

Meeting the challenges facing the trade union movement

Introductory note

This paper was first presented at the Augmented Central Committee in 2014. It was further enriched in line with the outcome of the deliberations. Through this passage it was finalised by the time of the 12th Plenary Session of the Central Committee, held from 29-31 May 2015. Following this Central Committee, the discussion document is now organised into two sections.

The first section presents a synopsis of the historical relationship between the Communist Party and the development of the progressive trade union movement in our country. It reflects, in the form of a summary, on the Party's unmatched efforts in building the progressive trade union movement.

The second section examines the contemporary challenges facing this task. In the ultimate analysis, this section, as must the outcome of the discussion, is concerned with the answer to the popular historical question posed by Vladimir Lenin: 'What is to be done?'

Section 1: Historical synopsis:

i. The SACP and the progressive trade union movement in our country

1. The history of the Communist Party in South Africa is deeply interlinked with the building and growth of progressive trade unions. The nucleus of the future Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), the International Socialist League (ISL), was founded in 1915, this year being its centenary. Many of its leading members were trade unionists, among them Bill Andrews who went on to become the CPSA's first general secretary in 1921.
2. Hardly a year after the formation of the CPSA, a major armed uprising by white workers broke out – the 1922 Rand Revolt. The strike had both a militant working class and a racist dimension. It was directed against the Chamber of Mines' attempt to re-classify some work categories to displace skilled white workers with lower-paid black miners. The CPSA sought to unite black and white workers in a common class stand against mining monopoly capital. However, the majority of white workers saw both the mining companies **and** the black workers as their enemies. Communist activists risked their lives in seeking to dissuade armed white worker commandos from raiding hostels and attacking black workers as "scabs". However, the Communist Party's principled stand failed to take root, and was marginalised by the tide of events. It is important to repeat these facts, since there is still a propaganda lie by both right wing and ultra-left anti-communist detractors that the Party supported white workers against black workers.
3. In the immediate aftermath of the 1922 strike, the Communist Party drew the correct conclusion that it needed to focus its energies more on the organisation of black workers into the trade union movement as the leading motive force for progressive trade unionism in our country. This strategic orientation was further validated by the National Party-Labour Party Pact Government's promulgation of the profoundly racist Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. This legislation, amongst other things, accorded recognition only to white workers as "employees". Thus they were the only ones entitled to form and join trade unions and to access certain trades and occupations, especially artisan trades. Black workers were

denied recognition as 'employees'. They were therefore barred from forming and joining trade unions.

4. From this period onwards the Communist Party paid increasing attention to the organisation of black workers. Of course, at this stage the majority of black workers were rural migrants or first generation (to be) urbanised and their working class consciousness was still uneven.
5. One of the earliest efforts of the Party in organising black workers was its active support in building the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU). The ICU was formed in 1920 out of a dock workers' strike in Cape Town, and was led by Clements Kadalie. It grew rapidly in size, and was both more and less than a union, something akin to a populist movement of the exploited and nationally oppressed. It mobilised in both urban and rural areas. Communist activists, including Jimmy La Guma, Johnny Gomas and EJ Khaile were in the leadership of the organisation. However, under the influence of liberal forces, Kadalie insisted that they had to renounce their membership of the Communist Party. All three refused. In 1927 they were expelled from the ICU. Not long after the expulsion of communists the ICU declined, dwindled and had virtually disappeared by 1930.
6. Despite the many internal challenges and factionalist squabbles within the CPSA in the 1930s, communist cadres played a leading role in the formation of dozens of progressive trade unions in this decade. Ray Alexander organised a number of unions in the Western Cape. With growing industrialisation and urbanisation, black workers were increasingly developing a proletarian class-consciousness. The first major federation of black unions was the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), formed in 1941 at a conference presided over by Moses Kotane. Gana Makabeni was elected president and Daniel Tloome the vice-president.
7. During the years of World War II (1939-1945) there was a further burst of industrialisation in South Africa to respond to the war needs, and with large numbers of white workers serving in the army, there was a major wave of black urbanisation and proletarianisation. The 1940s can be regarded as a critical decade of Communist Party mass mobilising and organisational work in trade unions. A number of direct predecessors of today's Cosatu affiliates were launched in this period. Among them the Food and Canning Workers' Union under the leadership of Ray Alexander and the great African Mine Workers' Union (AMWU) under the leadership of JB Marks.
8. It was AMWU that led one of the most decisive strike actions in 20th century South Africa. This was the 1946 mineworkers' strike in which some 76 000 mine workers left the mines, or refused to go underground. Although brutally repressed, the strike action had a major radicalising impact on the ANC and Youth League, thus laying a strong foundation for the mass campaigns of the Congress Movement in the 1950s. The Communist Party's supportive role in the strike, and prominent leadership of communists in it, resulted in increased repression directed against the Party – eventually leading to its banning in 1950 under the Suppression of Communism Act.
9. Despite the suppression of the CPSA, communists continued their work in the trade union movement. The Suppression of Communism Act enabled the apartheid regime to prevent communists and communist sympathisers from serving as officials in the trade union movement. By 1955 some 56 officials had been driven out of office. This purging of

communists resulted in the significant weakening of the South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC), which served as a non-racial trade union umbrella. Under pressure from the regime, some unions left the SATLC to form the Trade Union Council of South Africa (Tucsa) that excluded Africans or unions with African membership. Those unions that refused joined up with the Non-European Trade Union Council and in 1954 they jointly launched the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu).

10. Many communists and ANC militants played a leading role in Sactu in this period, including Moses Mabhida, Billy Nair, Liz Abrahams, Vuyisile Mini, and many more. After the effective exile of Sactu in the 1960s, it served as the trade union wing of the liberation movement internationally.
11. Sactu members emerging from jail in the early 1970s participated in the rebuilding of progressive trade unions in the wake of the 1973 Durban strikes inside the country. These worker struggles further created a fertile ground for the student and youth uprisings in 1976, thus laying a strong foundation for the worker/student alliances that spearheaded the semi-insurrectionary struggles of the 1980s that finally broke the back of the apartheid regime.
12. Under pressure from the rising tide of worker struggles, and following the Wiehahn Commission, the apartheid regime in 1979 officially recognised the right of African workers to form trade unions. However, both the SACP and Sactu at the time failed to exploit this opening. This tactical failure created space for what was later called a “workerist” tendency, partially emerging from a radicalised white student movement. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the “workerists” exploited the new organisational space that had been opened, and helped to build strong traditions of work-place organisation. However, much of this current was anti-SACP and unsympathetic to the ANC, arguing that over-politicising shop-floor organisation would expose the emerging union movement to persecution and destabilisation. It also argued that unions needed to be insulated from the “populist” politics of a national liberation movement like the ANC. This ideological current was dominant, although not unchallenged, within the important Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) launched in 1979.
13. Failure to support the registration of mainly black progressive trade unions after Wiehahn was a mistake that nearly cost the liberation movement dearly. However, the rising tide of community struggle in townships and rural villages in the 1980s increasingly made the “workerist” attempt to quarantine the active working class within factory floor struggles redundant. In 1985 Fosatu affiliates and a range of other militant unions came together on a Freedom Charter platform, to launch a new and larger federation – the Congress of South African Trade Unions – Cosatu. SACP cadres in the underground, in the trade union movement, and in United Democratic Front (UDF) structures after the latter's formation in 1983, played an important role in the building of Cosatu.
14. Attempts by today's Numsa leadership clique who try to belittle or redefine the SACP as an “outsider” to Cosatu are wholly mistaken. So is the attempt to try and position the SACP as a destroyer rather than a builder of Cosatu.
15. The history of the SACP is indistinguishable from the history of the organisation, building and growth of the progressive non-racial trade union movement in South Africa, especially over the last century since the founding of the ISL in 1915.

16. Over this period the SACP itself has taught but also learnt from the many heroic trade union struggles in our country. In fact no other political party or organisation in our country can claim to have built the trade union movement more than the SACP has done. This experience has also taught us that much as in a country like South Africa the trade union movement is a leading layer and stratum of the working class at an elementary level, it is not necessarily synonymous with the working class. Much as we need to always build a close relationship between our Party and the trade union movement, the two formations are not the same.
17. They have very distinct, albeit important complementary, roles in the national democratic revolution as our most direct route towards a transition to socialism. The trade unions must organise all workers in the various workplaces irrespective of political affiliation of the workers. But, working together with the SACP, progressive trade unions must deliberately seek to educate and influence members to grasp the broader political context within which trade union struggles are taking place. The SACP needs to recruit and develop more advanced cadres, from both inside and outside the ranks of the trade union movement into its ranks. The SACP understands that the working class it seeks to organise politically is broader than just the formally employed and organised workers in the trade union movement.
18. It is also, at this time of immense challenges facing Cosatu that the SACP needs to pay particular attention to the trade union movement in the best traditions of the ISL and CPUSA, and later the SACP itself, over the last 100 years. We need to defend and nurture the unity of Cosatu as one of the most important communist tasks in the current period.
19. Let us examine the terrain in which this work has to be carried out.

Section 2: Meeting the challenges facing the trade union movement

20. The current challenges confronting Cosatu, and the broader trade union movement require a much broader and deeper analysis than is common in most of the public debate. While acknowledging and dealing with specific issues, it is important that we do not reduce these challenges to little more than a clash of differing factions, personalities, audit reports and scandals within the union movement. These immediate issues must certainly be dealt with, both decisively and in a mature and principled manner that helps to re-build the unity of the working class in general and of Cosatu in particular.
21. However, our collective response will not be effective or strategically sustainable unless we also appreciate the complex underlying factors that have led to the current difficulties and turmoil. This SACP discussion document is issued with the intention of provoking a deeper collective discussion amongst all progressive forces, and particularly amongst those active in the trade union movement.
22. In response to its internal challenges, Cosatu has correctly advanced the slogan “Back to Basics” – underlining the importance of a re-dedication to active service to members on the shop-floor; and internal worker democracy within our unions, including the answerability of full-time officials to the membership. These are basic principles that helped to build and sustain progressive trade unionism in the bleak years of apartheid. There are also many voices within and beyond Cosatu calling for a revival of the UDF/MDM

era of union-community social movement cooperation and mobilisation. In principle this, too, is a correct concern.

23. In this time of union turmoil and challenge it is very important to recover key lessons and traditions like these from the past. But it is also important to remember that the past **IS** the past. We are operating on a shifting terrain of class struggle, the working class and its allies are not playing a solo, our class adversaries are active players and they seek constantly to change the terrain to their own advantage.
24. Changed realities also call for critical reflection and innovation. The last century is littered with examples of progressive trade unions (and worker parties - both social democratic and communist) achieving major organisational, social and political gains and then stagnating by clinging to “tried and tested” approaches, failing to adjust strategically, tactically and organisationally to new realities. Or, alternatively, adjusting to new realities in ways that were unprincipled and that led to a loss of momentum and support.
25. Charting a way forward for the progressive union movement in SA requires, therefore, that we ask hard questions about what remains valid from the struggle experience of, say, the 1980s and what has changed for better or worse in the current reality?
26. In the first place, we need to grasp the massive, neoliberal-driven global restructuring of the working class, under-way since at least the 1980s, and how this has impacted on SA post-1994. The South African story, with its own specifics of course, is part of a wider global picture.

ii. The capitalist-led global offensive against the working class and its organised formations – a brief history

27. Through much of the first half of the 20th century, the major mass labour movements in the advanced capitalist countries were typically rooted in a male, blue-collar, industrial working class. World War II began to have an impact on the composition and character of the active industrial working class. In some developed capitalist economies (notably UK and US) there was a massive wartime entry of women into the industrial working class.
28. With the end of World War II the objective reality within many war-torn European societies created the conditions for inter-class, national reconstruction and development social pacts. In West Germany, France, Italy, the UK, amongst others, national bourgeoisies supported explicit or implicit social pacts with their respective trade union movements and governments in a shared commitment:
 - To rebuild ruined economic infrastructure
 - To training and skilling – bearing in mind the war-time loss of manpower
 - To provide major social wage interventions – public housing, public transport, national health services, etc. in exchange for productivity advances by the working class
29. The capitalist welfare state in many advanced capitalist countries was further facilitated by major Marshall Aid-type investment by the US into Western Europe and Japan, which was in turn motivated by
 - The US’s post-war economy’s need for markets; and
 - The need for a capitalist response to the new reality of an extensive socialist bloc of countries. Capitalists needed to attempt to demonstrate that social gains (like full employment and an extensive social security net) could be made under capitalism

30. After 1945 the **feminisation** of the working class also expanded significantly in many advanced capitalist societies. The significant entry of women as workers was both a push and pull factor in the development of post-1945 welfare states – capital’s need to reproduce and expand the working class now required shifting many reproductive functions out of unpaid household work by women into publicly provided welfare services. The widespread expansion of a welfare state in much of the developed capitalist world also saw a significant expansion of public sector employment and of services, in which women workers were often in the majority.

In South Africa, World War II saw not just the increasing feminisation – but critically the massive Africanisation and urbanisation of a semi-skilled, factory-based, industrial working class. Apart from the continued expansion of the white welfare state, the South African counterpart in this period to the post-WW2 welfare state was the apartheid-era racially discriminatory, but nonetheless mass roll-out of primary and secondary Bantu education schools¹, a significant township housing program. There was nothing philanthropic about this – it was a strategic move to preserve CST racial capital by reproducing cheap Black labour, but now as increasingly semi-skilled factory operatives and as daily migrants from peri-urban townships. In short, these need to be understood as apartheid-era industrial policy and labour market interventions.

31. Increasingly after 1945, in the developed capitalist economies, the profile of the working class was beginning to change from a relatively exclusive, largely male-dominated, blue-collar, industrial working class concentrated in classical industries like mining, ship-building, railways and large factories organised on Taylorist assembly-line principles. While these critical strata of the proletariat typically remained central within the advanced capitalist economies for another 30 years or so, their pre-eminent position within the proletariat was increasingly challenged by what, in the bourgeois media, was portrayed as the emergence of a “new”, “more individualistic and consumerist”, “middle class” in the burgeoning professional and services sectors.
32. In fact, these were overwhelmingly and objectively (but often not subjectively - in terms of their class consciousness and sense of class solidarity) also part of an increasingly stratified working class. Many trade union and left parties (social democratic and communist) failed to adequately respond to the new challenges presented by the changing composition of the working class – a failure that was exploited fully by the neo-liberal onslaught.
33. The end of the “Golden Epoch” (1945-1973) of capitalism – globalisation and the neo-liberal assault on the working class
34. The first “oil shock” of 1973 exposed the deepening structural problems that had been gathering in the welfarist states of the developed capitalist centre. The post-war boom, based on explicit (or implicit) tripartite social contracts, began to encounter serious structural problems. Economic stagnation accompanied by growing inflation – stagflation – was a major symptom of this deepening crisis for sustained capitalist profitability.
35. The 1970s crisis of profitability in the advanced capitalist countries was the critical factor in driving the next major wave of imperialist global expansion, roughly from the 1980s in

to the present – what has come to be called “globalisation”. Globalisation has had a profound impact on the character of the working class.

iii. **Globalisation and the world-wide restructuring of the working class**

36. Before the onset of the late 20th century wave of globalisation, labour markets that were open to transnational, private corporate investment had about 1 billion workers and work seekers. By 2000, the labour force in these countries had risen to 1,5 billion. Meanwhile, China’s liberal reforms from the late-1970s, and the collapse of the former Soviet bloc countries at the end of the 1980s, added a further 1,5 billion according to Guy Standing (*The Precariat – the New Dangerous Class*). As a result, “the labour supply in the globalising economies trebled. The newcomers came with little capital and with very low wages, altering the world’s capital-labour ratio and weakening the bargaining position of workers.” (Standing)
37. The weakened bargaining position affected workers in the advanced capitalist countries themselves. Reagan and Thatcher launched vicious attacks against the union movements in their respective societies from which the unions have never fully recovered to this day. The neo-liberal “flexible labour market” lobby intensified, with realistic threats of disinvestment and re-location to low-wage economies if worker rights were not rolled back.

iv. **South African monopoly capital – a delayed starter in the globalisation process**

38. For a variety of reasons, South Africa was at first partially insulated from these global developments. Through the 1980s, South Africa’s not insignificant monopoly capitalist sector could not easily follow its international peer group on the globalisation freeway in pursuit of high profits in low wage economies. Anti-apartheid economic and financial sanctions, as well as apartheid state defensive measures (the financial rand and related stringent exchange control measures, for instance) made taking the on-ramp to transnationalisation a very difficult proposition for our local monopoly sector. Moreover, the rising, semi-insurrectionary struggles against apartheid, and the complicity of monopoly capital in the apartheid system, added to local trade union strength. Increasingly, work-place, community and wider political struggles reinforced each other and further contributed to South African monopoly capital finding itself relatively off-balance.
39. With its surplus bottled up within the country, South African mining and finance capital tended to conglomerate into multi-sectoral operations – diversifying into sectors like agro-processing, chemicals, paper, forestry and retail. At the same time, manufacturing corporates diversified into mining – like Barlow Rand, a sprawling conglomerate in the 1980s that became one of the largest corporations in the world in terms of the number of its employees (the majority within SA). With external investments and foreign markets restricted, South African monopoly capital, ironically in the midst of apartheid, had an objective interest in local industrialisation, in expanding the local market – and therefore, in even reaching a class compromise with the expanding industrial working class organised in the emerging trade union movement.
40. These specific realities within the South African conjuncture of the 1980s and early 1990s unfortunately also led to what we might describe as workerist, corporatist and social accord

illusions within the labour and broader progressive movement. As we will go on to show, the conjunctural realities that gave rise to these illusions were to be actively eroded in SA after the democratic breakthrough of 1994 – but workerist, corporatist and social accord illusions have often persisted into the present.

Is a social democratic-type social accord a viable option in contemporary SA?

We have spent some time sketching out both:

- The **temporary** historical conditions under which the classical social democratic, Keynesian-inspired, welfare state systems developed after 1945 in war-torn societies in many **developed** economies of the North – noting how, since the mid-1970s, capital has led a massive assault on the national welfare state, tearing up the social contract class compromise in the process; and
- The **temporary** and specific historical conditions in SA in the 1980s in which, paradoxically, (despite the presence of a repressive white minority apartheid state) the emerging progressive trade union movement in the private sector was able to make significant gains – symbolised by, amongst other things, the launch of Cosatu in 1985. Of course, these gains would not have been made without a revolutionary working class struggle – but some of the objective conditions confronting SA monopoly capital created leverage for the working class in which advances could be made. **To what extent is the same leverage still present?**
- We have rehearsed these points here because ever since the early 1990s many illusions have proliferated about the possibilities and actualities of the post-apartheid SA. The very title of the ANC's 1994 election manifesto – The Reconstruction and Development Programme (the RDP), borrowed its name from the World Bank's original title (the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) – when it was mandated to fund the recovery of war-torn European capitalist societies – to prevent them falling under the sway of powerful left movements that had led the anti-fascist resistance in many parts of western Europe. The 1996 class project developed a paper on the State in SA that advocated a “Golden Triangle” between capital, labour and the state. A very similar programmatic perspective is offered in the final chapter of the National Development Plan, which calls for an over-arching tripartite deal in which labour commits to wage restraint and improving productivity and capital, in return, commits to investing the increased surplus within the country in job creation. **Are these perspectives ` in 2015?**

41. Who has been the principal beneficiary of the post-1994 democratic breakthrough – SA monopoly capital or the organised working class?
42. The 1994 breakthrough certainly brought a series of real gains for the trade union movement – not least a range of progressive labour laws (including the Basic Conditions of Employment and the Labour Relations acts). However, with the lifting of apartheid-era economic sanctions, complemented by excessive and ill-judged ANC-led government liberalisation from the mid-1990s, South Africa's monopoly capital sector was now able to happily take the globalisation freeway. This has seen massive disinvestment, foreign stock exchange listings, transfer pricing, tax evasion, de-industrialisation and formal sector job losses. At the very moment that South Africa's progressive trade union movement began to reap the labour market legislation fruits of its revolutionary, decades-long struggle, these gains were being actively eroded in practice.

43. As has often been remarked, both the South African government and the labour movement, now increasingly confront all of the private sector giants of our economy (the likes of SA Breweries – now SAB Miller – Sasol, De Beers, Investec, Anglo, Old Mutual, etc.) as if they were foreign investors.

v. SA monopoly capital and the strategy of undercutting post-1994 labour gains

44. SA monopoly capital has not only relied on trans-nationalisation and capital flight to alter the class balance of forces within South Africa. Production processes and the labour market have also been actively re-shaped within the national economy in ways that have eroded union power in the private sector. In carrying forward this anti-worker agenda, SA monopoly capital has relied heavily on the neo-liberal repertoire of retrenchments, casualisation and informalisation as drivers for the active segmentation of the labour market.
45. Aggregate private sector employment growth since 1994 has been largely confined to non-industrial sectors like financial and business services, and wholesale and retail. What is more, in the “financial sector”, for instance, overwhelmingly the numbers of jobs created are, in fact, not clerical jobs, but poorly paid and insecure security services (Bhorat, FM, 27 June 2013). All of these sectors have been heavily characterised by casualisation and the use of labour brokers.
46. In November 2010 labour-brokered workers were estimated to represent 6,8% of total employment, or 23,2% of workers classified as temporary. In 2013 Adcorp (the largest labour brokering company in SA) boasted that the industry had a R44-billion turnover, and that from 2000 to 2012 while the number of permanent jobs declined by 1,9-million, the number of temporary jobs increased by 2,6-million.

Migration and the further segmentation of the working class

The 19th and early 20th centuries saw major waves of migration of “surplus” reserve labour from industrialising European countries to the “New World” and to colonies like SA. In the current era of imperialist expansion the flow of migration has reversed on a massive scale. Punishing structural adjustment programmes imposed on third world societies, and the ongoing accelerated penetration of transnational agri-business into peasant economies in the South have produced massive floods of migration from the countryside to informal settlements in teeming Third World cities, and from the Third World into the advanced economies. Annually, more than 1-billion people are now crossing national borders and the number is growing.

Today, the most militarised international border in the world is not between North and South Korea, but between the US and Mexico. It is designed to keep desperate (but “illegal”) work-seekers out. However, as Saskia Sassen and others have eloquently demonstrated, there is a deep hypocrisy in this. Tens of millions of desperate, “illegal” work seekers nonetheless still find their way into the US and Europe. As Sassen writes: “what looks like failure from the perspective of controlling entry is actually delivering results that particular sectors inside the US want from immigrants.” Key sectors of the US economy (like agriculture, retail and hospitality services) require large numbers of low-paid workers. Their “illegal” status means they are prepared to accept low wages and precarious working conditions. While a highly weaponised border sustains the charade of illegality, “US governments, regardless of political party, have repeatedly shown a strong reluctance to allocate funds and create jobs to inspect work-places” (Sassen).

The situation in the EU is similar. In this case it is the Mediterranean that acts as a dangerous hurdle for illegal immigration as hundreds of deaths by drowning in the past months have tragically underlined. Since the 1970s major European countries have had immigration policies partly to control but also to actively encourage immigration. European demographic trends mean that there are ageing populations, this, coupled with relatively high education and training standards and relatively comprehensive if challenged welfare systems, has meant that there has been a growing shortage of labour prepared to do unskilled, manual, so-called “dirty” work.

Although our own South African social and regional realities are somewhat different, millions of “illegals”, desperate work-seekers from throughout the continent, displaced by imperialist-driven structural adjustment programmes, climate change, and civil wars, have poured into post-apartheid South Africa. Many hundreds of thousands are super-exploited, non-unionised workers in agriculture, mining, security and hospitality services, as well as in the informal sector. This, too, has impacted on the relative bargaining strength of the South African labour movement.

Moreover, in the South African case, our overall (although not the White South African) demographic profile is quite different from the ageing population profile of most advanced capitalist economies. This means that the competition between nationals and foreign national migrants for less-skilled and informal sector jobs is liable to be much more intense, and the perception (and often the reality) that management in sectors like agriculture, security and hospitality is actively displacing employment opportunities for South Africans through hiring foreign nationals (legal or otherwise) is much greater. Of course, the “paper-less” are much more vulnerable to being subject to illegal exploitation.

vi. The intensified segmentation of the South African working class since 1994

47. A wide range of processes, then, has actively re-shaped and segmented the South African proletariat since 1994. Stats SA’s “Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4, 2014” gives some indication of the impact of this massive restructuring of the South African proletariat:

Total labour force	20,2--million
Formal sector (non-agricultural)	10,9-million
Informal sector (non-agricultural)	2,4-million
Agricultural	0,7-million
Private household	1,2-million
Unemployed	4,9-million
Discouraged job-seekers	2,4-million

Note how the Stats SA data excludes “discouraged job-seekers” (i.e. those who did not take active steps during the previous 4 weeks to find employment) from its total “labour force” figure.¹

48. Of those in both formal and informal employment, Stats SA records the following:

Unspecified	Permanent contract	Temporary
2,9-million	8,3-million	2,0-million

49. Many commentators believe that Stats SA’s figures for the unemployed (including the “discouraged”) are under-estimates, and the same applies to its figure for those in the “informal” sector.

50. Furthermore, these general statistics – encompassing those employed in **both** the private and public sectors – fail to give an adequate picture of the impact of monopoly capital’s radical restructuring of workers in the private sector.
51. Historically, the main segmentation of the South African working class was on socially engineered racial grounds. While racial segmentation persists, increasingly a range of other divisions have been driven in the private sector – notably, between a relatively diminishing core of permanent, formal sector workers and a growing pool of casualised, temporary workers, and an expanding mass of the unemployed and the informally employed. All of these serve to challenge the possibilities for building working class unity and organisation.

vii. The differential impact on private and public sector workers

52. While right-sizing and public sector restructuring in the mid-1990s – and notably in municipalities – had a negative impact on public sector workers, in general terms public sector workers have been the major beneficiaries within the working class of the post-apartheid reality.
53. Percentage unionisation (source Bhorat 2014)

Year	Private Sector	Public Sector
1997	35,6% (1,81m)	55,2% (0,8m)
2013	24,4% (1,86m)	69,2% (1,4m)

54. There has been a significant drop in the percentage of unionised workers in the private sector (although actual numbers have increased marginally) – while there has been a very significant increase in the percentage and numbers of unionised workers in the public sector.
55. At Cosatu’s 2012 National Congress public servants comprised¹ 39% of membership of the federation (in contrast to 7% in 1991). This public sector percentage will have since increased with the expulsion of Numsa and the continued loss of membership in many private sector affiliates.
56. The downward trend in union density in the private sector has been driven sectorally by declining membership numbers in manufacturing, construction, finance and agriculture. However, **mining** (historically the highest unionised sector of SA’s economy) continued to show growth: moving from 71% unionisation in 1997 to 80% in 2013. The mining sector reality may well be part of an explanation for the inclination for non-NUM unions like Numsa to seek to cannibalise membership in this sector in the face of challenges in much of their own historic manufacturing sectors.

viii. The anti-trade union propaganda offensive in SA

57. The combined impact of the many factors noted above – as well as internal turmoil and subjective errors within the union movement (which we will consider later) - is also reflected in other data:

58. According to HSRC research, in 2011, more than two-fifths of South Africans (42%) said they trusted trade unions. By 2013, this had fallen to 26%, with 42% of the survey saying they distrusted trade unions with the remainder choosing to be neutral. The 2013 level of trust in trade unions placed them were behind the trust levels for churches (76%), the SABC (69%), national government (38%), traditional leaders (42%), and even local government (29%).
59. However, this drop in public trust in trade unions should, of course, be understood substantially (although not entirely) as a neo-liberal manufactured hatred of trade unions. The 2013 dramatic drop in trust in unions in the HSRC poll should be partly situated in the context of the 2012 Marikana tragedy – in regard to which the mainstream commercial media went out of its way to portray events as if they were simply reducible to “inter-union” rivalry (a 2012 version of the early 1990s “black on black” violence racist propaganda).
60. This anti-labour ideological campaign is backed by the anti-majoritarian liberal think-tanks (see for instance John Kane-Berman, “Opportunity knocks with crumbling of reactionary Cosatu”, Business Day, 17 November 2014). The DA is also active in this space – blaming unions (and Cosatu) in particular for the unemployment crisis, and developing a right-wing conservative discourse that blames “Big Government and Big Unions” for all social ills – (with barely a mention of Big Capital, of course).
61. We should not, of course, be surprised that there is a powerful anti-union and anti-labour propaganda campaign. However, the fact that there *is* such a campaign means that we need to develop a much more effective counter-ideological campaign. This, too, must be part of re-building the trade union movement in SA.
62. Among the key proactive counter-measures that need to be taken by unions to meet the challenge of this propaganda offensive are:
 - Cleaning up their own act – dealing decisively with cases of corruption, and the excessive life-style social distance between leadership and mass base – particularly when the latter takes on an ostentatious form;
 - Ensuring that public sector unions and their members prioritise service to the public. Insensitivity to working class communities in front-line Government offices, and in the case of public sector, industrial action that impacts on learners, or hospital patients, plays directly into the hands of the anti-union propaganda offensive.
 - The use of violence against other workers during strike action – or the sabotage of public facilities (for example burning trains) must be dealt with decisively.
 - Above all, the better-organised sectors of the working class must ensure that they do not widen the segmentation of the proletariat by narrowly focusing only on their own issues.
63. It would be wrong to think of our trade unions, and of Cosatu in particular, as if they were simply passive victims over the past two decades of a global and monopoly capital-driven offensive.
64. There are two sets of reasons for saying this, positive and negative.
 - 64.1. Positively – Cosatu has been an active opponent of neo-liberalism since 1994
 - Over the past 20 years Cosatu, typically in alliance with the SACP, has fought many important battles, some of them rear-guard actions in the face of local neo-liberal inspired interventions. The Cosatu-SACP left-wing axis, for instance, was absolutely

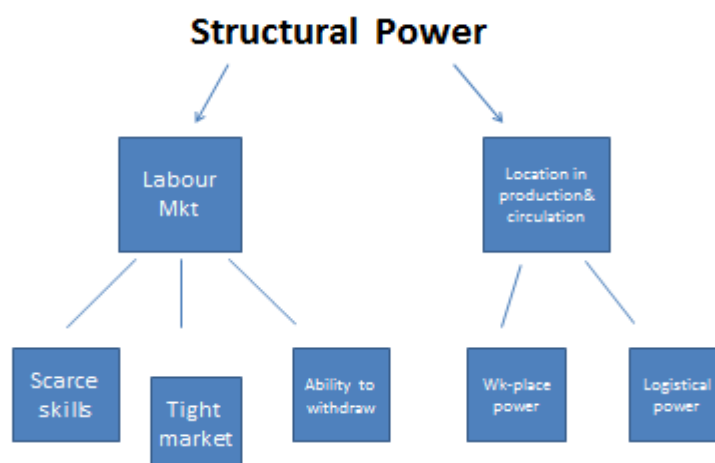
critical in the provisional defeat of the major privatisation strategy unleashed by the ANC-led government in the early 2000s. Likewise, trade union pressure on the ANC-government led to early state-led industrial policy initiatives, which have now been consolidated into the centre-piece of governments' progress, inclusive-growth strategies. An early leader in this process and the major beneficiary to date of these policies has been Numsa and its historical worker base in the auto and auto components sector. It is ironic, therefore, that it is precisely Numsa leadership (now expelled from Cosatu) that has led the anti-state, regime-change opposition within the federation.

- 64.2. Negatively – there have also been internal union weaknesses and subjective errors
- 64.2.1. If external factors have played a major role in creating the context for the turmoil and splits within Cosatu, there are, of course, important internal factors as well. Critical among these is what Sakhela Buhlungu has described as the “paradox of victory”. The victories of the trade union movement, born out of its central role in the anti-apartheid struggle, have seen significant institutional advances with real dangers of bureaucratisation. In many cases there has been a growing distance between an office-bound leadership and the factory-floor membership.
- 64.2.2. Cosatu affiliates have themselves not been immune to the dangers of the “sins of incumbency”, attributed frequently to the ANC as a ruling party. Faced with the restructuring of the working class, unions predominantly active in the private industrial sectors have increasingly become focused on (or defensively confined to) the more formal and better paid worker strata – a challenge confronting both the two major rivals in the recent past (NUM and Numsa).
- 64.2.3. Public sector workers (with the exception of municipal workers) have, generally, not been buffeted by the global neo-liberal restructuring of the working class to the same extent as those in the private sector. Membership of these unions has grown significantly post-1994. However, in several public sector unions there are cases of confusion between union functions and public sector managerial responsibilities. In these cases there are dangers of union leadership positions being abused to advance personal careers within the public service, rather than the active servicing of grass-roots members.
- 64.2.4. An even graver danger for worker solidarity is the phenomenon of “business unionism”. In the recent past the SACP has increasingly spoken out about this problem. The major unions all have nominal control over multi-billion rand retirement funds. These, in turn, have been leveraged to set up union investment arms. In principle, if subjected to democratic worker control and guided by clear strategic objectives, these investment arms have the potential to be a critical pillar of a solidarity economy – investing, for instance, in desperately needed social wage assets like affordable public transport or public housing. Sadly, in practice, they have often become entry-points through which the capitalist class has inserted its DNA into the head-offices of many unions. Much of the recent turmoil within Cosatu affiliates is to be located in competing factions seeking to control these resources.

ix. Mounting a counter-offensive

65. The labour movement does not have to be, and must not be, a simple victim of the global offensive of capital against labour. To develop effective strategies it is important to unpack the range of offensive and defensive options potentially available to labour. Conventionally, it is labour's presence at the point of production that has been understood to be its key strategic weapon in the struggle against capital. This remains a key consideration, but it is not the only potential class struggle point of leverage for labour. It is useful to distinguish two major domains of potential labour power leverage – what some writers have described as:

- Labour's structural power; and
- Labour's associational power.



66. As the above diagram seeks to illustrate, labour's potential/actual sources of structural power can be divided into its potential leverage:

- 66.1. In the labour market, and
- 66.2. in its location within capitalist production and circulation.

x. In the labour market, labour can exert power over capital through:

66.3. The possession of scarce skills. Still today, as a legacy of the colour bar labour market legislation of the past, a union like Solidarity wields a degree of power on the basis of relatively scarce skills in critical areas like aircraft technicians, air traffic controllers, etc. Generally speaking, as these examples illustrate, the control over scarce skills is unlikely to open up into a progressive agenda. This is now also a danger within the main-stream labour movement – how do the major unions achieve an effective balance between what is often their core membership (formal, skilled and semi-skilled workers)

and other sectors (rock-drill operators in mining, or foundry workers and scrap metal workers in the metal sector, for example).

- 66.4. Given our extraordinarily high levels of unemployment, workers in SA do not generally have the leverage of a tight labour market. However, the variety of government job creation initiatives (re-industrialisation, beneficiation, localisation, state procurement, co-op and SMME development, skills training) needs to be understood not just as a response to the crisis of unemployment – but measures which, by lowering unemployment, can in principle increase the labour market bargaining position of workers ;
- 66.5. The ability to withdraw *is* a very important but neglected potential point of working class leverage, however limited it might be.

xi. The ability of workers to withdraw from the capitalist labour market – i.e. the ability to de-commodify work

67. During the Amcu-led platinum strike, rock-drill operators were able (at great pain of course) to extend their strike over many months. This was, in part, due to their ability to “go back home” to rural homesteads and to meagre household sustainability due to the continued existence of communal land tenure and to the expansion of social grants in these rural areas. (Obviously we are not commenting here on the wisdom of the prolonged strike or on its likely medium-term impact – mine closures, retrenchments and increasing capitalisation of mining operations). While the conservation of communal land tenure in a meagre and increasingly over-crowded 13% of SA’s territory was a cornerstone for the reproduction of cheap migrant labour for the mines – the continued existence of communal land tenure is a potential point of leverage for the South African working class. This means that:
- The struggle for the democratisation of communal land tenure – rather than its abolition and its shifting into a capitalist land market dispensation – must be strengthened. The latter (advocated by the DA) will - as has happened in other African countries - result in rapid rural class stratification, with a few willing buyers and many impoverished and desperate sellers. This will lead to increased landlessness and impoverishment of the majority of those currently living in the former reserves, and it will impact, in turn, on many workers in urban areas whose extended household survival strategies still depend in part on a foot-hold in the countryside. We need to understand the *linkage* between labour struggles and the land struggle including the struggle for sustainable land reform and the struggle against the commodification of land tenure.
 - A second route down which labour’s bargaining power can be enhanced by strengthening its ability to withdraw (temporarily or permanently) from the capitalist labour market is through the expansion of the social wage and particularly through a more comprehensive publicly provided social security system
 - Thirdly, as the data noted above has clarified – a significant role in altering the class balance of forces has been the expansion and unionisation of public sector work in the post-1994 period. Much of this work still remains “alienated” work, owing to a lack of thorough democratisation of the public sector – but it does act as an important counterweight to the ravages of the neo-liberal labour market.

- Public employment programmes – the EPWP and CWP programmes – should also not be seen simply as temporary “make-work” measures, but rather as another potential form for changing the balance of class forces on the capitalist labour market. Currently involving some 1-million participants a year, these programmes need to be expanded, improved in terms of the quality of training and assets and services produced, and progressively move in the direction of becoming a “work guarantee programme”, as envisaged in the Freedom Charter (“Everyone shall have the right and duty to work”).
68. We now turn to the second leg of labour’s potential **structural power** (its location within capitalist production and circulation).

xii. Labour’s power at the point of production

69. It is obvious that labour’s location within the capitalist production process itself is a critical (if not the critical) point of leverage that it has in the ongoing class struggle. Trade union struggles and progressive legislation (LRA, BCEA and Health and Safety legislation) have all contributed to rolling back some of capital’s monopoly over the management of production to maximise surplus extraction at the point of production. Capital’s counter-offensive, which we have already elaborated upon (casualisation, labour brokering, increasing capital intensity, etc), has sought to dilute and reverse these advances.
70. Another well-acknowledged fact is that labour’s potential point of production power is challenged in dispersed work-places (domestic work, agriculture, the security sector, much of the informal sector, etc).
71. In these sectors innovative forms of organisation are required – some of which will be touched upon below.

xiii. Labour’s potential logistical power

72. While generally speaking, over the last 30 years or so capital has succeeded globally in weakening organised labour’s leverage at the point of production, the very nature of imperialist globalisation has opened up new spaces of capitalist vulnerability.
73. Capitalist production and realisation is now organised across vast spaces and along geographically dispersed “value chains”. A product may be designed in one locality, and its different components manufactured in several other localities, with its eventual packaging and marketing occurring in yet other places.
74. This potentially creates logistical points of vulnerability that can be strategically exploited by labour.
75. A classical case is provided by the farm-workers strike in De Doorns in 2012/13
76. The De Doorns farm-workers strike involved mainly seasonal temporary workers – interestingly with a class solidarity forged in which Coloured and African South Africans as well as labour-brokered foreign nationals struck together. Family and community members from informal settlements were also involved.
77. The success of the strike action depended upon the workers exploiting several “logistical” realities:
- The strike occurred at the critical harvesting time for high quality table grapes to be exported to European markets

- Much of the strike action consisted in blocking highways

78. **Organisationally** it is important to note that (partly as a result of the complexity of organising in the farming sector) there was minimal trade union involvement. FAWU had a very weak presence, and other small “unions” – often operating more as local advice offices in the Boland – were more active. The strikers often depended much more on their own localised community networks.

xiv. **Leveraging labour’s potential logistical power – should we organise sectorally or along “value chains”?**

79. Unfortunately, the current Numsa leadership group has introduced this important question in a factionalising way to justify attempts to unilaterally cannibalise union membership from other sectors. Cosatu’s founding principle – one industry, one union – was a crucial foundational step for the launch of the federation 20 years ago. Unless and until there are principled discussions and collective resolutions taken to change this founding principle, it is simply factionalist opportunism to undermine the principle.

80. However, this does not mean that we should not open up a sober and principled discussion on how, organisationally, the working class can best leverage its potential logistical power. This might mean that there is agreement that sectoral organisation remains the key principle, while better cooperation and coordination along multi-sectoral value-chains is developed. It might, on the other hand, mean re-thinking organisational structures.

81. Either way. We should not underestimate both the important positive possibilities AND the difficulties of maximising worker power along value chains. For instance, during the 2013 Numsa-led auto-sector strike, coordination WITHIN a single sector and WITHIN a single union broke down when auto assembly workers settled, only to find that many couldn’t return to work because the components sector then came out.

82. Which brings us to the broader question of:

xv. **Labour’s actual/potential associational power**

83. This refers basically to labour’s potential power through alliances, social movements, union-community mobilisation, social pacts, networks, international affiliations, etc.

84. All of these inter-related issues require critical assessment and review in the current South African reality – what has worked, what has changed? In this intervention we will focus on three aspects, and with a particular reference to Cosatu:

- The tripartite alliance – is it functioning optimally?
- Trade unions – social movements and working class communities
- Trade unions and the ANC-led government

xvi. **Cosatu and the Tripartite Alliance**

85. The 1985 launch of Cosatu as a “Charterist” formation in effect aligned the new federation not only with the UDF, but also with the banned ANC and SACP. It marked the relative displacement of a syndicalist/workerist leadership hegemony of its predecessor, Fosatu. The launch of Cosatu was not an automatic or pre-ordained outcome, but it represented a strategic shift in response to a changing reality. The re-building of a progressive trade union movement from 1973 after the strategic defeat of the liberation movement in the

mid-1960s owed a great deal to what was later described as “workerism”. In the conditions of the mid- to late-1970s it made sense to focus on careful shop-floor organisation, and caution not to expose the new shoots of union organisation too easily to security police crack-down through overt politicisation. However, in some quarters, tactics became ideological principles, and with the rising tide of both community and union mobilisation and militancy by the mid-1980s, a narrow workerism had become a blockage.

xvii. But what of the tripartite alliance today?

86. Soon after the 1994 democratic breakthrough, the Alliance ran into challenging times. With the hegemonic emergence within the ANC and ANC-led government of what the Party characterised as the “1996 class project”, the Alliance ran into turbulent waters. A key pillar of the 1996 class project was to marginalise the SACP and to de-politicise Cosatu – confining it largely to a wage-negotiating role.
87. Ideological and mobilisational opposition to this 1996 class project was the basis on which a strong SACP/Cosatu working relationship was built in this period and important partial victories were won, including:
 - The halt towards a runaway privatisation project
 - The reversal of AIDS denialism; and
 - Importantly – the provision of an alternative perspective to a rising tide of disaffection within the ANC itself
88. Within both the SACP and Cosatu there were those in leadership positions who were unhappy at the anti-1996 class stand. This encouraged considerable internal and (arguably at times) factional lobbying within each other’s formations and also within the ANC itself.
89. A turning point was reached at the ANC’s 2007 National Polokwane Conference, and the subsequent recall of President Mbeki as state president. These relatively dramatic events within the Alliance’s recent history opened up a new terrain and new prospects – but they also carried their own baggage:
 - The Polokwane conference outcome was achieved with a “marriage of convenience” between a left bloc and a right-wing populist group, which the SACP soon thereafter characterised as a tenderpreneurial “new tendency”. Part of this “new tendency” later morphed into the EFF.
 - The struggle against the 1996 class project often became over-personalised (as if the displacement of Cde Thabo Mbeki in itself would end the project), and the solution to the problem also at times became excessively individualised around the person of Cde Jacob Zuma.
90. This “baggage” from Polokwane (inevitable as it might have been) has since had some negative impacts within Cosatu and in the relationship between Cosatu and the SACP.
91. Among the dangers in excessively personalising politics and developing personality cults is that undue expectations can easily be invested in individuals. Worse still, when these expectations are disappointed, hero worship can turn into an infantile anti-fixation. Much of Julius Malema’s current politics, with its myopic fixation on President Zuma, is a case in point. However, with a different character and content, we believe some of the same syndrome can be found in the recent political posture of Cde Vavi – for instance, his

entirely inappropriate (for a serving Cosatu general secretary) reaction to the electoral outcome of the ANC Mangaung National Conference.

92. A related, but more substantial point of weakness in the post-Polokwane alliance has been the perpetuation of the failure to develop an effective, joint programme of action.
93. With the notable exception of election campaigns, since 1994, the ANC has failed almost entirely to lead its alliance in grass-roots campaigns that mobilise its mass constituency. (The recent important anti-xenophobia mobilisation is an encouraging partial exception). Which brings us to the next aspect of “associational” power:

xviii. The trade union movement and working class communities in the current SA reality

94. A key strategic and organisational response to capital’s segmentation of the working class into increasingly precarious work must be for unions to form much more active and organic links with a network of community and social movement formations. But how? And around what strategic agenda?
95. In the early 1990s and immediately after the 1994 democratic breakthrough, the SACP’s perspective was that the Tripartite Alliance’s grass-roots structures – notably ANC and SACP township branches, and Cosatu shop-steward locals – along with the civic movement and other CBO and social movement formations would sustain the earlier union/community struggle traditions that had been critical to the defeat of the apartheid regime.
96. In particular, working with our alliance partners, the SACP proposed the formation of community based RDP Councils. The proposal was taken up by the ANC’s SGO, then under Cdes Cyril Ramaphosa and Cheryl Carolus. In particular, the idea was that Alliance branches and shop steward locals would mobilise communities to actively engage, amongst other things, with the range of popular participatory structures envisaged in the RDP, and given some statutory weight through parliament in the course of the 1990s – CPFs, SGBs, Ward Committees, people’s budgeting, public transport forums, popular engagement in developing local IDPs, etc.
97. These initiatives never really took off, falling victim, in part, to the 1996 class project which had a very different, bureaucratic, top-down “delivery” model of transformation.
98. Increasingly, ANC local branches became narrow electoral formations, focused on local elite rivalries and often remote from the socio-economic problems of the communities in which they were located. While active, from time to time, in Red October and other campaigns, local SACP branches have also sometimes become embroiled in the politics of politicians. Many shop steward locals have also dissolved. At a local community level, the Alliance at best only comes together in joint mobilisation and campaigning for ANC-elections.
99. The SACP has run several important Red October campaigns, notably the Financial Sector Campaign, with uneven support from Cosatu, and with little more than lip-service support from ANC structures.
100. In short, the important traditions of localised organs of popular power in working class communities have largely been lost, and certainly as an Alliance we are not active as formations providing strategic leadership and coherence. The repertoire of resistance

tactics (burning tyres, barricades, toyi-toying) remains, but it tends to be spontaneous, sporadic, and diverse. It is often inward-turning (one faction against another, back-yarders against informal settlement households around priorities on the formal housing list, one taxi association against another, xenophobic violence, etc). It would be absolutely wrong to believe that most of the township delivery protests do not have their roots in very real socio-economic problems and in real frustrations with government, or our own formations. But popular power remains, at best, protest power and not transformative power. Most independent studies also suggest that in the majority of cases the protests are not anti-ANC as such, but rather designed to capture the attention of someone, or structure “higher up” – in other words, the protests tend not to build popular protagonism and popular governance in local communities. Some destroy public property, and at best many others simply reinforce the top-down delivery model by demanding “delivery”.

101. This is the context, presumably, in which from the side of Cosatu during the general secretaryship of Cde Vavi, or latterly from the side of Numsa, attempts have been made at forming a different kind of relationship with working class communities through some kind of “civil society platform”, or United Front. In principle initiatives of this kind are to be welcomed. However, in practice these initiatives, in the view of the Party, have been flawed by:

- Positioning themselves factionally, simply as oppositional to the Alliance and ANC-led government,
- Framing themselves as “watch-dogs” against government corruption, for instance, without acknowledging the challenges of corruption in the labour movement, for instance
- Being constituted less out of grass-roots formations, and more out of “advocacy” NGOs, many funded by European or North American donors

102. At the same time neither the SACP nor Cosatu should, in response, conduct themselves factionally in regard to any genuine causes raised from these quarters – whether it be solidarity with Palestine, or campaigns against corruption or xenophobia, or (as Cosatu has correctly done) with the Food Sovereignty Campaign.

xix. The changing character of working class communities and settlement patterns

103. We have argued that we cannot simply go “back to basics” in terms of union organisation, without considering the dramatic changes under way in the character and composition of the working class. So, too, when it comes to rebuilding labour-community organisation, we need to consider the changes that have been happening to working class communities. In fact, the two things are inter-related.

104. The peri-urban South African working class township with its origins in the early 20th century was formalised, rigidly planned and perfected during the apartheid years – far enough away from white suburbs, amenities, and recreational facilities, close enough for daily migrancy into work. It was deliberately designed for racial confinement over weekends (when there was little public transport running) and during times of “trouble”. Carefully ringed with rail-lines and freeways, townships were designed to have the minimum points of exit so that the residents could be sealed off by the security forces should the need arise. For hostel dwellers on mine compounds the deliberate isolation

was even harsher. However, the key point to remember is that apartheid was not just about racial exclusion – it was simultaneously about **including** the oppressed majority on inferior terms within the political economy of SA – primarily as workers, but also as mass consumers on the capitalist market.

105. A major part of the success of the rising waves of semi-insurrectionary struggle was the ability of our liberation movement to turn the apartheid strategy on its head, to use racial exclusion (in a township) as a weapon to collectively self-exclude – through general strikes or stayaways, through consumer boycotts of white shops, etc. In this way townships were turned into semi-liberated zones. However, because we were dealing here with a proletarianised reality (rather than an independent peasantry as in Cuba, Vietnam, or China), the general strike or stayaway, or general consumer boycott (as opposed to specific product boycotts) could only be sustained for a period of days or weeks, and not indefinitely. However, the collective self-exclusion forced the regime and capital into negotiations about the terms of inclusion.
106. It is, of course, important also to remember that the township, informal settlement, or hostel was not always controlled by progressive forces – shack-lords, witdoeke, ethnic vigilantes associated with Uwusa, or criminal gangs also contested for power and control.
107. This whole legacy still persists in many forms within working class communities. But there have also been significant changes – many of them essentially progressive, but which have had the paradoxical effect of weakening working class solidarity in some respects.
 - With the relative (but still only very partial) de-racialisation of urban settlement patterns, a key union (and political) cadre, along with more professional strata of the working class have moved into “lower-middle class” suburbs and townhouse developments. Those remaining within townships have better access than before to amenities and services, and there has been a minor migration of township school students into suburban schools – sometimes prompting the allegation that today’s township-residing teachers “no longer send their own children to township schools”. In these, and many other ways, the more organic bonds that once tied different black working class strata and their families together have been loosened.

Question: *Does the increased intra-working class violence evident in some of the recent working class strikes (notably, but not only the Security Workers strike) have anything to do with the greater challenges of maintaining strike discipline in the present as a result of the more fragmented settlement patterns of the working class?*

- The paradox of real or intended progress in transforming working class settlement patterns undermining working class solidarity is even more glaringly illustrated in the case of Marikana. One of the great achievements of NUM was to overcome the divide-and-rule ethnic strategies of mine management, by transforming mine compound hostels into organisational bases. One of NUM’s important post-1994 victories was the abolition of the prison-like single-sex hostels. But the mining houses and government have failed to provide adequate alternative housing, and many migrant workers use the “living out allowance” as a remittance to families in the rural areas, while moving into squalid informal settlements. Union organisation in these sprawling shanty towns has been compromised and there is considerable evidence that both the Five Madoda

and the later AMCU phenomena used a network of informal settlement formations – shack-lords, ethnically-aligned anti-stock theft vigilante groups from the Eastern Cape, the minibus sector, etc as the organisational basis from which to launch their often violent anti-NUM projects.

xx. **We believe that these examples underline two basic points:**

108. No progressive union can ignore the interplay between work-place and residential struggles and organisation. To advance working class struggles we need to analyse more carefully the persisting as well as the new realities confronting the broad working class in terms of settlement patterns and mobility.
109. It is not good enough dwelling in a nostalgia for “the-good-old-days” of township life. It is critical to mobilise around issues which unite the broader working class. These include:
 - The crisis of chronic **indebtedness**, which impacts upon both the marginalised sectors of the working class as well as (indeed, often, even more) upon many workers in the so-called “new black middle-class”
 - Decent, affordable, and reliable public transport
 - The problems of crime and drug abuse and basic safety afflicting many working class localities

xxi. **Cosatu and the post-1994 democratic state**

110. One of the major areas of confusion and challenge confronting Cosatu and the broader union movement in SA after the 1994 democratic breakthrough has been understanding the nature of the state, and therefore on how to engage with it. On the one hand, since the 1994 democratic elections there has been a steady flow of senior unionists into legislatures and into senior positions within the executive and state owned enterprises. Initially, in Cosatu ranks there was often a very instrumentalist version of the state – “put the right people into it, and all will be well”. The experience has been mixed – with some former unionists playing a progressive role, others disappearing into invisibility, and still others actively espousing anti-worker, neo-liberal agendas.
111. Decades of union work is fatiguing subjectively. Understandably, some of the passage of unionists into government has been partly motivated on humane grounds – providing some financial and family stability. But this factor, coupled with the uneven experience of ex-unionists in government, has led in some quarters of the union movement to a largely dismissive attitude towards political activism within the state and legislatures. Fusing with inherent tendencies towards workerism, we find tendencies within parts of the union movement simply to regard all political activism from within the state/government as “inherently corrupt”, “part of the gravy train”, etc. As we have already remarked above, this then (unwittingly) plays directly into the neo-liberal agenda of rolling back the capacity to exert national sovereignty (by way of a state-led industrial policy, for instance) on the basis of democratic majority rule.
112. Further complicating this picture has been the evocation of a vulgar Marxism which assumes that the state has to be “either a capitalist state, or a socialist state **finish an’ klaar**”. Since the current South African democratic state is clearly not a socialist state, so this vulgar pseudo-Marxist position goes, “it must be a state exercising the dictatorship of

the bourgeoisie – *finish an' klaar*". This easily leads, in turn, towards a regime change agenda (directed against a democratic government with over 60% electoral support). Which again means that pseudo-leftist positions like this inevitably end up in the same agenda as right-wingers.

113. A concrete example of exactly how this kind of vulgar Marxism ends up in contradictions is provided by the disgracefully opportunist media statement issued by Numsa following the Marikana August 2012 tragedy.

In the first place, the Numsa CC correctly condemned the police killing of miners on August 22 2012. It condemned the "savage, cowardly actions and excessive force used by the police, which invariably led to the deaths of 44 workers..." But notice how the statement deliberately conflates the killings of August 22 (34) with the 10 earlier deaths (including of policemen) at the hands of the strikers in the days before August 22.

At this point in the statement vulgar pseudo-Marxism enters the scene. We are told that the police carried out the killings because they are simply an instrument of bourgeois rule and "will do anything to defend the property rights and profits of this class, including slaughtering the working class".

But then, confusion starts to occur. A few sentences later the Numsa statement pleads that these "organs of class rule, particularly the police, should not be used recklessly and violently to intervene in industrial disputes involving workers and bosses." Leaving aside the presumption that what was at play in Marikana was a simple "industrial dispute between workers and bosses", what does this sentimental pleading mean – that the organs of supposed "bourgeois class dictatorship" shouldn't be unduly reckless or violent as they go about their inevitable slaughtering work?

The confusion thickens when, later in the same statement, economic policy matters are discussed. The statement calls for "strengthening of the state sector in mining in particular..." But we have just been told that the post-1994 state and government's "strategic task and real reason for existence is the defence" of the capitalist "Minerals/Energy/Finance Complex"! If there is any logical consistency in all of this, then the Numsa statement must be calling for the mines to be taken over by a state that operates in the interests of mining capitalists!

114. The post-1994 democratic state is not a simple instrument, nor is it unilaterally "capitalist" or "pro-worker and poor" – it is a deeply contested space. It is often characterised by bureaucratic silos and policy contradictions and inconsistency (typically these are the symptoms of contesting class agendas from within and the impact of diverse class pressures from without). The state needs to be actively contested by progressive, anti-capitalist forces both from within and from without. Desertion from these tasks in the name of "remaining pure" is a betrayal of the democratic mandate that the overwhelming majority of SA's working class continues to bestow on the ANC-led government. Conversely, a naive defence of everything emanating from government is equally a desertion from our revolutionary tasks.

xxii. Let us re-build and unify Cosatu and the broader working class!

115. The current challenges within the trade union movement are a wake-up call for all progressive formations in South Africa. As we seek to recover the proud traditions of our revolutionary labour movement there are several basic principles that must be observed:
- We need to appreciate that worker democracy within unions, and the servicing of workers in their daily shop-floor struggles is of paramount importance. Only a determined re-dedication to these tasks will counter the dangers of bureaucratic deviation and business unionism.
 - The massive restructuring of the working class, placing large sectors of workers in “atypical” employment effectively beyond the reach of traditional unionism, requires innovation.
 - Responding to a massive non-unionised “precariat” also means recovering previous struggle traditions, notably the re-building of active solidarity between work-place and community struggles. This talks not just to internal union weaknesses, but also to the organisational and campaigning challenges of ANC and SACP local-level branches. It also raises questions around the numerous local level struggles in townships and the imperative of linking more effectively with them.
 - Finally, above all, it is critical that progressives understand that a timid and uncritical stance by unions towards government, on the one hand, and (the flip-side of the same coin) worker mobilisation on the basis of a regime-change, anti-state oppositionism **both** play into the agenda of monopoly capital within the current realities of our society.
116. The trade union movement in our country stands at the crossroads. The dangers of increased intra-worker contest and of lose-lose union rivalry over membership with ordinary workers treated merely as cannon fodder to be mobilised demagogically into untimely and ill-considered actions on behalf of union head-office ambitions is very real. On the other hand, the traditions of worker solidarity and of militant shop-floor struggle have not disappeared. The SACP is convinced that the great majority of Cosatu unionists, the tens of thousands of shop stewards, and the millions of organised workers in the federation’s ranks will, once more, not fail the revolution.

ⁱ The latest Stats SA figures (released 26 May 2015) indicate a growth in the expanded unemployment figure to 36,1% (8,7-million people able to work but not employed).