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# New Unity Movement

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## The Worker

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We Fight Ideas with Ideas

### ON THE SCOURGE OF RACIALISM

In an article following the unrest in KZN in July 2021, Niall Reddy speculates on the causes and likely effects of this “unprecedented upsurge in mass action.” At the time, there were two main interpretations among mainstream left-wing commentators. One was that the unrest was fomented by elements loyal to Jacob Zuma, in an attempt to rouse public sentiment against his arrest. The sheer scale and level of destruction (so the argument went) attested to the depth of support for Zuma and what he reprehended, and amounted to a victory for the forces of “radical economic transformation.”

The other interpretation was that, while Zuma’s incarceration might have been the spark, the unrest was really an eruption of mass popular discontent among the working poor which had been festering for decades. In other words, it was an indication that the revolutionary situation was ripening, that the unrest could be interpreted as a “bread riot.” In short, the structure of SA society was being attacked, and that, if the downtrodden class were able to organise effectively, then future mass action (which would be inevitable) would be more organised, more focused, and therefore, more effective at shifting political power in favour of the workers.

Reddy’s own conclusion is that the unrest reflected both issues. He contemplates why “unrest on this scale, leavened by such profound desperation, show[ed] so little prospect of developing a radical edge? Why

was a “Tunisia moment” simply never on the cards?” He goes on to conclude that

An important part of the answer ... is that there has not yet been any serious breakdown in the *legitimacy of the political order in South Africa*. [our emphasis] Those who see a “Tunisia moment” around every corner base their predictions on the depth of the social crisis in the country. But they tend to overlook the fact that the political crisis, while incipient, simply has not matured to the same extent. *The ANC’s hegemony remains broadly intact both at the polls and on the ground, in communities and workplaces*. [again, our emphasis]

We would go so far as to say that the ANC’s hegemony extends beyond the ANC itself, and broadly includes all elements connected to a nationalist ideology. This would then

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include extremists such as are to be found in the EFF and Patriotic Alliance. The unifying ideology for them is that white monopoly capital needs to be dispossessed in favour of the black majority – not that capitalism needs to be liquidated in favour of socialism.

There are many on the Left who regard identitarianism as the biggest obstacle to working class unity in South Africa. Because previous regimes (segregationist, apartheidist) based their oppressive policies on the fiction of race, there is a widespread knee-jerk reaction to accepting that liberation has to be on “racial” terms. (“We were oppressed as a race therefore we have to liberate ourselves as a race”). This kind of thinking plays right into the hands of the true oppressors and beneficiaries of oppression: Big Capital, and their hangers-on in government. It fuels division not only among South Africans, but against other Africans, too – “illegal immigrants.”

It also obscures the struggle for a society which recognises and respects the genuine rights of indigenous communities, such as language and other cultural rights. Instead of elevating and celebrating indigenous history, and “rescuing” it from the distortions wreaked by colonialism, we have opportunistic elements surfacing in full tribal regalia, foregrounding their tribal roots, and laying claim to privileges based on their tribal leadership. This muddies the water, and takes the focus away from the material disabilities we suffer and their root cause, which is to say, capitalism.

Historically, a key battle for the liberation of this country has always been waged on this front. ANC stalwart of the mid-twentieth century, Anton Lembede, lambasted attempts to unify the oppressed on non-racial lines as a fallacy.

Before irreparable harm is done to the

development and progress of the African people, this fallacious and fantastic theory must be exposed. Unity among the abovementioned classes of Non-Europeans is impossible or extremely difficult of attainment ... [see the full article at

<https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/freedom-our-life-time-debates-and-relations-other-organizations> ]

As is well-known, the NEUM's entire philosophy was premised on non-racialism and the unity of the oppressed people. In the eight decades following the formation of the NEUM, their ideal of a society built on the foundation of non-racialism and anti-capitalism/anti-imperialism remains as relevant as ever. The need for a broad alliance of progressive groups and individuals committed to a programme of non-racialism and socialism remains an imperative.

A luta continua.

[Niall Reddy's article “A terrifying vision of South Africa's future” can be accessed at the following website: <https://africasacountry.com/2021/08/a-terrifying-vision-of-south-africas-future>]

## WE ARE NOT ISLANDS IN THE STREAM

Some food for thought (seen on social media recently):

**Individualism is rubbish. The individual is an entirely powerless unit; it could not give birth to itself, cannot raise itself, educate itself, or change the world itself. It is entirely a product of the people and environment around it. To emphasize the individual, is an error.**

**It's a hard pill to swallow for westerners brought up in an individualistic mindset, but the reality is that you have never really done anything by yourself. Your actions and very nature are defined by your relations with outside people, the land, and material things.**

One should be hesitant about dismissing anything seen on Facebook or Twitter as superficial pop culture, not worthy of serious contemplation—nice-sounding but devoid of wisdom.

Our quote above happens to be an amplification of a centuries-old message contained in John Donne's classic *No Man is an Island*.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man  
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;  
if a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe  
is the less, as well as if a promontory  
were, as  
well as any manner of thy friends or of  
thine  
own were; any man's death diminishes  
me,  
because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

(By coincidence, our title for this piece, "Islands in the Stream," and the last line of Donne's poem, "For Whom the Bell Tolls," both also happen to be titles of Hemingway novels).

History shows that *individualism* is not only something to be found in people-as-individuals, but in people-as-groups, particularly when they band together to strengthen or defend their group privilege. Several studies, for example, have highlighted how Irish immigrants to

America, fleeing English oppression at home, came to the New World and associated themselves with the American (capitalist) ruling class rather than with their (Black) working class comrades. Also, how they supported independence for Ireland from English tyranny, but turned their back on the anti-slavery movement. In his book, "How the Irish Became White," Noel Ignatiev explains how "the Catholic Irish, an oppressed 'race' (our inverted commas) in Ireland, became part of an oppressing race in America,"

The Irish who emigrated to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were fleeing caste oppression and a system of landlordism that made the material conditions of the Irish peasant comparable to those of an American slave. (page 17)

His book is about how the Irish chose to "become white in America," in order to "secure an advantage in a competitive society." In short, they abjured class solidarity and struggle for the privileges associated with "group individualism" as white Americans.

This phenomenon is not something unfamiliar to us in South Africa. One sees a parallel with the historic Afrikaner embrace of apartheid, despite

the horrors endured by them in the so-called Anglo-Boer war. As a group, Afrikaner workers chose to join the imperialist oppressors as well as the Afrikaner elite in forging and implementing heinous laws for the enslavement of black workers. They happily adopted the myth of white supremacy in order to benefit as a group from the direct exploitation of the black working class. They chose to become a labour aristocracy rather than join the struggle for freedom of society from all forms of exploitation and oppression. As we know, the pay-off for the elite was to divide the workers and hence to weaken their capacity for struggle, and for the white workers, material privileges.

And then there is the case of “ordinary” Israelis in the illegitimate state of Israel. Here, too, we see ordinary workers choosing loyalty to a criminal Israeli elite for the privileges which go with servitude on the part of the Israeli “state” to the needs and dictates of American and European imperialism.

Is there a general rule at play, here?

A common thread is divide-and-rule, specifically of the working class, which is the one agency that has the potential of overthrowing capitalist rule. Divide-and-rule is arguably the single most potent weapon in the arsenal of the capitalist ruling classes, whether at a local/national level, or globally, via imperialism.

It is not an exaggeration to say that group interest at the expense of class solidarity is the supreme obstacle facing workers today. (In fact, this awareness was already present in Marx’s day, when he issued the slogan, “Workers of the world unite!”)

In South Africa, the struggle for gender rights, for indigenous rights, for shop-floor rights, for

communal rights, for cultural rights, for community and civic rights—in short, for all progressive change, cannot be fought in isolation. These struggles have to be joined in a united, overarching struggle for socialism. There can be no other way. We have to foreground the common enemy: our multiple disabilities arise from and feed a rampant, self-serving capitalism.

Furthermore, a clear, *principled* approach is necessary. This recalls the Non-European Unity Movement’s stance of not working with elements among the oppressed who were willing to “work the machinery of their own oppression” by participating in dummy, racialized institutions such as the various representative councils (“Bantu, Coloured, Indian”). How can you be against discrimination while accepting it at the same time?

. . . which brings to mind current moves on the part of the SAFTU leadership to work with the EFF in organising a mass protest against the electricity crisis. The EFF is an opportunistic party of rabid black nationalists representing petit-bourgeois interests. The SAFTU leadership’s collaboration with them will only serve to strengthen the EFF’s legitimacy, not strengthen working class solidarity.

## FREEDOM DEFERRED

The negotiations that gave birth to “*democratic*” South Africa after 1994 have failed to bring real freedom to the masses of our citizenry. It had not been fashioned after the visions of the various political organisations that have evolved as a result of the struggles of the people over the past three hundred years. The full implementation of the Freedom Charter, the Azanian Manifesto, or the Unity Movement’s Ten Point Programme of Minimum Demands has NOT been realised. This means that the complete change as expected is in dispute. What the dispute is all about is that radical change was not instituted. The substance of the programmes of the various political parties has remained unchanged. If the changes that the ruling party has implemented are thus now seen as cosmetic, can it be a case of “*old garbage in new bags*”?

There exists evidence that poverty can drive citizens to the depth of depravity. Do the effects of inequality in society influence depravity as experienced in our country in July 2021? Does joblessness result in depravity? Is looting part of such depraved behavioural patterns? To answer these questions we have to analyse the effects of the policies of the current political system.

If revolution is defined as the overthrow of one class by another, then our country was never involved in a revolution. What we have experienced is mere regime change. The ruling party (ANC) has been bourgeois since its inception. It was more about including the black emerging middle class as part of the governance of this country. Indicative of this were the successive deputations to the British royalty and the government soon after the establishment of the ANC in 1912. The dominant tendency in the ANC, the conservatives and the liberals was always going to be in the ascendancy and plot the course for the masses.

The Soweto uprisings of 1976, initiated by the Black Consciousness Movement, changed the course of the political landscape in our country. The imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in the schools led to what was later referred to as Soweto '76. The whole country went up in flames. The masses then realised that

despite the armed forces of the apartheid regime, the oppressor could be overthrown.

Fast forward to 1985. The world was told that PW Botha would announce major reforms including the abolition of apartheid and the release of Mandela. Instead, he merely reiterated stated government policy. The corporates from Europe and the USA then spun into gear, capitalism-imperialism fearing a backlash from militants in our country including in the ANC, instituted immediate and far-reaching sanctions that, 1) removed PW Botha and installed the more favourable FW De Klerk as president, and 2) set the scene for a negotiated settlement by releasing Mandela and all political prisoners. Meetings between the ANC and big business, the Stellenbosch mafia, trade unions, sports bodies, including professional unions were held to lay the groundwork for the negotiated settlement.

Can we thus say that the ANC government betrayed the interest of South Africans? – the answer is an unequivocal NO! Because the ANC was never on the side of the workers and the rural poor and never on the side of the oppressed majority in South Africa. Their class interest was the same as that of the ruling class. This is the major reason why the ANC is now facing opposition on the home front – why the electoral system is rejected by the majority of the population.

Whilst this opposition and rejection may not as yet be a coherent combative force, this day cannot be far-off.

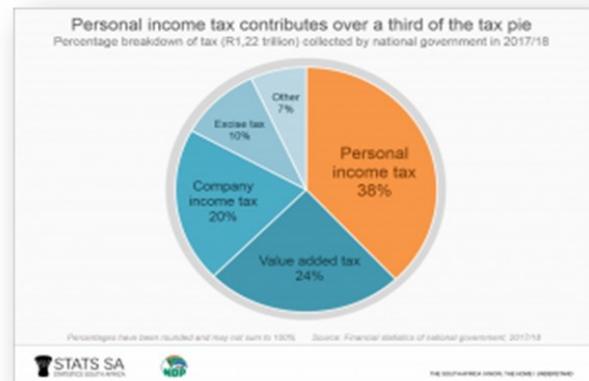
South Africa has reached a political and economic crisis of unprecedented proportions. Political in the sense that far more than half the voters of our country do not participate in the party political processes. Economic, in the sense that the free-market system that is supposed to create wealth for its citizenry only creates wealth for the super-rich. The result is that the gap between the rich and the poor is expanding at a rapid rate.

Beneficiaries of the free-market system are wont to claim that only a small percentage of the population pays tax. Is this true? Those that work, have to pay Personal Income Tax (PIT). Those that do not earn a salary/wage obviously cannot pay any PIT – yet they pay tax on services – on going to the doctor, the pharmacist, many becoming ill because of the squalid circumstances under which they are forced to live, without sanitation, without electricity and in the decrepit shantytowns dotted around the country. Workers have to pay taxes when going to work, when getting in a taxi, bus or train, for the almost non-existent electricity, for irregular water provision, for taking a bus or train or when buying food. Because of poverty, people can ill afford the value-added tax (VAT). Added to this there are hidden taxes such as school fees, fees at churches and entertainment arenas. The poor are thus further impoverished in this way.

Companies pay tax on the profits they make and not on their investments - this totals a mere 20% of the income from taxes. What scandalous exploitation of the workers of this country! Companies paid for the maintenance of the apartheid state. They paid a whopping 50% company tax from 1980 – 1986. Yet in 2023, this tax rate has dropped to 28%. This is exploitation of the Work-

ers on a massive scale!

This is a pie chart by Stats SA of the tax revenue collected.



We don't seem to realise that the free-market system produced 'homeless street people'. It is estimated that approximately 200 000 people live on the streets in South Africa's urban areas. Studies have shown that this dates back to the apartheid era. It is exacerbated by increasing unemployment, lack of affordable housing, social disintegration and the current economic policies. The expanded unemployment stats in the rural areas can be as high as 60%, with the official youth unemployment (ages 15 – 24) reaching 64.18%. Indications are that the unemployment rate in South Africa as a whole is edging toward the 40% mark. This will be disastrous for the country.

Inadequate food supply and limited access to clean water are the lot of the poor in South Africa. In the shantytowns dotted around the country, for many, it is just a case of survival.

Have we gained freedom in our country? Have we achieved a better life for all? If the answer is NO, then we have to continue the struggle. In the years ahead the fight will be more difficult than the battles fought prior to 1994. At this time the battles are just more difficult to characterise and recognise, the venom much more deceptive.

Different strategies will have to be employed. We have to employ tactics and strategies that promote the struggle for socio-economic justice.

Taking the above into account, we have now entered the struggle for the complete liberation of the masses. The struggle for non-racialism has to be intensified. The struggle for equality and jobs for all have to be prioritised. In this task, we must not be distracted by the blandishments of the parliamentary clique, the wabenzi elite. Our duty as part of the world movement is to put out of business those that are in the business of wishing to sustain the economic status quo.

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## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**in 1910 the Copenhagen Conference of the Second International, Clara Zetkin proposed the following motion:**

*'.....the Socialist women of all countries will hold each year a Women's Day, whose foremost purpose it must be to aid the attainment of women's suffrage. This demand must be handled in conjunction with the entire women's question according to Socialist precepts. The Women's Day must have an international character and is to be prepared carefully.'*

In 1922, in honour of the women's role on IWD in 1917, Lenin declared that March 8<sup>th</sup> should be designated officially as women's day. 8 March was declared a national holiday in most of the former socialist countries.

Today we acknowledge that IWD gives us an opportunity to draw attention to our own struggles for women's rights, to link this with women's struggles worldwide and to demonstrate international solidarity with working women everywhere. However, the socialist feminist origins of IWD should never be forgotten.

Abuse of women in SA has reached pandemic proportions. **1 in 3** women have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. This includes a range of behavioural deviations such as verbal abuse, physical abuse/violence that includes slapping, shoving, pushing and even murder. The latest police figures show that 10,818 rape cases were reported in the first quarter of 2022. The NUM is opposed to all forms of violence.

Today, on 8 March 2023, we bring homage to all women worldwide and in particular those who served the NEUM, its affiliates and particularly those who served in the NUM.

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