

## THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS 2019: TIME FOR THE WORKERS PARTY?

**The 6<sup>th</sup> national elections are due to take place on 8 May. More than 312 parties were registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to contest the elections nationally. However only a fraction of those are likely to actually contest the elections, given that a deposit of R200,000 is required to participate in the national poll and R45,000 to participate in Provincial elections.**

**Registered political parties had until 17h00 13 March 2019, to pay their deposits and submit candidate lists to be allowed to contest the elections.**

**Consequently only 48 parties have been accepted to participate nationally and a total of 276 at provincial level.**

**One of the parties accepted by the IEC is the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP).**

**The formation of the SRWP was initiated by the trade union the National Union of Metal Workers (NUMSA) that announced its intention to form the party in December 2017. However, the actual launch of the party only took place this month, with surprisingly little fanfare.**

**The formation of a worker's party had been on the cards ever since NUMSA was expelled from COSATU in 2013.**

The background to this development is as follows:

In the wake of its expulsion from COSATU in 2013, NUMSA at its Special National Congress (SNC) in December 2013 declared; that they were not going to support the ANC in the general elections of 2014 and simultaneously announced their intention to build a United Front (UF) and a Movement for Socialism (MfS). This declaration has become known as the NUMSA moment.

The New Unity Movement (NUM) had been a participant both regionally, especially in the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, as well as nationally in the United Front established by NUMSA.

The next significant event to take place was the NUMSA Conference on Socialism which took place on 16 April 2015 in Johannesburg. We as the NUM participated in this conference.

Subsequent to this conference three Movement for Socialism (MfS) task teams were established. The three MfS task teams were tasked with drafting a programme of action, forming a publications committee and establishing a coordinating structure.

Subsequently, an official MfS Newsletter was published as well as a Draft programme for a "Socialist Workers Party"

However, our own experience of these initiatives were not entirely satisfactory.

For whilst we felt that the launch of the MfS carried with it the hopes and aspirations of the millions of unemployed and poor masses of this country we had a number of reservations concerning the manner in which this initiative had unfolded as well as the ideological underpinnings of NUMSA's approach to setting up of the MfS.

During the course of our involvement with these initiatives, it became clear to us that the views of parties other than NUMSA that participated in the Conference on Socialism and in MfS meetings were not taken into account at all. We felt that despite the fact that there were a number of non-NUMSA members on the MfS task teams, their views were not acknowledged at all and that in fact the MfS was all about NUMSA!

The NUM's delegates made it known within the forums of the both the UF and the MfS that we were critical of Numsa's commitment to the Freedom Charter and their espousal of the discredited concepts of colonialism of a special type (CST) and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR)..

Coincidentally the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) which was also represented on the MfS task team expressed the view that: "The MfS disappointingly appears to be aiming less to serve to unite the Left on a commonly agreed ideological and political basis, but to whip the Left behind Numsa's ideological line. That line, if the editorial by comrade Jim in the second edition of the online bulletin of the MfS is an indication, points in the direction not of the total rejection of the revisionist Marxism of the SACP but the refurbishment of its ideological traditions and organisational culture. The stubborn adherence to the theoretical concepts of the National Democratic Revolution, Colonialism of a Special Type and the Freedom Charter, point in only one direction – the resurrection of the bankrupt Stalinist theory of the two-stage revolution. The comrades are approaching the question in the manner of political prisoners freed from incarceration in the SACP, but voluntarily returning there as ideological re-offenders. What the situation demands is not a Reformed (Herstigte) SACP, but a mass workers party on a socialist programme."

Furthermore, the NUM's response to the formation of the UF was set out in an editorial in the April 2014 edition of our Bulletin which concluded thus:

*"The workers (at Marikana) were in fact giving this message to NUMSA –*

*Please lead our reorganization as a class force by reframing the entire organization of COSATU!*

*Please take us out of the “one industry, one union” straight jacket set up by neoliberalism for the purpose of bargaining us to the ground!*

*Please help us to rebuild a huge general union federation for the employed as well as the unemployed working class in this country!*

*Please help us to build a united front of workers and the poor in this country, in town and country for a proper re-articulation in the organization of the forces of the poor so that we can properly unite on a national scale and come to grips with our class enemies after all!*

*This is the essence of the NUMSA moment. Whatever else it may be deemed to portend, let those be the minimum understandings in the political bottom lines set by the masses of the poor in this country. This message is not just for the leadership of NUMSA and the forces of the left in the old COSATU, but to be sure, for the whole “organized left in South Africa”. The problems of the times are urgent let our stand between these milestones of history be firm, principled and unwavering.”*

The attitude of the NUM to Numsa’s initiative was also expressed in a chapter we contributed to the book, *The Unresolved National Question: Left Thought Under Apartheid* which was published in 2017.

We said the following:

“the dynamics within the organise working class movement (following the massacre of mineworkers at Marikana in 2012) are centred on the emergence of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) and the United Front being built by the National Union of Metal Workers ( NUMSA) While it is far too early to predict which way events will shift, it is not unlikely that forces in favour of worker participation in the bourgeois Parliament will surface under both the WASP and NUMSA banners. Given its commitment to building the people’s power base *outside* of Parliament, this is something that the Unity Movement will definitely seek to contest via democratic processes within the working class movement.”

A review of the book referred to has appeared in the February issue of *The American Historical Review*, 124(1):397:399, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhy542>.

Others have also criticised the ideological underpinning of Numsa’s call for a MfS For example, Prof Jane Duncan of the department of Journalism at the University of

Johannesburg who In an article published on line by the South African Civil Society Information Service (SACISIS) was critical of NUMSA's professed adherence to Marxist-Leninism, the theory of Colonialism of a Special Type, the NDR and the Freedom Charter. She said: *"It is unfortunate that Numsa is invoking a Stalinist path to socialism: a path that has been tried and shown to fail."*

However we believe that a most telling critique of the decision by NUMSA to launch the WSRP at this juncture, is that expressed by John Appolis, the General Secretary of the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA) which is affiliated to SAFTU.

He wrote a very insightful article on the launch of SRWP titled "The Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP): A major distraction" (<http://wwmp.prg.za/elitsha/category/labour> )

Appolis says, *"It is my contention that the formation of the is a distraction and not the appropriate call in the present conjuncture. Also the SRWP is being formed with no regard to history, context and working class experience"*

He goes on to say *"We know that initially, after a period of illusions about the new government, sections of the working class are waking up. They are beginning to resist and disrupt ruling class plans. This is an important part of any re-wakening and the building of working class power. But as socialists we need to be honest and recognise that much effort and struggle is required before we can say that proletariat has begun to replace the ruling class plans with its own."*

Yet another critical voice is that of Terry Bell who in his syndicated column in Fin24 supports the views of Appolis when he says:

"The Socialist Revolutionary Workers' Party (SRWP), recently registered by the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa), seems to be positioning itself to play such a role. But, incredibly, this party emerged without a political platform other than being anti-capitalist, socialist, revolutionary and Marxist-Leninist, terms that clearly need to be defined" (<https://www.fin24.com/Opinion/Columnists/terry-bell-ahead-of-elections-the-when-and-how-of-promises-need-to-be-interrogated-20190112> }

On the other hand, Bob Archer of the Workers International for Rebuilding the Fourth International (WIRFI) is highly critical of Appolis, lauding the new party It seems that he bases his unqualified support for the SRWP simply because they **claim** to be anti-capitalist, socialist, revolutionary and Marxist-Leninist!

However, in response to Archer's criticism one can but allude to the fact that there is a contestation of ideas in respect of whether the proposition that the overthrow of capitalism-imperialism by the working class cannot succeed without the leadership of a Marxist – Leninist Vanguard party is a sine qua non in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The SRWP's draft manifesto of 16 February is a long, rambling document providing a long list of aims many of which are couched in Marxist-Leninist terms but lacking in analysis.

Nevertheless with the support of NUMSA's 330,000 members it is certain to fare much better than WASP did in 2014. As Terry Bell says:

*“Wasp was formed in the wake of the Marikana massacre by the small Democratic Socialist Movement, with the apparent backing of groups of striking miners. It was one of 29 parties that contested the 2014 elections where it gained just 8 331 votes out of the more than 18.3 million cast”.*

It will be recalled that WASP claimed to be the first party to emerge to the left of the ANC in the post-apartheid period with “a revolutionary socialist programme.”

In opposition to the call for the formation of a Worker's Party at this juncture, we pose the question: How do we use the widespread, groundswell of opposition from civil society, which resulted in the formation of movements like #FMF, Save SA campaign, #ZMF and social movement organisations like the Landless Peoples Movement and Abehlali baseMjondolo and the Amadiba Crisis Committee?

In reply to that question we say:

We need to launch a campaign aimed at enlightening people to the fact that whilst it is the ANC government that is responsible for implementing the dehumanising exploitative system that has condemned millions of people to degradation, abject poverty, illiteracy, ill-health and joblessness; that it is the parliamentary system that operates within parameters dictated by capitalism-imperialism which is the ultimate cause and that the situation can only be changed when we eliminate the profit-driven system and replace it with an economy that ensures that all human needs are catered for based on equity and justice.

We therefore make a call for the building of a movement against capitalism-imperialism. The call for the building of a movement for socialism has become even more relevant in the current conjuncture and it is to this end that we make a call for the Re-awakening, or a new awakening of the people.

This last mentioned endeavour is inspired by the book “The Awakening of the People”, a history of the All African Convention (AAC) written by IB Tabata, a founder member

of the Unity Movement which was published in 1950. We believe the current conjuncture cries out for the formation of a body like the AAC, which can serve as a catalyst to the building of a movement for socialism in this country.

To this end, we propose an engagement with likeminded organisations and individuals around the question of building a national movement for socialism based on the model of the AAC.

We say, Organise, Rebuild, Mobilise

Forward to the building of an anti-imperialist movement for socialism and People's Democracies

A Luta continua