



31 January 2023

New Unity Movement

The Worker is an official publication of the New Unity Movement (NUM)

The Worker

No. 99

We Fight Ideas with Ideas

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE 2023

The NUM extends best wishes to all the readers of *The Worker* for a happy new year. Much as we wish that the tribulations of the past year may become a fading memory, the reality of the prevailing conditions globally as well as nationally bodes ill, especially for the majority of the citizens of South Africa and all the countries of the world.

For there can be no gainsaying that when one surveys the state of affairs prevailing in the world and here at home, to paraphrase WB Yeats, things are falling apart at quite a rapid pace, and the signs of the centre not holding have become more evident.

A review of the state of affairs prevailing in any number of geopolitical theatres will testify to the correctness of this statement.

Quite apart from the many very serious outcomes that the Covid 19 pandemic has inflicted upon the world, we have had to come to terms with operating in a world which is beset by challenges and crises which are too numerous to mention here. We believe that these crises, whether they are global in nature or confined to us here in South Africa, can all be shown to be manifestations of the ongoing breakdown in the system of Neoliberal Capitalism-Imperialism.

As we enter the new year of 2023 our world is in the midst of a string of seemingly insurmountable challenges. Those crises and challenges with a global impact, include:

- The aftermath of the Covid 19 Pandemic
- The devastating effects of global warming / climate change on the earth's ecology
- The horrors of the war in Ukraine



The President of the NUM: Dr Basil Brown

- A de facto economic recession which according to the IMF will affect at least one-third of the countries in the world.
- The signs of a rise of fascism in the USA and some countries in Europe.

In particular, as far as countries in the Global South are concerned, it is the imposition by the twin evil handmaidens of Imperialism

namely, the IMF and the WB, of their Neoliberal economic policies on countries such as ours which results in the massive unemployment levels, the poverty and the degradation of the quality of life amongst the majority of the world's population.

It is that system that we are dedicated to overthrowing, albeit a monumental task.

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The crises and challenges with a national impact have been brilliantly set out by Judith February in her column published in the Daily Maverick on 26 January 2023. In setting out the details of the prevailing circumstances that we face in this country, she makes this telling observation, *"It would not be the first time that we collectively weep for the land which has been broken"*. (Our emphasis)

One can add the following to what she covers in her article the ongoing breakdown in the social fabric of society as evidenced by a soaring crime rate which includes an increase in GBV and child murders:

- The aftermath of the Jacob Zuma inspired rioting and looting in KZN and Gauteng, with outbursts of Xenophobia being ever-present
- The activities of criminal gangs and syndicates responsible for the plundering of our natural resources like perlemoen, and the destruction of essential infrastructure caused by cable theft.

In addition, one could recommend the following books which expose the real nature of the state and of the ANC in particular:

- Mcebisi Ndletyana in *"Anatomy of the ANC in Power"* provides insights into the dynamics of the rise and fall of the ANC as the ruling party including manifestations of factionalism, patronage and criminal networks located within SMME's and the minibus taxi industry
- The appropriately titled book *"Gangster State"* by Peter Louis Myburgh
- Jaques Pauw's the *"President's Keepers"* and *"Our Poisoned Land"* .

It is against the above background that we pose the questions, is there a way out of the mess that the country finds itself in and what is the vehicle that will bring about the changes that are required?

We have made our standpoint clear on many of the issues raised above in our regular publication, *The Worker*.

Our approach to answering the questions may be derived from what is encapsulated in the following extract from the preamble to our Ten Point Programme of Transitional Demands (TPP):

"In the era of capitalist parliamentary democracy following the abrogation of apartheid legislation in South Africa, our struggle continues to be both the national and class struggle of a people dominated by imperialism. It is a struggle by the entire working class of this country for nothing less than total emancipation –

emancipation from all forms of deprivation and discrimination, from all forms of enslavement and victimisation. It is an anti-capitalist struggle; it is a struggle for the socialist transformation of society. Our struggle is based on a transitional programme, one that raises demands for the immediate reform of society such that the disabilities of the working class are immediately addressed, as well as one that raises demands that will lead to the democratic transition of society to a post-capitalist order."

The preamble goes on to state our aims as being:

- *"To build a single, undivided, independent, non-racial, democratic and socialist South Africa in which the interests of workers and the rural poor shall be paramount.*
- *To build the unity of workers and the urban and rural poor under the leadership of the working class in the struggle for national liberation and freedom from both national and foreign domination.*
- *To rid society of all forms of "racial", colour, gender and class discrimination – including the political, economic, social, educational and cultural areas of our lives.*
- *To establish a truly democratic government in a united South Africa and to resist the schemes to set up separate "race"-based enclaves or kingdoms to perpetuate division and strife in society.*
- *To subordinate the state and the economy to the leadership of the working class, so that the scandalous social deficits existing in our society, which are actively promoted by the policies of the current ruling class, might be rapidly eliminated.*
- *To end foreign domination - political and economic - and to wage a relentless battle against all local agents who serve the cause of foreign domination and exploitation.*
- *To strenuously oppose all Washington Consensus prescriptions, in terms of which our economy is subject to structural adjustment programmes, privatization, deregulation and other forms of subjugation to imperialist interests.*
- *To forge alliances with like-minded movements both in South Africa and abroad in order to accelerate the aims of the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle.*

William Shoki in an article posted on the Africa Is A Country (AIAC) website provocatively titled *"What's Left of the South African Left"*, correctly observes, *"the worsening political, social and ecological crisis before us (that most acutely affects the poor and working-class), requires effective and coordinated action from*

South Africa's progressive forces." (<https://africasacountry.com>)

With reference to our forerunner, the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), founded in 1943, we have posited the idea of building a movement for socialism. Such an initiative was spearheaded by NUMSA in 2015. However, that initiative was stillborn. The reasons for this failure however need a close examination in the light of the fact that we may need to consider reviving that initiative.

However, our call for the establishment of a movement for socialism is contested by Niall Reddy of AIAC who argues:

"Social strains look set to keep accumulating. But assuming that any crisis they produce will automatically redound to the Left's benefit would be folly. That will only happen if we have the political vision and the organizational capacity to ensure that class becomes the fault line of social polarization. And for that we need to face up to the challenge of constructing a new party. (<https://africasacountry.com>)"

In this article he argues against what he calls "movementism".

In response to Reddy we would argue that in considering the question of forming a workers' party, timing is a critical factor.

Some on the left have put their faith in the building of a vanguard party of workers. However, experience has taught us that a Leninist inspired vanguard party may not be the answer.

The idea of forming a mass workers' party in South Africa has reared its head repeatedly over many decades. The closest we've come to realizing that idea has been with organizations like the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), the Workers List of the Workers Organization for Socialist Action (WOSA) and the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) formed by NUMSA. They each in turn floundered after participating in the parliamentary elections. The reasons for the failure of these initiatives are not difficult to see.

As we've seen the working class in SA is not ready to vote power to a working-class party. As we saw in 1994, COSATU were far too focused on economic issues in the workplace, rather than broadening the struggle in all areas of working-class life.

So, we argue that the movement "comes first" to build working-class political consciousness and to strengthen working-class organisations (trade unions, civics). Only then will it make sense for the working class to attempt to gain access to, if not seize parliament. You can be sure that capitalism will not stand idly by, but will use every means at its disposal to prevent it from happening. As it is, we are seeing working-class

consciousness and militancy constantly being shuttled into dead ends such as identitarianism and fascism (e.g. xenophobia). Thus, the struggle is never an anti-capitalist struggle, but always one for short-term immediate reforms - for relief from current hardship..

A key element in bringing about the formation of an effective working-class party is a well-organized trade union movement.. A precondition for working-class party formation is a powerful workers' movement. Such a movement would "guarantee" the power of a working-class party in parliament not only to retain its power, but to secure enlightened legislation in the face of hostile bourgeois interests. Sadly, the fractured trade union movement in this country does not inspire hope in this regard.

We once again make a call for progressive workers, intellectuals, academics and members of organisations or formations that espouse socialism, to rise up to this challenge.

Just as we did in 2022, we can only reiterate the call we made then for the Left to start the process of the building of a movement for socialism.

We stand ready to join any initiative that will lead to the establishment of a movement for socialism.

BROEDERTWIS (SIBLING RIVALRY)

Broedertwis (sibling rivalry) reminiscent of the split in Afrikanerdom has hit the ANC. Whilst Rome was burning for the Afrikaners, they were squabbling amongst each other, not realising that there were forces at play much stronger and more influential than the religious and political forces that they were squabbling about. It is interesting to now read about their internal bickering.

In a similar vein, the wrangling in the ANC camp is typical of the Longfellow quote, *whom the gods would destroy they first make mad*. South Africa (SA) is burning, yet the power struggle in the ANC dominates the political discourse.

South Africa is on the verge of imploding.

After years of corruption, mismanagement, ill-advised cadre deployment, and nepotism the country, with so much potential is collapsing. Roads, rail, and our ports are all in disarray. Transport, with an economic strike looming by the transport union, SATAWU, is virtually collapsing. The Post Office has long ago given up on its main functions and the only real

function it has is handling the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant, and that not very well in any case.

According to the 2022 South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE) infrastructure report, the picture painted for SA was very bleak. The SAICE has a simple five-point scale ranging from A (world-class) to E (unfit for purpose). The overall rating for SA was a D, indicating that SA is not coping with the normal demand and is poorly maintained.

People in the townships find it difficult to access basic services such as water, sanitation, health, education, public transport and electricity.



South Africa's failing infrastructure - potholed roads

Municipalities are using ageing infrastructure (not being maintained) as an excuse for the non-delivery of services. Most township roads are in a state of disrepair. Most roads in these areas are not tarred, and even if some are tarred, it is not up to standard. In addition, there are very few if any sidewalks on many of the streets of the townships.

South Africa's water system is also in a state of collapse. This is mainly due to the lack of maintenance of infrastructure and corruption in which tenderpreneurs build and maintain substandard infrastructure. The delivery of water infrastructure at the municipal level has collapsed across the country.

The municipal sewerage system is in a state of virtual collapse as effluent from the wastewater runs into the sea after the floods in KZN and the Eastern Cape and beaches have to be closed. Even where there were no floods such as in Cape Town, certain beaches had to be closed. Further, Gauteng has similar problems with sewage from wastewater treatment works spilling the effluent into the rivers, this is besides water from the mines polluting the rivers. Almost half of South Africa's wastewater treatment works fail to treat sewage properly. The poor state of the effluent discharged into the environment harms the quality of water in the rivers, lakes, wetlands and groundwater. Most of SA's rivers and wetland ecosystems are in a parlous state.

The recent firing of policemen who watched whilst large sections of copper wire were stolen is symptomatic of a decaying society. In Kariega, opposite a police station, a civic centre was completely vandalised until a mere shell remained. Are the police in bed with the criminals? The rape of a six-year-old by an Eastern Cape official from the Department of Education and a male teacher being suspended in Kwa-Mhlanga on allegations of rape, sexual assault and child pornography involving boys at a primary school, is further evidence of the declining moral values in our society. This is exacerbated by multiple killings in SA's townships on a daily basis. Gender-based violence has reached epidemic proportions in our country.

What is the cause of this moral decay?

SA has an unemployment rate of close to 50%, with youth unemployment reaching crisis levels of more than 70%. Poverty and inequality, the seemingly insoluble twin scourges, is a blight on our society.

Are these the contributory factors to the decay in society?

BNP Paribas estimates that the economic growth rate in SA is likely to stall and at best reach a growth rate of 0.5% over the short term. The electricity crisis (SA has not had one day without blackouts in 2023) has impacted severely on the economy. All facets of the economy as well as civil society have suffered as a result of the loadshedding. By December 2022, SA had experienced more than 200 days of loadshedding. The ANC-led government is now supporting calls for declaring a "*state of disaster*" in the wake of the continuing electricity crisis.

SA is now experiencing infrastructural failure at unprecedented levels. The entire infrastructure system is likely to collapse. The KZN floods of April 2022 claimed more than 400 lives with 100 lives unaccounted for and damage to property estimated to be in excess of R50 billion, would have been less severe if the infrastructure was maintained properly and better managed.

SAA (Airways), Prasa (Passenger Rail), Transnet (Railways & Harbours Company), Denel (Defence, Security) and most of the State-Owned Companies are riddled with corruption and mismanagement.

All this bodes ill for the electoral system. Approximately 12 million voters out of a possible 43 million voters participated in the last elections. It is going to take some effort to get more voters to the polls.

Is this the right time for the like-minded left to put aside differences and march separately, but strike together?

The Editor

Recently I saw an advertisement for an employment opportunity in the healthcare sector. Notably, included among the attributes required for the job, amongst numeracy and computer literacy, was “integrity”. That one should have found that noteworthy, speaks to the state of our nation’s moral fibre. Integrity is a personal characteristic expected implicitly of people, so it is telling that an employment advertisement expressly calls for that attribute.

This takes me to the tragic killing of the bodyguard of the vice-chancellor of the University of Fort Hare. It seems to have been an attempt on the life of the rector himself, which, in turn, seems connected to his determination to root out corruption at the university. Similarly, the fight against tender fraud, nominations for positions as councillors at municipalities and the struggle for the honest management of essential service delivery entities in the public sphere, are fraught with not only the threat of, but actual violent opposition by unscrupulous individuals and groups.

Such incidents, including the theft of state assets and the corruption that is becoming endemic, are symptomatic of an absolute lack of integrity in South Africa.

Our country has been suffering a dearth of integrity for the longest time. Centuries ago corruptors came ashore on ships with billowing sails carrying bulging purses. Subsequently, honour and probity were but some of the casualties among the many wrecks on our rocky shores. From day one, their pilfering voyages sought out the corruptible amongst us. Gunpowder backed up their guile to extract, to this day, the riches that South Africa has above and below the ground.

Illegally assuming ownership of the land they saw before them, in an orgy of entitlement, they gifted smallholdings and farms to Free Burghers and Settlers stocked with stolen cattle and sheep. The defence by the indigenous people of their land and property was arrogantly characterised as theft, cunning and laziness. And for trying to reclaim what was rightfully theirs, people were punished with imprisonment in dungeons and even execution to the extent of a full-blown ethnocide.

This display of the absence of integrity of the colonisers continued apace, regardless of their European country of origin. Forced removals and Bantustan creations saw the uprooting of communities and the reinvention of geography in the name of separate development. Opportunities were denied, and doors were chauvinistically closed. The Integrity Deficit (ID) just grew larger, keeping pace with the growing impunity of whoever claimed they owned the country.

Today, you cannot switch on a light or draw a glass of water, without wondering whether these things you take for granted, may no longer be. The ID is sustained by rallying calls of “a lootat continua” and delinquent governance without consequence.

The result of all this, is garish opulence living cheek by jowl with homelessness, hunger and abject poverty. Surely, this is unsustainable. This brutish manifestation of capitalism must certainly make socialism a preferable alternative. We deserve better!

Concerned Citizen

The Worker was produced by the Publications Collective of the New Unity Movement

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