



New Unity Movement

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

September 2022

WORKER

No. 95

The Worker

Address all correspondence to the Secretariat

P.O. Box 27561 Greenacres 6057

We Fight Ideas with Ideas

ARE WE HEADED FOR SOMETHING CALLED “NEO-FEUDAL (TECHNO) BARBARISM?”

It’s ironic that we can predict with a strong degree of accuracy how climate change will destroy life on earth, but lack the imagination to see the end of capitalism. In this regard, we have to concede victory to the capitalist propaganda machine, which relentlessly works to *naturalize* the system in our collective mind. Writer Mark Fisher (2009) refers to “capitalist realism” as the “widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.”

Not only are we confronted by a tacit acceptance of the status quo, but are often exhorted to desist from “utopian thinking” whenever we dare speculate on what a post-capitalist order could look like. In our own ranks on the Left, there exists a tendency to invoke Karl Marx (no less!) as one who concerned himself predominantly with the present rather than one who indulged in visions of the future. But this is a hopeless distortion. While it is true that Marx created no “blueprints” of a future socialist society, he did emphasize (in a letter in 1843 to Arnold Ruge) the need to avoid anticipating the world with our *dogmas* but instead to attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old. (Our emphasis)



about the task confronting us at present: the *ruthless critique of the existing order*, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries, nor from conflict with the powers that be. (Ibid)

The challenge is to change the present; or, as Trotsky put it, to build a transitional programme, which begins “with the demands and consciousness present today,” and which builds the “bridge between present demands and the socialist programme.”

With this approach, one can clearly see why Marx would make the point that the future society would be “economically, morally and intellectually stamped with the birthmarks of the old society (from whose womb it emerges).”

In terms of Marxist thinking, capitalism contains the seeds of its own demise, but, critically, will not collapse on its own under the weight of its own contradictions and crises. For this to happen, the subjective force of working class power in class struggle is needed. However, sociologist

If we have no business with the construction of the future or with organizing it for all time, there can still be no doubt

Inside this issue:

1	Are we headed for something called “Neo-Feudal (Techno) Barbarism?”	1
2	Biden wags the finger at Ramaphosa	3
3	Heritage Day - A distraction for the Rainbow Nation	4

Wolfgang Streeck thinks we might already be living through a post-capitalist dystopia. He sees the principal cause as “The combined impact of declining growth, heightened debt levels and extreme inequality (three “mutually-reinforcing, intertwined long-term trends”). (2016)

Pundits on the Left are generally pessimistic about any immediate, decisive intervention on the part of an organised working class agency, whether on a national or global scale; hence the preoccupation with dystopian rather than utopian (or at least more optimistic) scenarios. Evgeny Morozov sums it up:

[A]pparently the long-awaited end of capitalism could merely be the beginning of something much worse. Late capitalism is certainly bad enough, with its explosive cocktail of climate change, inequality, police brutality and the deadly pandemic. (New Left Review, Jan-April 2022)

Trends in the modern global economy are playing a big role in shaping current-day thinking on “whither humanity?” The rise of giant firms in the tech/digital industry and increasing moves to robotize the workplace are raising questions about whether the future is not socialism, but feudalism.

What is feudalism? In a nutshell, it was a system in which, under threat of violence, the peasantry were forced by a class of non-producing, parasitic landlords to give up their surplus product. *Neo-feudalism*, then, is the modern-day expropriation of workers (and users of digital-products) by a class of rentiers – that is, owners who appropriate their profits in large measure via intellectual property rights. Thus, the question arises: does Uber make its fortune via something it *produces*, or via licensing the use of its software? Similar questions can be asked of other tech/digital giants who are making their owners insanely rich – Facebook, Twitter, and so on.

A firm like Google strengthens the perception. Google does not charge users for its service. But, as Evgeny Morozov argues, it nevertheless produces a commodity – “real time access to vast amounts of human knowledge” (Ibid) Google’s business model is based on the fact that it does “not pay the publishers and content creators whose pages it indexes in order to produce that commodity.” In other words, despite appearances, Google and other tech firms are still very much capitalist rather than feudalist.

There is also a belief that the move towards greater and greater robotization of the workplace will invalidate the Marxist notion that the workers produce (surplus) value. But this, too, is an illusion, since even fully robotized factories make use of “dead labour and congealed knowledge of previous generations.”

Even while today’s tech giants *appear* to be non-capitalist, this

might just be an illusion, as their investment data shows: Alphabet (Google’s parent company) in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 spent \$16.6 billion, \$21.4 billion, \$26 billion and \$27.5 billion respectively on R&D. Amazon spent \$42.7 billion in 2020 alone on R&D. This is not how rentiers behave; this is how capitalists behave.

It would appear, therefore, that economically, the rise of the tech/digital age is very much a capitalist phenomenon, and that worsening conditions – a deepening immiseration – resulting for society in general and workers in particular are feudalistic in their appearance. In this latter sense, a term like “neo-feudal techno barbarism” might have good descriptive value, but must not be allowed to overshadow the underlying capitalist nature of oppression.

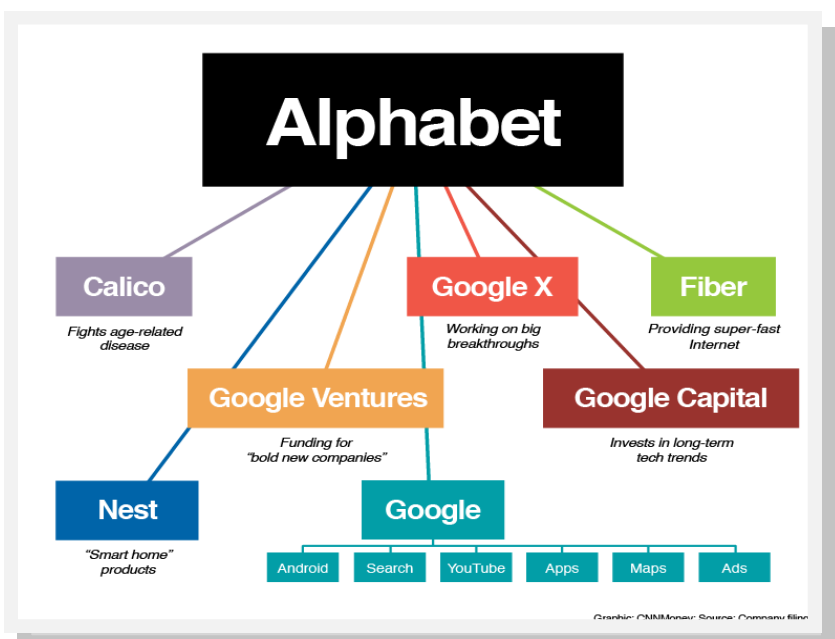
Thus, the anti-capitalist struggle continues, but not without the need for us to factor in the fast-changing conditions within which such struggle has to take place.

NOTE (i): The above discussion scratches the surface of what is likely to become a key focus of analysis and interpretation going forward. It is going to be critical for us to achieve clarity, as it is our understanding of the nature of our oppression which drives our strategy for emancipation.

NOTE (ii): This short piece owes much to the following article by Evgeny Morozov, “Critique of Techno-Feudal Reason,” carried in the Jan-April 2022 edition of New Left Review.

See the following website:

<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii133/articles/evgeny-morozov-critique-of-techno-feudal-reason?token=IGUtsN7MttUn>



BIDEN WAGS THE FINGER AT RAMAPHOSA

So, Biden summons his lackey, Ramaphosa, to appear before him on the White House red carpet – no doubt, for the SA president to explain (and repent of) the ANC’s ambivalent stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

But, of course, the media spin-doctors did their job by couching this news in positive terms. We were provided with a timely reminder that the US, along with France, the UK and the EU (including Germany) have put up a kitty of \$8.5 billion to “invest” in a so-called Just-Energy-Transition-Partnership (JETP) with SA. This is supposed to be a show of generosity and caring on the part of our imperialist masters to assist us in the transition from coal to renewable sources of energy – and to assist workers and communities in the industry to “adapt.”

What does “adapt” mean? How much of this sum of \$8.5 billion will come in the form of loans – meaning, how much of it will be repayable? And – not unimportantly – how much of it will end up in the pockets of loyal ANC cadres?

One of the first messages to come out of Biden’s session with Ramaphosa was the news that there was “agreement on the need to create a more attractive environment for American companies to invest in South Africa, where an estimated 600 US companies are already doing business in a range of sectors.”

Be afraid. Be very afraid. This is code-speak for: “Open your economy up wider – no, wider! – to enable us to more easily exploit it.”

So, what’s in it for the US? For one, shoring up its global market dominance. We know that it is using Ukraine to fight a proxy war so that US/imperialist/capitalist hegemony can be extended at the expense of Russia. (No doubt, China will be the next target, maybe with Taiwan cast in the role of Ukraine) The “meeting” with Ramaphosa would have been about reading him the riot act – “don’t step too far out of line, if you know what’s good for you.”

And what’s “good” for Ramaphosa? Why, US investment, of course. Ramaphosa and the ANC have never made a secret of the fact that imperialist investment is by far-and-away their number one strategy for ruling this country. Throughout the ANC’s almost thirty years at the helm, they and their bedfellows in COSATU and the SACP have never departed from this approach. It’s been hugely profitable for the



“investors” and for their facilitators in the SA government.

Concerning the mass of South Africans? Well, they have democracy – underpinned by one of the “world’s best” constitutions, as our rulers never tire of telling us. They also have a pot-load of (yet-if-ever-to-be-fulfilled) promises

of a rosy new dawn.

Thus, the ANC can approach the elections in 2024 with a renewed confidence. Vote ANC for a better tomorrow. With generous, benign investment inflows from our Western friends/partners/allies, we will soon have the wherewithal to fix our collapsed/collapsing infrastructure; we’ll soon have the wherewithal to reform our education system; we’ll soon be able to provide those all-important jobs we’ve been promising for the last almost-thirty years.

No doubt, we, the SA working class, will be reminded of our role to make these promises come true, and that “role” can be encapsulated in a single word: compliance. We are exhorted to collaborate in the process of our own immiseration via simple docility. Worker strikes (within the boundaries of the law, of course) and the occasional looting and burning on the part of embattled communities are acceptable (if not wholly desirable) – after all, they prove we are a free democratic society, don’t they?

Why would we trust Biden? Why would we trust Ramaphosa? The only time working people anywhere in the world have won any kind of concession has been when they’ve threatened the system of capitalism, when they’ve threatened the privileges of the ruling class.

It will be no different for us in South Africa. We must not waste our time with electoral politics – deciding every five years who’s to be our masters. Our task remains to build the unity of the Left, and in the process to win the mass of South Africans over to a programme for transition to socialism.

HERITAGE DAY – A DISTRACTION FOR THE RAINBOW NATION.

Heritage Day is a day when “South Africans are encouraged to celebrate their culture and the diversity of their beliefs and traditions, in the wider context of a nation, this pertains to all those who accept SA as their home and therefore regard themselves as Africans”.

Every human being who lives in this country and contributes to its welfare is a citizen and is therefore entitled to an equal say in the government and management of the affairs of the country. This view effectively condemns xenophobia (Afrophobia) and the views of “*Operation Dudula*”.

With all the pomp and ceremony in the UK following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, the concept of Western Civilisation has come to the fore. Colonialism and Western Civilisation are being discussed in all corners of the globe and especially in South Africa and Australia with diametrically opposed opinions being expressed.

We should all become aware that westerners alone did not create Western Civilisation. Moreover, the African is not inferior to the “Westerners” or the “Civilised nations” as alluded to by westerners. IB Tabata in his monologue, “*Contribution to Modern Civilisation*” avers that the concept of Western Civilisation is a myth that there is only *Human Civilisation* to which all human beings, all over the world have contributed. The people of Africa made as huge a contribution to the development of Human Civilisation as any other. The discovery of the “new world” with its spices, sugar, cotton and tea had the effect of hastening the slave trade. These events contributed largely to the birth of the industrial revolution. It is estimated that during the 16th – 19th centuries, 50 million slaves were transported from Africa. Would the industrial revolution have taken place at the time without the labour of the slave trade? The workers and peasantry are the backbone of society – in this society, it happened to be the slaves.

The European Colonialists continued the rape of Africa with extraction of minerals being their prime target. Exploitation on an unprecedented scale followed with avarice unknown anywhere in the world prior to this. Between 1765 and 1938 the British Colonisers took 45 trillion sterling from India. No attempt has been made to repay these monies. The exploitation and theft on the African continent by the European colonisers is incalculable. This is continuing to this day. All minerals viz. oil, gold, diamonds, coal, platinum, uranium, iron ore, as well as fruit and fresh produce are exported to the European countries and the USA. They literally own the farms on the African continent and sell at prices that the poor in Africa, who work on these farms, cannot afford. North

America was developed by slave labour under the most atrocious conditions. Frederick Douglass vividly describes his experiences as a slave in the American South. It includes the following chilling account:

Mr. Severe (an overseer) was rightly named: he was a cruel man. I have seen him whip a woman, causing the blood to run half an hour at the time; and this, too, in the midst of her crying children, pleading for their mother’s release. He seemed to take pleasure in manifesting his fiendish barbarity. Added to his cruelty, he was a profane swearer. It was enough to chill the blood and stiffen the hair of an ordinary man to hear him talk. . . From the rising till the going down of the sun, he was cursing, raving, cutting, and slashing among the slaves of the field, in the most frightful manner.

Do we still have slave labour in SA?



**IB Tabata
1909—1990**

Whilst the ruling ANC government is keen to promote the idea of a “rainbow nation,” it does not address in any meaningful way the fact that we – the working people of the country – are more united by our immiseration under the capitalist system which the ANC government so avidly champions, than we are divided by the separate identities which apartheid imposed on us, and which now the ANC continues to uphold and reinforce. So much for the rainbow nation.

The twin evils – capitalism and race – are two sides of the same coin. The history of South Africa is the history of racial capital, in terms of which ownership in the means of production was centralized in the hands of a European elite, underwritten by an indigenous class of enforcers armed with a battery of segregationist and apartheid laws.

1994 did not undo the disparities in wealth distribution caused by decades of segregation and apartheid. If anything, the post-1994 era worsened these disparities. Today, almost thirty years into the post-apartheid South Africa, as a nation, our socio-economic stats make dreadful reading. Consider the following:

1. The country’s unemployment rate stands at 33.9%

2. (44.1ifone considers the expanded definition). Almost half our adult population lives in poverty. According to the Department of Statistics, 49.2% of the population over the age of 18 falls below the upper-bound poverty line, which stands at an income level of R1183 per month.
3. According to an article in a local newspaper, informal settlements have grown from an estimated 300 in 1994 to 2,700 in 2020. "This is compounded," says the article, "by dramatic growth in backyarding and private rentals."
4. According to Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga there are close to 4 000 pit latrines in public schools. HOW DO WE SLEEP AT NIGHT KNOWING THIS? In addition, there are 3 500 schools with water supply challenges.
5. Virtually every sector where the state is responsible for catering to the needs of the public is in crisis – healthcare, education, transport, and crime-prevention.

Many underlying causes have been identified to explain the wave of unrest and looting in KZN and Gauteng during July last year: there can be no doubt that sheer poverty and deprivation would be a leading factor.

When one considers the role of capitalism in the creation and reproduction of poverty among the masses of people whose role in the system is to produce the wealth expropriated by the owners of the means of production, one is inclined to focus mainly (if not exclusively) on the class of parasitic capitalists, both local and global. However, there is a considerable sub-species of beneficiary: and that is the non-producing layer of the political elite and their hangers-on in the state bureaucracy. The true total amount that has been siphoned off into the pockets of this class of criminal will probably never be known.

This government may be in office but certainly not in power. The real bosses are the International Monetary Fund (IMF),

World Bank (WB) and the capitalists' countries. These powerful agencies and countries dictate how South Africa must be managed so that the capitalists can benefit. They are responsible for the condition in which we find ourselves. The lack of jobs and housing, poor health services and gutter education can be laid at their doorsteps, as much needed money that could be used on social services leave the country in the form of debt repayment and profits.

What we should remember is that our political heroes are not only those that are *fêted* and lionised by the liberal media or the TV stations but also in the many undocumented shared histories of our communities.

On these days of Heritage Month, we are annually subjected to huge numbers of African National Congress (ANC) cadres and other political nonentities whose virtues are extolled to conceal the inadequacies in the government's poor service delivery and failed policies.

What we must do?

1. We must build a single, undivided, independent, non-racial and democratic SA free from foreign domination.
2. The interests of the workers and the rural poor must be made paramount.
3. The land and its wealth belong to the people and must be restored to social ownership.
4. We must bring about a new society in which we will all be truly free.

The sooner we foreground our heritage as workers under capitalism and imperialism, the sooner we will begin to realise the necessity of class struggle in order to reshape our heritage from that of divided, exploited wage slaves to an emancipated community of citizens in a free, genuinely democratic society.



The Contribution of the
Non European Peoples to
World Civilisation

ADDITIONAL READING

"The Contribution of the Non European Peoples to World Civilisation"
- 1953

BM Kies

Reprinted in 2019 on the 40th anniversary of the death of BM Kies.

The book is available from the Joint Secretaries.

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

The Secretariat

Michael Titus / Michael Steenveld

083 255 6329 / 071 645 1590

michaeltitus@vodamail.co.za / mikesteenveld2020@gmail.com

Visit us at <http://www.newunitymovement.org.za/>