



Namibian government increasingly uses

‘militia and police violence’

To repress people’s resistance to violations of their rights

We, the undersigned organisations on Sunday, 29 June 2014 deliberated on the seizure and kidnapping of Jacobus Josob, a consultant of the Workers Advice Centre, a member of the Workers International, and a representative of the Southern Peoples Alliance on Tuesday, 24 June 2014, by the Namibian Government in collaboration with the United Nations.

We noted with serious concern that he was seized at the security gate of the United Nations headquarters in Klein Windhoek by the Government’s “Special Reserve Force” on the premises of the United Nations for handing over of a petition to be delivered to Mr Ban Ki Moon. He was manhandled by the said force, dragged for 40 metres across the street and transported to the Police Headquarters. He was kept without water and food and refused toilet.

We note that this takes on a definite pattern in which the Namibian Government increasingly use a militia and

**COMMUNAL OBJECTION
AGAINST JACOBUS JOSOB’S
SEIZURE, KIDNAPPING,
DETENTION AND
MISTREATMENT BY THE
GOVERNMENT OF NAMIBIA
AND THE UNITED NATIONS
To: The President of Namibia,
the Secretary General of
the United Nations**

police brutality to repress the Namibian people’s resistance against the violation of their rights.

In the above regard, we note the following incidents which preceded comrade Josob’s violation:

The Namibian police obstructed the TCL workers to protest in 2013.

The Namibian police – excessively armed with grenades and automatic

weapons – led unsuspecting home owners out of built-up areas in 2012 and tried to create a situation in which they were to shoot the protestors. They were doing this in collaboration with the Namibian High Court.

In April 2012 armed police and the army were dispatched to Keetmanshoop for an assault on 400 homeless families who had seized their own land. Only the intervention of the Workers Advice Centre averted certain tragedy in an event which saw the deputy sheriff attempting to bulldoze and shoot at the families.

We are painfully aware that the United Nations actively collaborated with the present Namibian government leaders during the mass jailing, killing and torture of Namibians in exile from the 60’s to 1989. We are also reminded by the UN action in the case of comrade Josob of the order it gave on 1 April

(Ctd. on page 2)

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WORKERS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Political and theoretical journal of Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International

No 6, July 2014

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1989 that more than 500 Plan fighters be shot by South Africa.

We call on all freedom-loving people nationally and internationally to support our call on the United Nations to forthwith cease its unending persecution of the Namibian people and to end its obstruction of our fundamental rights. We further call on the United Nations to cease its encourage-

ment of the Namibian Government to violate our fundamental rights.

We point out that due to these secretive actions of the Government and the UN while maintaining a democratic masquerade Namibia is increasingly in a more and more dangerous situation of provocation, tribal polarisation and instability. Given the violent and tragic history of the country and

the endless continual murder of its people, we are more than justified to regard the above actions as a prelude to another tragedy.

We reiterate our support of the letter of Jacobus Josob to the UN and the Southern Peoples Allegiance on the demands on the 1922 massacre of the Bondelswarts people.

Signed: *Jacobus Josob, Workers International, Silvester Haingura, TCL Workers Committee, Hewat Beukes, Workers International, Paulus Mangundu, TCL Workers Committee, Erica Beukes, Workers Advice Centre, Isdor Mukuve, TCL Workers Committee, Didard Mparo, TCL Workers Committee, Pastor Links, Southern Peoples Allegiance, Simon Isaaks, Southern Communities Allegiance, Gabriël Jacobs, Southern Peoples Allegiance*

The letter Jacobus Josob was trying to deliver to Ban Ki-Moon,

‘Re: Bondelswarts private property still occupied’

From: Jacobus Josob
P.O. Box 3854 Windhoek Namibia
To: Ban Ki-Moon
Secretary-General
“VERY URGENT”
20 June 2014
Re: Bondelswarts private property still occupied

Dear Mr. Secretary-General.

May I take this opportunity to welcome you to Namibia as a leading member of the Bondelswarts people and wish you a memorable stay. I also wish to state that you pay attention to the cry of the said community.

You are here on the invitation of the Namibian Government as a gesture of recognition of the active role the UN played in the prelude to the independence of Namibia. Namibia is presented as shining example of the success story of UN. This to my opinion is not in line with the realities on the ground. I however would like to remind you of the long outstanding issue regarding the Bondelswarts people for 92 years.

Despite the ideals of the UN of peace and social and economic progress our people are still reeling under abject poverty in the presence of plenty. Under the supervision of the UN in 1922 we were murdered, maimed and disowned of our private property until

today. They have never recuperated from these barbaric onslaught by the South African forces. The Namibian government received the Bondelswarts stolen property at independence from the South African illegal government. It is today occupied by the Namibian Government as “state property”.

For your attention Mr Secretary-General:

The League of Nations Assembly Resolution of 20 September 1922 expressed the hope that after the settlement of the Bondelswarts affair (1922 bombings), satisfactory conditions will have been established and the Mandatory Power will make every effort to relieve the suffering of victims, and it will ensure restitution of the remaining livestock and in general the restoration of economic life of the Bondelswarts. Nothing happened the situation is still dire.

You will recall that South Africa dropped 40 bombs on the Bondelswarts Community and used 2000 rounds of ammunition in a massacre of about 110 men, women and children with 150 wounded between 26 May to 8 June, 1922.

The reality is that nothing has changed for our people since decolonisation.

1. Our people are excluded from the main stream economy.

2. Our lands are still expropriated and occupied by people who had never paid for it.

3. The Bondelswarts had never sold their land.

4. Sections of our people removed under the Apartheid occupation are still living outside their natural home.

Despite his solemn promise in the media to protect independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and to ensure justice for all the inhabitants of the Republic of Namibia, President Pohamba’s contrary actions make it a pipe dream.

I attach hereto a report drafted by me on the situation in the south.

In conclusion Mr Secretary-General the purpose of this writing is to request you to address this issue with your host as a matter of urgency. The restoration of the Bondelswart property is paramount. The property will enable them to address the social conditions which are confronting them presently.

Lastly Mr Secretary-General the land question is a very central, urgent and an emotional issue, which we are demanding to be resolved.

Yours for Justice.
Jacobus Josob

Report on the South, the report Jacobus Josob tried to present:

‘We intend to develop ourselves and our land’

During December 2012, I went down to the South to consult with the Southern Communities Allegiance on various issues inter alia the state of the south, the economic conditions and the outstanding issue on housing.

This Allegiance was formed by landless and homeless communities in Keetmanshoop, Gibeon, Aroab, Tses, Karasburg, and Bethanie to fight for land and development of their respective communities. Thirty representatives attended and we discussed the following: In April 2012 a group of 400 homeless families seized land. After a violent confrontation the Municipality allocated the land to the group. In the meantime some of the members were relocated to a dreadful area far away from town centre. The hospital, clinic and businesses are far away and without proper transport. It is a nightmare to get help.

The community were resettled close to the Army Barracks. Soldiers seized erven (plots of land – Ed.) and are running Shebeens smuggling liquor and drugs. The Council ignores complaints against the soldiers. The squatting and smuggling in these slum areas is part of the strategy of the Namibian Government to break down the southern communities completely. It is a cultural and moral attack on the Nama people and their descendants.

Chief Fredericks of Bethanie has reported to Mr Niema Movassat, the parliamentary representative of the Linke Partei in the German Bundestag, that his people were subjected to cultural and moral genocide. These soldiers provide liquor and drugs to minor children and use the ensuing dependency to rape underage girls. They spread HIV infection. This president ignores all complaints directed to him. In Karasburg it is the same situation.

The soldiers deserted their barracks and moved into the suburbs. They are earning income and due to the rampant poverty they are exploiting the situation and starting sexual relationships with young girls and school girls. They set up shebeens where alcohol and drugs are smuggled. In one incident a soldier assaulted a mother viciously when she came to bar him from further rape of her minor daughter. The government is hell bent on destroying the southern communities in this way.

We also deliberated on the issue of big businesses operating in the south

for not contributing to the development of the people of the south. The fishing companies are employing 99% of people from the North in order to qualify for fishing quotas. The De Beers Diamond Company was found to be over exploiting its mining concession by a Judicial Inquiry in the colonial era (the Thirion Commission) and that the Country was defrauded with R5 billion at the time.

This Government entered into an incestuous relationship with De Beers and formed a purportedly new company called Namdeb Corporation with 50% shareholding. The mineral rights of Rosh Pinah Zinc are owned by Aaron Mushimba, the brother in law of the former President Samuel Nujoma. The Exclusive Prospective Licences are dished out to cronies with tribal and political connections.

During her visit in November 2012 the UN Special Rapporteur made the following observation on the current situation in Namibia:

“More than two decades after independence, Namibian society is still beset by unacceptable levels of inequality along the lines of gender, race, region, ethnicity and class”, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda, warned at the end of her first factfinding mission to Namibia.

“While I recognize the damaging legacy of colonialism, progress has not been forthcoming at the necessary pace,” Ms. Sepúlveda said, recalling that Namibia has enjoyed political stability and steady economic growth since independence, is rich in natural resources and has a GDP that classifies it as a middle income country.

(While we strongly contest this as this country has sunk into absolute levels of theft and depravity by this regime, we concur that the resources are mismanaged).

“The fact that the country remains one of the most unequal in the world is a clear sign that the benefits of economic growth have not reached the poor.”

The community’s standpoint is that they will not plead for land from the Council as they are entitled thereto. The Council in the meantime hinted that they will reallocate the particular portion to a Swapo Councillor for a housing program. The community is

adamant that this will lead to a serious confrontation should this happen.

The Nama Community therefore have further resolved as follows:

We intend to develop ourselves and our land that we live on in the Town of Keetmanshoop.

We demand the channelling of the money from the Namibian Government directly to us to make the land fit for human habitation.

We will take action on the abuse of the land and natural resources in the South to secure its use for our needs and purposes. We demand that the Namibian Government immediately ceases to provoke tribal reaction amongst the impoverished peoples of Namibia. We demand that the Namibian Government – in particular its President – immediately stop their deliberate corruption and moral destruction of the southern communities by sending in their soldiers to smuggle liquor, drugs, rape minor and school children and that these rogue agents of the Government be removed from the squatter camps and banished from the south. We call upon the international workers’ and civil movements to urgently and strongly oppose the continuing genocide against our people by the rape of young children and their infection with HIV by the Namibian Army, and the destruction of the southern communities by the smuggling of drugs and alcohol. We demand from the German State the Bilateral Partner of this Government to make clear its position on the policy of rape of young children of the south by soldiers with impunity, their squatting amongst impoverished Namas, their spreading of HIV, their smuggling of drugs and alcohol. We call on unions, civil organisations and the German NGO Alliance to support our demand for an urgent inquiry into the crimes against humanity in the south by the Namibian president and State. We call on all to characterise the crimes in the south as the continuation of the Genocide. The resolutions are being circulated throughout the south for signatures which will be submitted to the Namibian and German States, the local and international workers’ movements and unions, and civil organisations.

**Signed: JACOBUS JOSOB,
January 2013**

Seizure and kidnapping by UN and Field Force

On 24 June 2014 I went to the United Nations Headquarters in Klein Windhoek to deliver a letter to be handed to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon on his arrival in Windhoek later that day. I approached the pedestrian entrance for the Namibian public at the security gate at 10:40am. People were coming and going and I saw nobody being turned away or prohibited to enter. There were two NAMPOL police officers at the counter.

I addressed the male officer about my mission that I had wanted to deliver a document for the attention of Mr Ban Ki Moon. He then called the reception and handed the receiver over to me. I talked to a lady and explained the reason for me being there. The lady told me to leave the paper at the gate. I told the lady that I wanted the document to be signed for acknowledgment.

The lady then said she would come to the gate. After a while a female police officer came and again enquired from me what I had wanted. I again explained to her what my mission was all about. She told me to wait. After a while I saw her entering the security office followed by a lot of men clad in camouflage uniform battle-ready and armed to the teeth.

The female police officer pointed to me and told the Special Field Force men to remove me. I insisted that the people should identify themselves and tried to explain that I only brought a letter to be signed by the UN officials. My request was ignored. The thugs confiscated my documentation. One was threatening me and grabbed me by the neck and dragged me out of the office across the street 40 metres away to the parking area of Woermann Brock Shopping complex. This undignified treatment was in full view of the people arriving at the shopping centre.

They brought me to their vehicles in the parking area. I was surrounded by 15 of them and I insisted to know their identity and the reason for my seizure. They could not tell me. When I protested for them not to read my private correspondence with the UN Secretary-General they were insulting and swore at me. They told me that I should not "bullshit" the police by one

P. Nepembe who had a name tag on his uniform. They were telling me not to tell "shit" and they would teach me a lesson. This was a clear threat of assault and torture which reminded me of the apartheid brutality of police officers in that era (please see attachment below).

After a while a Nampol Police officer arrived in a pick-up truck and I was ordered to embark. I again insisted on the identity of the officer and the reason for my arrest in vain. I was directed to get onto the van. Two male police officers climbed with me in the back and two female officers and male occupied the front. I was taken to the Khomas Regional Police Headquarters. There I was introduced to the Chief Inspector JJ Nandapo and I introduced myself. I complained to him that the officers did not introduce themselves and that I was not informed why I was arrested. He just directed me to an office and explained to me that he was going to interrogate me.

He told me they were not happy that I had gone to the UN headquarters without their approval. I had disrespected the UN he informed me. I told him that I fought for this country and did not expect to be treated as a criminal. Why should the UN not be disrespected while they had disrespected the Bondelswarts for 92 years. I visited the UN Headquarters on numerous times but was never told to ask for approval from the Namibian Police. I was denied water and food and to visit the toilet. Despite denial by the Chief Inspector that I was not under arrest, I

was arrested, kidnapped, detained and maltreated. This was done maliciously to intimidate me and deny me my rights as reprisal against my political organisation, the Workers International and our communal resource centre, the Workers Advice Centre.

Further to the above:

This is part of the intensifying attempt to use the State organs in reprisal against me and my comrades and my organisations to suppress us politically. It is an attack against the working class of this country.

In December last year the Judge President Petrus Damaseb and a Judge David Smuts used the police to arrest us for complaints to the Judicial Service Commission that the Judge President was not qualified and had no high school education and that David Smuts was involved in money laundering, tax evasion and organised crime.

They did not succeed then. The law allowed us to lodge the complaints.

This brutal act against me is a continuation of those illegal and draconian attempts.

I later learned that the "special Reserve Force" were a "Special Reserve Force" of the "Special Field Force" - a parastatal militia formed as a terror squad outside the law. This was a force that was established as a successor of the Lubango killer squads which killed and tortured hundreds of Namibians in Lubango and hurled prisoners from cliffs in southern Angola. The "Special Field Force" was formed soon after independence to terrorise Namibians.

Workers International Namibian Section

is in urgent need of political and financial support and solidarity against the situation and actions described in this statement. For more information contact them at

P.O. Box 3854 Windhoek

Fax: 088641065

Tel: 061-260647

jacobusjosob@ymail.com

Retired Namibian copper miners continue their pensions fight:

'Re: Unsatisfactory clarification of current status of our complaint vis-à-vis our stolen pension fund'

'Letter from the TCL Workers Committee, P.O. Box 23667, Windhoek, Namibia

To: Mr George Simataa, The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare
2 July 2014
Dear Sir,

We attach hereto the following documents which bear reference:

1. Our letter dated 6 February 2014 to the President of Namibia.
2. Your letter dated 23 May 2014 to State House.
3. State House letter dated 5 June 2014 to yourself.

We note that the information in your above letter to the State House is not correct in important respects.

1. Paragraph 3 of your letter: It is wrong that the case was removed from the roll for lack of evidence. It was removed to be amended, but never placed back on the roll by the lawyers given to us by the State despite our numerous enquiries and objections.

The evidence is there, crystal clear and admitted. Our pension fund was transferred from South Africa by Momentum Insurance on behalf of the TCL (Goldfields South Africa) Management with the knowledge of the Mine Workers Union of Namibia (MUN) and without our knowledge.

It was 'liquidated' by the Registrar of Pension Funds without our knowledge and without any legal procedure. The money was taken by Goldfields South Africa which bribed Government and union officials.

Bob Meiring the former Managing Director of TCL group of mines and board member of the Namibian Financial Institutions Supervisory Authority which succeeded the Registrar of Pension Funds in his own handwriting admitted in 2006 that he was 'liquidating' R70 million of the balance of the fund since 2002. Everybody knows how and to where the fund disappeared.

2. Your letter is therefore seriously misleading with respect to paragraph 1.
3. A criminal case was lodged against Bob Meiring amongst others in 2011. You are correct that the criminal case number is CR 1023/03/11. The police do not act against the persons even

though more than probable cause exists to arrest them.

The police reported that they had found that R300 million had been given to TCL (Goldfields South Africa) without the knowledge of the workers.

What is more while this case is pending the High Court of Namibia admitted Bob Meiring as a lawyer, an officer of the Court.

4. Your letter omits that the Cabinet Committee comprised by Mr Hon. Peter Ilonga, Deputy Minister of Defence and Mr Hon. Tweya Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry were appointed by Cabinet in 2008 to investigate the matter on our request, but to date they have not reported back to us.

5. The said Cabinet Committee need to immediately report back.

We now express our concerns:

1. Is this Government incapable/unwilling of providing a report on its investigation and is it incapable/unwilling to resolve this matter affecting more than 4,000 impoverished families and mine workers?
2. Has the Cabinet any authority and professional reliability? In this regard why does it fail to conduct itself professionally on a decision to investigate and report to us on this matter?
3. Is there any law and order? Why are persons such as Bob Meiring not subjected to law and order? Or are we to understand that the 'law and order' referred to by the Namibian State and

the Constitution is meant only for the working and poor people of this country?

4. Our members who are working in the mines are now subjected to labour hire in which they are hired and fired at will. They have no pension or other benefits anymore.

They cannot get their pension fund back. Hundreds of miners are being fired while the labour hirers call some of them back and rotate them.

The union works against us and refuse to fight the labour hirers.

We insist that the Cabinet Committee reports on its findings regarding our complaints immediately.

We ask that you carry out the instruction from the Executive Director of the State House to clarify the matter, that is, to get the report from Messrs Ilonga and Tweya.

We await your affirmative response by Friday, 11th July 2014.

Signed: **DIDHARD MPARO**

On behalf of **DIDHARD MPARO**, Chairman; **HEWAT BEUKES**, Committee member; **FRANS KAFULA**, Committee member; **SILVESTER HAINGURA**, Committee member; **PAULUS MANGUNDU**, Committee member; **ERASMUS NGHIHALWA**, Committee member, **KAUTEUA MUMUANHUMBI**, Committee member **ISADOR MUKUVE**, Committee member **HENDRIK CHRISTIAN**, Committee member

The TCL Workers Committee state that during the period 1996-98 the Registrar of Pension Funds allowed the Goldfields South Africa and Momentum to steal the Pension Fund of more than 4,000 mineworkers. Since then the mineworkers were fighting to recover their fund. In the meantime labour conditions in Namibia have deteriorated for the mineworkers who now work through labour hire in temporary jobs without job security, without pension and any benefit. They may be hired and fired.

The TCL Workers invite all workers to contact them at: Didhard Mparo (cell) 0812399444, fax 00 264 (0) 88 641 065, email onemay52@ymail.com

In response to SA Metalworkers' union's "Movement for Socialism" proposal:

'It is now our job to educate and organise'

HEWAT BEUKES, a leader of Workers International, previously a member of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) Youth League and now in opposition to the Namibian SWAPO government, interviews TANGENI NUUKUAWO, a leader of the 1971-72 general strike and also formerly a member of the SWAPO Youth League. This is an extract from the pamphlet *Movement for Socialism*

In the first chapter of "Trade Union Struggles for Freedom in South Africa" (page 43 of *Movement for Socialism*) there is a reference to the 1971-72 general strike in Namibia (then South West Africa) being a prelude to the strike wave in Durban in 1973. The Namibian strike also profoundly affected the freedom movement when 4,000 youth joined the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) in exile.

The South West African Native Labour Association (SWANLA) was formed in 1943 by the South Africa colonial government for the purpose of herding workers from the north of Namibia to work in the mines in the south.

Under the so-called contract system, workers were gathered together in Ondangua and then driven down to Grootfontein where their assigned bosses would collect them. The compulsory contract was for 18 months. Over time the entire commercial, small industrial, mining and agricultural sectors would be fed by contract labour.

Tangeni experienced this himself and remembers his father who was a labourer in Walvis Bay. He was employed on compulsory 18-month contracts, during which time he could not come home and his wife was not allowed to visit him. Tangeni obtained a permit to visit his father in the compound, but for only one hour at lunch-time.

The beds were concrete slabs protruding from the wall, one on top of the other. Rooms were small for two to four occupants, but during the return of seasonal workers these were overcrowded. The food was the same day after day for 18 months; lunch consisted of porridge with either meat or fish relish, and breakfast consisted of brown bread with jam.

It was slave conditions, performing back-breaking labour without sitting down for more than eight hours a day. Workers developed back problems and

illnesses arising from the unsanitary conditions. If you became sick you lost your job.

Many Angolans were contracted. They were much cheaper than the Namibians. Mostly illiterate, they suffered even worse abuse and exploitation. Many lost their lives due to being killed on farms with no relatives to enquire and question their whereabouts. They were slaughtered.

The inhuman conditions built up frustration and resentment to breaking point amongst the vast number of workers housed in large compounds especially in the urban areas, and in 1971 the anger boiled over into a general strike which started on 13 December 1971 and ended on 20 January 1972.

The organisation was underground with the leaders explaining to the workers concentrated in the compounds that their situation could only be changed through political struggle. They needed to overthrow the system. They demanded amongst others:

- the right to free movement;
- better wages and better conditions of work;
- the pass book to be replaced by an I.D.;
- the right to negotiate for pay and to choose their own employers.

However, finally the only change brought about by the strike was the shortening to six months of the compulsory period before returning home to see their families.

Nevertheless the strike had a heavy impact on the economy. Production went down in mines and fishing, also farms were unattended. Most important, it gave way to political organisation and awareness.

The colonial regime transported many workers back to the north, but they returned as organised workers, and as a token of defiance and freedom they cut a large section of the border fence between Namibia and Angola. Before the strike, political organisation was loose. The SWAPO Youth League

consisted of unstructured individuals. The strike gave structure and organisation both to the workers and the Youth League. In 1973 there were school boycotts in the north and organisation of national resistance against the Bantustan policy enforced by the Odendaal Plan of 1964 which put homeland "second tier" authorities in place for the various national groups.

These boycotts and resistance were met by harsh repression by the colonial regime and the homeland authorities. In the north, youth and workers were tied to trees and flogged with palm branches. This led to an exodus of four thousand youth in 1974 to join the SWAPO in exile in Zambia; when the Anti-Apartheid Committee interviewed the youth in Lusaka they mostly wanted to hear about the strike

No wonder! The Namibian General Strike defied the largest colonial military force in Africa – one soldier for every 12 Namibians – and shocked not only the colonial administration for its determination and death defiance but the South African regime itself.

It was a big thing internationally. South African contract workers in mines and industry suffered the same conditions as those who took strike action in Namibia, and so the mood spread. A strike of 300 PUTCO workers in the Transvaal against low wages was followed by the wave of strikes which exploded in Durban in 1973. Our general strike had an impact in South Africa, and the development of workers' struggles in South Africa had an impact on us.

In Namibia the general strike led to a restive period of labour resistance and political organisation culminating in the 1978 Rössing Strike which involved thousands of miners at the Rössing uranium mine and other mines and which saw the formulation of a broad set of demands including trade union demands. This level of development was influenced by the trade union struggles in South Africa. Today it is particularly important that the

Announcing a new book

Dear Friends,

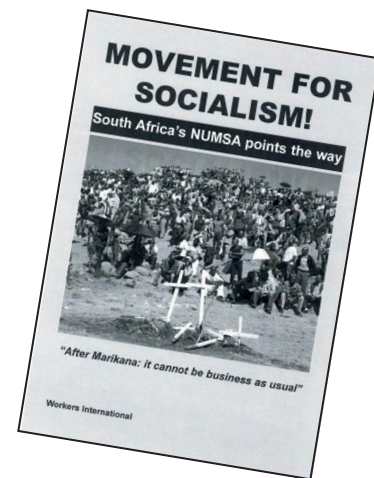
At their Special National Congress in December 2013, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) agreed that to truthfully and fully honour Mandela and his Comrades; his passing must spur a fight even harder for the attainment of all the ideals he stood for: liberty, freedom, dignity, democracy and full social and economic equality of all human beings.

Not to do so, would be to betray him and his Comrades.

The Congress remembered vividly the words Madiba offered to the COSATU Special National Congress in 1993 when he said:

“You must be vigilant! How many times has a labour movement supported a liberation movement only to find itself betrayed on the day of liberation? If the ANC does not deliver the goods you must do what you did to the apartheid regime.”

For NUMSA the massacre of the Marikana miners “marked a turning point in the social and political life of South Africa”. 20 years after the first democratic



multi-racial general election, it could not be “business as usual”.

They put the question: “How do we explain the killing of striking miners in a democracy?” They had to conduct “a sustained and thorough analysis of the political meaning of Marikana”.

MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM **South Africa's NUMSA points the way**

is a new book published by Socialist Studies for Workers International; it includes:

- NUMSA's Special Congress Resolution and Declaration
- The Khanya College pamphlet: “Trade Unions and Struggles for Democracy and Freedom in South Africa 1973-2005”
- An interview with Tangeni Nuukuawo, a leader of the 1971-72 Namibian general strike
- A Foreword by Brian Ashley - co-founder of the Democratic Left Front in South Africa and Editor of the journal “Amandla”
- A statement by Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

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PO Box 68375, London, E7 7DT, or online at <http://workersinternational@info>

National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) has broken with the ANC. Even when we joined SWAPO in exile in Zambia in 1974 we were already conscious of the corruption and political poverty of the SWAPO leaders and SWAPO in government has proved this to be true! We knew when we organised the general strike that workers' conditions could only be changed through political struggle.

Workers here are faced with the same task as workers in South Africa – to start a Movement for Socialism. NUMSA is the biggest affiliate of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), but COSATU is in President Zuma's pocket and the ANC can't even implement the Freedom Charter!

I thought the general secretary of the ANC was a communist, but then I listened to his statements on relations between the ANC and the unions and realised that the ANC seeks to seriously weaken the workers' situation, and so I agree 100% with NUMSA's decision to work towards a new independent workers' party for socialism.

It is now our job to educate and organise!

This article and the following one, both by BALAZS NAGY, appeared last autumn in the French publication *Lutte des Classes*

Cracks have appeared in the facade of world capitalism

We really ought to draw our readers' attention to two major current events which – each in its own political and economic way – testify to a considerable deterioration in the painful death-agony of capitalism-imperialism.

On the one hand, there is the current stage reached in the breakdown of its arrangements in the Middle East with the in itself unusual and surprising but real political blockage affecting this system in relation to the civil war in Syria; on the other, the fresh upsurge of world crisis in the – for many – unexpected shape of a general fall in the rate of growth in production among more or less all the so-called “emerging” countries: India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, etc., including China.

This fall is expressed and accompanied by a real upheaval in their financial system through a brutal fall in the values of their currencies, excepting China. As luck would have it, all of these serious problems of imperialism have matured and are concentrated at the Moscow meeting of the 20 countries which are considered to be the most important, the famous G20 on 7 and 8 September 2013.

The attempt to consolidate imperialism's rickety mechanism in the Middle East has turned into its opposite in Iraq and Afghanistan, accelerating its decomposition throughout the region. This historical set-back has laid bare its congenital weaknesses and its contradictions to such an extent that, faced with the rise of the proletarian revolution, even in its incomplete and unfinished form, in North Africa, and the Middle East, it finds itself almost completely impotent and incapacitated. The civil war in Syria has completely paralysed it; its leaders no longer have a clue what to do or how to do it to win back dominance. And that is their only pre-occupation. Their breast-beating about the miserable fate of the Syrian people is merely a hypocritical facade to mask their real concerns. To put it more exactly: the existence of a near-unanimous camp of those who advo-

cate inactivity and abstention shows their disarray in the face of uncertainty. Imperialist war-lust has been reduced to the roaring of a toothless lion. But beware: it is still a ferocious predator!

On the other hand, there are few better indications of the notable shortcomings and retreat of the workers' movement than the total absence of its voice and independent initiatives on this whole question.

Under these conditions, the process of decomposition will go on, as we can already see in Libya and Turkey. But this disarray is also an opportunity which the various oppressed peoples (like the Palestinians and Kurds) will seize in order to break free from the imperialist yoke and its local satraps, who will not give up easily, so that there is a risk the whole region will become the seat of a future inter-imperialist war. The charges are already laid and the fuses lit.

The other event of considerable international import is the sudden economic deterioration in the so-called “emerging” countries, with a significant and rapid drop in their economic growth, which since the beginning of the new century had been spectacular. The basis for this fall was when the US central bank (the Fed) decided to stop the artificial issue of millions of dollars not backed by actual production. It is common knowledge that in the last six months alone, this bank has redeemed worthless bonds to the value of \$86 billion a month (!) in order to bolster the ailing US economy.

As soon as this policy was announced, US interest rates started an irresistible rise, so much so that capital massively deserted the economies of India and other “emerging” countries. At the same time their currencies depreciated dangerously, thus expressing the fact that the value of their production was actually rather modest. At a stroke, their real growth was shown to be quite a lot lower than it had appeared to be previously. Even China's growth rate fell because her exports are

marking time. At a general level, what we are dealing with is a persistent phenomenon which lays bare the organic inter-dependence of national economies within the contradictions of the system as a whole.

Despite what the proponents of so-called “globalisation” say about the economic levels of these countries as a whole tending to converge, with the more backward ones catching up with the more advanced (really?), following the same scheme of development as the advanced countries, this inter-dependence actually makes the differences between their levels greater and more obvious.

As it happens, the massive displacement of dollars – the expression of the economic dominance of the US – has placed the “emerging” countries at a disadvantage and caused their fictitious growth to evaporate. In place of growing “equality” or “catching up” harmoniously, what we have is the development of contradictions. In place of the fantasy of the everywhere uniform and even capitalism that was an article of faith for those who swore by “globalisation” or “mondialisation”, we see an ever greater accentuation of capitalism's internal contradictions.

The problems of China, which still has a non-capitalism system, are at a different level, even if, overall, even she cannot absolutely escape the constraining effects of international economic interdependence and its contradictions.

All of this also drives forward and exacerbates international competition, which contains within itself the germ of a new international conflagration, the warning signs of which are already visible. We shall have occasion to return to its various aspects in greater detail in future.

Balazs Nagy

First published in *Lutte des Classes* No. 11, September 2013.

Capitalism between hammer and anvil

In our last issue, we briefly noted “cracks” emerging in world capitalism, including, among other things, weaknesses in relation to the international monetary system organised on the basis of and governed by the US dollar. We do know that, to ward off the last great crisis, the big chiefs of US finance decided to supply the economy, which was gasping for breath and quite unable to meet astronomic levels of losses and needs, with even greater massively and artificially swollen credit arrangements.

To put it another way, the crisis had revealed the imperative urgent need to deal quickly and urgently with the yawning gap between real production on the one hand, hampered and dragged back by the growing limitations on effective profits, and on the other the phenomenal pile-up of dollars not backed by anything whose job was to make good the market’s organic deficiencies. Let me repeat: the whole edifice of runaway and inflamed world finance operates under the auspices of the US dollar.

We know that immediately on the outbreak of the crisis, capitalist governments carefully put the corpse of capitalist economy on life-support, injecting hundreds of billions of dollars (and euros) to soften the sudden absence of billions of fictitious dollars which had gone up in smoke.

The managers of the US dollar in the Federal Reserve System (the US central bank) panicked and decided to institutionalise the allocation of billions of dollars into the economy through regular purchases of American Treasury bills, i.e. to buy these bits of valueless paper with billions of newly-created dollars (\$85 billion a month!) hot off the press and not properly backed by anything.

This blatant forgery they pompously baptised “quantitative easing”, and it is no more than an act of common counterfeiting. But this time the forgeries are done by the state and swapped for other state bonds which are also worthless, i.e. they are buying government debt with paper.

As the notoriously blunt billionaire Warren Buffet commented recently: “The Fed is the greatest hedge fund in history” (*Bloomberg.com/news September 20 2013*). Indeed, the whole business casts a glaring light on the fact that the whole mechanism of capitalism-imperialism today rests on a swindle.

Now, as we commented in a previous article, the US central bank, the Fed, has stated that it will now aim to progressively reduce these purchases with a view to ending them. Obviously by doing so the Fed hoped to help, in its own way, to contain the unbridled proliferation of un-backed credit which even they admit is a permanent crisis-trigger. But as our previous article said, the bare mention that they would eventually do this shook capital around the world.

The first consequence of the Fed’s announcement that it wanted to turn off the easy dollar-tap was to provoke a swift and inevitable rise in interest rates in the dollar’s US home country, and elsewhere, given that currency’s preponderant role. This rise in interest rates meant that credit became more expensive, which cut across the imperative need for cheap money. This fact immediately unmasked all the claims about an economic recovery as mendacious bragging.

Next, it started a massive flight of capital from the so-called “emerging” countries in search of more profitable investments. This defection abruptly exposed a bitter truth for the bourgeoisie: that the best part of economic growth in these countries (India, Brazil, etc.) is not based on real production, but is artificially doped by financial juggling with the cheap dollar. So the announcement that the easy dollar was shortly to be withdrawn cut the trans-fusion needed for their economic growth, and as they were left short of blood, their markedly lower real growth rate emerged in the light of day and their currencies depreciated.

A terrible new stage in the crisis started to loom on the horizon in these countries. But while they were waiting to hear what the 22 May announcement about reducing and then stopping the flow of easy dollars actually involved, the Fed took everybody by surprise on 18 September by finally announcing a spectacular U-turn. The same Bernanke who had disconcerted capitalists with his astonishing announcement that he would deprive the economy of cheap dollars, caught the whole world napping with the Fed’s final decision contradicting its previous announcement. It turned 180 degrees, stating that “the Fed would continue to buy long term treasury paper and other bonds worth \$85 bn a month, believing that tightening financial conditions

could slow down the rate of recovery” (*Le Monde*, 20 September 2013.)

Despite the coded and extremely careful language, this is a resounding and honest public confession. It reveals the servile press’s enthusiastic reports of a supposed economic recovery in the US and elsewhere to be lying fantasy on a level with the Coué method of optimistic auto-suggestion. More generally it is an involuntary admission that capitalism actually is undergoing a prolonged worsening of its death-agony, and in particular that merely keeping it going pushes and drags the economy towards an even more corrupt state of putrefaction and parasitism than was already revealed by Lenin’s analysis of imperialism.

The major fact is and remains that finance, or more exactly omnipotent credit and the way it is manipulated, tend to supplant production in simply making sure that capitalist economy keeps functioning (accumulation, investment and circulation).

But here we must remember what Marx said about credit in volume 3 of *Capital*:

“Banks and credit become the most potent means of bringing capitalist production out of its own limits and one of the most effective bringers of crises and fraudulent speculation”.

To support this judgement he quoted a contemporary (J.W.Gilbart, *The History and Principles of Banking*, London 1834, pp 137-8):

“It is the object of banking to give facilities to trade, and whatever gives facilities to trade gives facilities to speculation. Trade and speculation are in some cases so nearly allied, that it is impossible to say at what precise point trade ends and speculation begins.”

To which Engels adds a note: “To what extent the entire business world of a country may be seized by such swindling, and what it finally comes to, is amply illustrated by the history of English business during 1845-47.” (*Capital* vol 3, 1984 p. 406). What would they say about things today!

The dead hand of finance is precisely the concrete form that the increasing rottenness of the system takes today. Massive parasitism in the economy – and in daily life – are its inevitable outgrowths. In the same way, the amazing growth in the social stratum of *rentiers* (people who live off investments or assets – Ed), as well as the appearance of a series of *rentier* states and their expansion and their significance testify to an unparalleled growth in parasitism.

It is really characteristic that when the Fed announced it was going to reduce the flow of dollars, economic growth immediately tended to slow down, especially in the “emerging” countries, whereas immediately after the bank turned 180 degrees, stock markets around the world marked up considerable gains. Even the European Central Bank (ECB) is now itself proposing to pump some fresh liquidity into the deathly anaemic European banks, having vainly allowed them a thousand billion euros in 2011-1012. But it is still a lot more reticent than its US colleagues.

In fact world capital as a whole is trying to walk a tightrope between two pseudo-solutions, both equally risky: either they will continue to pour billions into keeping their system ticking over, and in doing so all the while preparing a series of upheavals even more devastating than the one we have not yet got out of. Or, anxious about that way out, they will try to control credit parsimoniously, which seems to be the option which the ECB favours. But both potential outcomes of this tightrope-walking lead to the same blind alley of capitalism. With or without injecting billions, production

in this system keeps marking time and has not even managed to make good past and current losses.

Two things are certain. The first is that these two false capitalist options will both deepen the systems congenital sickness, bringing redoubled attacks and suffering on working people. The second, which flows from it, is that the overthrow of this cruel system in its death-throes is now on the agenda.

Balazs Nagy,

First printed in *Lutte des Classes* No. 12, October 2013.

RADOSLAV PAVLOVIC proposed this approach to building the workers’ movement in former Yugoslavia earlier this year, in a LETTER TO A TRADE UNIONIST.

‘Strengthen and broaden the movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina’

Dear Comrade,

Let’s think through what positive and appropriate proposals to put forward in discussion with Bosnian worker or socialist activists.

We will be of some use if we just find ways to help a given social movement to draw from the experience of the international workers’ movement (which we know something about) which is long-buried in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We don’t need to invent anything, especially not substituting ourselves for the Bosnians; all we need do is generalise and bring together the demands they themselves are fighting for.

Character of the movement

a. The character of the movement: (1) it is clearly social, workers and young people suffering chronic unemployment; (2) This movement is up against a political regime with the following characteristics: – political paralysis as a result of the Dayton Accords which installed a two-headed federation alongside another state (republica serbska), this means no joint measures of any significance can be achieved; – endemic corruption whose source is the nationalist political parties; – a liberal outlook, from which the fourth, social-democrat, component of the coalition is also not exempt; (3) The whole has produced the worst possible remedy for a war-ravaged country: all-round privatisation. The slogans on the demonstrations and the political programmes of the collectives involved

(“Udar” and “Revolt” in Tuzla) reflect this diagnosis.

Our position

b. Our position consists of: (1) supporting this profoundly correct movement; (2) clarifying it from the class point of view (to oppose provocations, running battles with the police, looting and arson), things which workers instinctively agree with; (3) sifting out which of the demands raised are most appropriate to unite, structure and develop the movement.

Stop privatisation!

c. The main demand comes from the movement itself: – Stop all new privatisations NOW, review all existing privatisations, no privatisation without workers’ control!

How? By a national commission of persons of integrity, including qualified economists (like e.g. Stoyanov, currently an economist at the university of Rijeka), independent of the government and the bosses, under the control of elected workers’ councils (committees) in all workplaces and institutions, including students and especially in the big mining and industrial units, and structured at a Federation level; total transparency of this Commission’s work via public media (TV and major dailies):

People should know the whole truth about a quarter of a century of fiddles! This Commission should have the authority to set up its own investigation and enforcement branches, as there can be no confidence in the state fraud squad, corrupted by the crooks

in the ruling political parties who appoint and supervise them. Immediate payment of unpaid wages! Social security for all! Free access to schooling and hospital treatment for all! Cost-of-living indexing of wages and pensions, etc.

Job creation

d. A Federal emergency job-creation plan! Between those who have lost their jobs and those who have never had one, unemployment stands at 44%.

This is a question of life and death for hundreds of thousands of men and women. Unless the government can very quickly come up with a plan to absorb mass unemployment, they should go! They should resign or be thrown out by the people.

Working people always prefer peaceful and democratic solutions, but if that means keeping in power the class of capitalist rascals impotent in the face of unemployment, working people and young people will not stand idly by as society decays. If they can find the will, tenacity and discipline to elect their own central organ of committees or councils of struggle, they can put forward a government of suitably qualified people of integrity.

Without their own permanent, democratic and durable rank-and-file organisations, all the demonstrations, petitions and cries of anger will go up in smoke. If the country has to look abroad to borrow money, at least it should be used to create jobs. Life is more important than the laws of the market!

No Bantustans!

e. Commission to review privatisations and Emergency plan to deal with unemployment are merely the first measures to put in place.

There still remains the institutional Gordian knot of the Dayton Peace, which engendered a state paralysed from birth. Two or three states in one, half a dozen canton-states in each of them, states which straddle each other so that main roads have to leap-frog over each other on flyovers and suffering unparalleled legislative anarchy and negligence – the whole thing is untenable. Social progress is what brings peace, not the nationalism which ram-paged during the war.

The only way forward for working people and young people in the Federation is to stretch out a hand to their fellow-citizens, workers and young people of the so-called “republica serbska”: For an independent, united and democratic Bosnia-Herzegovina! No Bantustans! There is room in such a joint federation for all the peoples of the region, for all nationalities, all religions

and all alphabets, but not for war criminals or state mafias.

A joint confederation of three peoples ready to turn the page and secure their children’s future is possible. Two or three states in one, pulled this way and that by great power influence, is not. Bosnia-Herzegovina is condemned to political paralysis, economic stagnation and social decay. Working people and young people in “republica Serbska” have a choice: live together in a common state, with the federation guaranteeing national rights, or eke out a miserable existence as hostages of a state which was criminal when Mladic and Karadzic ran it and has turned into a mafia state under Dodik.

Working people and young people in Tuzla, Sarajevo, Bihac and Mostar have shown that they do not want to sacrifice their futures on the altar of nationalist party rule; it is up to their fellows in Bania Luka to respond by joining their struggle for an independent, united and democratic Bosnia-Herzegovina and refusing to be held hostage to rule by a mafia that can

neither acknowledge the crimes of Srebrenica nor catch the guilty.

Conclusion

I think that is essentially the size of it. Privatisations and unemployment – immediate key issues. Medium-term perspective: a re-united country, break with the paralysing Dayton arrangements. Means to do it: Committees of struggle (of action) of working people, unemployed and young people – essentially all the stuff nobody else mentions.

Long-term perspective: links with the working and young people in Serbia and Croatia, who have had to put up with the same liberal treatment (privatisation, unemployment) and the same nationalist straitjacket. In brief: suggest ways to strengthen and broaden the movement.

Yours in Solidarity
Radoslav Pavlovic,
10 Feb 2014

ROGER SILVERMAN replies to some comments provoked by his article in *Workers International Journal* no. 5 “What does Modi’s victory mean?”

‘There is simply no basis for your assumption that the medieval barbarities of India’s caste heritage are now coming to an end’

The article I wrote recently on the Indian election results initiated a correspondence with the son of a British friend who is currently working in India. He has illusions in Modi, and we have had a fairly spirited exchange of ideas. I have copied here my latest reply to him...

R.S.

Thanks for your reply. For me, too, it is stimulating to have my ideas challenged (even when they are right!). I haven’t got time for a thorough reply now, but here are a few interim points to keep the discussion going:

You keep quoting the wishes of the USA (in this case, once again in relation to their collusion with India in unilaterally violating the nuclear non-proliferation pact), as if that were a decisive factor in determining the future course of world history. If anything, this policy had far more to do with US determina-

tion to tie the hands of Pakistan, with its ambivalent attitude to Islamic fundamentalism, than with India’s rivalry with China; it is after all towards Pakistan that the Indian H-bombs are facing.

But even leaving that issue aside, your faith in the power of the USA to shape the world according to its own interests is hopelessly anachronistic and touchingly naïve in the current epoch, and is belied in front of our very eyes, day after day, from Ukraine to Afghanistan to Iraq to Latin America. The USA may well want to find some means of curbing China’s growth, but for all the reasons I’ve already mentioned, any hope of promoting India to the extent that it threatens to eclipse China is doomed.

(Incidentally, you also disregard the evolution of the Chinese economy. Increasingly, China’s economy is shifting its former dependence on the export of cheap goods to the growth of

a potentially enormous internal domestic market.)

Independent India was born amid a bloodbath of communal genocide. It was plagued from the beginning with caste atrocities and domination over the sub-continent’s patchwork of national minority cultures and languages. There is simply no basis for your assumption that the medieval barbarities of India’s caste heritage are now coming to an end. The very survival of a bigoted communal rabble like the BJP – let alone its current ascendancy – gives the lie to that illusion. The BJP is the shamelessly blatant political voice of Hindu communal supremacy over the Muslim and other minority religions; of perpetuation of an upper-caste apartheid system of “untouchability”; and of brutal imposition of the dominant minority Hindi language over the regional cultures.

Narendra Modi personally is the man who, as chief minister of Gujarat,

presided over the communal slaughter of thousands of Muslim men, women and children, and who this very day is ramming the Hindi language down the throats of the vast non-Hindi speaking majority. I'm afraid the myth that he represents some kind of modernising technocratic enlightenment is, frankly, laughable.

In a society where every day women are raped, hanged from trees and burned alive over dowry disputes, what do you make of the recent public pronouncements by BJP ministers that rape is "sometimes right, sometimes wrong" and that "these incidents happen accidentally"? Is this evidence that "India is evolving"?

Under Modi, the last vestigial traces of the old policies of the Nehru dynasty are being stamped out. Modi is the face of reaction in India today – the traditional ideology of India's brutal ruling class and castes, now openly feeding the voracious appetites of the global corporations, and triumphantly stamping out the last vestiges of the long-discarded policies of the Nehru dynasty, which had made at least token concessions to planning, protection and secularism – albeit hypocritically and corruptly administered.

You advocate an "effectively regulated" market economy; but who is to administer regulation over the tiny handful of rampantly predatory multinational corporations, incomparably richer and more powerful than any state, that exploit the world's resources and populations?

You defend the provision of health care, food subsidies and education for their potential role in improving productivity, but haven't you noticed that welfare measures of any kind – health care, subsidies, housing, education, unemployment and disability benefits – are being destroyed worldwide? And don't you feel uneasy at finding yourself actually advocating the wholesale demolition of workers' rights to even minimal employment security in a country where hundreds of millions of people are already unemployed or chronically underemployed? And even defending it, on the very dubious grounds that it will allegedly help provide employment? Even if this turns out to be marginally correct, any jobs that it does create will be at starvation rates of pay and under daily threat of instant termination.

I hope that you will use your stay in India, as I did for many years, to talk to people at all levels, stay with workers' families, sleep on floors and roofs,

shower with buckets of cold water, contend with rats and mosquitos, languish under power cuts, witness firsthand the hardships and struggles of ordinary people, and look at life from their standpoint too, as well as those of well-fed business economists.

And do travel outside India's "Silicon Valley" to get a more rounded picture of the real Indian society; although even Bangalore suffers from

more fundamental problems than mere "conservatism in women's dress codes".

I am reading Luce's book (Edward Luce: *In Spite of the Gods: The Rise of Modern India*), and will give you a fair and balanced appraisal of it once I have finished it.

But I have to warn you that so far my impressions are not favourable...

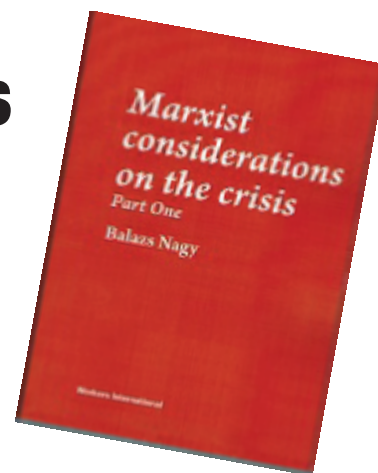
Roger Silverman
June 2014

ESSENTIAL READING

Marxist Considerations on the Crisis

Part 1

by Balazs Nagy



Published for Workers International by
Socialist Studies. ISBN 978 0 9564319 3 6

The Hungarian Marxist BALAZS NAGY originally planned this work as 'an article explaining the great economic crisis which erupted in 2007 from a Marxist point of view'. However, he 'quite quickly realised that a deeper understanding of this development would only be possible if I located it within a broader historical and political context than I had anticipated ... it would only be possible to grasp the nature and meaning of this current upheaval in and through the development of the economic-political system as a whole'

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Social movement trade unionism

Report of a conference organised by teacher unions in London, 24 May 2014

The UK-based TeacherSolidarity website organised this one-day conference involving about 80 activists from local Divisions (branches) of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at the union's headquarters in London.

It started with a presentation by Professor Susan Robertson (Bristol University).

A list of international guests from Mexico, Sweden, Ecuador, British Columbia, India, Greece, Chicago and Venezuela then conducted rolling seminars with smaller groups; i.e. they made more or less the same presentation about their work three times to different groups of NUT members with lots of time for discussion.

There was then a presentation to the whole conference by Professor Lois Weiner, (University of New Jersey), a prominent advocate of "Social Movement Trade Unionism", after which participants reported back on what they had learned during the day.

Background:

The bourgeoisie is conducting a "neo-liberal" drive known to its opponents as the Global Education Reform Movement, or "GERM". The aim of this "movement" is to privatise and de-nature education so that business can profit from an activity that turns over many billions of dollars and both creates and potentially domesticates its labour force. The "GERM" is affecting just about every corner of the globe.

In the UK, this involves dismantling the social gains in relation to education achieved post 1944 (the key date of the introduction of compulsory, free, state secondary education there) and before.

The corruption and decline of socialist and communist political parties means that virtually all governments are won over to the "GERM" and are working to destroy and undermine public education systems. The global body linking education unions, Education International, is also heavily compromised in this reactionary agenda.

For over 60 years in England the NUT has defended teachers' interests within the institutional framework established in 1944 and before. Local government (municipal councils acting as Local Education Authorities) built and ran schools in their localities with

major financial support from central government. Teachers' wages and terms and conditions of service were regulated at a national level. The union's job was to maintain these arrangements in partnership with successive governments (who have all respected and maintained the 1944 settlement), negotiate some marginal issues with local authorities and individually support members who encountered problems on the job ("case-work").

Over many years, the key union figure in every locality has been the Divisional Secretary (Div.Sec.), a serving teacher who is allowed time off to deal with case-work. They have very often become totally immersed in this work and have neglected the task of organising the union members in schools and local branches. In the process the rank-and-file organisation of the union has tended to wither away, especially as teachers' work-load has increased hugely, while local meetings can be very formal and uninspiring. At the same time union membership as a percentage of the teacher work-force remains very high.

Over recent decades, the post-1944 consensus has been breaking down, but while steel-workers, miners, print-workers, employees in manufacturing, dockers and seafarers and their trade unions suffered the Thatcher onslaught, teachers have been relatively unscathed, although various pressures have been building up on them.

From the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 the avalanche of attacks has hit teachers, with the break-up of local education authorities and the creation of academies and free schools as an antechamber to full privatisation of education in the hands of "for profit" employers, a wage-freeze, serious inroads into pension rights, all-out attacks on and denigration of any humane liberal curriculum and a return to hierarchical and authoritarian structures, curriculum, examinations and pedagogy.

The unions are no longer treated (except purely verbally) as any sort of genuine "social partner" by governments of any colour.

A left, generally socialist, but diverse grouping has won the post of General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary (both full-time elected posts) of the NUT and a fragile majority on the elected lay National Executive of the union. Some of the best left leaders were trained by members of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International ("USec") who themselves had become active in the 1960s, but these apprentices do not exactly follow their masters.

The body of full-time union employees who actually keep the union functioning day-by-day, continues to be not unlike the professional workforce of other major trade unions in the UK, with reformist influences and echoes of Stalinism.

The 300,000 or so members of the NUT (there are also approximately the same number in the "rival" NASUWT union) have been caught almost totally unprepared by the events since 2010. Despite growing stresses on the job, they have for decades had access to fairly comfortable middle-class lives, home-ownership, etc. Now everything they have taken for granted in the past is being torn away at bewildering speed.

Gone is the sure certainty of an annual wage increment, a job for life and a guarantee of a comfortable retirement. A savage system of appraisal linked to pay progression and increasingly easy ways to dismiss teachers on "competency" grounds has put serious tools into the hands of managements which wish to sweat their workforce and impose the official curriculum and pedagogy.

While this is wreaking great damage among older teachers, young teachers have little prospect (in London and the South-East of the country at least) of ever owning their own home, and often realise they will not be able to keep up with the intense requirements of the job throughout a whole working career. Whether they can last it out or not, they will be expected to wait until their late 60s before they can draw a pension that is not "actuarially" reduced.

The huge inroads of semi-privatisation into the school system, the ending of national arrangements for terms and



July 10 2014: a widespread strike of the public sector in the UK is led by the National Union of Teachers mobilised through the “Stand Up For Education” campaign. In London, up to 15,000 strikers marched to a rally in Trafalgar Square

conditions and for teacher training, the growing crisis over school places and so forth present the NUT with a challenge. The leaders need to “kick-start” their own trade union and prepare the membership, which is not ready and has not been prepared by previous leaderships, for a decisive struggle, a fight against ruthless and determined hostile governments.

Despite their relatively tiny memberships, radical left groups like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Socialist Party (SP) and the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), all parts of the fragmentation of the Fourth International, play a significant role in the NUT, mainly in the bigger cities like London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leicester, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and Bristol.

In general, despite great mutual tensions and rivalries, they seek a way forward in this situation by calling for the most militant and continuous strike action possible, preferably alongside other trade unions which can be drawn into struggle. The SP flatly proposes a call for a general strike as the way forward.

However, the overall membership of the union is prepared neither in

outlook nor in organisational terms for any prolonged struggle along those lines. There is little point in going for a few days of all-out strike action only to be met by government intransigence followed by a collapse and the possibility of the union being broken for good.

The NUT has been one of the most militant unions in the UK over the last 15 years. Only the RMT rail and transport union can compare with it in terms of militancy. The NUT uses the strike weapon as and when it can, and has actually managed to organise single days of joint strike action with other unions to defend pensions.

Unfortunately, at the end of 2011 other unions backed away from a developing resistance to attacks on public sector workers’ pensions, and the union has found it difficult to achieve effective strike action on its own since then, although there have been some regional days and one national day of strike over the past 12 months.

To change the terrain, the NUT is on the one hand employing a new breed of full-time organisers to build up union organisation within and between schools, with a growing network of trained and confident workplace reps in schools in touch with their members

and with reps at other local schools, while on the other it is seeking allies in the community to sustain a campaign to build the union within a wider movement for social justice in education. The 24 May conference took place within this context.

Setting the tone for the day

In her introduction, Susan Robertson explained that around the world education is a multi-trillion dollar industry, and that capital is looking for what profits it can make out of that. She warned that the so-called “philanthropists” like Bill Gates are the Trojan horses for capital’s take-over of education.

Any actual teachers are excluded from big international meetings that discuss education “reform”. She explained that the term “reform” masks a take-over by capital, and needs to be exposed. She talked about the abuse of statistics generated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which can use concepts of international competitiveness to justify “reform” along the lines capital proposes. She talked about their use of the “weird indices” they generate which correlate, for example, high-school graduation rates in a given country with

broadband internet penetration. These mean very little but act as scare tactics to drive government “reform” policies around the world.

She talked about the impact of all this on what is taught and how, mentioning for example the reduction of science education to “techno-science”, a subject with academic content hollowed out and just good enough to service industry, which also disadvantages girl students and minority students. What is new is that, for example in the US, science teacher associations are becoming radicalised over this and open to critiques of the “reforms”.

She mentioned that the generation of pupils and students which spent the last decade opposing neo-liberal education reforms in Chile is now furnishing elected parliamentarians. They are fighting to re-establish the national education system that was destroyed under Pinochet.

She talked about how education is being opened up as a service sector accessible to business and investors, evoking the international campaign in the 1990s against the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Business corporations keen to act as providers (Pearson and others) talk about the “enterprising poor” and argue “the poor” should “also have the choice” of the benefits of a private education. But what happens in Ghana is that families who make that “choice” get the “school in a box” containing a “teaching kit” provided to the pupil by an untrained high-school graduate at 1/5 of the pay of a proper Ghanaian teacher. At a cost of 65 US cents a day, this sounds cheap, but it is 1/3 of an average family daily income in Ghana, meaning that only one child in the family (probably a boy) is going to receive an education.

She made the point that research by one of her graduate students on the ground in Ghana had exposed this sham. (The importance of research in the service of campaigning was one of the strands in the day’s discussions).

In the UK, private “for profit” providers have already completely infiltrated entire aspects of the education system, including the inspection service, the setting and marking of public examinations, etc.

Bill and Melinda Gates’ “value added” criteria for educational outcomes in the marketplace completely ignore what we know about learning. They assume it is straightforward and linear.

But an opposition is arising to “face down square on” the idea of teaching as a commodity, rejecting corrupt and socially corrosive policies in order to assert education as a public good.

Where capital has been too pre-sumptuous, it has evoked opposition and come to grief.

The various discussion groups heard reports from the presenters noted above. These reports thoroughly established the international character of the assault on education as a public good and had a visible impact on the trade union activists present.

In the main, though, the latter had difficulty digesting what they were hearing. The speaker from India, for example, described decades of neo-liberal attacks on state education in the sub-continent. In the discussion, a middle-aged male NUT member asked whether the economic boom in India would not lead to recovery of state-provided education, in a sense “going back to normal”.

I was able to attend three seminars (on Greece, India and Chicago). Participants in other seminars reported back to the plenary session.

All seminars reported on forms of resistance to the attacks described. There is very little organised fight-back in India. The teacher trade unions there are organised as adjuncts to political parties and are very hidebound and bureaucratic.

Pavlos Charamis from the Greek secondary teachers’ union OLME described how in his country expenditure on education has fallen by 35% since 2009, many school and education support structures have closed, there are 30,000 fewer teachers, 10,000 substitute teachers have been sacked and 2,000 vocational teachers are suspended. 5 000 secondary teachers have been transferred to primary education and administrative positions. The weekly teaching workload has risen by 2 hours. A new teacher evaluation system has been imposed, as have a number of authoritarian laws which bring fear, competition between schools and teachers and a feeling of insecurity.

The changes to vocational education in Greece involve a gift of valuable properties and resources to the private sector, while students have been re-assigned to non-formal education and straight on to on-the-job training at the end of statutory education.

The government and World Bank claim a “success story” in Greece but for

the people there is a humanitarian disaster.

Greek teachers have been very much involved in strike action and have been forced to take more demonstrative and radical action. To defend cleaners’ jobs they occupied official premises and the riot police filled the buildings with tear gas.

The British Columbia teachers’ union in Canada has developed international solidarity work successfully, and the Mexican and Chicago teachers’ unions report successes using social movement trade unionism.

The Chicago report

The presenter of the Chicago Teachers’ Union report was an enthusiastic young woman. Teachers who were not initially active in the union (I am sure some of them were active in the anti-globalisation movement as students) were concerned by the growing inequality in education in the city, with school closures and other cuts in black and latino areas, while middle-class white areas were spared.

They campaigned as “Teachers for Social Justice”, but made little progress. Trying to understand their situation, they studied Naomi Klein’s *Shock Doctrine* as a political text. They met up with more experienced allies and then formed a caucus (CORE) which simply took over Chicago Teachers’ Union.

They embedded the union in the poor communities via links with the black and latino churches. They democratised the processes at union meetings to encourage the involvement of new layers of member and instituted a method whereby each participant in any union meeting was expected to pass on a set number of decisions of that meeting to a specific number of people.

They devoted a lot of time to organising and checking organisation; they decided to engage with people “where they were at”, i.e. on their own political level and in their own setting, so that they could get as many as possible involved in the campaign.

They “reached people at many different levels”. For example, where a school is at a very basic level of organisation, they would be content to have people wear one red garment one day a week to show support for the union. Where members were strong, confident and organised many of them would wear very flamboyantly red clothes, while elsewhere they might choose to be less obvious.

An organiser who visited a school on a set day would immediately see

how strong the union organisation was in that school.

The reporter emphasised that we should not imagine that every member of the union had a high level of consciousness and militancy, but that the union had (she did not use the word!) a cadre which reached into every school and linked the union to every teacher.

Once "CORE" won office, they (by individual decision) accepted only average teachers' pay and ploughed the rest back into hiring organisers who would work intensively with a group of neighbouring schools to bring the organisation to life. The money saved was also used to change the legal department, which then started legal challenges to the authorities on a range of social and political issues.

All this won strong support in the community, which was very important during contract negotiations involving several days of strike action. There were very big mass public rallies in support of the teachers. The union held off a series of attacks on salaries, conditions and trade union right, although it could not stop all.

In the instance of Chicago, therefore, it is very clear that the union has taken on some of the functions and even the forms of a political party, without actually being a political party. However, it has established an "Independent Political Organisation" (IPO) as a vehicle to exert influence in the political sphere.

Lois Weiner

In her remarks to the closing plenary session, Lois Weiner of New Jersey City University hailed the NUT's initiative for, among other things, its "commitment to move beyond resistance to creation of alternatives."

She pointed out that "both higher and lower education are being transformed" by policies which subject them to the discipline of the market, which is, however, "the control of powerful elites who manage capitalism and increasingly use the state without political challenge". She welcomed the collaboration of teachers in schools and universities.

Professor Weiner highlighted the role of research in countering the myths fostered by the neo-liberal project, but added the need to "move on to public policy debates that incorporate a very different logic, one that recognises the limits of expertise and one that reflects that different views of 'evidence' can only be applied within democratic participative processes that

give voice and power to those currently treated so inequitably" (quoting Stephen J. Klees).

"Unions and their members need research to help them devise strategies to win public support in the struggle to turn back attacks on the profession", while "US academics are beginning to realise that teachers unions can be an invaluable ally in social struggles against neo-liberalism's education project".

She addressed the contradiction between "activism", whose aim is to "simplify" in order to achieve change, and "research", whose "aim is to bring complexity, pose problems", which means that "we may reach conclusions which make us and the unions uncomfortable".

She continued: "... critical analysis of the neo-liberal project must begin with recognition that neo-liberalism's ideological and material victories were and are abetted by inequalities in schooling and society that teachers unions accepted, as did social democracy as a whole in labor's post-World War II pact with capital".

"While collective bargaining gave teachers unions stability and the strength to negotiate improved wages and benefits ... the arrangement also locked teachers and students into arrangements for schooling that resulted in unequal educational outcomes..."

"Just as we see a global footprint of neo-liberalism's global project in education ... so we can now see a footprint of resistance", she continued, warning that "we need to take the alliances we have formed to a different terrain, a territory that can make unions uncomfortable because they must share power in ways that are often unfamiliar", citing the North Carolina teachers who "are working with Moral Mondays, a civil rights campaign organised by churches and supported by the few labor unions in North Carolina".

Quoting developments in Mexico, Lois Weiner suggested "the new footprint resistance needs to take (is) teachers occupying schools with parents, making schools sites of human emancipation".

Going forward

We should not expect that the NUT activists will assimilate everything they encountered at this conference quickly or easily, but they really have encountered major issues which are now established on their agendas. These are all social and political questions as well as trade union matters. This should

open up a political discussion among union members and, if they start working correctly, they can take that discussion among parents and other people they come into contact with on their campaigns.

This is a big turn by a very conservative union. It is the outcome of several years of planning and discussion by a variety of forces in the union. It has put the National Union of Teachers in a real position of leadership among British trade unions.

At the same time there is a difficult conundrum at the heart of this movement.

The turn to "social justice" or "social movement" trade unionism is necessary and refreshing, but it arises from a genuine and intractable contradiction.

While capitalism is plunging deeper and deeper into social and political crisis, the depth of this crisis is not immediately reflected in a positive way in the consciousness of masses of people. People do not view this as the terminal crisis of capitalism nor do they by and large embrace the need to replace this social order with a socialist one.

Reciprocally linked with this is the lack of the political leadership which, by rights, ought to be at the head of a strong international movement of working people, with the organised working class at its heart.

The beginnings of this movement in the Communist International were overwhelmed by Stalinism, and now in the abject decay and collapse of the Stalinised Soviet bloc and its political supporters around the world, the lack of such a revolutionary political organisation is having a painful effect.

Very often now, it is trade unions which have to take on the political and social functions which rightly belong to political parties and movements. This is precisely what teacher unions have done in British Columbia, parts of the USA, Mexico and in the UK in the form of the NUT.

But it is an awkward role for a trade union. Trade unions have always in the past had to find a political expression beyond their own structures for the simple fact that they need to establish legal rights for themselves and the workers whose interests they represent. Without a labour code and the right to strike, unions cannot do their most basic tasks.

The same is true of workers' and other working people's social rights. They are only really established by state action enshrined in legislation.

The struggle of workers and working people more broadly can only reach its full development in the political arena, and that requires specific structures and activities.

So “social justice” trade unionism is a promising and necessary development and the discussion and the discussion and proposals arising from the May 24 conference should be encouraged and assisted in every way.

In the UK it is part and parcel of the growing “Peoples Assembly” movement which is also a very novel and significant attempt mainly by trade unions to express what workers and working people more broadly need.

The NUT members who turned out on the June 21 London demonstration and rally of “Peoples Assembly” and the July 10 national public sector strike were, it was noted, by and large the ones who the union had managed to mobilise in their own “Stand Up For Education” campaign to staff street stalls, collect petition signatures, talk to parents and lobby politicians.

“Social movement trade unionism” is a response to the situation working people are in that is encouraging because it is positive and lively and offers a path of struggle to which people can relate.

It should be pushed forward in every way. But it has internal tensions and will meet external limits.

In Chicago, for example, CORE has brought about a huge change by mobilising teachers and communities in a new way, but it can so far only slow down and hold up the bourgeoisie’s onslaught on education and other

social goods. Formal Marxists condemn the CORE leadership for the inadequacies of the movement, saying they should have demanded more or organised on a more explicit basis.

But this critique misses the material stage in which the masses of people find themselves, and risks condemning the movement to impotence and passivity.

There is a real discussion to be had within this movement.

Lois Weiner talks about the need to “educate parents to the real facts of economic life”, and explains (correctly) that Education International’s “assumption it should persuade world leaders to return to the post-war social-democratic compact” is frustrated because: “One insurmountable problem with this strategy is that capitalism rejects the compact. The powerful, super-wealthy elites who control governments and media want to destroy unions’ power as well as the gains they have made for working people”.

Her proposal for a way forward is “Teachers occupying schools with parents, making schools sites of human emancipation. Teachers, together with one another, joined by parents and community, taking back their schools from the powerful elites who aim to eliminate democratic control of education are succeeding in doing so.”

While proposals of this kind are effective and exciting in arousing resistance to the inroads of capital, they are also bound up with illusions that there can be some new “normal” situation which does not challenge the very exist-

ence of capitalism itself, with everything that that entails.

Above all, even the best union leaders involved in this work (and there are some very effective ones indeed) shy away from addressing the historic crisis of capitalism and imperialism as the main factor driving the bourgeoisie’s attacks, partly out of their own political training and experience and partly out of a worry that talk of this kind will alienate the very members they are trying to mobilise.

In this discussion, it is the responsibility of revolutionaries to find ways which “meet people where they are at” and “at many different levels” to explain exactly why “capital rejects the compact. The powerful, super-wealthy elites who control governments and media want to destroy unions’ power” and so on.

It is not just a preferred policy of the bourgeoisie, but a profound life and death necessity that drives them. And ultimately the only effective defence is to build a movement based on an understanding of that crisis and the need to replace capitalism with socialism through the overthrow of the bourgeois order.

Given a correct approach to and involvement in this movement, it will be possible to re-organise and re-equip the forces which want to go beyond it to build a really powerful and conscious political movement of working people for socialism, such as the South African National Union of Metalworkers proposes.

Bob Archer
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June 21: People’s Assembly fills Parliament Square with a march variously judged to bring together between 30,000 and 50,000 demonstrators opposed to government cuts and austerity policies