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WE FIGHT IDEAS WITH IDEAS

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80 years of struggle



The Rev. Zaccheus Richard Mahabane was the first president of the NEUM. He was president of the NEUM from 1943 - 1957.

In the case of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the name provides a clue to its early history: it was a body which aimed to unite, on a federal basis, members of the three main 'ethnic groups' – "Africans", "Coloureds" and "Indians" – irrespective of religions, castes, or 'tribes'.

THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR A GENUINE NON-RACIAL PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY

2023 marks 80 years since the establishment of the Unity Movement.

SA's history of struggle strongly vindicates the Movement's commitment to and politicization of the concept of non-racialism. Today, non-racialism is enshrined in the country's constitution, which ironically enables the ruling ANC Alliance to opportunistically create the impression that "non-racialism was *their* idea." Non-racialism, as understood and implemented by the ANC, however, is nothing other than *multi-racialism*. The ANC has never forewarned the division of society into the apartheid "racial" groupings (or categories) of "black," "coloured," "Indian" and "white."

The ANC was never in favour of a politics of non-racialism. In the 1940s, the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) attempted to draw the ANC into an alliance of non-racial forces opposing apartheid, but without success. The ANC was neither willing to terminate its participation in the (racial, dummy) Native Representative Council, nor was it willing to elevate the unity of the oppressed as a whole above the unity of the "African people" (by which they meant people exclusively of indigenous descent). Speaking for the ANC at a meeting with a delegation of the All-African Convention (which was an affiliate of the NEUM), R V Selope Thema, (himself a member of the Native Representative Council) declared that the unity of the African peo-

ple was of primary importance. "Charity begins at home," he said.

They, the Africans, want to unite in their economic and social life, and therefore they have to unite as a race. We have a purpose to fulfill as a united African race. Our aims might be opposed to those of other people, it does not matter. We should follow the law of self-preservation. We should love each other first before we love other people.

This sounds quaint in this day-and-age. Even quainter was the response of the SA Indian Congress. Speaking on their behalf at the Second Unity Conference in 1943, Mr Al Kajee, dealing with the question of the franchise as con-

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tained in Point 1 of the NEUM's Ten Point Programme, stated that the Indian Congress stood by the policy of compromise, and had accepted the principle of a "Communal" vote based on educational and property qualifications. The Merchant class leadership had no interest in building a movement for liberation from economic exploitation and political domination. They wanted a loose "unity" that could be manipulated to improve their bargaining position in various negotiations with the ruling class. What mattered to them were their trading rights and they would make any compromise to secure these. Thus they were quite prepared to sell out the franchise rights of all the oppressed, including the vast majority of the "Indian" people, in order to secure the trading rights of the few merchants.

However, the demand for a genuine non-racial democracy resonated with the mass of oppressed South Africans, who vigorously opposed all notions of "ethno-nationalism," and boycotted the separate dummy tribal councils and Bantustans out of existence. So strong was the stench of apartheid in the nostrils of the oppressed, that anything less than a united, democratic, non-racial South Africa would not fly. Yet, none of the players at CODESA espoused a philosophy of non-racialism.

CODESA was about saving South Africa for capitalism-imperialism, it was not about liberating the country from apartheid fascism. It was about preserving the institutions of capitalist exploitation while erasing discriminatory legislation from the statute books. Essential to this project was the deception of retaining a "multi-racial" order, but renaming it "non-racialism."

CODESA did nothing to disturb the economic distortions in society. There was no appropriation of the wealthy, not even via a more just tax regime. The new constitution conceded personal freedoms such as freedom of speech, but more importantly, also sanctified the "freedom" to accumulate private property. The essential purpose of CODESA was to "change things but keep them the same." Thus, we have a constitutional democracy which is a watered-down version of the real thing. The fatal flaw in SA's so-called democratic process is that it creates a very minor, virtually inconsequential role for us, *The People*. All we are required to do is to

stand in long queues every few years and cast our ballots. The real process of ruling and decision-making is then taken over by the political parties. They are then free to appoint their own people to positions of power, and rule us according to their own needs and interests. The only time they would be willing to listen to us is when things get out of hand, when communities reach boiling-point and take to the streets to protest their grievances. Even then, very little is done to address our needs. That is why, over time, nothing really changes. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer.

And so, despite the fact that we have a so-called "non-racial" constitution, the contours of poverty remain in line with pre-CODESA social structures. The elections in 2024 will not change this. The goal of all parties contesting those elections will be to maximize their number of places at the feeding trough. They are all "in it" for the same reason as the ANC.

Espousing non-racialism in a capitalist society entails the practice and promotion of an "ethics of altruism" in every-day life – of genuine caring. But to destroy the roots of racialism and racial discrimination, we have to build a society based on socialist principles.

As we pause to reflect on the legacy of the Unity Movement, we take pride in the role it has played in the gains achieved by our society in the past eight decades. However, we also take cognizance of the fact that much work lies ahead for us as part of the non-Stalinist Left as we pursue the journey towards the building of a genuine people's democracy.

The ongoing crisis of capital is driving change at both a global and a local level. In SA, this can be seen in the decline of the ANC and the simultaneous rise of multiple groupings on the right all eager to fill any void which might be created. We know that a number of these groupings will readily invoke calls to chauvinism if not open xenophobia, in order to rouse a latent ethnocentrism within their support-base. The bourgeois-democratic face of oppression could well then morph into outright fascism.

And so, for us the struggle continues.

For further information: Read Majority Rule

1. **Unity Movement / Apdusa Views site**
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**Delegates at the 2013
Conference**

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Suddenly political theatre in SA has something new to ooh-and-aah about: one Roger Jardine, punted as a presidential candidate no less. It should hardly be surprising now, with all the talk of the ANC's decline, that hordes of opportunists will surface from every nook and cranny to find a slot at the feeding trough.



Roger Jardine

What are Mr Jardine's credentials? Well, for starters, he's a former chairman of FirstRand. That should tell you something. In an interview, a lot of his utterances came directly from the neoliberal playbook. He is quoted as saying that South Africa has a "very advanced private sector" which would "have to step in to assist with services," and "We have to fix the balance sheets of SA Inc. A lot of private capital must be leveraged." So, away with cadre deployment, and in its place all the lucrative contracts will remain in the corporate sector, making the rich richer, with the poor scrambling as usual for crumbs.

A further clue to his political and ideological leanings is indicated by the team which he has assembled about him: outgoing "Maverick Citizen" editor, Mark Heywood; outgoing Helen Suzman Foundation head, Nicole Fritz; Progressive Health Forum's Dr Aslam Dasoo; and former UDF stalwart (and Thabo Mbeki speechwriter) Murphy Morobe.

The question of whether or not Jardine's "Change Starts Now" party will join ranks with other groupings of a similar ilk (most notably the "Moonshot Pact" crowd) is not disclosed for now, but one would expect the likelihood to be great, especially if the way to unseat the ANC (as so many think) is via coalition politics.

And so the voters will be confronted with a choice between the ANC (and EFF) on the one hand, and a motley assemblage of business-friendly puppets on the other. It's a choice between evils, not dissimilar to what American voters are faced with, having to choose between a Trump and a Biden.

Do not underestimate the chances of Jardine & Co. We have seen capital-friendly regimes arise elsewhere in the current period (just think of right-wing clown, Javier Milei in Argentina).

One thing's for sure: the working people of this country will not benefit. Under whichever party wins power in 2024, the best we would be able to hope for is a marginal improvement in this or that indicator. Perhaps, for example, unemployment will fall from 32.9 percent to 32.7 percent. What was true in Marx's time is true in ours: in a bourgeois democracy, parliamentary politics is all about voting for which party you would wish to oppress you.

Philosopher Soren Mau recently published a book in which he draws attention to "the mute compulsion of capital," a concept highlighted by Marx in his "Capital," referring to a key means by which capital "tames" the working class. Thus, in addition to force/coercion and propaganda, capital also traps workers in a system which "compels" their obedience on pain of starvation. It's not much different with electoral politics. Someone needs to run the country, so let's try to pick the best of a poor bunch. It is a sad truth that an air of resignation hangs over the country when we consider our options.

However, we can and must change this. The challenge for the non-Stalinist Left in this country is to catalyse a transformation. As Vivek Chibber notes in his illuminating book, "Confronting Capital: How the World Works and How to Change it," success at the ballot box will not be sufficient to ensure the rulers adopt a worker-friendly agenda ". . . unless the electoral successes (achieved by the working class) are used to deepen and expand the base in workplaces and neighbourhoods, state by state, region by region. Without the organizational strength of the labour movement, electoral success will not yield the success the Left seeks."

EDUCATION IN SA CANNOT BE REFORMED

As we enter the last phase of the school year and our matriculants are waiting on the 18 January 2024 pageantry, with Angie Motshekga and the MEC's of Education in the provinces being the main actors, we are thinking particularly of the children in Gaza.

7 112 children have been killed and 46 000 wounded since the start of the genocidal war on the Palestinians on October 7. How many children have been killed and wounded since the Nakba (the mass removal and dispossession of Palestinians from their land) in 1948?

There is no doubt, wherever they may be, socio-economic circumstances impact on the education of our children. In South Africa though, another scenario currently presents itself. Different in many respects (to the Palestinian) but still a war on our children. This is a war of poverty and malnutrition. It was reported on Carte Blanche on 26 November 2023 that in the OR Tambo district, in a twelve-month period, 22 children had died of malnutrition. The situation is however far worse than that, as, according to the Daily Maverick, between 5 000 - 7 500 children under the age of five die annually as a direct result of hunger.

How does this impact on the education of our children? Children just cannot learn when they are hungry.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (Pirls) report released on 16 May 2023 concluded that 81% of Gr. 4 learners could not read for meaning in any language, including their home language. This means that only 19% of South African Grade 4 learners could read for meaning in any language in 2021 (all 11 languages were assessed). How do children learn if they cannot read? No prizes for guessing that most of the 19% group are all from the privileged / moneyed class.

Professor Mark Tomlinson, co-director of the Institute for Life Course Health Research in the Department of Global Health at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University expressing his personal views states, "Reforming the education system is a bit like providing cough syrup for severe Covid-19. Hope, I am afraid will not come from reform. We will only find it in total and complete system transformation".

South Africa: Ratio of government expenditure to gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022 was 19.75% - translates to R28.8 billion (2023/2024). Despite the relatively high level of public spending on education, the country suffers from weak educational outcomes.

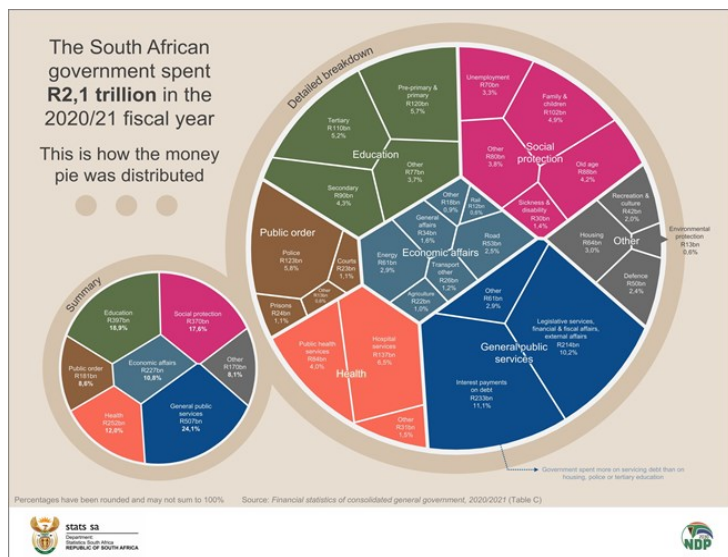
Of about 1 300 000 learners who started school in 2012, approximately 460 000 will not have written the matriculation exams in 2023. The dropout rate alone attests to the failure of the education system. That is, however, not the end of it as 960 000 (in 2021) children

of school-going age were not in school.

An overview of the statistics leads us to the conclusion that South Africa has one of the most unequal education systems in the world. Children in the top 200 schools in the country obtain more distinctions in mathematics than the children in the next 6 600 schools combined. In a number of schools in the areas of the poor, there is not one qualified maths teacher. The gap in test scores between the top 20% of schools and the other 80% is wider than any other country in the world.

Some of the problems, particularly in schools in the areas of the poor, include dilapidated infrastructure, overcrowding in classrooms, lack of resources, low academic standards, pit toilets and unaccountable teachers that make for substandard education for our children. In addition, as a throwback from the past, in a number of cases, we have an overbearing, oppressive and all-knowing bureaucracy.

Motshekga and the SA government have failed to deliver on their mandate – quality education for the masses has remained a pipe dream, the poor inevitably suckle at the rear.



In SA, the money bar has replaced the colour bar. Nowhere in South Africa is this more evident than in the country's educational system.

Amnesty International's report on the state of education in South Africa provides extensive details of the huge disparities between the educational experiences of the haves versus those of the have-nots. According to the report, the average-spend by government per learner amounts to around R15 000 – R17 000 per year. Contrast this with the fees charged by a (public) school like Pretoria Boys' High School, being the most expensive public school in South Africa. In 2023, fees for that school remain the highest, at R65 850. Although South Africa's most expensive state schools are not cheap, they are significantly more affordable than the private schools. Choosing the most expensive government school over the most expensive private school will save you as much as R158,000 for the year.

What this signifies is that equal education can only be assured through equal funding per learner. Today all parents, including the poorest of the poor, have to fund the education of their children.

According to a Mail & Guardian report on 19 November 2019:

Income inequality in South Africa has deepened. According to the latest figures from the World Inequality Database, the top 1% of

South African earners take home almost 20% of all income in the country, while the top 10% take home 65%. The remaining 90% of South African earners get only 35% of total income.

This legacy was entrenched at CODESA. CODESA did nothing to change the power and economic dynamics of the education set-up.

As long as such disparities in income persist, so long will the current disparities in educational experiences (and outcomes) persist. How can it be otherwise?

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

Radical transformation – not piecemeal, reversible reforms – is the pathway to this wholly realisable vision.



- South Africa's most expensive government schools cost about R65 000 for the 2023 academic year.
- All but one is located in Gauteng and the Western Cape.
- Boys' schools dominate the list, with only two of the top 10 being girls-only.

NHI: A NEW DAWN OR ANOTHER LOOMING DISASTER FOR HEALTH CARE?

The idea of establishing a National Health Insurance (NHI) system for the country was first mooted by the ANC in 2010.

Now, 13 years later a NHI bill is awaiting the signature of Cyril Ramaphosa to have it promulgated into law.

The passage of the bill in both the national assembly in June and the NCOP this month has evoked responses both pro and contra.

By all accounts, it would seem that those in favour of the bill in its current form are mostly members of the ANC and its allies including Cosatu and the SACP.

However, the majority of responses, all clamouring for Ramaphosa not to sign the bill into law, have received massive media attention. These naysayers include business sector organisations, many of the role players in the private health sector, certain university academics, and political parties like the DA and IFP. They all aver that the bill, in its current form, is unacceptable.

Given the dire state of the health sector in this country, there can be no doubt that, all things being equal, a national health service as envisaged by the NHI Bill should be of the order of the day.

However the ANC, rather simplistically, sees the NHI as holding the key to making health care freely available to all of the country's more than 60 million citizens but has presented it in a rather ham-fisted manner.

As things stand at the moment, the majority of our citizens depend on the current largely dysfunctional, crisis-ridden and grossly under-resourced public health service. On the other hand there are 9 million Medical Aid members who have access to high quality medical care albeit that this system, apart from being prohibitively expensive, is also beset by problems which we can't go into here.

This decision by the ANC to introduce the NHI system needs to be seen in a broader context.

To focus solely on the NHI, the government loses sight of the fact that ill health is largely the consequence of the failure of the government to eradicate the many social determinants of health (SDH) that are at the heart of the poor state of health of the majority of our people. The SDH includes: decent housing, household food security, water and sanitation, personal safety and security, good education, decent jobs, and adequate income. The vast majority of people here live and work in conditions that are incompatible with good health: unsafe physical environments, social disintegration, violent crime, not to mention the poor service delivery from municipalities. All of which are compounded by the unacceptably high unemployment rate.

However, it is abundantly clear that for those who have expressed reservations or outright opposition to the idea of a NHI, health is a commodity rather than a right. For them it is not a question of whether an equitable health system is necessary or desirable but whether such a system is feasible and or affordable in terms of the present market driven capitalist economic system.

Given its track record of poor service delivery after 30 years in power, it is obvious that the ANC government is totally incapable of implementing the NHI. This begs the question of whether it is possible for any government which is beholden to neo liberal economic policies to implement this. The answer must be a resounding no!

This is especially so, given that the ANC is overseeing what the Growth Lab at Harvard University has described as a "failed state". This report was referred to in our last issue of the Worker.

Therefore, for many observers it seems self-evident that the ANC will fail in the setting up of the NHI.

This is so because, quite apart from the ineptitude of the ANC government, and the naysayers referred to above, the exercise of implementing the NHI bill is doomed to failure because of the lack of support from key role players, like most health care workers in both the private and public hospital sectors.

A very useful review of the NHI bill is that by Reynolds and Sandler which we commented upon in the last issue of the Worker. In this op-ed piece they make the following very pertinent observations:

The NHI, with all of its faults and lack of clarity, provides a basis for a unified and equitable health system. None of its detractors have produced a viable, realistic alternative. Moving forward will be fraught with setbacks and arguments and it won't be easy. But we must do what is necessary to make it work.

As a nation, we cannot let the health crisis continue. The current state of affairs in our health system is unsustainable and morally unacceptable: the public sector, on which most of the population depend, is under-resourced, badly managed and dysfunctional in many areas. The private sector, where resources are concentrated, is unaccountable, lacks proper regulation and is increasingly unaffordable and unsustainable

To put the question of health service delivery in a broader context one could look at Britain's ailing NHS which is currently in the news, as well as the challenges facing China as described in "China's Health and Health Care in the "New Era"" by Wei Zhang, which appeared in the October issue of MONTHLY REVIEW. This article is very instructive so far as developments in China are concerned.

In reviewing the state of health care in China the author shows how the health care and health outcomes dramatically improved when a socialist health system was implemented in the 1950's. He then goes on to show how the health outcomes plummeted after the introduction of the market economy there in the 1970's.

He then proceeds to comment upon the report which Xi Jing Ping presented to the Twentieth National Congress of the CPC in October 2022, when the Party announced that China will become "a leading country" in health by 2035 and pledged to "deepen" reform of public hospitals to see that they truly serve the public interest.

In his commentary of this announcement by Xi the author makes the following observations, many of which will resonate with many of us here:

- *This will require structural reforms. For one thing, the government must sever the economic connection between the income of hospitals and doctors and how many medical procedures and tests they perform, or how many medications they prescribe.*
- *The pay scale of doctors who work in public hospitals must be primarily linked to their fulfilment of medical responsibilities rather than their profitability; incentives should be structured to elicit a high quality of care, rather than high volume.*
- *Increasing government health spending alone may have an unintended effect: the injections of public funds into the deep pockets of renowned hospitals, elite physicians, and monopolistic pharmaceutical and medical companies.*
- *Health care is only one component of overall health and well-being, and it is not the most critical determinant of health.*
- *Despite nearly universal health insurance and improved access to health resources, the deterioration in some of China's major population health indicators—particularly the multiplication of chronic diseases among younger cohorts—deserves focused attention.*
- *Medicine does not resolve chronic problems, and health programs that focus on behavioural and lifestyle modifications are insufficient.*
- *Health should not be treated as a technological matter; it is, by nature, an economic, social, and ultimately political matter determined by the distribution of power and resources.*
- *As a socialist-oriented country with a relatively large state sector and strong state capacity for macroeconomic planning and regulation, China should take full advantage of its potential to mobilize resources and power to build a health-enhancing society.*
- *Given that both unemployment and job precarity pose grave threats to health, the government should actively intervene by enforcing the rules of labor and*

generating more, and more stable, public-sector jobs.

- *These actions not only stabilize the labor market and, hence, sustain social and political order, they also prevent "social murder" (vide infra) and deliver health in a fundamental fashion.*

In looking for solutions to the ghastly state of affairs, pertaining in the health sector in most countries in the world, one can but refer to the example of Cuba with its much-maligned Socialist system, that despite a USA imposed economic blockade, has arguably produced the best health care system in the world.

THE NUM'S POSITION ON HEALTH

We see health as a right but emphasise that we see it as an integral part of the demands contained in our Ten Point Programme. Given our analysis of the nature of the state, we do not believe that the problems we face here can be resolved within the neo-liberal, macro-economic policies being pursued by the ANC. While accepting reforms brought about as the result of struggle from below, we believe that only the eradication of capitalism-imperialism will make it possible for the creation of a just and equitable society.

We see the struggles around health as being an important rallying point for developing solidarity networks and forging unity with like-minded organisations with the objective of mobilising the masses to challenge the entire current economic and political dispensation.

We cannot allow the question of the NHI to be seen in isolation from the broader socio-political issues that underpin the health system presently in place.

Hence we fully support the objectives of the People's Health Movement (PHM) which is a global network of civil society groups, researchers, activists, and teachers involved in health, which was established in Bangalore, India, in 2000. A South African affiliate was established in 2003. The objectives of the PHM are set out in their Right to Health (RTH) campaign which we fully support.

FOOTNOTE:

The term "Social Murder:" Engels used the term social murder to describe how living and working conditions of English workers caused their premature death. Engels argued that since those responsible for these conditions – the ruling class or the bourgeoisie – were aware of the conditions that caused premature death, they were therefore committing social murder.

(See Stella Medvedyuk, Piara Govender, and Dennis Raphael, "The Re-emergence of Engels' Concept of Social Murder in Response to Growing Social and Health Inequalities," *Social Science and Medicine* 289 (2021): 114377.)

POEM: "IF I MUST DIE" BY REFAAT ALAREER

Refaat Alareer (23 September 1979 – 6 December 2023) was a prominent Palestinian writer, poet, professor, and activist who lived in Gaza. On 6 December, he was killed in an Israeli airstrike, along with his brother, sister, and her three children. According to the Euro-Med Monitor, he was apparently deliberately targeted, surgically bombed, after weeks of death threats he received online and by phone from Israeli accounts.

His final poem, "If I must die," was widely circulated after his killing, and was translated into more than 40 languages.

If I must die,
 you must live
 to tell my story
 to sell my things
 to buy a piece of cloth
 and some strings,
 (make it white with a long tail)
 so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
 while looking heaven in the eye
 awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—
 and bid no one farewell
 not even to his flesh
 not even to himself—
 sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up
 above
 and thinks for a moment an angel is there
 bringing back love
 If I must die
 let it bring hope
 let it be a tale

If I must die
 Refaat Alareer

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