given rise to, has largely failed to register on the trade union leaders and the wider left. In response to Operation Dudula’s emergence it has been business as usual so far. The complete failure of the trade union leaders to put up a serious fight against the disaster of the last several years is the decisive factor in the growing boldness of reaction and the emergence of organisations like Operation Dudula.

Operation Dudula is the newest symptom of the growing boldness of reaction in South Africa in the face of the huge working class political vacuum that has been allowed to persist. The vacuum in working class leadership is reflected in Operation Dudula in a distorted borrowing of methods from the class struggle – marches, the submission of memoranda to management, self-organisation and direct action. On a recent Dudula ‘operation’ in Johannesburg targeting a Pic N Pay supermarket protestors invoked the spirit of the 1956 women’s march and the 1976 youth revolt!

Incapable of recognising their own culpability, they are equally incapable of comprehending what can develop within their own ranks as result of their inaction. More than once over the past few years xenophobic slogans have appeared on trade union banners, including Saftu affiliates. Burning with frustration at leaders who refuse to lead struggle even some organised workers can begin to think of Operation Dudula, “At least *someone* is doing *something*! Until *you* are willing to lift a finger do not criticise.” To other workers abandoned by the trade union leaders and thrown on the scrap-heap of unemployment, the idea of marching to workplaces to create vacancies through ejecting foreigners, can, out of desperation, seem to offer a way forward compared to the total inaction and betrayals of the trade union leaders.

Despite the dangers in the situation the capitalist reaction’s position is precarious. Operation Dudula is not a mass movement. The RET faction is forced to operate in the shadows, its unpopularity underscored by the collapse in the ANC vote in KZN in November. It is only the massive vacuum of working class leadership and politics that is allowing these forces any influence over the working class and poor.

Moralism

But if the Operation Dudula movement is not a mass movement at this stage, neither unfortunately, is the opposition to it. The organised working class and the trade unions, themselves disorientated by xenophobic infections, are completely absent. The mainly middle class left-led NGO-type formations, have a predominantly moralistic approach. Instead of taking a class approach and campaigning for the unity of the working class of all African countries against their common enemy – the corrupt capitalist elites in SA and their countries of origin, they champion an abstract and false identity of the unity of all Africans – the capitalist exploiters and working class slaves alike. This is unlikely to resonate amongst those seduced by the Operation Dudula leaders’ message and has no prospect of either tearing them away from them, nor inoculate the rest of the working class against the toxin of xenophobia and its blood relatives, racism and tribalism.

The facts they raise are correct. Migrants are not responsible for crime, poverty, mass unemployment and inequality (see box). These facts, most of which are not generally known even amongst labour movement activists, must however, be explained patiently; not presented as nails to be hammered into the skulls of the wilfully ignorant.

There are now more than 12m unemployed in SA. Only about 1m of the estimated 3m migrants in SA are in some form of employment. Even if every single migrant were to be deported it would make no significant difference to the destitution facing the working class majority.

The false claims of the xenophobia leaders about the economy must of course be countered. The SA economy is being looted by big business in collaboration with foreign-owned multinationals which dominate the Johannesburg Stock Exchange with 40% share ownership. Foreign-owned multinationals like Arcelor Mittal are responsible for exploitation, retrenchments and dictating protectionist economic policies and import parity pricing that push up the steel prices and drives local steel manufacturers out of business. The bosses exploit migrants who are prepared to accept the pitifully low salaries and jobs insecurity to survive.

Just 10% of the 2,000 multinationals operating in SA are responsible for 90% of the R400bn smuggled out of the country every year in illicit capital flows according to Judge Dennis Davis, appointed by SARS to investigate this theft. The government is committed to even greater cuts which affect amongst others Home Affairs, leading to the closure of refugee centres, staff shortages and the mountainous backlog of asylum applications.

Way Forward

The organised working class needs to work to re-establish itself as the decisive reference point in communities. It needs to take back the initiative on unemployment and crime. The trade union movement should be leading marches to workplaces, uniting workers with the unemployed, to demand, among other things:

- Workers' economic planning to end unemployment. Struggle for a reduction of the working week to 30 hours with no cuts in pay. Demand democratic control of hiring and firing and the re-design of shift patterns by workers' representatives. Share out the work with the unemployed.

Re-establishing the leadership of the working class requires a struggle to politically and ideologically re-arm the trade union movement, renew its leaderships and create the basis for reuniting a fractured movement. This could include:

- Campaigning for a policy of "Once a member, always a member". Retrenched workers to retain union membership and full democratic rights in union structures.

- Expand the campaigns to organise the unorganised majority of workers, for example EPWP, CWP, CHW and ECD workers.

- Organising the chronically unemployed under the leadership of the trade union movement by building unemployed-workers and unemployed-youth locals in communities.

- Re-organise workers in the trucking, farming, mining and hospitality industries to cleanse them of criminal mafias and xenophobia. Build regional links between workers across the sub-continent

- Campaigning for a policy of "One working class, one struggle!" Lay the foundations for the unity of the divided trade union movement by building workplace, industry- and sector-wide action-committees that unite the workers of all federations, unions, and those not members of unions.

- Struggle against bureaucracy and careerism! The culture of trade union leaders as CEOs must be ended through salary and wage control of all officials determined democratically sector-by-sector. Trade union investment funds must be abolished and all investments cashed-out into fixed-interest savings to fund membership benefits, strike and solidarity funds.

A campaign to re-build the working class's basic organisations would need to simultaneously fill the political vacuum with a mass workers party armed with a socialist programme.

- The 25/26 June 2022 reconvened Saftu-led Working Class Summit must set a date for the launch of a mass workers party on a socialist programme – May Day 2023. Campaign for it to be a *genuine* parliament of the *working class* and its mass organisations.

- Build a unifying, democratic and open socialist mass workers party on a federal basis, allowing unions, community structures, youth campaigns and the existing working class political groups and parties to affiliate.

By opening up a political front in the class struggle, direct action in the workplaces and communities could be complemented by campaigns to:

- Fight all retrenchments and closures. Struggle for the nationalisation of job shedding big businesses under democratic workers control, enforced through workplace occupations.

- Defend the right to strike and organise! Scrap the LRA amendments. Organised mass defiance of unjust labour laws that prevent workers defending themselves. Fight for the passing of a trade union freedom bill *increasing* the powers of trade unions, drafted by workers' representatives.

Under the umbrella of a new workers party organised workers could take the initiative in linking-up with genuine community organisations where they exist and helping to create them where they do not:

- Build democratic, accountable, mass community organisations in every community. Build direct links with workplaces and trade unions. Link-up all community organisations in a country-wide socialist civic federation to unite and co-ordinate service delivery protests and campaign and fight for free, accessible, and high quality services, housing, health and education

- Make communities safe! Organise against crime, drugs and gangsterism. Organise community watch programmes in every community, including patrols of crime 'hot spots'; mass community mobilisations against gangsterism and organised crime. Campaign for free, accessible and high-quality community drug rehabilitation programmes linked to guaranteed jobs for recovering addicts.

- Encourage the integration of migrant communities and SA small business, and social and cultural collaboration

- Encourage working class anti-capitalist political organisation amongst migrants to assist in the struggle against injustice, oppression and exploitation in their home countries to which the majority wish to return by linking up with trade unions and anti-capitalist political formations there.

- For community-controlled policing! Struggle for working class oversight and control of policing through organised community and trade union participation in Community Policing Forums, including worker-representatives of police unions and private security unions. Campaign for the election of station commanders, district and provincial commissioners and magistrates and judges; community control of hiring and firing in SAPS to combat corruption and the waste of police resources. Dismiss all perpetrators of bribery, harassment, rape and torture. Abolish the militarised tactical and public order policing units used to suppress working class protests. This will assist both migrant and South African communities to collaborate in identifying the criminals in their midst, whatever their nationality.

An explosion of xenophobic violence is possible any day. The platforms could also be used to call on the organisations of the working class to prepare for a rapid response when it comes by:

- Lay foundations for democratic community self-defence groups organised on a non-national, non-ethnic, non-tribal basis. At the first hint of reactionary organisations attempting to instigate xenophobic pogroms they must mobilise.

Only the working class, united and organised around the ideas of socialism, using the weapons of the class struggle, can arrest the growing social collapse and offer an alternative to Operation Dudula and all the "putrid vapours of disintegrating bourgeois society". The vacuum the forces of xenophobia are filling, must be filled by the working class organised to overthrow the capitalist system which in its decay, is creating the conditions for a war of all against all. Only a mass workers party on a socialist programme can overcome this.

For a socialist SA, a socialist federation of southern Africa and African unity on a socialist basis!

ESWATINI The Struggle Must be for Democracy AND Socialism

Over the last several months protests have rocked eSwatini. The masses have taken to the streets to end the dictatorship of King Mswati III with greater militancy than ever before. In two waves of protests this year the youth have been in the frontline. More than 80 protesters have been killed and hundreds have been arrested. But this has not stopped the movement growing. In October, transport workers, nurses and other public sector workers took strike action. Schools were closed as school students began joining the protests. We salute the heroism of the emaSwati workers and youth.

Swazi society is deeply polarised. The current movement has been simmering since 1990. Then the impulse was provided by the trade-union led mass movement in South Africa that compelled the white-minority regime to enter negotiations to end apartheid. With trade unions to the fore, that movement culminated in 1996 with a stay away that shut down the country for a week. Mswati eventually made concessions on trade union rights and collective bargaining but rejected demands for multiparty democracy. Since then Mswati has taunted the masses offering various impotent 'democratic' reforms but banned trade unions again in 2014.

Now the outlines of a potential revolutionary situation are clearly visible. The intensified hardships imposed on the masses by the Covid-19 pandemic have pushed class tensions past breaking-point. They are moving, refusing to live in the old way. A deep political crisis now grips the ruling class. Three MPs from Mswati's sham *tinkhundla* 'traditional' parliament have defied the regime and called for democratic reform. One, Mduduzi Simelane, has defied the ban on political parties and formed the Swaziland Liberation Movement, albeit from exile in Johannesburg. Sections of the ruling class increasingly recognise that they cannot rule in the old way. The tiny capitalist clique gathered around the royal family is struggling to maintain the autocratic form of its rule.

Capitalism & Democracy

Ending Mswati's absolute monarchy is the central demand of the movement. Its fall is expected to sweep away the daily nightmares of arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and murder at the hands of the police and army. The ban on political parties and trade unions, and other despotic limitations on the freedoms of speech and assembly, are also expected to fall with the king. What the masses are *against* is clear. However, what form a new 'democratic' government should take is less clear. Ideas range from the establishment of a constitutional monarchy to the creation of a democratic republic.

But one thing is certain. The masses see 'democracy' as a means to an end. They are fighting for 'democracy' *because* they believe it will allow them to end poverty, unemployment and transform their living standards. More than 60% of emaSwati live below the poverty line. They scrape an existence on less than R30 per day. More than a quarter of all children under five years-old are chronically malnourished. Unemployment is 23% but over 50% for the youth. Covid-19 has been piled on top of the worst HIV pandemic in the world which has orphaned half of all children. These desperate living conditions and the abuses of the dictatorship are tied together in the minds of the masses – they are experienced as two sides of the same coin.

Mswati's cold indifference to the suffering of "his subjects" is not hidden. In 2019 he bought each one of his fifteen wives, as well as the Queen Mother, a Rolls Royce car. The cost of his uncompleted vanity project – a five-star hotel and convention centre – has ballooned from R350 million to R6 billion. These callous displays of wealth act like a lightning rod for the anger of the masses.

Without question the fall of the Mswati dictatorship will lift a huge burden from the backs of the emaSwati people. But, we have a duty



CYRIL RAMAPHOSA & KING MSWATI III

to point out, that the end of the dictatorship, in and of itself, offers no guarantees about the transformation of living standards for the majority. Unfortunately, the entire experience of the Southern Africa region over the last half century, and indeed the entire African continent, points in the opposite direction.

Bonapartism

The brutal colonial route by which Africa was incorporated into world capitalism, and its neo-colonial position in the world economy today, gives capitalist democracy a weak and sporadic character on the continent. Severe economic under-development has produced massive inequality giving rise to extremely sharp class contradictions. Small and weak capitalist elites square-off against the impoverished mass of the population with virtually nothing standing in between. The crumbs of world capitalism cannot be spread widely enough to maintain the African capitalist classes in power 'democratically' for any great length of time. They must constantly manoeuvre to ensure that any democratic concessions the masses force upon them are not used to challenge the capitalist economic foundations of their rule.

The result is the fostering of tribalism, ethnic conflict and the manipulation of linguistic and religious differences by elites that they periodically detonate in bouts of terrorism, insurgency and civil war. Periods of civilian rule alternate with periods of military rule. In 2021 alone there have been coups in Sudan, Guinea and Mali. The norm for the African continent is not regimes of capitalist democracy, or bourgeois democracy, but regimes of bourgeois bonapartism. Under such regimes, the state, often in the hands of the military, directly or indirectly, pose as the saviours of society, standing above the infighting, corruption and dysfunction of governments unable to meet even the most basic demands of the masses.

In the final analysis, however, whatever the precise form of bonapartist regimes, they use varying degrees of force to defend the private ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. 'Democracy' is stage-managed. The intervention of the police, army and judiciary in political life becomes routine. The media is controlled, critical journalists and editors removed. Trade unions and political parties are restricted, or banned outright. Political rivals to the ruling clique, especially those threatening to harness the discontent of the masses, are persecuted or eliminated. The last roll of the dice to defend capitalism is imperialist intervention to prop-up tottering regimes or replace them. But despite their 'strong man' appearance these are regimes of crisis.

In tiny eSwatini the anti-democratic pressures exerted by capitalism

are felt all the more strongly. The country has already travelled 'backwards' since the 1960s – from a constitutional monarchy at independence to today's absolute monarchy. Against the background of the pandemic-deepened crisis of world capitalism the overthrow of Mswati will allow, at best, only a temporary 'democratic' honeymoon before sharpening class contradictions force any new regime down the road of bonapartism.

The eSwatini economy is completely dependent economically on South Africa. It imports nearly all its goods from SA and is dependent on the funding it receives through the SADC Customs Union. SA's relationship with eSwatini is a neo-colonial one. SA and its SADC partners reacted to the economic stagnation that followed the 2008 world financial crisis by imposing crippling cuts to eSwatini's share of the Custom Union's revenue. The capitalist ANC government not only has a strangle-hold in eSwatini economically, it also props-up the monarchy politically, including with relations cemented through inter-marriage between the royal family and the Zuma clan. It is thus no accident that SADC has failed to support the masses against the Mswati dictatorship, just as it has failed the masses in other crises in the region. It was correct for the Multi-Stakeholder Forum – bringing together pro-democracy organisations in eSwatini – to reject Ramaphosa's proposal for a "national dialogue" on Mswati's terms.

The only way out of this quagmire, is to break with capitalism and build a *workers and small farmers* democracy based on the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. Such a government, linking-up with the working class of the region, could begin to lay the foundations for a democratic socialist economy. It will at the same time be necessary to link with the potentially powerful trade unions in South Africa and the SADC region to undercut the SADC elite's support for Mswati. Only on the basis of the unity of the working class across the region will it be possible to satisfy the democratic aspirations of the eSwati masses and simultaneously transform their living standards.

eSwatini's Political Opposition

Unfortunately, none of the political organisations that make up eSwatini's pro-democracy movement have a programme that links the struggle for democracy to genuine democratic control of the economy and the struggle for socialism. Nor do any of them have a regional, continental, and world perspective, for working class solidarity and cooperation.

The banned People's United Democratic Movement (Pudemo) and its youth wing, the Swaziland Youth Congress (Swayoco), are the most consistent organised opponents of the dictatorship. But they call for the creation of a "constitutional multi-party democracy" based on a "mixed market economy". In other words they stand for a regime of bourgeois democracy atop a capitalist economy.

The older and more conservative Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC), and its Youth League, despite rejecting the *tinkhundla* system, seek to "promote national unity and consciousness in the whole nation by bringing about harmony between the people and the traditional leaders" – in practice a constitutional monarchy. Like Pudemo, the NNLC also supports a "market [i.e. capitalist] economy".

The Communist Party of Swaziland (CPS) claims to be committed to the "struggle for socialism" and the "revolutionary transformation of society". But they state on their website that "We join Swaziland's mass democratic movement for change and pledge our full support to building that movement, led by PUDEMO and SWYOCO, to bring about a National Democratic Revolution in Swaziland."

The CPS still conceives of the struggle for socialism in terms of a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) which divides the revolution into "stages" – a first "democratic" stage, and then, at an unspecified point in the future, a second "socialist" stage. During the so-called "democratic" stage the working class, instead of using its majority in society to raise its living standards, is required to support 'democratic' capitalists who will develop the economy *on a capitalist basis*. Presumably, in eSwatini, the CPS believes Pudemo represents the 'democratic' capitalists.

In eSwatini, pursuing the NDR would become an even bigger farce than elsewhere. Mswati is not just a dictator, but the country's biggest

capitalist too. The confiscation of the royal family's vast economic interests in the Tibiyo Taka Ngwane investment fund would see a huge swathe of the economy, possibly even a majority, taken out of private capitalist ownership at one stroke. The task facing a new workers' and small farmers' government would be to use this as a foundation to extend democratic public ownership across the entire economy. This would make available the wealth needed to raise living standards and end unemployment. But the NDR implies that the wealth of the royal family be handed to the 'democratic' capitalist class instead!

In truth the NDR completely contradicts the ideas of Marx and Lenin as well as the experience of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Leon Trotsky gave the clearest presentation of a genuine Marxist approach to the socialist revolution in the neo-colonial world in his theory of Permanent Revolution. In this Trotsky explained that only the working class, leading the rural and peasant masses, is capable of developing society in the neo-colonial world. The neo-colonial bourgeoisie has come onto the scene of history too late. The globalisation of capitalism means they have to collaborate with, and become the puppets of, rival imperialist powers and follow the economic dictates of the institutions of global capitalism like the IMF. The character and position of the neo-colonial capitalist classes within world capitalism makes them incapable of playing a progressive role.

Trotsky understood how mass movements and revolutions unfold. Contrary to the teachings of the NDR, he knew that it would be impossible to separate the democratic demands of the masses from their social ones. What is unfolding in eSwatini today confirms this. In one breath the masses demand an end to the monarchy *in order* to raise their living standards. Overthrowing Mswati is seen as just the first step in resolving the burning issues of poverty and unemployment. But, as Trotsky understood, this will bring the masses into collision with the capitalist class. As soon as the monarchy is gone, the 'democratic' eSwatini capitalists will want to stop the mass movement from developing further. They will say to the masses, "Thank you for your assistance, but we will take it from here!" But the masses will want to continue the struggle until they have solved their social issues, impossible as long as the economy remains capitalist.

At this point the NDR would prepare the CPS to betray the working class and poor. Their theory would direct them to collaborate with the capitalist class to demobilise the mass movement in order to defend capitalism – doing so in the name of the socialist revolution! This was the role played by supporters of the NDR in both Zimbabwe and South Africa after the defeat of white-minority rule. The experience of both countries under majority-rule has been a complete refutation of the NDR.

Rather than laying deeper foundations for socialism through capitalist economic development as the NDR promises, the Zimbabwean economy has virtually collapsed. The South African economy has stagnated. Poverty and inequality in both countries has worsened and unemployment exploded. The so-called "democratic" stage of the revolution in Zimbabwe looks no different to the anti-democratic bourgeois bonapartism in other parts of the continent. There has been only one change in Zimbabwe's head of state in forty years – and that was through a military coup!

Even in South Africa there is a bonapartist tendency within the ruling class. Restrictions on the right to strike and picket have been introduced. Political assassinations are becoming more frequent. In 2012 the police were used to gun-down striking mineworkers in the Marikana Massacre. The judiciary plays an increasingly partisan role in favour of the bosses and the government in labour disputes. The State Security Agency has been placed under the control of the Presidency. The SACP, from whom the CPS unfortunately appears to take its guidance, as part of the ANC-led government, has supported all of this.

The section of the black capitalist class that gathered around the Radical Economic Transformation faction have been prepared to go even further. During Zuma's presidency a shadow state was being constructed that would use all the dirty tricks from the playbook of African bonapartism – the undermining of political rivals, media manipulation, infiltration of student protests and the workers' movements. Elements of this shadow state were activated to sow violence and destruction in July in an orchestrated campaign of sabotage and looting. But Zuma's presidency was not an aberration.

The same anti-democratic pressures of world capitalism exert their influence on 'democratic' South Africa as relentlessly as elsewhere.

If this is what decades of the "democratic" stage of the revolution looks like in Zimbabwe and South Africa, with their greater size and economic resources, only horrors to rival Mswati's dictatorship can await the emaSwati in eSwatini's "democratic" stage.

Party Needed

The key task facing revolutionaries in eSwatini is to place the working class in the leadership of the democracy movement armed with a programme for the creation of a workers' and small farmers' government and socialism. This will require a party that can unite the working class with the youth and give leadership to the rural masses. Such a party could rapidly win the support of the population by adopting slogans that make conscious the masses' instinctive merging of the democratic and social struggles, for example "Abolish Autocracy and Capitalism! End Unemployment and Poverty – Nationalise Royal Property and the Commanding Heights of the Economy Under Democratic Control!" We want to engage worker and youth activists in eSwatini on how they see such a party being created.

Worker activists need to win their trade unions to play a central role in the creation of a new party. At this stage, the youth – more than half the population – appear to be moving through the Swaziland National Union of Students, Swayco, the NNLC Youth League and even the Communist Party. In a media interview, Mandla Hlatshwayo, one of the founders of Pudemo, said that the older generation is being replaced by a "new breed of youth who are impatient and less

tolerant ... to the abuse of power and domination by the king and his family of all spheres of life and the economy". In their search for any weapon to use against the hated dictatorship the youth are breathing fresh life into decades-old organisations. However, in doing so, the youth must not take these organisations as they find them. They must examine their programmes, the class aspirations of their leaders and their links with the regional capitalist elites and governments. If it is not possible for the socialist revolution to move through the existing parties then the task of creating a new party cannot be postponed.

Only the emergence of the working class as an independent political force can help the crisis in eSwatini mature into a revolution. The regional elites organised in SADC are already intervening to "mediate", promoting a "national dialogue" between the regime and the political leaders of the democracy movement. There is a danger of betrayal. With no alternative to capitalism, elements within the leadership of the democracy movement will want to find a compromise as quickly as possible, fearful that the situation, and the mass protests in particular, can escape their control. The organisation of the working class as an independent political force, married with the energy of the youth, is the only defence against this. Allied to this must be an internationalist linking-up with the working class in the region. Just as the capitalist elites act in concert with each other to defend themselves and their interest at the top, so too the working class and rural masses must unite with their class brothers and sisters from below. But it will also be crucial for worker and youth activists to discover the genuine ideas of Marxism. Only these can help clarify the methods and programme necessary for victory in the struggle for democracy and socialism across the region, the continent and the world.

Constituent Assembly

The demand for the convening of a Constituent Assembly that would democratically decide all questions about a post-Mswati eSwatini, including a future constitution and economic dispensation, needs to have a central place in a revolutionary programme. It would be the role of Marxists to campaign for this demand to be adopted by the broader-movement.

Historically the demand for a Constituent Assembly belongs to the era of the bourgeois revolutions, especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. Then the capitalist class, to the extent that it was struggling against the outmoded form of social, economic and political organisation of feudalism, was a revolutionary class. It fought for the unification of the 'nation' in order to consolidate an internal capitalist market and create a favourable terrain for the development of modern industry. This required sweeping away the remnants of pre-capitalist social relations, especially by resolving the land question. Tribal land customs and feudal land obligations were transformed into capitalist private property. This 'freed' the majority of the population from the land and forced them into capitalist wage-work and dependence on the capitalist market.

For the capitalists to realise their economic interests it was necessary to create a democratic political order responsive, and committed to, the pursuit of its class interests – a *bourgeois* democracy. For this reason, it was initially restricted to a democracy of property-owners. The bourgeois had no intention of extending the democratic right to elect representative government to all of society. More far-sweeping democratic concessions, e.g., a universal franchise, trade union rights etc., had to be fought for by the working class and poor.

Despite the world having now entered the era of the proletarian (or socialist) revolution the demand for a Constituent Assembly has remained relevant. In capitalist societies following periods of dictatorship, it can answer the question of how society moves from dictatorship to democracy, even if only democracy on a capitalist basis. It also remains relevant in the neo-colonial world where the bourgeois-democratic revolution has only been partially carried through, and, often directly as a result of this, the masses suffer under dictatorships of one form or another. This of course describes the situation in eSwatini.

It is important to be clear that in and of itself the demand for a Constituent Assembly is not a socialist demand. Lenin described the Constituent Assembly as "the highest form of democracy" possible *under capitalism*. A Constituent Assembly is a multi-class institution. Its delegates would not automatically be workers but could be drawn from any section of the population. It would be convened with the votes of the working class and poor, but also the rural population, the middle class and even the capitalist class.

However, society has been transformed since the revolutionary capitalist class used the Constituent Assembly to rally 'the nation' behind it in the struggle against feudalism. On the basis of monopoly capitalism, the capitalist class is now a tiny minority in every society, separated from the majority by a chasm of inequality. The claim that they, as a class, represent 'the nation', credible up to a point in capitalism's pre-monopoly past, is today utterly laughable. The middle classes they could previously rely on for support have also shrunk and changed. The working class and poor have a crushing majority in almost every country even where a majority of the population is rural. Everywhere the working class has some tradition of independent self-organisation, at least in trade unions etc., plus nearly two centuries of an international revolutionary working class tradition to draw from. This was not the case in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where the working class had not yet accumulated the experience to stand independently as a class.

In the past the demand for a Constituent Assembly was embraced by the capitalist class as crucial to consolidating its rule. Today, on the basis of the changed balance of class forces, it would be a potential threat to it. The capitalist class will do anything to avoid a genuinely democratic Constituent Assembly. It would be the role of Marxists to campaign for the masses', using their overwhelming numbers in society, to use a Constituent Assembly to fight for the creation of a government of workers and the poor armed with its own socialist programme. The nation must be reconstructed under the leadership of the working class, the only class capable of solving the democratic and social problems. The creation of such a government will pose the need to break with capitalism and begin the socialist revolution.

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine & the New Era of Global Capitalism

The world has been plunged into another catastrophe on top of the COVID-19 pandemic, following the murderous Putin regime's invasion of Ukraine. The war, which has raged for more than two weeks, has brought with it carnage and human suffering not experienced in Europe since the Balkan wars in the 1990s. This conflict reflects the new era which global capitalism has now entered. The COVID pandemic acted as the great accelerator of all of the underlying contradictions of capitalism. This war has already crystallised some of the underlying tendencies present, in particular, the sharpening geopolitical relations between the capitalist powers. What would have seemed unthinkable in a previous period has now become possible during the protracted death agony of global capitalism.

The consequences of this war on geopolitical relations, the world economy and political and class relations are already devastating. Yet the crises in all these spheres will intensify in the coming weeks, months and years. War and revolution are the greatest tests for socialists and revolutionaries. The official left, and the socialist left, in the main, has once again, as they did during the COVID pandemic, capitulated to the ruling classes and failed to provide a comprehensive rounded-out analysis or perspective of these events. Much less have they put forward an independent programme of the working class. At best they have called for 'peace' but ignored the capitalist roots of this conflict. Thus they ignore the fact that neither Putin, the western capitalist leaders, nor any institution or representative of capitalism are able to resolve this horrific crisis or the consequences which now flow from it.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine reveals the era of the decline of US imperialism we are now in. The brief post-1991 period which saw a unipolar world, in which the US was often able to impose its will internationally, is over. Putin undertook the invasion driven by Greater Russian chauvinism and a desire to establish an expanded Russian sphere of influence, with compliant regimes in countries on Russia's border. The aim is to obliterate Ukraine as an independent state and its right to exist. Putin has taken up once again the ideology of 'Novorossiya' – 'New Russia' – establishing an expanded area of Russian language, culture and the assimilation of states or statelets into such an amalgam. This follows three decades of provocative eastwards expansion by NATO, and the rearming and modernisation of Russia's armed forces.

The Right to Self-Determination

Putin claims he has taken up the cause of recognizing the mainly ethnic Russian enclaves of Donetsk and Luhansk. Western imperialism has championed the right of self-determination and sovereignty for Ukraine. Yet Putin is not concerned about the peoples of Donetsk in the declared People's Republic of Donetsk (PRD) or the People's Republic of Luhansk (PRL). Neither is western imperialism concerned about the democratic rights of the Ukrainian peoples. Putin has denounced Lenin, who, along with the Bolsheviks, defended the right of self-determination of the Ukrainian people. Putin embraces Greater Russian chauvinism. The US and its allies have trampled over the democratic rights of many peoples, for example, the Palestinians, who are denied their right to self-determination. Neither are they prepared to accept these democratic rights of Donetsk and Luhansk to democratically decide their future.

The CWI is opposed to the invasion of Ukraine and Putin's aim of destroying as an independent state. However, there can be no trust in western imperialism to defend the rights of the Ukrainian people. The working class and people of Ukraine need to establish their own cross-ethnic, armed, democratically controlled defence force. What is needed in the face of an invasion are both self-defence and a political programme and organisation of the working class.

The 'Independent People Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk are ruled by ruthless right-wing nationalist forces compliant with Putin's regime. The peoples of Donetsk and Luhansk also have the right to



UKRAINIAN CITIES HAVE BEEN DEVASTATED

decide if they wish to be independent, remain in Ukraine or become a part of Russia. However, this cannot be democratically decided under the rule of Russian bayonets. Such a democratic solution to the national and cultural rights, of all, can only be achieved by the working class and the peoples of the area, by stopping the war and linking together the Ukrainian and Russian working classes. The absence of powerful independent workers' organisations and parties in the Ukraine and Russia with a socialist programme to overthrow capitalism, is a key obstacle that needs to be overcome to defend the democratic and cultural rights of all the peoples of the area.

War is a Continuation of Politics by Other Means

War is a continuation of politics by other means. Although Putin's precise endgame remains unclear, as a minimum, his objective seems to be to occupy the eastern part of Ukraine and seize the port city of Mariupol and also Kharkiv, forming a Russian-controlled zone linking up Crimea to Donetsk and Luhansk, possibly also including Odesa and extending to Transdnistria. Putin is fighting for this as part of what he perceives as Russian interests and now the prestige of his regime. It seems Putin and his gang imagined a quick victory was possible. By attacking the Ukraine capital, Kyiv, Putin possibly wanted to carry through 'regime change' and install a more pro-Russian anti-western government.

This appeared to be the plan. Yet as the 19th-century German military strategist Helmuth von Moltke put it, no plan survives first contact with the enemy. Plan 1 failed, so Putin has resorted to plan 2. It seems the Russian army met determined resistance from Ukrainian forces. Whilst making advances in the south, Russian forces appear to be bogged down in the north. Putin is now deploying similar tactics as the Russian army used in Syria and is pounding cities to rubble. In some areas, they are in the process of repeating what they did in Aleppo and Grozny, especially in Mariupol, at a horrific human cost. The shelling of civilian areas with no military significance continues, as does the destruction of entire cities. In the process, part of the Ukrainian infrastructure is being destroyed.

The outcome of any war is not predetermined. Yet it will not be possible for Putin's regime to occupy the whole of Ukraine and suppress its entire population for a prolonged period, even if he manages to take the key cities. With a landmass the combined size of Germany and France, and a 40 million population, Putin would face an ongoing protracted struggle of armed resistance. Although with many differences, Ukraine in such a scenario would become Putin's Afghanistan.

The consequences of the war have been profound for the western imperialist powers. In the short term, it has appeared to unify them and strengthen NATO and the EU. In the western capitalist countries, a wide layer at this stage is looking to NATO more favourably, as

it is seen by many, although not all, as a force that could stop the fighting or at least prevent it from spreading. The pro-NATO, pro-EU mood amongst Ukrainians, which is powerful at this stage, reflects a desperate desire to save their lives and homes and improve their situation and win more 'democratic' rights. However, this can turn into its opposite, flowing from a feeling that "your words of support failed to provide real support". This sentiment is already beginning to be expressed by a layer that feels "the west has abandoned us".

At the same time, Western imperialism, especially US imperialism, is trying to use this crisis to hold onto the old world order in a fundamentally changed world situation.

Asia, Africa and Latin America

This more favourable view of NATO is not echoed in many countries of the neo-colonial world, especially Asia and Africa. This was reflected in the vote at the UN general assembly to condemn Russia's invasion where 35 countries abstained – all from Asia, Africa and Latin America. In some countries, a more sympathetic attitude towards Russia exists amongst layers of the population. This reflects two main issues. Firstly, a reaction to the astounding hypocrisy of the western imperialist powers which have an equally brutal record of intervention. Bloody interventions by western imperialism in Iraq and Yemen, along with other examples, are ingrained in the consciousness of millions in these countries.

These sentiments are reflected by some of the bourgeois regimes in these countries. When a Pakistani ex-general expressed support for Russia and was condemned by the US, Pakistan's prime minister, Imran Khan, who has implemented reactionary policies in Pakistan, responded in kind, proclaiming, "We are not your slaves".

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are all indirectly supporting Russia in this conflict. In Uganda, the army commander, General Kainerugaba, the son of President Museveni, tweeted that, "the majority of mankind (that are non-white) support Russia's stand in Ukraine". Evo Morales in Bolivia has attacked the US and denounced it for causing the death of millions by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and by the Condor Plan in Latin America and other NATO interventions.

This is not Marxist opposition to western imperialism. Museveni is an authoritarian ruler. Morales has compromised with capitalism when in power. But they reflect what is seen as hypocrisy by western imperialism. Amongst sections of the masses in these countries, there is a sentiment that the protests of the west about the horrors unfolding in Ukraine are in contrast to the attitude towards the horrific suffering of the masses in Ethiopia, Yemen, Gaza and other war zones.

Amongst a layer, there is also a hankering back to the past and a failure to fully accept the reactionary gangster capitalism of Putin's regime. Some have not come to terms with the fact that the collapse of the former Soviet Union meant a new social system of reactionary oligarchical capitalism replaced it, epitomised by Putin. In South Africa, for example, the idea that the USSR helped in the armed struggle against the apartheid regime is equated today with a more sympathetic attitude towards Putin and Russia, in this war. In many countries in the neo-colonial world, the hypocrisy of western imperialism is reflected in an attitude that Russia is the 'lesser evil'. Yet in the main western capitalist countries, however, the overwhelming mood is against the war and opposition to Russia.

China's Response to the Crisis

Some of the countries which have lent more support to Russia have been increasingly tied to China economically. For its part, China has adopted a position akin to 'pro-Russian neutrality'. Whilst not explicitly supporting the Russian invasion, Xi's regime is pursuing a careful policy aiming at defending its own interests. For this reason, Xi and the Chinese regime want an end to the conflict. It is intervening in discussions with the Ukrainian regime with the hope of attempting to broker some deal – which will not be easy – and strengthen its global position, as a result. A major crisis in the global economy would not be in the interests of Chinese state capitalism. The impact of slowdown in the global economy arising from the Ukraine war will have an impact on Chinese exporters. It is not coincidental that during March 2022, China set its lowest growth target in thirty years, following a slowdown in 2021.

Significantly, in response to NATO's 'strengthened' position and the attempt of US imperialism to defend the 'old order', China has forcefully responded with a warning to US imperialism. Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister, speaking at the National People's Congress, stated that "Russia and China jointly oppose attempts to revive the cold war mindset." He denounced the US for wanting to establish an Indo-Pacific NATO and then warned that "Taiwan is not Ukraine".

Putin is looking towards increased economic ties with China to offset the effect of sanctions and the isolation that the west is imposing on Russia economically, although some Chinese companies have cut back on Russian investments. In the short term, it seems likely that stronger economic ties between China and Russia will develop, as they have been prior to the Russian invasion. As a Financial Times headline put it on 3 March: "Xi is unlikely to ditch his 'best friend' despite Ukraine pressure". How long this 'alliance' is maintained is another question. Yet whilst it is possible that the economic ties with China can mitigate against the effects of the western sanctions, it will not prevent the Russian economy from being badly hit and a terrible price being paid for this by the Russian workers and middle-class people.

Russian Workers' Paying the Price and Putin's Future

The crash of the rouble by over 30% in a week, an increase in interest rates from 9.5% to 20%, and the cutting off of access to international finance will lead to a sharp cut in living standards in Russia. Putin was banking on a war chest of US\$630 billion of gold and foreign exchange reserves. Yet how much of this can be accessed is now in doubt. More than two-thirds is held in foreign currencies or securities and is now largely off-limits. This is another blow to Putin. At the same time, the effect of capitalist sanctions can work in two ways. It can enrage a layer to oppose the war and Putin. However, in the short term, it can also strengthen a 'siege' mentality and strengthen Russian nationalistic sentiments.

These developments, coupled with the rising number of Russian casualties as the war continues to be more complicated for the Russian forces in the medium to long term, can eventually point to the end of the Putin regime. Yet in the short term, Putin is likely to maintain his regime in power, probably enjoying majority support, at this stage, reinforced by brutal state repression of those opposed to the war. The opposition to the war inside Russia seems fairly substantial and can grow. But Putin has responded with widespread repression, reflecting the oppressive Bonapartist regime he heads. Foreign policy is a continuation of domestic policy; the brutality Putin's regime used in Ukraine can be used against the Russian masses.

The massive internal security machine may, in the short term, act to delay the development of an opposition movement powerful enough to challenge the regime, which still has a layer of support. However, this situation can rapidly change depending on how the war itself develops. If Russia becomes bogged down in a protracted war and a collapsing economy, the opposition could develop and provoke some sort of 'palace coup', although this seems unlikely in the short term. The prestige of Putin's regime and Russian capitalism is now on the line. At this stage, the regime's main players around Putin all are die-hard loyalists, with many of them, like Putin, originating in the former KGB of the ex-USSR.

Abrupt Changes and Worsening Crisis

The war has also resulted in abrupt historic changes in policies in some countries. For the first time, the EU as a body has officially agreed to fund weapons purchasing. Germany, under the SPD Chancellor Scholz, overnight changed its military policy and introduced a massive special armaments budget of €100 billion, an increase of 'normal' military spending to over 2% of its GDP, and agreed to allow the profitable exports of German weapons to conflict zones. The German government is aiming to build the largest military apparatus in Europe, which is a massive change in the position that has existed since the end of the Second World War in 1945. These are important points of departure, reflecting the new situation which exists in world relations. They are part of an explosion of arms expenditure that has taken place globally, not least in China, which has again increased its military budget.

The Ukraine war, at this stage, has unified the western imperialist powers. However, behind this mask, the underlying tensions which

exist between them remain. The divisions within the EU and between the EU and US imperialism have not evaporated. They will resurface again, particularly as the effects of this crisis are increasingly felt in the world economy and impact each country. New rifts can also open up about how to respond to the crisis. It is one thing for the US and UK to ban the imports of Russian oil, gas and coal. It is entirely another to demand Germany and other countries which are much more dependent on it do so.

The massive spike in oil and gas prices threatens to trigger a stagflationary shock, especially in energy-importing countries. Oil prices jumped 20% in the morning trading on 7 March to \$139 a barrel. The same day saw wholesale gas prices in Europe hit 335 euro a megawatt-hour, up from 16 euro a year ago! At the time of writing, Shell has done a somersault in 24 hours and stopped purchasing Russian oil on the spot market. Should this process continue, it cannot be excluded that Russia will cut the gas supply to Europe. This would have devastating consequences. EU countries import 40% of their gas from Russia. Russia also supplies 10% of the world's crude oil.

US imperialism and the western powers are desperately searching for alternative sources of oil and gas to reduce dependency on Russian supplies. Needs must! This has led to the spectacle of Biden's administration opening "cordial" discussions with the Maduro regime in Venezuela, which they have been trying to overthrow for years.

The consequences of the war will lead to higher inflation. It threatens to choke off the ephemeral economic 'recovery' post-COVID and trigger a recession, leading to possible stagflation (recession and higher inflation). Already the cutting off of supplies of parts from Ukraine has forced car makers and others to shut some European plants. It is leading to a sharp attack on living standards globally. In many countries, this will result in an explosive rise in poverty, including rising hunger, malnutrition and homelessness in the western imperialist powers.

The threat to the world's food supply is potentially catastrophic, especially for countries in the neo-colonial world. Ukraine and Russia account for 29% of global wheat exports, 19% of global corn and 80% of sunflower oil. The war can cut across the planting of this year's crops. Bangladesh, Sudan and Pakistan receive over 50% of their wheat supply from Russia or Ukraine. The surge in prices which is already taking place will have a devastating effect on these and other countries. Already eight million people face starvation in Afghanistan, which is set to be the fate of millions more in other countries.

Added to this is the fact that Russia and Belarus are major suppliers of fertilizers, which have also seen a massive spike in prices. This will be disastrous for food production in countries of the neo-colonial world.

These developments are certain to provoke massive social and political explosions throughout the neo-colonial world and in the industrialised capitalist countries. Uprisings of peasants and rural workers and a more general social crisis arising from famine can explode in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Famines of this scale can provoke wars and ethnic conflicts for grain and food.

The depth of this crisis has led to a fear that world war three and a nuclear holocaust could be unleashed. Putin's reminder that he has nuclear weapons has certainly raised such fears. Such worries, especially prevalent amongst young people, are understandable especially given the nature of the forces involved in the conflict. Wars can escalate and widen beyond what the contending forces intended. Accidental encounters can trigger wider conflicts. It cannot be excluded that this conflict could lead to wider military exchanges and skirmishes taking place, especially on the Polish border or some other countries.

However, it is not in the interests of western imperialism or Putin to allow this conflict to develop into an all-out war between NATO

forces and Russia, to become a third world war, with a nuclear arms exchange. This would not only result in the slaughter of millions but would obliterate the capitalist economy and the rule of the oligarchs. The proposal of the Polish government to send its MiG fighter planes to a US airbase in Germany and then onto Ukraine was rejected by the Pentagon for this very reason: to avert a full escalation of the conflict into a wider war. It also illustrates the potential for divisions to open up amongst the NATO and western powers as the crisis continues. The establishment of direct lines of communication between the Russian military and NATO also illustrates that the ruling elites are putting in place safeguards to avert such a catastrophe.

The decision of the US and UK to ban imports of Russian oil, gas and coal will not come into effect until the end of the year. This partly reflects the pressure to avoid a wider conflict spiralling out of control and also the need for time to establish reliable alternative oil supplies.

The far-reaching effects of this crisis on geopolitical relations have been reflected in the clash which has taken place between the parties involved in negotiations to establish a nuclear deal with Iran. The US and Iran seem close to securing a deal, which the Iranian regime desperately needs. However, Putin has added an additional demand that its trade with Iran is exempted from US sanctions. The Iranian regime, which has friendly relations with Putin, described this as "unhelpful" as it has sent negotiations into a tailspin.

The humanitarian disaster, including over two million refugees fleeing the killing fields of Ukraine, has opened a sea of human misery. It is a repetition of the heart-rending scenes seen in other conflicts around the world in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is the reality of capitalism in its death agony for millions around the world. The war in Ukraine has also brought with it outpourings of human solidarity.

In Poland, Berlin and elsewhere, people have opened their homes to strangers to offer food, accommodation and other support. These positive features were also initially the reaction to the refugees from Syria. However, this mood can also change if the necessary investment in housing, education, health and jobs are not made available, opening a space for the far-right and racist organisations to intervene. The vicious racism displayed towards African and Asian students and others by sections of the Ukrainian and Polish state forces and far-right organisations is a warning of how the situation can be cynically exploited and the mood can change.

Need for a Socialist Alternative to War

The consequences of this crisis internationally, regarding both economic and geopolitical relations, are still unfolding, and it is not clear how it will develop. However, it is intensifying the underlying multiple crises faced by global capitalism in this new era. The economic and social consequences will sharpen the polarization which exists in all countries. The economic and food crisis which is unfolding, especially in Asia and Africa, together with other issues, will strengthen national and ethnic conflicts and wars. However, these issues will also be present in all areas of the world.

This conflict will continue in one form or another for a protracted period. Contained within it is a struggle by the Putin regime to expand its sphere of influence and assert itself as a global power against the democratic rights and right to self-determination of various peoples. Capitalism, both its western imperialist face and its oligarchical Bonapartist face, can offer no solution to the working class and peoples in the Ukraine, Donetsk, Luhansk or Russia. This bloody conflict is not the first and will not be the last to erupt in this era of capitalism. It highlights the urgency of building mass workers' parties with a revolutionary socialist programme, including an independent policy for the working class, to combat war and capitalism which breeds it.



SOCIALIST WORLD.net

Committee for a Workers' International
Comité por una Internacional de los Trabajadores



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www.marxistworkersparty.org.za

What We Stand For

South Africa faces a crisis. The capitalist economy in SA and worldwide is in a dead-end. Poverty pay and the threat of retrenchment weigh down the majority of workers. Mass unemployment threatens to leave an entire generation on the scrap heap. Working class communities are engulfed in a social crisis. Widespread poverty drives crime, drug addiction and violence against women. Neither the ANC government, nor any of the parties represented in parliament, have a way out. Instead, these defenders of the capitalist profit-system police the working class on behalf of the bosses. The very right to organise and to strike is under attack. Only the working class is capable of leading society out of this dead-end. This will require organisation and mass struggle armed with a bold and revolutionary socialist programme. Only along this path can capitalism be ended creating the pre-condition for the socialist reconstruction of the economy and the rebuilding of society in the interests of the working class majority.

Work & Unemployment

- **Fight all retrenchments and closures.** Struggle for the nationalisation of job shedding big businesses under democratic workers control, enforced through workplace occupations.
- **Once a member, always a member.** Retrenched workers to retain union membership and full democratic rights in union structures. Organise the chronically unemployed under the leadership of the trade union movement – build unemployed-workers and unemployed-youth locals in communities.
- **Workers' economic planning to end unemployment.** Struggle for a reduction of the working week to 30 hours with no cuts in pay. Demand democratic control of hiring and firing and the re-design of shift patterns by workers' representatives. Share out the work with the unemployed.
- **Reject the ANC's poverty-level minimum wage.** Organise the workplaces to win a living wage of R12,500 per month for all full-time workers backed-up by a rigorous regime of workplace inspections under the democratic control of workers' representatives. Nationalise non-complying big business; on the basis of proven unaffordability, subsidies and tax relief to small and family businesses adequate for the minimum wage to be paid. For a basic income social grant of R8,000 per month for all those not in work – unemployed, pensioners, disabled etc.
- **Expose the bosses' lies!** Abolish so-called 'business secrets'. Demand that the financial accounts of big business are opened to inspection by workers' representatives. When the bosses say "we can't afford it", the workers' movement must say "prove it!"
- **Abolish outsourcing and labour broking!** Build a mass campaign to enforce anti-labour broking legislation. Make all EPWP workers permanent.

The Trade Union Movement

- **Defend the right to strike and organise!** Scrap the LRA amendments. Organised mass defiance of unjust labour laws that prevent workers defending themselves. Scrap the category of "essential services" – workers themselves will determine the level and organisation of emergency cover during strikes. Fight for the passing of a trade union freedom bill *increasing* the powers of trade unions, drafted by workers' representatives.
- **Revolutionary in word AND Revolutionary in deed!** Build the principled unity of the trade union movement on the basis of class independence from the bosses, democracy and workers' control. Campaign in every federation and every union for a programme of revolutionary trade unionism that links workers' struggles on day-to-day issues to the struggle for socialism. Cosatu out of the Tripartite Alliance.
- **One working class, one struggle!** For maximum workers unity in struggle. Build workplace, industry- and sector-wide action-committees that unite the workers of all federations, unions, and those not members of unions.
- **Struggle against bureaucracy and careerism! Trade union leaders are not CEOs!** Salary and wage control of all trade union officials determined democratically sector-by-sector. Abolish

trade union investment funds – cash-out all investments into fixed-interest savings to fund membership benefits, strike and solidarity funds.

The Social Crisis in Working Class Communities

- **Nothing for communities, without communities!** Build democratic, accountable, mass community organisations in every community. Build direct links with workplaces and trade unions. Link-up all community organisations in a country-wide socialist civic federation to unite and co-ordinate service delivery protests and campaign and fight for:

- o **A mass decent house-building, electricity, water, sanitation, road and public transport infrastructure programme.** Nationalise the big construction companies, building wholesalers and big building retailers. Full community involvement in the design of houses and the planning of communities. Place housing waiting lists under the democratic control of community organisations, with allocation on the basis of fair and objective criteria, including current housing situation, number of dependents and length of time on waiting list.

- o **A publicly-funded, free, accessible and high quality national health service – reject National Health Insurance.** Nationalise Mediclinic, Netcare, Life Healthcare, and the big pharmaceutical companies under the democratic control of health workers, patients and communities.

- o **Funding and resources to end violence against women and children.** For (i) a free, accessible, secure and high-quality network of women's shelters for survivors of domestic abuse and rape, with provision for children, giving women the freedom to leave abusive relationships, (ii) an increase in the child support grant, (iii) free, accessible, secure and high-quality pre-school child-care and elderly-care centres to relieve the domestic burden on women, (iv) free, accessible and high-quality sexual health and family planning services to allow women genuine choice over if, and when, to have children, (v) dismiss all police officers, magistrates and judges guilty of victim blaming in cases of gender-based violence and LGBT+ hate crimes. Scrap the discriminatory anti-woman Traditional Courts Bill.

- o **Publicly-funded, free, accessible and high quality education from nursery to tertiary.** Re-establish parent-teacher-learner committees to place schools under democratic community control. Cancel all student debt and end financial and academic exclusions.

- **Make communities safe!** Organise against crime, drugs and gangsterism. Organise community watch programmes in every community, including patrols of crime 'hot spots'; mass community mobilisations against gangsterism and organised crime. Campaign for free, accessible and high-quality community drug rehabilitation programmes linked to guaranteed jobs for recovering addicts. Trade unions and community organisations to campaign against gender based violence, LGBT+ hate crimes and xenophobic attacks, taking up the defence of women, LGBT+ people and foreign residents in workplaces and communities with their full involvement.

2 OUR PROGRAMME

NB: For further explanation and expansion please read our website.



- **For community-controlled policing!** Struggle for working class oversight and control of policing through organised community and trade union participation in Community Policing Forums, including worker-representatives of police unions and private security unions. Campaign for the election of station commanders, district and provincial commissioners and magistrates and judges; community control of hiring and firing in SAPS to combat corruption and the waste of police resources. Dismiss all perpetrators of bribery, harassment, rape and torture. Abolish the militarised tactical and public order policing units used to suppress working class protests.

For Working Class Unity

- **For working class unity, leadership and mass class-based struggle against sexism, LGBT+ discrimination, tribalism, racism and xenophobia.** Overcome all possible lines of division within the working class in united working class organisations, built on clear anti-sexist, anti-LGBT+ discrimination, anti-tribalist, anti-racist and anti-xenophobic principles. For the full and equal participation in working class organisations of all foreign-born workers and residents. Build a united working class mass movement to end the capitalist economic foundations of society which guarantee poverty and inequality and upon which intolerance, prejudice and discrimination rest.

- **Build a class-independent trade union-led Campaign Against Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence, Rape and the Murder of Women.** United action of men and women workers to end sexual harassment in the workplace. Demand from the bosses (i) equal pay for work of equal value, (ii) employer subsidised healthcare, (iii) housing allowances adequate to allow women to leave abusive relationships, (iv) adequate paid parental leave for all workers, (v) safe employer-provided transport to and from night-shifts, (vi) free workplace childcare facilities.

The Economic Crisis

- **No to the privatisation of SAA, Eskom and the other SOEs! No job losses at the SOEs!** Re-structure the SOEs on the basis of *socialist* nationalisation:

- o **Recover the stolen R-billions!** Organise a worker and trade union-led commission to investigate and drive-out corruption.

- o **End the looting of the SOEs!** End outsourcing. Kick-out big business 'consultants'. Cancel all contracts and tenders and bring workers and services in-house.

- o **Sack the boards of all the SOEs!** For workers' control of the SOEs. For fully elected and recallable boards composed of representatives of the workers in the SOE, their trade unions and consumer and community groups.

- o **Reject the capitalist organisation of the SOEs as profit-driven silos!** Integrate the SOEs according to a democratic economic plan, reducing waste and achieving scales of economy, whilst protecting jobs, wages and conditions. Extend socialist nationalisation to support the SOEs – e.g. (i) nationalise Sasol and Engen to supply cost-price jet fuel to SAA, (ii) nationalise the coal mines to supply cost-price coal to Eskom.

- **Place the levers of finance in the hands of the working class for planned investment.** Nationalise under democratic working class control Standard Bank, ABSA, FNB, Nedbank, Capitec and Investec along with the entire financial sector. For a state monopoly over credit, under the control of democratically elected committees of the working class. Guarantee the savings of all working class and middle class people and small businesses. Bond and debt relief for struggling home-owners and small businesses. Abolish garnishee orders!

- **Oppose imperialism's watch-dogs!** Combat the sabotage of Moody's and the other ratings agencies. Defend the economy from a downgrade via a state monopoly of foreign trade alongside capital and price controls under the control of democratically elected committees of the working class.

- **For a socialist economy to meet the needs of the working class majority.** Nationalise under democratic working class control the biggest companies in all the key sectors of the economy: agriculture, mining, construction, transport, manufacturing, telecommunications, wholesale, retail and distribution. Integrate nationalised industry according to a democratic socialist plan of production to raise wages, protect and create new jobs and end poverty.

- **Restore the land to the people – restore the land to the working class!** Nationalise big agri-business and the 36,000 big commercial farms that control 95% of agricultural land; support and debt cancellation for small and subsistence farmers. Democratically elected community committees to determine the use of non-agricultural land – home owner-occupiers and small business premises exempt. Scrap the Traditional Courts Bill and the Traditional Khoisan Leadership Bill. End state salaries for traditional leaders and abolish the traditional authorities. Put all taxes and royalties currently paid to traditional leaders by mining companies under the democratic control of elected and accountable community committees to spend on social development.

- **Socialist planning to solve the environmental crisis.** Rapid re-direction of energy generation toward renewables. Kick out the IPPs and build a publicly-owned renewables sector. Retrofit the entire economy to eliminate pollution with retraining and guaranteed jobs for any workers whose jobs are rendered obsolete.

- **Workers of the world unite! Socialism cannot be built in one country!** Build solidarity and international links with the workers of the world in the global struggle against capitalism and imperialism, laying the foundations of co-operation for a worldwide socialist plan of production.

For Working Class Power

Our programme to overcome the economic crisis is a direct challenge to the rule of the capitalist class. They will resist it ferociously using all the forces of the capitalist state, backed-up by world imperialism. The working class needs to build a vehicle that can take political power out of the hands of the bosses and their politicians and transfer it to a revolutionary socialist government leading a workers state built upon a workers democracy.

- **Forge the fighting unity of the working class in a party of mass struggle.** Build a socialist mass workers party to unite the struggles of the workplaces, the communities and the youth as a vital step toward the creation of a mass revolutionary party.

- **Implement the Saftu and Working Class Summit resolutions on the workers party.** Build a unifying, democratic and open socialist mass workers party on a federal basis, allowing unions, community structures, youth campaigns and the existing working class political groups and parties to affiliate.



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