



The Crisis in SAFTU and the Fight for Revolutionary Leadership

Break With the Labour Traitors— For Black Proletarian Power!

19 JULY—The May congress of the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) made it unmistakably clear that both SAFTU and its largest affiliate, the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), are in a massive crisis. The main expression of this crisis so far is a split in the bureaucracy, running up through the top leadership, and a bitter struggle for organisational control between the two factions—supporters of SAFTU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi on one side and supporters of NUMSA general secretary Irvin Jim on the other. The struggle for positions repeatedly threatened to plunge the May congress into chaos and split the federation. At one point, pro-Jim delegates marched toward the podium singing “*ungayiyijahi impi, iyabulala* [don’t rush to war, it’s deadly]” as Vavi tried to steamroller obstacles to the election of his slate. Many expect the battle to continue at NUMSA’s 11th national congress, which has now been postponed twice as Jim and his allies try to suppress revolts in a number of regions by NUMSA members aligned to Vavi.

Despite the ferocity of the organisational struggle, both sides try to obscure the political issues while making a big show of unity. Behind this crisis is something *neither faction* wants to (or can) address: the utter failure, since the split from the ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance in 2013-15, to bring about the revival of a militant and powerful trade-union movement that would defend and advance the interests of the black toiling masses. This is what left-wing workers hoped for at the time of the split. Many also expected it to lay the basis for some kind of new political voice of the working class, feeling thoroughly disillusioned with the wretched pro-capitalist SACP leaders. These

hopes have been utterly betrayed. The fundamental reason is not a “lack of urgency” or organisational incapacity, as preached by the pseudo-Marxist left groups whose whole strategic outlook is defined by supporting and pressuring one faction of the bureaucracy or the other—WASP, Marxist Workers Party (MWP), Keep Left!, etc. The root cause is the nationalist, class-collaborationist programme of the NUMSA/SAFTU leaders, who despite their secondary differences all seek to re-furbish the nationalist popular front by building a “left” version of the Tripartite Alliance.

The past two years of pandemic and crisis, in particular, have laid bare how totally bankrupt and treacherous this is. As the working class was pumelled by the virus, capitalist attacks and a worsening jobs bloodbath, the “left” labour traitors at the head of NUMSA/SAFTU stood with the Randlords and the ANC government in every critical situation—from supporting the starvation lockdowns and shoving “shared sacrifice” down their members’ throats, to chaining workers to the warring ANC factions and betraying the desperate food rioters during the July 2021 unrest. While the SACP/COSATU tops openly and viciously attacked the workers from inside the capitalist government, the NUMSA/SAFTU leaders loudly denounced the government in words—only to support it and betray workers in deeds. This made them *more effective* at subordinating the mainly black proletariat to the racist capitalist exploiters in this crisis, as they were better able to contain the anger and militancy of left-wing workers.

These betrayals underline again a fundamental truth, which class-conscious workers must grasp to advance their interests: The genuine independence of the workers

Jim vs. Vavi: Both Factions Bankrupt

movement from the Randlords and their black government frontmen, can *only* be ensured through forging a revolutionary leadership on the basis of a programme for black proletarian power. Everybody knows that South Africa today is a smouldering powder keg of social discontent—the only questions are when the next explosion will come and, most importantly, which direction it will go. The alternatives, posed point blank, are either the road of workers revolution based on the power of the millions-strong black proletariat, or a worsening spiral of misery and reaction. There is no middle ground.

In the year since the July 2021 food riots, the social misery at the root of that plebeian upheaval has only grown worse in every way, from sky-rocketing costs of living, hunger and starvation, to worsening economic chaos and mass unemployment. This year has also seen a revival of strikes and protests, demonstrating that despite decades of massive betrayal at the hands of its leaders, the South African working class has not been decisively defeated. It remains militant and relatively well-organised, and many workers subjectively want to fight for communism, insofar as they understand it. At the same time, the potential for reaction—marked by increasingly murderous divisions along racial, ethnic and tribal lines—is clearly shown by the near-weekly anti-immigrant attacks and marches by pogromist outfits like Dudula.

In this explosive situation, a programme limited to trade-union struggle is utterly inadequate for addressing any of the tasks facing the working class. To fight for the burning needs of the working masses—for jobs and a living wage; for access to land and quality, racially-integrated housing; for abolition of the racist migrant labour system and liberation of particularly black women from the former bantustans—necessarily poses the question of which class will rule. To defend and advance its interests, the mainly black working class must place itself at the head of the struggle for the liberation of the black African masses and the coloured and Indian toilers—a struggle which must culminate in a black-centred workers government to expropriate the Randlords as a class and struggle to extend proletarian revolution to the imperialist centres. This is the core of the Trotskyist programme of permanent revolution, which provides the only progressive solution to the intense race and class contradictions of neo-apartheid.

The key task is forging a *revolutionary leadership* of the working class, based on strict political independence from the bourgeoisie and its nationalist frontmen. The crisis in SAFTU/NUMSA can be an important opening if it is used to bring about a real break from the nationalist-reformist programme of Jim, Vavi and Co among the union militants who are disillusioned with their leaders. This requires

cohering a revolutionary pole as the nucleus of a Leninist vanguard party. Toward that end, we offer a Trotskyist perspective on some of the burning issues posed by the current crises, which we believe to be indispensable for this task. To workers and youth looking for a revolutionary road out of neo-apartheid misery, we urge you to consider these points and get in touch with Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) to discuss the way forward.

Permanent Revolution vs. NDR Betrayal

When NUMSA and other unions split from the Tripartite Alliance in 2013-15, it was a response to massive working-class anger against all the betrayals the SACP and COSATU tops committed as a necessary part of subordinating the proletariat to the capitalists and running neo-apartheid capitalism—betrayals represented for many workers by the 2012 Marikana massacre. But this response was distorted and deformed by the pro-capitalist leadership of the split, which from the very outset sought to ensure that the *organisational* break from the Alliance would not lead to a *political* break from the bourgeois programme of the nationalist popular front. Vavi, Jim and Co remain fully committed to the nationalist class collaboration that paved the way to the Marikana massacre and all the other bloody betrayals in the first place—just as they were when they supported Zuma as ANC president a second time in December 2012, a few months after the massacre. But they recognised at a certain point that they needed to formally disavow Zuma and the ANC if they were to maintain the credibility needed to continue serving the bourgeoisie as left-talking labour lieutenants.

After decades of neo-apartheid, the betrayal of the anti-apartheid struggle is so glaringly obvious that any political leader now abandoning the ANC must explain this betrayal. The NUMSA/SAFTU leaders' answer is to throw sand in the eyes of left-wing workers. They acknowledge that the negotiated settlement kept economic and social power in the hands of the white capitalist rulers, ensuring the continued national oppression of the black majority. This is absolutely true, but it is merely admitted as a smokescreen to peddle the lie that this monumental betrayal of black freedom was simply an “unfortunate” oversight by the ANC and Alliance leaders. The NUMSA/SAFTU leaders tell workers that the Tripartite Alliance government could have been an instrument for suppressing the white rulers, instead of “becoming captured” by them, if only the ANC had adopted different policies and changed some clauses in the CODESA agreement and the Constitution.

This is pure parliamentary cretinism. It isn't constitutional clauses and the like—ultimately nothing more than scraps of paper—that are decisive for maintaining the dominance of the bourgeoisie, but the capitalist state. The essence of the negotiated settlement and “power sharing” deal was that the Tripartite Alliance tops took over administering that state—which they *could only* do on behalf of the white rulers, becoming black frontmen for racist capitalist rule. For the capitalists, this was dictated by the need to “adapt or die”: co-opting the leaders of the ANC Alliance offered the best hope for preserving their system in the face of a militant and powerful black workers movement, many of whom saw their fight as being one for socialism and red revolution. *All wings* of the nationalist popular front were critical to helping the capitalists out of this tight spot. This included left critics like the NUMSA leaders, who played a crucial role in pacifying and politically disarming left-wing workers. They betrayed these workers by telling them that, since socialism is supposedly “not yet on the agenda”, the

SPARTACIST SOUTH AFRICA 

— Contact Us: —

Spartacist

**P.O. Box 61574, Marshalltown,
Johannesburg 2107**

Voicemail: 088-130-1035

Email: spartacist_sa@yahoo.com

www.spartacist.org

only game in town is “swelling the ranks” of the ANC to push it to the left.

Today, the NUMSA/SAFTU leaders must cover up this historic betrayal in order to promote the lie that a solution to the misery of neo-apartheid capitalism can be reached through a “course correction” to re-furbish the nationalist popular front. For Jim and the NUMSA tops, this is expressed in the call to “get the national democratic revolution (NDR) back on track”. For Vavi and his supporters (including pseudo-Trotskyists like WASP and MWP), it is to push for a return to COSATU’s founding principles of “democratic socialism” and “workers control”, and resurrect the UDF-era version of the nationalist popular front. While their rhetoric and appetites conflict in some ways, what they have in common is that they are pro-capitalist programmes based on opposing a fight for black proletarian power. Instead, they seek to politically tie the proletariat to populist bourgeois-nationalists and other “left-leaning” bourgeois forces (the EFF, NGOs, etc). As a result, they necessarily prepare the way for new betrayals of socialism and black freedom.

Capitalism in South Africa is **built on** the national oppression and dispossession of the black majority. Superexploitation of mainly black labour in the mines, farms and factories produces mountains of wealth for the Randlords and their Anglo-American imperialist senior partners. These rapacious exploiters will never give up power peacefully, through negotiations or reforms. The **only way** to break their economic and social domination is through workers revolution to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the black African masses and the coloured and Indian toilers. **For a black-centred workers government!** The struggle for national liberation will be **the** strategic motor force for proletarian socialist revolution in this country. The key requirement is the proletariat’s complete political independence from bourgeois nationalism—both the ANC’s liberal brand and more populist variants like the EFF’s. This requires a sharp **break** with the nationalist class collaboration of Jim, Vavi and Co.

Since 2013, Jim and the NUMSA tops have endlessly preached that workers need to “get the NDR back on track” by campaigning for the “radical implementation of the Freedom Charter”. It is the same Stalinist schema of “revolution by stages” which the SACP has used for decades to politically chain the working class to the ANC, except now it’s offered to workers who are already *gatvol* with three decades of ANC-administered neo-apartheid. The ANC has utterly betrayed the aspirations for national liberation, including ditching the vague promises of the bourgeois-populist Freedom Charter to nationalise the mines, land, etc. The NUMSA leaders tell workers that the answer to this betrayal is to desperately cling to that populist programme. They pay lip service to “socialist transformation” as the “most consistent and thorough-going” way to uproot national domination and colonial dispossession, but the **whole point** of “getting the NDR on track” is to (continue to) **postpone** “socialism” to an indefinite future. Thus, Irvin Jim and Co tell the working class that it must limit its struggle to a **bourgeois** programme, the Freedom Charter, before it can “reach the phase of socialist transformation”.

The near-complete overlap of race and class in South Africa gives black nationalism a strong hold on proletarian consciousness, growing out of black workers’ just hatred of the racist system of superexploitation. The NUMSA tops and other labour traitors **exploit** this nationalism—the mistaken notion that **all** black people share a common interest standing higher than class divisions—in order

to subordinate the proletariat to finance capital. They tell them that the programme of the Freedom Charter offers the way to pry the land, mines, and other wealth of the country out of the hands of the white masters because it represents “all the class forces that suffer under the yoke of colonial dispossession and imperialist domination” (NUMSA 11th National Congress, Secretariat Report).

This is a swindle. Behind appeals for unity of “all the class forces” oppressed by white-minority rule, populist nationalism rallies the black toilers behind the class aims of the aspiring black capitalist layers, which nationalist parties like the ANC, EFF, PAC and AZAPO all represent. Above all, these parties are committed to **maintaining capitalist class rule**. As a result, they are utterly incapable of ending racial/national oppression, imperialist subjugation, or resolving any of the other basic national-democratic tasks created by colonialism and white-minority rule. On the contrary, in power they inevitably serve as black frontmen for the white big bourgeoisie and the imperialist overlords, employing nationalism to cover for this and attack the working class.

The **only** thing that reviving the NDR can achieve is continued subordination of the proletariat to finance capital, i.e. continued betrayal of **both** the struggle for socialism **and** national liberation. This is clearly shown by looking at what NUMSA leaders did during the period from the late 1980s until 2013, when they acted as “left” critics to keep left-wing workers trapped in the Tripartite Alliance class-collaborationist straitjacket. For example, in 1989 then NUMSA general secretary (and SACP leader) Moses Mayekiso told NUMSA workers that negotiations with the white rulers were the only way as the “socialist stage” had not yet arrived:

“I believe the solutions to our country’s problems will finally come through negotiations. I don’t believe that we will be able to get to Pretoria and oust Botha from those buildings.”

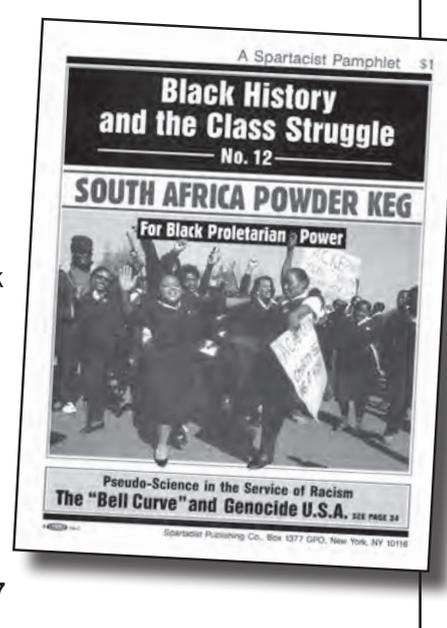
The following year, Mayekiso and SACP leader Joe Slovo were brought in by the bosses of Mercedes-Benz SA to put a stop to a “sleep-in” strike by thousands of NUMSA members at the company’s East London factory. A few months later, Slovo was in the US reassuring Wall Street and the White House that imperialist finance capital and its controlling stakes in the mines would not be touched by the government that came out of the negotiations: “We know that they aren’t charities and they need security, they need

South Africa Powder Keg

Four-part series, from 1994, dissected the roots of neo-apartheid, advanced programme for black proletarian power against betrayal of black freedom.

R2

Order from/pay to:
Spartacist,
P.O. Box 61574,
Marshalltown,
Johannesburg 2107



the feeling that what they've got they're going to keep." Strike-breaking and policing the working class on behalf of the white rulers and the imperialists—*this* is what keeping the proletariat "on track" for the "first stage" of the NDR meant in reality.

Even NUMSA's leaders were forced to admit that their decades of loyal support to the ANC had "merely resulted in delivering more working class victims, like lambs to the slaughter by the ANC's bourgeois leadership" (NUMSA Special National Congress Declaration, 2013). This in itself is a damning indictment, but to top it all off Irvin Jim and Co brazenly insist that this is something to be "proud" of and for the workers to repeat! In a 2015 speech, Jim explained that "swelling the ranks" of the ANC with workers had all been part of the plan for "a working class led NDR", which constitutes "the shortest route to a socialist South Africa. We still hold that view."

By pushing to "get the NDR back on track", the NUMSA tops are preparing the way for a re-furbished nationalist popular front, and their most probable bourgeois-nationalist coalition partner is currently the EFF. It is an illusion to think that a capitalist government with the EFF would be any less subordinate to the white rulers and Anglo-American imperialists than the ANC government today. No different from the ANC in the 1980s, the EFF populists raise calls like land expropriation and nationalisation in order to deceive the black masses, appealing to their anger in order to pressure the white rulers and convince them that they need the populists to keep a lid on things. For example, EFF leader Julius Malema held out an olive branch to the (mainly white) SA Property Owners Association, concerned by the EFF's calls to nationalise the land: "If you are going to invest in property today, it is also going to be wise to invest in the EFF. ... There is no future without the EFF."

Irvin Jim has called for a return to "the SACP of Joe Slovo", and this is the model on which he seeks to build the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP): a new "vanguard party" to lead the working class on a programme of "radical implementation of the Freedom Charter". This means continuing to betray the aspirations of the black masses for freedom by telling them to leave the resolution of the land question, the nationalisation of the mines, etc, in the hands of the bourgeois nationalists and the capitalist state—a guarantee that the domination of the Randlords and imperialists will remain intact.

Against this treachery, it is necessary to rally the masses behind the social power of the black proletariat in a struggle to *overthrow* the bourgeoisie and its black-nationalist frontmen. To uproot colonial dispossession and end imperialist domination, a revolutionary internationalist programme is necessary. This is underlined by the fact that the mountains of finance capital accumulated over 150 years of superexploitation in the country's mines is parked, for the most part, in Wall Street and the City of London. The Tripartite Alliance government has loyally paid down the debt from the apartheid butchers—a clear index of the nationalists' utter subordination to imperialist finance capital. ***Down with the imperialist-imposed debt!***

What would happen in the unlikely event of a bourgeois government adopting a populist course, taking measures like repudiating the debt or nationalising land? First of all, the big bourgeoisie would use massive capital flight, imperialist sanctions and other forms of economic sabotage to retaliate. History shows that there are a few avenues open under capitalism, but *none of them lead to the liberation of the oppressed masses*. The new government could get a few temporary concessions and use them to cut a deal, becoming the new frontmen for the Randlords and imperialists.

Alternatively, the regime could end up like Iran or Zimbabwe, isolated and crippled by decades of imperialist strangulation. There could also be a reactionary and bloody backlash fomented by the bourgeoisie, with a section of the army and police commanders attempting to oust the new government by force and crush the proletariat—like what happened to the Allende popular front government in Chile in 1973.

What all of these possibilities show is that a programme based on maintaining capitalism necessarily leads to a dead end. While defending the bourgeois-populist measures as blows against imperialism and national oppression, the proletariat must maintain strict political independence from the capitalist government carrying them out, pursuing the struggle for proletarian revolution and its international extension as the only way to break the chains of imperialist subjugation. What's needed is a revolutionary, class-struggle response to economic strangulation: ***Expropriate the banks! For a state monopoly on foreign trade!*** This is urgently needed to counter the numerous deceptions the bourgeoisie uses to hide its profits and spirit them out of the country, by uncovering and carefully controlling all the accounts and financial transactions of the exploiters. Introduction of centralised control of production and economic planning; expropriation without compensation of the mines, banks, industry, and the white-owned commercial farms—all of these necessary measures require workers state power.

Of course, a black-centred workers government would also face the threat of economic strangulation by the imperialists, and would still be integrated into a world capitalist economy dominated by the imperialists. The solution is not to withdraw from the world economy—which is utopian and reactionary in any case—but to fight like hell to spread the revolution internationally, especially to the proletariat of the advanced imperialist countries. For this, an international Leninist vanguard party must be constructed through the reforging of the Fourth International.

Neo-Apartheid Powder Keg

Neo-apartheid capitalism has always been highly volatile, and the sharpened crises of the past two years have exposed again that South Africa is a powder keg waiting to explode. This has also starkly exposed the utter bankruptcy of the NUMSA/SAFTU leaders, contributing to the crisis that has now split the bureaucracy into warring factions. On the one hand, all the NUMSA/SAFTU leaders denounce the ANC government up and down for its anti-working-class attacks, seeking to appeal to the widespread hatred of the government among the working class. But their nationalist-reformist programme is premised on *opposing* the only alternative that can advance the interests of the masses—the struggle for proletarian revolution to replace this capitalist government with a black-centred workers government—and looking for "left-leaning" bourgeois forces with which to form a coalition. Since there is currently no obvious alternative party or coalition to take the ANC's place in a bourgeois-parliamentary framework, each shock in the crisis has seen the NUMSA/SAFTU leadership respond by either simply supporting the government, or polarising along the lines of the faction fight *within the ANC*.

From the first Covid lockdowns in March 2020, to the July 2021 food riots, to the current electricity crisis, each new stage of crisis underlines that the interests of the working class can *only* be defended with an independent working-class policy conducted against *all wings* of the bourgeoisie and its nationalist frontmen. This is only possible on the basis of a revolutionary programme linking the immediate needs of the masses to the conquest of state

and Co help chain workers to the pro-Zuma faction, whose protests were not in defence of democratic rights or any just cause, but merely sought to rile up the masses to save Zuma from jail. The cynical calculation was that the protests could demonstrate to the Randlords that Zuma and his cronies are still needed to contain the socially explosive situation, and use this as leverage.

As we explained in “Ramaphosa vs. Zuma: ANC Factions of Marikana Massacre” (SSA No. 15, January 2018), the working class’s interests dictate opposition to both sides of the “state capture” squabble and the ANC factional struggle it is a part of. While the “anti-corruption” campaign of Ramaphosa and his allies is dripping with bourgeois hypocrisy and anti-black racism, those on the other side—Zuma, the Guptas and the would-be black exploiters in their camp—are no less deadly enemies of the working class and black freedom.

The current split between the pro-Vavi and pro-Jim factions in fact goes back to 2017, when rifts in the SAFTU/NUMSA leadership emerged over which side of the “state capture” squabble to support. On one side, Vavi fulsomely supported the hypocritical bourgeois “anti-corruption” campaign. He even joined forces with the right-wing SaveSA coalition to defend Pravin Gordhan when Zuma sacked him as finance minister in March 2017, calling it “the darkest hour [!] in the history [!!] of South Africa”. On the other side, Jim and Co white-wash Zuma’s heinous crimes against the working class, now saying that the decision in 2013 to no longer support him was taken because Zuma “was failing to crystallise any revolutionary agenda”. This shows contempt for NUMSA workers, who in fact were motivated to dump the ANC out of *class hatred* for the Zuma government and its role (alongside Ramaphosa) in overseeing the *bloody massacre* of striking black mineworkers!

Electricity Crisis

Enough betrayals! The current electricity crisis vividly shows, once again, how the search for a *verligte* section of the bourgeoisie to ally with—or for a wing of their bourgeois-nationalist frontmen to “crystallise a revolutionary agenda”—can only spell catastrophe for the working class and the oppressed masses. The primary cause of this crisis is the *deliberate, systematic sabotage and looting*, over decades, of the power-generating plant and infrastructure by the bourgeoisie and its black frontmen. The bourgeoisie’s attempt to blame government corruption and incompetence as the *sole* cause is meant to cover the fact that this serves its interests very well—the drive to privatise Eskom, which would open up a profitable field of investment for finance capital and be an important step to

smashing the power of organised labour. The crisis is useful to the bosses on both counts. While massively driving up the price of electricity, it also provides a cudgel with which to beat the heavily unionised Eskom workforce, who the capitalists demagogically blame for the mass misery caused by load shedding, sky-rocketing electricity prices and racist load reduction in the townships.

It is urgently necessary to fight this, and it’s clear that the trade union tops are under enormous pressure from their base to do so. Following a semi-wildcat strike by NUM and NUMSA members at Eskom in late June, the bourgeoisie’s mouthpiece *Financial Mail* (7-13 July) noted, with concern, that it “showed the trade unions no longer have control of their own members, and can’t stop them walking off the job in an unprotected strike”. The SAFTU tops are calling for a national shutdown and “rolling mass actions” beginning in August to, among other things, protest load shedding and the rising costs of living. They call on workers and the unemployed to “be ready for a battle that will stop at nothing”. This *is* necessary, but what is the *aim* of the battle? “To ensure that President Ramaphosa takes practical steps” to end load shedding and lower prices for electricity, fuel and food, answer the SAFTU leaders. Similarly, the NUMSA tops demand that the state resolve the electricity crisis by abandoning neoliberalism and intervening in markets to support manufacturing. But Ramaphosa and the capitalists are the ones holding the country to ransom! It is criminal to leave the resolution of the self-made crisis in their hands—it can only disarm the proletariat and make it easier for the bosses to carry out their privatisation plans, which in turn will plunge the country into further economic chaos and exacerbate the already catastrophic situation facing the masses.

To defend the interests of *both* Eskom workers *and* the broad working masses, we propose a programme of revolutionary action to combine the fight for affordable electricity, industrialisation and jobs for all, with a struggle for the working class to run the country. The unions must fight for a comprehensive programme of repairs, maintenance and expansion of the grid, with union-run hiring and skills training to provide the necessary staff, shorten the work week and combat unemployment. To rely on the bosses and their government is the road to defeat! Instead, workers committees must be formed to exercise *workers control* of production, exposing and rooting out the looting, profiteering and outright sabotage that are rife at Eskom and its private suppliers. *Open the books! Abolish business and banking secrets!*

The labour traitors and fake left groups constantly use “workers control” to push class collaboration, presenting it as some kind of utopian proletarian-democratic means of administering a nationalised industry under capitalism. For revolutionaries, workers control is not a prolonged, “normal” condition. It is not a recipe for improving capitalism, but for *overthrowing* it. It means *dual power* at the point of production, and is raised as a bridge to revolution: *Expropriate industry, mines, banks, and the capitalist class as a whole!* To carry this out requires the formation of a black-centred workers government based on *workers councils (soviets)* incorporating the vast numbers of urban poor and linked to *soviets of rural toilers* in the farms and former bantustans.

To prepare the ground for the formation of these organs of proletarian dual power in a revolutionary situation, it is necessary to fight *now* for revolutionary, class-struggle methods in response to all the pressing needs of the masses. For example, committees of workers and consumers are needed to monitor and control prices and distribution



27 February 2022
Statement by the
International
Communist
League
(Fourth
Internationalist)

Available on ICL website: www.spartacist.org

against the growing threat of starvation and malnutrition. Democratic demands are also critical to uniting the oppressed toilers behind the proletariat and strengthening the working class's revolutionary determination. For example, it's necessary to fight for *defence of security of tenure* for farm workers and subsistence farmers: **Smash the system of "traditional" rule!** The "traditional" authorities are parasitic tools of white domination and disfranchisement of the black masses, particularly women, in the rural areas.

Above all, to gain the support of the broad masses it is necessary for the proletariat to fight to take state power in its own name as the only progressive way out of the deepening crisis of neo-apartheid capitalism. That perspective is totally counterposed to the nationalist class collaboration of the SAFTU/NUMSA tops and their left tails, which is why their ritual declarations of the need to "unite workplace and community struggles" remain empty words, used to cover for wretched betrayal.

State and Revolution

For both factions of the SAFTU/NUMSA leadership, a central tenet of their nationalist class collaboration is promoting the illusion that the existing state machinery can, through reforms like amending the Constitution or changing the government's economic policy, be transformed into an instrument for national liberation and meeting the needs of the proletariat. Jim and Co tell workers that if the NDR were "back on track" the black majority could use the "democratic state" to take ownership of the country's economy. Vavi and his allies tell them that neo-apartheid misery can be overcome if only the government would see the light and commit to constructing a "developmental state" (or even a "caring state") to combat poverty and inequality.

Just like the bourgeoisie and the ANC government, the SAFTU/NUMSA tops exploit nationalist false consciousness to deceive the oppressed and promote submissiveness to the capitalist state. They promote the lie that "our 1994 democratic breakthrough" means the state now represents the majority—or that it *could*, if only the correct policies were adopted, the "political will" to fix things were found, less corrupt politicians were elected, etc. The SAFTU/NUMSA tops like to cover themselves with the authority of Marxism-Leninism, in order to appeal to left-wing workers, which is a total sham. As comrade Lenin explained in *State and Revolution*, the capitalist state consists of special bodies of armed men whose purpose is to defend with violence the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat—not "care" for the people!

Reformists and bourgeois liberals blab about the "democratic state", the "developmental state" and the like, in order to divert attention from the fundamental question, which is *whose class rule* it defends. The present South African state stands in unbroken continuity with the apartheid state, defending the rule of the overwhelmingly white big bourgeoisie and imperialists whose wealth comes from superexploitation of a mainly black proletariat. Contrary to Irvin Jim and Co, no amount of amendments to the Constitution or other reforms can ever make it possible for the working class to use this state to liberate itself and the black majority. The proletariat must lead the black masses, along with the coloured and Indian toilers, in a revolution to *break up* the existing machinery, erecting in its place a state power to suppress and crush the resistance of the capitalist exploiters—the dictatorship of the proletariat. We use the slogan of a *black-centred workers government* to express the relation between the social and national transformations for which the proletarian dictatorship is necessary.

The SAFTU congress in May highlighted, in a curious way, the crass contradiction between both factions' pretensions to Marxism-Leninism and their treacherous reformism. On one side, the "red revolutionary" Irvin Jim, who never tires of quoting Lenin, fought alongside the bourgeois cops of the South African Policing Union in a bloc to gain control of the SAFTU leadership. On the other, Zwelinzima Vavi, the champion of "strong, worker-controlled unions", tried to woo the same SAPU professional strike-breakers by denouncing the government for not hiring more police and not spending more to equip them with better rifles, body armour, etc. Ever since that congress, a major campaign of the SAFTU tops has been to preach the need for defence of *the cops* against the population, including denouncing violence against the police as "an act of treason against the people"!

This is thoroughly reactionary, and suicidal for the working class. SAPU and other police "unions" represent the interests of the cops that massacred striking black mineworkers in Marikana, that are always deployed to protect scabs and attack strike pickets. It is an elementary class demand, necessary for building trade unions that can defend workers interests through struggle against the bosses, to kick the *cops, security guards and prison guards out of the unions!*

For a Leninist-Trotskyist Vanguard Party!

Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky wrote in an unfinished essay, "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (1940):

"They [the trade unions] can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat."

These alternatives are sharply posed in the powder keg of today's South Africa. Especially following the wretched betrayals of the past two years, there is widespread anger at the base of the unions, including NUMSA and other SAFTU affiliates. Workers are increasingly disillusioned with a leadership they see as co-opted and corrupted by the perks and privileges of union office. To break the treacherous subordination to finance capital, this anger must be channelled toward a fight for *revolutionary leadership* of the unions, to *oust the labour traitors, "left" and right.*

Workers cannot defend or further their interests simply

Workers Hammer
No. 247
Winter 2021-2022
Newspaper of the
Spartacist League/Britain,
section of the International
Communist League
(Fourth Internationalist)
R2 per issue



For subscription information, visit www.spartacist.org

through struggles at the trade-union level, no matter how militant. This is particularly stark in South Africa, where the oppression of the black African people by the white ruling class dominates all aspects of economic, social and political life. Almost half the workforce is unemployed; millions of black Africans, especially women, are hideously oppressed and deprived of basic democratic rights under tribal authorities in the former bantustans; the migrant labour system remains firmly entrenched, along with slave-like conditions on the farms. It is vital for the workers movement to take up these burning issues. As Lenin explained in *What is to be done?*, a communist leadership must represent the working class not only in relation to a given group of employers, but in its relation to all classes of modern society, putting forward a revolutionary solution to general democratic tasks and combating all forms of capitalist-state oppression.

A major dispute in the SAFTU/NUMSA split has been over the question of the federation's relationship to the SRWP. Vavi and his supporters complain that the crisis was caused by Irvin Jim and the NUMSA leaders seeking to impose the SRWP on SAFTU, which Vavi has valiantly resisted in defence of the principle of the federation's "political independence". To the SRWP, Vavi and Co counterpose the Working Class Summit (WCS). The alternatives posed in this dispute are false all around. Politically "independent" unions have in fact never existed anywhere, and never will. Reformists like Vavi use such phrases as a smokescreen for subordinating the working class to the bourgeoisie. This is exactly the aim with the WCS, which is envisioned as a re-boot of the 1980s UDF popular front, with imperialist-funded NGOs and other "left-leaning" small-time bourgeois forces serving as place holders for the big bourgeoisie. The SRWP, on the other hand, is meant to be a re-hash of the SACP, with a treacherous Stalinist programme of subordinating the black proletariat to finance capitalism, i.e. "getting the NDR on track".

To these bankrupt alternatives, we counterpose the fight for a racially-integrated vanguard workers party, based on a revolutionary programme. This is the necessary instrument to intervene among all sections of the oppressed, linking their struggles to the fight for a black-centred workers government, for a socialist federation of southern Africa,

and to extend revolution to the imperialist centres.

The urgent need for such a party is starkly highlighted by the increasingly murderous divisions among the oppressed. Anti-immigrant pogroms under the leadership of Dudula and Co have risen sharply over the past year, while the massacre of dozens of black Africans by racist vigilantes in Phoenix during the July 2021 unrest threw a spotlight on the deadly tensions between the black majority and Indian minority. To unify the workers movement in struggle against capitalist misery, it is urgent for the unions to defend foreign-born workers: **Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! No to jobs quotas! Organise the unorganised!** It is necessary to build union-based workers defence militias, integrated across tribal and racial lines and linking the factory to the townships, to smash anti-immigrant pogroms and racist vigilantism.

The SAFTU/NUMSA labour traitors and fake left of course all take a moral stand "against xenophobia" and make ritual appeals to the workers to "unite and fight". But they are fundamentally incapable of transcending the divisions fostered by the capitalist rulers, and in fact they capitulate to them. For example, the SAFTU tops support job quotas for South Africans and oppose employment of undocumented immigrants. This crass capitulation flows from their bankrupt programme: on the basis of **upholding the system of capitalist rule**, collaborating with the capitalist state against undocumented immigrants is seen as the best option to counter the bosses' "strategy of using the undocumented labour to deepen the exploitation of workers". It is a treacherous lie that this nationalist class collaboration is a way to counter exploitation! In fact, it can only play into the hands of the bosses by making immigrant workers more vulnerable and further pitting South African and foreign workers against each other.

To fight the exploitation of **all** workers and cut through the bosses' racist divide-and-rule, what's needed is the revolutionary mobilisation of the proletariat under the leadership of a communist vanguard party. A party of the Bolshevik type, fighting for new October Revolutions worldwide, is what's needed to open the road to a progressive solution to the South African powder keg. **Reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!** ■

Subscribe to the press of the International Communist League

Spartacist South Africa

Marxist journal of Spartacist/South Africa
(includes English-language *Spartacist*)

- R10 for 4 issues (in South Africa) or
 R20 for 4 issues (rest of Africa)

Name _____

Address _____

Post Code _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Mail to **Spartacist, P.O. Box 61574, Marshalltown, Johannesburg 2107, South Africa**