

Build foundations for a socialist mass workers party

Call Assembly of Working Class Unity

The impressive turnout on the anti-Zuma protests – over 100,000 in separate marches – is a new high water mark. They reflect ordinary peoples' fears over the consequences of S&P's 3 April credit downgrade – increased prices, job losses, growing indebtedness and more public service cuts.

Despite healthy suspicion of the DA, EFF, IFP etc. the turnout on the opposition party protests reflected a growing mood for action. For now, who exactly calls or 'leads' protest is secondary; people are filled with a burning desire to "do something" about Zuma's disastrous rule.

Though middle class dominated, these were overwhelmingly 'ordinary people' with no strong party affiliations or worked-out political ideologies including many young people, both black and white. Whilst the working class did not participate as an organised group, many workers attended.

Of course, as is always the case at the start of any movement, especially amongst those taking action for the first time, there was a weak understanding of the root of the crisis and what Zuma's removal would require. Middle class illusions undoubtedly weighed heavily on the outlook of many e.g. about the neutrality of the capitalist state and the sanctity of the constitution. But people learn from experience. For many this was their first protest and the start of their journey towards political clarification.

Attitudes of 'the left'

Yet at a time of the sharpest post-apartheid political and economic crisis, the workers movement and the left had no coherent position. Whereas expelled Cosatu general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, had supported the 2015 anti-corruption march and addressed the 7 April 2017 civil society protests, Numsa criticized both those in 2015 and 2017.

Cosatu's absence from the Gordhan roadshow was the result of the paralysis produced by the spillage of the ANC's factional civil war into the federation rather than opposition to its message of neo-liberal assurances to investors. Fedusa general secretary Dennis

George joined the condemnations of the cancellation of Pravin Gordhan's investor roadshow.

It is true that this is a quarrel between a section of the black capitalist class and the predominantly white capitalists and their black capitalist allies on the other. But the working class has an independent interest in the fight against corruption. As Marxists we do not simply echo the hypocritical indignation of the possessing classes about "state capture." The entire architecture of the post-apartheid dispensation – the constitution and the bourgeois parliamentary system – has been designed to serve the interests of capital.

It is not a question of 'picking sides' but for the working class to intervene as Lenin said "with its own forces, its own programme and its own organization"...

This split in the black political elite is over how to enrich themselves whilst maintaining the brutal exploitative capitalist system. The outcome of this factional struggle has consequences for democratic, trade union rights and immediate consequences for workers' living standards. Both factions want to curtail the right to strike through compulsory secret ballots and as Gigaba has already made clear, are committed to the same brutal neo-liberal measures Pravin and his predecessors carried out. The downgrade will pile even greater misery on the working class who already languish in poverty in the most unequal society on earth.

Workers party

To abstain from this battle is to abdicate responsibility to provide leadership and to leave the middle class to follow the capitalist class. It is not a question of 'picking sides' but for the working class to intervene as Lenin said "with its own forces, its own programme and its own organization" with demands for higher wages, job creation, free education, and ending outsourcing etc. The working class

must display its far more powerful forces in action to win the middle class over. As a more conscientious study of Lenin teaches us, a split in the middle class and breaking the ruling class' grip over them is one of the preconditions for revolution.

This could have been done if a socialist mass workers party existed – as it could have had the Numsa leadership implemented its 2013 special national congress resolutions. In the absence of such a party it is still correct for workers to participate in anti-Zuma protests. However this must be as an organised independent bloc. Sharpening the differences between the classes can play an important part in assembling the forces for a workers party. The alternative is to leave leadership with the bourgeois and pro-capitalist opposition parties. This is likely to end up as a 'grand pro-capitalist coalition', likely to include the EFF building on their 'coalitions' with the DA in Tshwane and Johannesburg, if the ANC falls below 50% in 2019's elections.

The Easter bus drivers' strike showed the enormous power of the working class. How much more politically effective could it have been if the organised working class had brought this power to bear on the political crisis? Zuma would have been gone in days!

The answer to the working class' day-to-day workplace and community struggles and the ANC's and capitalism's crisis is ultimately the same: socialism. As the economic crisis deepens the importance of the workers' movement skillfully linking the economic and political struggles will become crucial. But if the working class is to place itself at the head of the movement against Zuma and capitalism a political vehicle is needed. An important first step would be to convene an Assembly of Working Class Unity to lay the foundations for a mass workers party. Saftu must place this question on the launch agenda.

