



**THE PROGRAMME & PRINCIPLES OF  
REVOLUTIONARY  
TRADE UNIONISM**

**WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE FIGHT FOR  
AND WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US**

**R5**

# IF YOU AGREE WITH WHAT YOU READ...



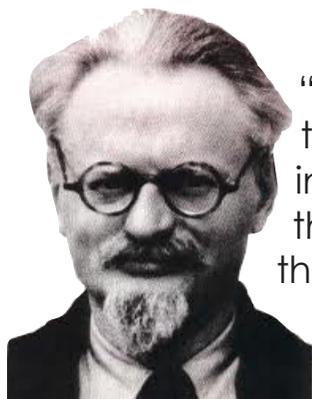
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“In the epoch of imperialist decay the trade unions can be really independent only to the extent that they are conscious of being, in action, the organs of proletarian revolution.”

**Leon Trotsky, 1940**

# (1) INTRODUCTION

**Why did you join a trade union? Or, why are you thinking about joining one? Maybe it was the low pay or the long hours. Perhaps the humiliating searches, breath-tests and lie-detector tests. Maybe it was a bullying supervisor, a sexist HR or a racist manager. It would not be unusual if it was all of these things in one workplace. This daily abuse and exploitation pushes workers to look for a way to defend themselves. They quickly discover that most of their workmates and colleagues feel the same way. The need to unite is obvious – workers are the majority in the workplace; the bosses and their managers a minority.**

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**Shaun Arendse**

*Executive Committee*

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Workers organising themselves to use the power of their greater numbers is of course the basic idea of a trade union – the principle of ‘an injury to one is an injury to all’. When workers are organised they can defend themselves and struggle for improvements to wages and other working conditions. But often things are more complicated than: unite, fight and win. Why? After all, the working class has proved over and over again that it is willing to struggle for a better future. The number of strikes in 2017 was the highest ever since the Department of Labour began recording them. The months of April, May and June 2018, also saw a record high number of community protests.

These struggles can and do win important victories. But after a generation of majority rule it is clear that the problems in South Africa are extremely deep. We will argue

below that the crises of low-pay, poverty, inequality and unemployment cannot be solved by the capitalist profit system. To win permanent improvements – a living wage, decent working conditions, permanent jobs, high quality and affordable housing, efficient and reliable services – workers need to struggle to fundamentally change society.

## **Crisis of leadership**

To do this, workers need to be organised. For most working class people a trade union is the first step – though this is just the start of the journey that class conscious workers must travel (see Part 5 below). Trade union organisation gives workers discipline, unity and power. Because the economy is the heartbeat of any society, a strike, or even the threat of one, gives organised workers an extremely effective weapon. For these reasons organised workers in the trade union movement play a decisive role in working class struggle.

But over the past twenty years the trade unions have faced a growing crisis of leadership. Corruption has become widespread and class independence and democratic worker-control weakened. From being the driving force in the struggle to change society many trade unions have become part of the status quo. Nearly 75% of workers are not even members of trade unions. Those that are members are divided. There are currently 190 registered trade unions in South Africa spread across four trade union federations. In many sectors one united employers’ organisation sits across the table from a pie ‘n’ mix of unions whose leaders are more interested in members’ deductions than in unity against the bosses.

A crisis of working class leadership starts with the wrong ideas; it is ultimately a crisis of programme. Overcoming it requires uniting workers around a programme that expresses the fundamental interests of the working class. We will explain below why this can only be a socialist programme based on the revolutionary ideas of genuine Marxism.

### **Mistakes**

Trade union leaders without a socialist programme ultimately accept the bosses' control of the economy and therefore the bosses' 'right' to exploit workers. Of course, they cannot usually say this to workers. They have to dress it up – sometimes in 'revolutionary' language. But the result is the same. Such leaders see trade unions' role as limited to negotiating the terms of exploitation but not challenging their capitalist foundation.

For example, workers in Cosatu are sold the idea of the 'National Democratic Revolution' by the SA Communist Party. This implies that following the end of apartheid capitalism must be given time to develop before a revolutionary struggle for socialism can begin. Workers need to limit their struggles until the time is right – so far there are 24 years on the clock! This programme has led Cosatu into alliance with the ANC which since 1996 has had an openly pro-capitalist neo-liberal programme entrenching poverty, inequality and unemployment. Cosatu members strike against the ANC government and its policies one day and then are told by their leaders to vote for it the next.

In some Nactu unions nationalist ideas still have some influence. These ideas suggest that black bosses are not 'bad' because of their class position in society but because they have forgotten to stand in solidarity with their black brothers and sisters. These

ideas limit workers from building truly independent working class organisations and from developing a clear understanding of the class struggle.

### **Crucial time**

But the crisis of leadership has not stopped workers from searching for a way forward. The mineworkers' strikes in 2012 were a decisive break in the situation. Demanding a R12,500 per month minimum wage these heroic unprotected strikes by-passed the 'official' structures of the trade unions. The Cosatu-affiliated NUM, until then the biggest union in the country, crumbled as mineworkers tore-up their membership cards in their tens of thousands. Mineworkers rejected the entire system of 'sweetheart' unions that the ANC government demanded from Cosatu as part of the 'terms and conditions' of their Alliance. The price of this over-due rebellion was paid in blood by the 34 mineworkers murdered at Marikana.

Even before Marikana workers were increasingly questioning the direction of Cosatu. But the massacre sped this up and led to greater polarisation within the federation. Many workers grew in their determination that "something must change". Reflecting members' anger over Marikana the metalworkers' union NUMSA decided at a Special National Congress in 2013 not to support the ANC in the upcoming elections. This led to further turmoil within the federation. NUMSA and Cosatu general secretary Vavi were both expelled. Many affiliates went through local or regional splits as a result leading to the creation of new trade unions.

### **Clarity**

Out of this shake-up of the trade union movement the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu) was launched in April

2017. This was an important development that has further challenged the status quo. Saftu's successful 25 April 2018 strike against the ANC government's new poverty-level minimum wage and attacks on the right to strike has again forced workers in other federations to question the direction of their organisations. Their leaders condemned the strike and supported the government's attack on workers.

This poses more sharply than ever the need for workers in every trade union to clarify their programme. There are many important questions that still need to be answered. How do we stop corruption in our trade unions? How do we defend class independence and democratic worker-control in our organisations? How do we ensure our leaders do not climb into bed with the bosses? How can organised workers link-up with the rest of the working class? What attitude should

we take to politics, parties, elections and parliament? What is our understanding of the role of the capitalist state and its legal framework of labour law and collective bargaining? And, crucially, must we accept the capitalist profit system as 'the best there is'? Or is socialism an alternative within our reach?

For us these are all questions of programme. To begin to answer them it is necessary to go back and examine the 'first principles' of workers' struggle, checking our foundations in order to re-build a class-independent and united movement of militant, democratic worker-led trade unions. WASP is committed to this task. We appeal to you to join us if you agree with what you read in the pages ahead. Become part of the conscious and organised struggle for *revolutionary* trade unionism.

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## (2) CAPITALISM & THE TRADE UNIONS

We live in a capitalist society where the banks, the mines, the farms, the big factories and the big businesses – like Absa Bank, Anglo American, Rainbow Chicken, SCAW Metals, Vodacom, and Shoprite – are *privately owned*. This splits society into two main groups of people – the minority capitalist class (the bosses) that own the economy, and a majority working class who work for them. The working class includes workers' dependents, e.g. pensioners, the unemployed, children etc.

### Monopoly

The development of capitalism across the world over the past 200+ years has concentrated ownership of the economy in fewer and fewer hands. Today we live under *monopoly capitalism*. This is where just a handful of privately owned companies dominate the economy. For

example, Shoprite Holdings Ltd. not only owns Shoprite, but also Checkers, Usave, OK Furniture, Liquor Shop, MediRite Pharmacies, House & Home, Transpharm and Computicket. The scandal hit Steinhoff group owns 32 different retailers, including Ackermans, PEP, HiFi Corp, Shoe City and Sleepmasters. Famous Brands owns the franchises of 27 different food outlets including Wimpy, Steers, Debonairs and Fishaways. If you go into a mall, most of the shops and restaurants are owned by the same capitalists.

These mega-companies are in turn usually owned by a handful of financial institutions and banks – e.g. Absa, Nedbank, FNB and Standard Bank. Further, capitalism has developed a *world market* dominated by a handful of imperialist countries. The major stakes in the South African banks are often owned by even bigger banks in the imperialist centres of the USA and Europe.

## **Inequality**

With private ownership comes narrow self-interest and monstrous inequality. Capitalism is a system where production is organised for private profit and not for social need. The monopolies are not run for the 'greater good' of society but to make money for their owners. The so-called 'market' allocates resources to those who can pay not to those in need. In South Africa 14 million people go to bed hungry every night. But 10 million tonnes of food are wasted every year – that is one third of all the food in the country. The capitalist economy is incapable of something as basic as feeding the population.

Worldwide, just 42 dollar billionaires – who together would fit in three mini-bus taxis with space left over – have as much wealth as the poorest 3.7 billion people. And most of these 3.7 billion people, who together are more than half of the world's entire population, live in poverty. As a result 22,000 children die every year simply because they were born poor.

In South Africa itself, 1% of the population owns 71% of all wealth. Out of a population of 57 million, just the richest three billionaires have as much wealth as the poorest 28 million. Because the poor majority are not a profitable investment the big monopolies hoard their wealth. The top 50 companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are together sitting on R1.4 trillion. This is nearly 150% of the government's annual spending on everything – schools, hospitals, clinics, houses, roads, wages etc. But this wealth just lies unused in bank accounts awaiting a profitable 'investment opportunity'.

Super-wealth for a tiny minority means poverty for the majority. There are 30.4 million people, more than half of South Africa's entire population, living in poverty. Many of them are the so-called 'working poor'. There are 6.6 million workers earning

less than R3,500 per month. But on this foundation of poverty-wages the bosses are enjoying life. The average income of a CEO is R24 million per year. And this is just the average. In 2017-18, the CEO of Naspers, Bob van Dijk, received a bonus worth a total of R1.5 billion.

South Africa's racist history of colonialism and apartheid means class inequality goes hand-in-hand with racial inequality. Over 64% of black people live in poverty, compared to just 1% of white people; 74% of black children will grow up in poverty but less than 1.5% of white children will. The class inequality of capitalism maintains racism by branding black skin as poor and inferior.

## **Competition**

The pursuit of profit leads to wasteful competition. Rather than develop society, the capitalist economy is a 'winner takes all' casino game. This means chaos for workers. Jobs come and go and livelihoods are built and then destroyed over whether people should shop at Pic N Pay or Shoprite, buy Sunlight or Omo, drive Volkswagens or Toyotas, or eat Sasko or Albany. In 2016 R45 billion was spent on advertising to try and convince the working class that somehow this capitalist competition matters to them.

Capitalist competition compels every company to squeeze its workers as much as possible to gain any 'competitive edge' over their rivals. But in doing so they actually destroy the very market they are frantically producing for – low pay and mass unemployment means that the working class cannot buy back all of the goods they produce. This leads to recession and economic crises. But these are not 'natural disasters' as the capitalist class would have us believe. They are the normal outcome of production for profit and capitalist competition.

On a world scale capitalist competition can lead to the destruction of entire industries. For example, cheap clothing imports have seen the South African textile industry virtually disappear. The industry went from an employer of 200,000 workers to an employer of barely 19,000. The local capitalists were outcompeted by their overseas counter-parts. The competition between rival capitalists in different countries can lead to trade wars, like the one unfolding between the US and China today. It leads to real wars when the capitalist class use their state to defend their interests.

### Unemployment

But the madness of capitalism does not end there. It is often more profitable for the bosses to make their existing employees work long hours instead of creating new jobs. This means that in South Africa long hours exist side-by-side with mass unemployment. One in ten workers works for more than 60 hours every week. This is despite laws setting 45 hours as the maximum.

But workers know this ‘working day’ is just the tip of the iceberg. Long journeys to and from work every day, unpaid lunchbreaks and unpaid overtime must also be added. There is little time for workers to relax, spend time with family and friends, or develop and educate themselves. At the same time, more than nine million people sit with nothing to do – South Africa’s vast army of unemployed.

*This is capitalism. It is a system of permanent crisis. This is the system that pushed workers to organise trade unions.*

### Exploitation

So how are the bosses able to get away with this? To begin to understand this we need to look at *exactly how* the bosses exploit workers under capitalism. The starting point

is the private ownership of the economy we have already mentioned – ownership of the land, the buildings on it, the equipment and machinery in those buildings, packaged with a nice company logo. This allows the bosses to say to workers:

“You need money to live? I can give you a job and pay you a wage. But let us be clear that this is *my* business and you will be working in *my* building on *my* land using *my* equipment. Therefore all the wealth you create will *also belong to me* and it is up to me what I do with it.”

Workers have no choice but to accept this – the other choice is to starve. But this ‘normal’ boss-worker relationship – exchanging labour for wages – hides the big con-trick at the heart of capitalism. Every time workers perform a day’s work they create new wealth (or ‘value’ as Karl Marx called it). In doing so, workers create *more* than is needed to cover their own wages and the bosses’ other fixed costs, e.g. buying materials, replacing equipment, paying electricity bills, etc. Something is left over which Marx called *surplus-value*. When the capitalists take this surplus for themselves it is called profit. But *profit* is simply the unpaid labour of workers.

Understanding that it is only workers’ hard-work day-in and day-out that creates the bosses’ profits is very important. Without the products workers make, the services they provide, and the buildings they clean and guard, the bosses have nothing. But they try and hide this. Backed up by the media they sell the false idea that they are rich because they have ‘worked hard’. They tell workers to stop complaining and do the same. But this is comparing apples and oranges. A worker can exhaust him or herself through overtime, working every hour possible. But they will never be able to achieve wealth even close to that of the bosses because they are selling their own labour, not exploiting the labour of many others. This is the ‘legal’

mechanism by which the capitalist minority enriches themselves with the wealth created by the working class majority. In 2017 82% of the world's new wealth was taken by the richest 1%.

Any struggle for higher wages is a struggle over surplus-value. The same is true of demands for more jobs to be created, for more spending on health and safety, to modernise equipment, for longer breaks and leave-days, for more money to be placed in education, pension and other funds, or demanding that government raise taxes on profits to fund hospitals and schools. The division of surplus-value between the capitalist class and the working class is the engine of the *class struggle*. Trade unions are on the front-line in the class struggle because they organise workers where wealth is created – in the workplace. This arms workers with their most basic weapon: the withdrawal of labour, i.e. a strike.

### Control

But there is another side to the class struggle. Workers also want to be treated as human beings when in the workplace. Many workers were pushed to join a trade union because of the petty dictators in the workplace – the supervisors, HRs and various managers. We have all felt outrage that one or two people are allowed to push-around tens, hundreds, even thousands of people day-in and day-out.

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Workers are employed in huge numbers. For example, Absa Bank employs 40,000 workers, Anglo American 135,000, Rainbow Chicken 20,000, SCAW Metals 7,000+, Vodacom 7,000+ and Shoprite 130,000. Together, the 25 biggest companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange employ a staggering 1.3 million workers. These figures do not even include all the contractors, outsourced and labour broker workers, or the workers in the small and medium-sized businesses that depend on these giants for their existence.

But the bosses have the final say on everything. The CEOs and company boards, mere handfuls of individuals, have unchallenged authority over the lives of workers, and because of their dominance of the economy, all of society. If a worker is brave enough to raise an issue they may be accused of 'insubordination'. Maybe they will be identified as a 'trouble maker' and even dismissed.

Such control by the bosses over the workplace is absolutely necessary for capitalism. The majority of workers cannot be allowed a real say because they would never voluntarily agree to run the workplace solely to maximise the profits of the bosses. The capitalist class justifies this because the workplace is their private property. But a trade union is a direct challenge to the bosses' control as workers demand a greater say in how the workplace is run.

# **(3) HOW THE BOSSES CONTROL AND CO-OPT THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT**

## **PART I: THE CAPITALIST STATE**

The capitalist class understands that the class struggle cannot be wished away. If they want to keep control of society it is therefore necessary for them to try and manage it. They are prepared to use force and violence to do this. In the 2012 mineworkers' strikes the ANC government declared a state of emergency across the platinum belt, deployed heavily armed police and shot dead 34 mineworkers at Marikana. To think that this was an exceptional tragedy that could never be repeated would be a dangerous mistake.

Organised violence against workers is routine under capitalism. Even taking part in a legal strike does not always give protection from police intimidation, harassment or even assault. Sometimes the bosses will use hired-thugs to attack workers and the 'neutral' state turns a blind-eye. But wherever possible the bosses prefer to disguise the violence of their system. Capitalism's stability is at risk if its brutality is too obvious. Moreover, it is expensive to suppress the working class by force. So the capitalist class has developed methods of control for 'normal times'.

The capitalist class's economic dictatorship gives them enormous power to shape 'public opinion' through their control of the media and the education system; the family and religion are used to encourage the 'virtues' of hard work, obedience and acceptance of authority. The capitalist class use these levers to try and lower the temperature of the class struggle and avoid provoking a head-on confrontation between the classes.

### **Reforms**

The struggle for the fullest possible political freedoms and democratic rights has always been a part of workers' struggles. The struggle to end apartheid and win basic political freedoms and democratic rights were hard fought in South Africa. The right to vote, to form political parties and trade unions, freedoms of speech, assembly and movement are very important tools that workers can use to organise. The very fact that today we are able to organise trade unions openly is a debt owed by workers to all those who struggled before them.

With organisation workers can force the capitalist class to make democratic concessions. At other times the bosses and the capitalist politicians recognise that it is in their interests to grant workers and their trade unions certain legal rights to stop a conflict from starting. From this combination of mass pressure and political calculation, laws like the Labour Relations Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act have been passed, and special courts like the CCMA and Labour Court created. On paper at least, these place some limits on the bosses' right to exploit workers.

But workers face enormous obstacles in exercising their rights. The bosses find legal tricks to win cases. They have the money to hire lawyers to create endless delays. They use the time that they 'buy' to demoralise workers into giving-up. Other 'pro-worker' reforms are no better than window-dressing. The 2015 law requiring all workers under labour-brokers to be hired as permanent staff after three months was simply ignored by the bosses. After more than three years the Constitutional Court has upheld the

law – but even this is being challenged. The ANC government has done nothing about the bosses’ defiance. If they were serious about ending the super-exploitation of labour broking they would have hired thousands of new labour inspectors to enforce compliance.

When past concessions to workers become inconvenient the capitalist class will try and take them back. For example in 2018 new amendments to the Labour Relation Act were passed by the ANC government with the support of other capitalist political parties that make a legal strike more difficult to organise.

### **Economic dictatorship**

Democracy and the freedoms and rights mentioned have not been sufficient for the working class majority to end poverty, inequality and unemployment. If anything things are moving in the opposite direction. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The young age of South Africa’s democracy is not the issue. Across North America and Europe democracy is decades, even centuries old. But poverty and inequality continue to exist there too. The enormous burden that corruption places upon state institutions is likewise more symptom than cause. Corruption is endemic to capitalism and has been excused, dressed-up and justified in different ways as long as capitalism has existed (see *There Can Be No Capitalism without Corruption* and other material on the WASP website). Rather, there is a more fundamental contradiction between democracy and capitalism.

We have already seen that the bosses cannot allow workers a real say in the workplace. It would make exploitation impossible. But the same is true across the economy as a whole. This too must be placed beyond the control of the majority. The result is a limited capitalist democracy (or bourgeois

democracy as Marx called it) where institutions that appear highly democratic – one person, one vote, a parliament, a constitution, courts etc. – exist side by side with an *economic dictatorship* of the capitalist class. This contradiction demands strict limits on the democratic rights and individual freedoms of workers.

For example, imagine a group of 100 workers. They are unhappy that the time of their lunch hour has been changed. If one worker walks out alone the boss might complain, but he will likely agree it is their right to quit if they want to. Even if two, three, four or five workers did this. But if all 100 workers walk out together to demand that the boss changes their lunch hour back the boss will howl about an ‘illegal’ or ‘unprotected’ strike. He will say that workers are “holding him to ransom”. It is likely that the police will be called to deal with the workers. The boss may decide to fire every worker on the spot for ‘gross misconduct’.

From the point of view of the workers their actions were democratic. By walking-out they have exercised their right to protest. To make their views known they have used their freedom of speech and their freedom of association (i.e. to organise). But when the police arrive it is the workers who will be arrested, not the boss. From the point of view of the bosses and the defenders of capitalism it was ‘mob-rule’.

Of course workers can organise to defend themselves from the most arbitrary treatment. But democratic mass organisations like trade unions are a problem for the capitalist class’s economic dictatorship. So everything possible is done to strangle the class independence of trade unions and co-opt them within the framework of the capitalist state. From the bosses point of view the legal framework of the capitalist state is organised according to the principle, “keep your friends close and your enemies closer”.

On the surface South Africa appears to give organised workers and their trade unions significant status and power. For example, trade unions can appeal to the courts if an employer refuses to recognise them. Different collective bargaining forums allow trade unions to influence the wages of entire industries. But the price of the appearance of power is an unspoken agreement to 'play the game' according to the bosses' rules.

For example, as we have explained above, industries are divided into many rival companies. They are all competing with each other meaning huge waste. Will the representatives of the so-called 'neutral' capitalist state ever point their finger at this? Will they ever recommend that the state intervenes and forces the consolidation (i.e. merger) of an industry to maximise economies of scale, reduce waste and free the resources necessary to raise wages? If a trade union were to raise such a bold proposal they will be told that it is "outside the mandate" of the forum. Anything that truly challenges the bosses' control of the economy is off-limits.

Often the more generous a concession appears, the greater the deception it hides. For example, the constitution upholds the freedom of association – i.e. the right to organise – of both workers and employers. The right to strike is also recognised, though it is subject to heavy control. But the bosses' right to lock-out workers is also recognised. This means that the constitution assumes private capitalist ownership of the economy. The constitution's formal equality before the law is in reality a defence and recognition of the bosses' economic dictatorship and a cover-up of the huge inequality of power between exploiter and exploited.

Karl Marx explained that, "The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie [capitalist class]." Under capitalism the reality is that even the most 'democratic' state is not neutral in the class

struggle. The capitalist class uses it to defend their control of society. But to disguise this they present the state as an 'honest broker' between different but equal 'stakeholders'. Lenin pointed out that,

"A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell ... it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it."

*The State and Revolution, 1917*

But always, behind the 'democratic' appearance, lies the threat of the organised violence of the capitalist state. If the bosses are unable to keep us busy chasing our tails they will crack our heads. Indeed, the legal framework of capitalism allows the bosses to appeal to 'law and order' as a justification to suppress workers' struggles when they step outside of what the law sanctions – and the law sanctions only that which does not challenge capitalism.

### **Capitalist politics**

The capitalist political parties play an important role in this too. They act like there is no alternative to capitalism. If they do talk about an alternative to capitalism it is consciously left fuzzy and undefined with the idea encouraged that it will somehow be created via their party's control of the capitalist state.

The most radical capitalist political parties may talk about expropriation of land or nationalisation of key industries. But this does not mean they are calling for a challenge to capitalism *as a system*. For example, if expropriation of farms swaps white capitalist farmers for black capitalist farmers, private ownership of the economy

has not been changed. There has just been a re-division of ownership *within* the capitalist class. If nationalised industries are ‘owned’ by the capitalist state and run by capitalist politicians they will use nationalisation to promote and defend their class interests. For example, by subsidising privately owned industries, as Eskom does for the mine bosses by charging lower tariffs.

All the politicians and political parties that agree that capitalism is the ‘only’ way to run society ultimately have to accept and defend the bosses’ economic dictatorship. This is why the trade union movement cannot be neutral or stand aside from the question of politics. There are important

discussions taking place among organised workers on this issue. The question of Cosatu’s Alliance with the ANC is again rising to the surface. Within Saftu there is a debate about launching a workers party. WASP is of the firm view that the organised working class must be at the forefront of building a socialist mass workers party. Trade unions challenge the bosses’ control of the workplace every day by independent working class organisation. Why would we leave their political control of society unchallenged? The struggle against the bosses on the shop floor must be extended into every corner of society. (See *The Workers Party We Need* and other material on the WASP website.)

## PART II: THE TRADE UNION BUREAUCRACY

Workers often view capitalist politicians with suspicion even at the best of times. But the leaders of the trade unions are far closer to workers’ day-to-day lives. The bosses can have no better allies if those who lead the organisations that are meant to fight capitalist exploitation agree to defend it.

This requires weakening members’ control over their leaders; of making the leaders vulnerable to pressure from the bosses and shielding them from the pressure of the workers. Leon Trotsky explained that:

...the whole task of the bourgeoisie [capitalist class] consists in liquidating the trade unions as organs of the class struggle and substituting in their place the trade union bureaucracy as the organ of the leadership over the workers by the bourgeois state.

*Trade Unions in the Epoch of  
Imperialist Decay, 1940*

The co-option of leaders is not always done through corruption, though this is often an important part of it. Brown envelopes of

cash are in fact the least reliable method for co-opting the workers’ movement. If it is exposed the corrupt leader quickly loses influence over workers.

A far more reliable method is to change the outlook of workers’ leaders – for workers’ leaders to *convince themselves* that there is no alternative to capitalism. This outlook can be encouraged from the ‘harmless’ step of the shop steward attending the manager’s private Christmas party, to the integration of the unions into the capitalist state through the various bargaining forums, parliamentary committees, courts and ‘dispute resolution’ laws we have already mentioned.

All of this opens up workers’ leaders to the influence of an entirely different milieu (or environment). Here they are exposed to ‘sensible’ middle class opinion which agrees on the ‘proper place’ of trade unions in society – they can complain, protest even, but never challenge the foundations of capitalism. This is the viewpoint of those with certain privileges under capitalism. It is the milieu from which the bosses recruit the managers, HRs, lawyers, and

accountants that will sit across the table from shop stewards. These people are far removed from the mines, the factories, the workshops, the cleaning trolleys, the kitchens and security parades of raw class exploitation. What is out of sight is out of mind. From this middle class point of view capitalism may not be perfect but it works well enough *because it works for them*. The middle class plays an important role for capitalism. They help to dress-up and justify it as 'natural' and 'normal' – as 'just the way things are'.

The boardroom will be very strange environment for a shop steward newly elected and sent for a week of negotiations. It is easy to get lost in such a hostile landscape. Our shop steward will be told by capitalism's representatives that the existence of the class exploitation that yesterday he or she took for granted, is in fact all a big misunderstanding. The company is actually one big happy family working together for the mutual benefit of all. But returning to the shop floor and the day-to-day reality of class exploitation can keep shop stewards feet on the ground.

### Privileges

But the bosses find ways to try and stop workers' leaders' feet from ever landing back on the ground. The starting point for this co-option is encouraging privileges that no other worker could ever dream of – privileges enormously over-and-above what is actually required to be an effective workers' leader.

The struggle for workers' rights has always included correct demands for full-time shop stewards paid their normal wage by the boss. Workers rightly see it as a sign of progress when their union has the funds to open offices, hire full-time organisers and for certain elected leadership positions to become full-time posts. All of this is

necessary for building a strong trade union. For most, being the shop steward is the hardest and most demanding job there is in the workers' movement. Only the bravest and most self-sacrificing workers would even be willing to do it, normally pushed into the position because they have the confidence of other workers.

But the bosses' find ways to make progress in the strength of trade union organisation work for them too. The bosses 're-tool' measures originally necessary to build the workers' movement as an opportunity to co-opt it. So the shop steward is released permanently from the hard and boring work of the shop floor. He or she is given their own office, additional allowances, an expensive cell phone, a new car. The bosses of some companies automatically put shop stewards on management pay grades. The bosses try and create as much distance as possible between workers and their leaders in order to isolate the leaders and 'soften them up' to their point of view.

The granting of special privileges can be extended into the trade union structures by those whose appetites have grown with eating. They want to feel the 'social equals' of the middle class representatives they sit opposite in the boardroom. They want to present the union general secretary as equivalent to a CEO. So full-time officials' salaries and perks can grow and grow and grow. They are freed from using public transport because they can afford their own cars. They no longer have to rely on under-funded public hospitals or government schools for their children because they can go private. Eventually, they move out of working class communities and move in next door to the bosses and their managers in the suburbs.

These trade union leaders become lifted into the middle class. The milieu they are exposed to in the boardroom becomes the norm of their personal life too. They no longer move in working class circles or

mix with working class crowds. They start to view the world as the middle class does. They start to think that, “yes, capitalism is bad, but it is not that bad, after all, *it works for me now too*”.

The interests of such privileged trade union leaders are no longer the same as the interests of the workers. They want to enjoy their privileges. The class struggle can become a nuisance to them. If it threatens to get ‘out of hand’ it can even become a threat to their privileges – a strike could end in defeat and job losses damaging the union’s finances. This gives them an interest in limiting struggle – they become conservative and scared to ‘rock the boat’.

From here, it is not a great leap to start looking beyond their union’s risky ‘core business’ of the class struggle to all sorts of ‘get rich quick’ schemes such as union investment funds. These introduce severe conflicts of interest and tie trade unions ever more closely into dependence on capitalism. Trade unions cease to be the thorn in the side of the class enemy but become the ‘partners’ of big business and the launch pad for trade union leaders’ business careers. For example, chemical workers’ union CEPPAWU, alongside the Nactu federation, both became shareholders in Sasol in 2008 – a company they both had members in. The former CEPPAWU general secretary used fake documents to win contracts worth R300 million before his fraud was discovered. The Coastu-affiliated mineworkers’ union NUM has a long standing 50/50 partnership with the Chamber of Mines in Ubank – a short-term money lender, in effect a loan-shark, targeting mineworkers as its main customer base. This gave the NUM a vested interest in low wages as this would keep their lending services in high demand among poverty-stricken mineworkers.

When enough workers’ leaders have been co-opted in this manner, what started as necessary administration has become something else – *bureaucracy*. (The word

bureaucrat is French. It is derived from the French word for office - bureau. Bureaucrat therefore literally means ‘rule by the office’.) Whereas workers see trade unions as a vehicle to take forward their struggles for better wages and working conditions the trade union bureaucrat views them as the source of their privileges.

When bureaucracy becomes institutionalised (i.e. a permanent part of the ‘culture’ of a trade union) careerism takes root. The type of shop-steward we described earlier is pushed-out by those wanting to climb on the gravy train – opportunism replaces principle. This leads to destructive rivalries between unions to dominate an industry, collect workers deductions and control investment funds. Within unions a thuggish fight for positions can take hold. To create the space to play these games bureaucrats must suppress democracy and workers control and replace it with corruption, intimidation and even violence.

## Results

Now the bosses can let the workers’ leaders police the workers’ movement for them. This ‘outsourcing’ of the defence of capitalism is the best possible scenario for them. What better friends could the bosses have than shop stewards, trade union officials and trade union leaders who do not believe there is any alternative to capitalism? They will enter every negotiation, campaign and strike *looking to compromise*. With no belief that anyone other than the capitalist class can run society trade union bureaucrats run in terror when they are accused of ‘politicising’ a struggle. They easily accept the limitations that the capitalist state places on the workers’ movement and instead of challenging it they beg for its co-operation.

There are however limits to how far this agenda of co-option and control can be pushed. A trade union is nothing without

its members. Ultimately even the worst trade union bureaucracy needs to keep the workers' movement alive as the source of their privileges. Although some trade union bureaucracies have stretched this to its limits by basing their privileges more and more on the union investment funds we have already mentioned and other corporate sponsorship. But they can never completely break their dependence on workers without the union ceasing to be a union.

Despite all of these pressures, many shop stewards, trade union officials and leaders never surrender to the bosses or capitulate to bureaucratic pressures. But there is not a single trade union or federation that exists that is not vulnerable to co-option. The danger comes from the very nature of capitalism. But it is possible for workers to defend against it. This requires organisation around the programme of revolutionary trade unionism. It is a programme that has a clear alternative to capitalism that can help workers avoid the traps created for them.

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## (4) SOCIALISM & REVOLUTIONARY TRADE UNIONISM

The heart of revolutionary trade unionism is recognising that there is an alternative to capitalism and understanding what that alternative is – *socialism*. Instead of settling for never-ending conflict with the bosses, with the occasional unstable compromise, revolutionary trade unionism poses the necessity of linking day-to-day workplace struggles to the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

### Socialist economy

The seeds of a future socialist society have been planted within capitalism in the course of its own development. Private ownership of the economy gives the bosses' the 'right' to heap the wealth created by workers onto their own plates. In a socialist economy individuals would not be allowed to own the 'commanding heights' of the economy. The banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and the big businesses would be nationalised under democratic workers' control.

Monopoly capitalism has already prepared the ground for this. The development of share ownership and stock exchanges has, in

a sense, already socialised ownership within the capitalist class. Shares can be bought and owned by any capitalist, anywhere in the world. Often they don't even know what they own – and they don't care as long as the profits keep flowing. The value of the 300+ companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange was R14 trillion in 2016 and just the biggest 25 companies accounted for R10 trillion of that. Capitalist share ownership of the commanding heights of the economy must be replaced with *socialist public ownership*.

The competition between capitalist companies and the allocation of resources according to 'the market' creates economic crises and unemployment, at an international level it can lead to war. In a socialist economy competition and economic chaos would be replaced with co-operation and democratic economic planning.

Again, capitalism has already prepared the ground for us. The monopolies that dominate the economy already employ and organise workers in huge numbers according to detailed economic plans. But they leave the job half-finished. They plan production and distribution *within*

companies but not *between* companies. Price-fixing and ‘anti-competition’ scandals are an admission by the bosses themselves that economic planning makes sense. In a socialist economy, instead of Shoprite organising the work of their 130,000 workers in one isolated silo, and Pic N Pay organising the work of their 80,000 workers in another, the entire food processing, retail and distribution sector would be organised according to one democratic economic plan. This would allow for a massive reduction in waste and duplicated resources and ensure that the entire country was fed, clothed and able to access affordable household goods. In turn every sector of the economy would be integrated into one national democratic plan of production.

But a socialist economy cannot reach its full potential within the borders of one country. The work of building a socialist economy is a worldwide task. Capitalism has already created a world market and a vast international division of labour. No country that wants to enjoy all the benefits of modern society can retreat from it. For example, South Africa itself is the world’s top platinum producer. Platinum is used in many industrial processes and to make the catalytic converters in cars. More is produced than could ever be used domestically in South Africa. On the other hand, there is no oil in South Africa. Oil is used to make petrol and anything that contains plastic. Without the world economy we would have mountains of platinum that we cannot use and no petrol or plastic! Every country will have its own examples of its dependence on the world economy. In the 21st century it is inconceivable that any society could ‘un-plug’ from it.

Driving the development of the world economy has been ever more ingenious industrial methods and techniques. The most modern must be deployed upon huge scales to realise their potential. For example, the Chinese steel industry, using the most

developed methods, can already supply the world’s entire demand for steel. But a dozen other countries have big steel industries too. It is only capitalism that could have a ‘crisis’ of *over*-production for such a basic and necessary product as steel. The results are trade wars, cuts to production and job losses as capitalist states defend the profitability of their ‘own’ industries. But what possible interest can workers either in China or any other steel producing country have in this competition? The world working class must unite across borders in a joint struggle for socialism and in doing so lay the foundations for an internationally planned economy.

These measures are the foundation of a socialist economy. Socialism will allow the wealth created by workers to be used to benefit the whole of society. Wages can be raised and jobs created. Decent and modern houses, clinics, hospitals and schools can be built and high quality services organised. Ending poverty will enormously reduce crime and other social problems, including racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia. Culture and life-long education will be developed. Everyone will have the chance to achieve their potential.

### **Socialist democracy**

In the trade union struggle for greater democratic control of the workplace are the seeds of a future workers’ democracy able to run a socialist economy. The trade unions can play a role in preparing workers to take over the running of society. In the workplace trade unions challenge the bosses’ control. Shop stewards intervene to defend the jobs of workers, to stop unfair work practices, or block arbitrary changes to shifts. As the trade union movement develops elected and accountable shop stewards committees must push for more and more control in the workplace – even over hiring and firing, the organisation of shifts etc.

Trade union education must not be limited to teaching shop stewards how to follow laws that ultimately defend capitalist exploitation, necessary as this is. It must also teach workers about the history of trade unions, organising strategies and political education on all of the methods the bosses use to control and co-opt the trade union movement, including their efforts to divide workers by gender, race, sexuality, language and nationality. Trade union education must go further still and teach workers about administration, logistics and the industrial and scientific techniques of production. This work can begin to lay the foundations for a future workers' state where the key economic decisions in society can be taken democratically by workers themselves. The capitalist state's threat of violence that hangs over our heads every day can be abolished.

Full employment under socialism will allow us to reduce the length of the work week, without loss of pay, and create the time workers will need to run society. There is no reason we cannot organise a four day or even a three day week, without loss of pay, and use one of these days for democratic discussion, oversight and planning for the future.

***This is the programme of revolutionary trade unionism – the preparation of the working class for the struggle of the socialist transformation of society. It is from this clear political foundation that revolutionary trade unionists' commitment to building a class-independent and united movement of militant, democratic worker-controlled trade unions flows.***

### **Principles from programme**

Leon Trotsky wrote about the saying "the end justifies the means". He rejected the idea that the two could be separated, pointing out that "seeds of wheat must be sown in order to yield an ear of wheat." Trotsky explained

what this means for revolutionaries' attitude to building the workers' movement. He said:

Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means ... which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality [i.e. middle class/capitalist 'common sense'] and its democratic echoers [i.e. defenders of narrow capitalist 'democracy'], imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle.

*Their Morals and Ours, 1938*

It is from our clear understanding of the socialist alternative to capitalism, our 'end' in the language of Trotsky, that our principled commitment to building a class-independent and united movement of militant, democratic and worker-controlled trade unions comes. Socialism cannot be built behind the backs of the working class but only **by** the working class, with the organised workers of the trade unions in the front line. Anything that prevents or limits workers from preparing themselves to play their 'historic role' is in conflict with the programme of revolutionary trade unionism. That is why building such a trade union movement is written into the DNA of revolutionary trade unionism. It is necessary for the development of the working class's socialist consciousness and their role in the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

So if revolutionary trade unionists are the most determined fighters and incorruptible leaders, it is only because they stand firmly on the programme of revolutionary trade unionism. It is the programme that workers must place their confidence in; confidence in individuals must only be given to the extent that they represent and defend the programme.

## **Militant fighters**

Trade union bureaucrats who want to limit struggle will whisper to workers, “look at these revolutionaries, they only care about the socialist *future*, they do not really care about the problems you have *today*”. But the opposite is true. The programme of revolutionary trade unionism prepares all those who stand on it to be the most militant fighters.

Going all-out to win every struggle is of critical importance because most people learn by experience. Above all, nothing educates workers’ about the nature of society, or builds confidence in their own power to change it, more than a victorious struggle. Further, every struggle that wins higher wages, more secure jobs, or longer paid-leave strengthens the working class by easing their struggle for survival. This gives workers more time and energy to organise and plan campaigns, take part in political education etc.

Armed with the socialist alternative to capitalist exploitation, revolutionary trade unionists do not enter struggle to balance the interests of the bosses and the workers. They enter struggle 100% on the side of the workers. Instead of running from the accusation that strikes are being ‘politicised’, revolutionary trade unionists go out of their way to do just that. Every struggle, no matter how small, or limited in its demands, must educate workers about the nature of capitalism and their role in transforming society. Revolutionary trade unionists will push themselves to their limits to guarantee victories in all day-to-day struggles because they do not see them as separate from the struggle for socialism but as necessary preparation for it.

## **Compromises**

That does not mean that revolutionary trade unionists are reckless, ‘strike happy’, or

think that every struggle can immediately be turned into a challenge to capitalism. This is a childish criticism sometimes made by trade union bureaucrats. Sometimes a compromise is unavoidable. Lenin answered such lazy criticisms when he explained that:

The task of a truly revolutionary party is not to declare that it is impossible to renounce all compromises, but to be able, through all compromises, when they are unavoidable, to remain true to its principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the mass of the people for victory in the revolution.

*On Compromises, 1917*

For the trade union bureaucrat with no alternative to capitalism, a compromise means making a deal with the bosses behind the backs of the workers and then lying through their teeth to try and ‘sell it’. But for revolutionaries, an unavoidable compromise with the bosses can only ever be understood as a tactical retreat and an opportunity to honestly educate workers. Revolutionary trade unionism has no use for deception even in defeat. Lies cannot educate workers about what future victory will require, either in the immediate struggle or in the struggle for socialism.

## **Class independence**

A clear understanding of the role of the capitalist state means revolutionary trade unionists refuse to be co-opted and integrated into it. Rather, they fiercely defend independent class organisation. Our attitude towards the capitalist state and its institutions must be a purely tactical one.

For example, parliament cannot abolish capitalism – it is part-and-parcel of the capitalist state which exists to defend capitalism. But through history this has not

stopped workers from using the platform to win reforms that can improve the lives of the working class but at the same time using it to expose the limitations of capitalist democracy. Revolutionary trade unionism takes the same approach to the capitalist state's different bargaining forums and labour courts. These will never abolish class exploitation. But they can be used to win some concessions and mount a basic defence of workers. This must be done at the same time as exposing their limitations and their role in defending capitalism as a system. Ultimately, if unjust laws are a barrier to the success of workers' struggles then mass campaigns of defiance must be organised.

### Democracy and workers' control

Genuinely democratic trade union structures where workers are free to discuss, debate, reflect, hear different sides of an argument and exercise real control over their representatives and leaders are vital to maintain class independence.

Democratic structures act as forums for workers to discuss and debate their experiences of struggle. Such discussions assist workers to draw important lessons and in doing so gain a deeper understanding of the nature of capitalism and their own role in the socialist transformation of society. It is totally alien to revolutionary trade unionists to tolerate the limiting of democratic structures or their bureaucratic manipulation because this will limit workers' political and ideological growth.

It would be as much of a problem if revolutionary trade unionists tried to impose our own programme bureaucratically. The working class cannot be tricked or manoeuvred into embracing the struggle for socialism. To the extent that a majority of workers continue to have illusions in capitalism, or do not yet have confidence

that socialism is 'realistic', revolutionary trade unionist's campaign for the 'hearts and minds' of workers is still incomplete. We would only be fooling ourselves to pretend otherwise. Rather, it is necessary to analyse the cause of those continuing illusions and find slogans, campaigns and organise education that can help workers to overcome them.

Further, the exercise of genuine control by workers over their *own* organisations is vital training for their future role in running a socialist society. Powerful democratic worker-controlled trade unions that are more and more capable of limiting the power of the bosses and controlling the workplace lead workers to important and practical political conclusions. With the experience of growing power and control over at least some parts of their lives it will become normal for workers to ask themselves the question: "if we can run our own organisations, and via them influence and even control the workplace, why can we not do away with the bosses entirely and run society ourselves?" The development of a trade union in a workplace begins to pose the question – who really controls this workplace? If this question is posed simultaneously in a majority of workplaces then an even bigger question is on the agenda – which *class* controls *society*?

But if workers are limited and blocked by an unaccountable bureaucracy in their 'own' organisations, in a mirror of the way they are blocked by the boss from democratic control in the workplace, confidence in their own powers will be undermined. Unaccountable leaders and bureaucratic structures only reinforce what the bosses preach – the subordinate role of the working class. For revolutionary trade unionism, workers' control over their own organisations is preparation for the working class's control over society as a whole.

## **Administration vs. bureaucracy**

Revolutionary trade unionism arms us with a solid understanding of the causes of bureaucracy – which is the source of the suppression of democracy and workers' control in trade unions. The bosses co-opt workers' leaders through privileges that lift them out of the working class. By understanding this we are armed to resist it.

Revolutionary trade unionism calls on workers to demand that the organisation of vital *administration*, including the payment of salaries to organisers and certain elected officials, does not develop beyond what is necessary for it to be effective. This must of course take account of the fact that the payment of salaries was originally intended to relieve some of the financial pressure that working class people face. It is counter-productive if workers' leaders are always hungry and wondering where their next meal will come from, or if they are distracted because of the stress of not knowing how they will pay their rent. Such grinding poverty can itself be a temptation to give in to corruption out of desperation. Every union and every industry can determine what is realistic and what is appropriate for their circumstances.

Sometimes revolutionaries will win positions in unions where a culture of bureaucracy has already taken hold. Taking-up such posts will be a necessary part of the struggle to transform the trade unions. Those that do so will find themselves receiving sky-high salaries and be given the possibility of claiming endless expenses. In such circumstances a revolutionary trade unionist must only take part of that salary for their personal use and organise their expenses in an open way to prove to workers that all claims are legitimate.

## **The revolutionary party**

Every programme needs a vehicle to both

protect it and to spread it. For us trade unions alone are not an adequate vehicle. A revolutionary party is also necessary. Trotsky explained why when he said:

The question of the relationships between the party, which represents the proletariat [working class] as it should be, and the trade unions, which represent the proletariat as it is, is the most fundamental question of revolutionary Marxism.

*Communism and Syndicalism*, 1929

Trotsky is pointing out that in 'normal times' the capitalist class uses its control of society – the state, the media, education etc. – to encourage the working class to accept their exploitation. All sorts of reactionary and backward ideas are encouraged to keep workers divided and ignorant. Ideologies that justify capitalism and try to rubbish socialism are transmitted into the trade union movement from the capitalist class via privileged trade union bureaucrats. Supporters of revolutionary trade unionism need to be organised to withstand these pressures – that form of organisation can only be a revolutionary party.

A revolutionary party works to win the working class to a revolutionary socialist programme in every theatre of struggle – the workplaces, the communities, the schools and the campuses – and not just in one country, but worldwide. A revolutionary socialist programme is also the necessary starting point to build broader working class unity. This is because socialism is a generalisation of the interests of the entire working class.

Under capitalism, the bosses constantly try and divide us. Sexism, racism, nationalism, homophobia and xenophobia are encouraged. They hope we will fight each other over their crumbs. But socialism can unite workers across these divisions. A revolutionary socialist programme does not

accept that crumbs are all that is possible. It explains that there is in fact enough for everyone – it is only capitalism’s system of private ownership and production for profit that means poverty and inequality. To end capitalism the working class must unite in the struggle to create socialism.

To guarantee that revolutionary trade unionism takes root in the trade unions it is necessary to have the goal of winning the entire working class to a revolutionary socialist programme. The whole working class united against the bosses and their system will be unstoppable.

### **Revolutionary work in the unions**

WASP is a revolutionary party. We exist to win the working class to a revolutionary socialist programme that arms them for the struggle to transform society. In the trade unions we build party caucuses around the ideas outlined in this booklet. Trotsky went so far as to say that any revolutionary who did not see the importance of such work had “lost touch with reality”. How revolutionary trade unionists win over the broad majority of workers in the trade unions as the class struggle unfolds is a detailed tactical discussion that varies in every workplace, union and federation. The main role of our caucuses is to develop a way forward for every group of workers. But with the clear principles of revolutionary trade unionism we are armed for that struggle.

The organised political work of a revolutionary party like WASP has nothing in common with the abusive treatment of the trade unions by the capitalist political parties. Wherever they walk in the workers’ movement they leave division and conflict. That is because in one way or another any party that does not have an alternative to capitalism cannot genuinely express the interests of the working class, no matter how radical their rhetoric may sometimes

be. Rather the activists and leaders of such parties only view the trade unions as machines to generate votes for their attempt to win control of the capitalist state. Toward this goal they are willing to resort to undemocratic manoeuvres and secret manipulations.

But WASP is not trying to win control of the capitalist state and take over the management of capitalism. We are fighting to end capitalism! This means there is a huge difference in how we approach work in the trade unions. Trotsky explained that revolutionaries:

... have no reason, either in their ideology or their organisation, to hide themselves behind the trade unions. They do not misuse the trade unions for machinations behind the scenes. They do not split the trade unions when they are a minority in them. They do not in any way disturb the independent development of the trade unions, and they support trade union struggles with all their strength. But at the same time [the revolutionary party] reserves the right of expressing its opinion on all questions in the working class movement including the trade union question, to criticise trade union tactics, and to make definite proposals to the trade unions, which, on their part are at liberty to accept or reject these proposals. The party strives to win the confidence of the working class, above all, of that section organised in the trade unions.

*A Necessary Discussion with Our  
Syndicalist Comrades, 1923*

As we have explained throughout this pamphlet revolutionary trade unionism is not only in harmony with a militant, democratic and worker-controlled trade union movement – it demands it!

*We call on every worker, shop steward, trade union official and leader to take their stand on the programme of revolutionary trade unionism. Join our party, involve*

*yourself in our caucuses and work with us to transform the trade union movement, unite the working class and achieve victory in the struggle for socialism.*

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## WHAT WE STAND FOR

- Revolutionary in word AND revolutionary in deed! Campaign in every federation and every union for a programme of revolutionary trade unionism – link workers’ struggles on day-to-day issues to the struggle for socialism.
- One country, one federation – build the principled unity of the trade union movement on the basis of class independence from the bosses, democracy and workers’ control.
- Build efficient administration – struggle against bureaucracy and careerism! For democracy and worker-control. Trade union leaders are not CEOs! Salary and wage control of all trade union officials determined democratically sector-by-sector. Abolish trade union investment funds – turn investments into savings for strike and solidarity funds!
- Build co-ordinated campaigns of rolling mass action on all issues facing the working class. Build industry- and sector-wide action-committees that unite the workers of all federations, unions, and those not members of unions in campaigns of rolling mass action. Lock-out the bosses in non-complying industries through workplace occupations. Demand nationalisation under workers control.
- No trust in the institutions of the capitalist state! Defend the class independence of the trade unions. Campaign to expose the bosses’ economic dictatorship and the limitations of capitalist democracy. Mass defiance of unjust laws that stop workers defending themselves.
- Nationalise under democratic working class and community control the banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and big businesses. A publicly owned and democratically planned socialist economy to meet the needs of all and not the profits of the capitalists.
- Forge the fighting unity of the working class in a party of mass struggle. Build a socialist mass workers party to unite the struggles of the workplaces, the communities and the youth as a vital step toward the creation of a mass revolutionary party
- Prepare the working class to lead the socialist transformation of society! Join the Workers and Socialist Party. Organise WASP caucuses and campaign to win every trade union to the programme of revolutionary trade unionism.



# Political Education Programme



## Topic 1

**Introduction to Marxism:  
who were Marx & Engels and what did they say?**

**Reading 1:** Marx the Revolutionary (MWT)

**Reading 2:** The Three Sources and Three  
Component Parts of Marxism (Lenin)

**Reading 3:** Ninety Years of the  
Communist Manifesto (Trotsky)

**Reading 4:** The Communist Manifesto,  
Chapters 1 and 2 (Marx & Engels)

## Topic 2

**How do Marxists understand the world?  
Marxism's dialectical and historical materialism**

**Reading 1:** Dialectical Materialism: the Foundation of  
Revolutionary Theory (WASP)

**Reading 2:** The Preface to "A Contribution to the  
Critique of Political Economy" (Marx)

**Reading 3:** The Materialist Conception of History (Engels)

**Reading 4:** How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,  
Chapter 2 (Rodney)

## Topic 3

**How is the working class exploited?  
Introduction to Marxist economics**

**Reading 1:** Capitalism's Big Con:  
Understanding Marxist Economics (CWI)

**Reading 2:** Value, Price and Profit (Marx)

**Reading 3:** Capital, selected chapters (Marx)

## Topic 4

**Social grants & police brutality  
– the Marxist theory of the State**

**Reading 1:** The State (Lenin)

**Reading 2:** The State and Revolution, extracts (Lenin)

**Reading 3:** Should We Participate in  
Bourgeois Parliaments? (Lenin)

## Topic 5

**How can we win the working class  
to revolutionary socialism?**

**Trotsky's Transitional Programme**

**Reading 1:** The Transitional Programme (Trotsky)

**Reading 2:** Founding the Fourth International (CWI)

**Reading 3:** On the Radicalisation of the Masses (Trotsky)

## Topic 6

**When the working class took power  
The lessons of the Russian Revolution**

**Reading 1:** The Russian Revolution and the  
Rise of Stalinism (MWT)

**Reading 2:** The Lessons of October (Trotsky)

## Topic 7

**The rise and fall of Stalinism: how and why did the  
bureaucratic dictatorship fail?**

**Reading 1:** The Rise of Stalinism, (MWT)

**Reading 2:** The Nature of the Soviet Regime, (MWT)

**Reading 3:** The Crisis of the Stalinist States, (MWT)

**Reading 4:** From Perestroika to Capitalist Restoration (CWI)

## Topic 8

**The socialist revolution in the neo-colonial world  
– Trotsky's Permanent Revolution vs the SACP's  
National Democratic Revolution**

**Reading 1:** The Theory of the Permanent Revolution (MWT)

**Reading 2:** The "New" SACP's Explanation  
of Stalinism (MWT)

**Reading 3:** Results & Prospects (Trotsky)

**Reading 4:** The Right of Nations to  
Self-Determination (Lenin)

## Topic 9

**Lenin's theory of imperialism: why was Africa  
colonized and how is it exploited today?**

**Reading 1:** Imperialism: the Highest  
Stage of Capitalism (Lenin)

**Reading 2:** The Colonial Revolution (MWT)

**Reading 3:** A History of Pan-African Revolt,  
excerpts (CLR James)

**Reading 4:** Draft Theses on the National and Colonial  
Questions (Lenin)

## Topic 10

**Apartheid and the liberation struggle**

**Reading 1:** The Nature and Tasks of the Revolution (MWT)

**Reading 2:** Lessons of the 1950s (MWT)

**Reading 3:** The Soweto Uprising (MWT/WASP)

**Reading 4:** Tasks of the South African Revolution (MWT)

**Reading 5:** Letter to South African Revolutionaries (Trotsky)

## Topic 11

**Africanism vs. Marxism**

**Reading 1:** Class & Race: Marxism, Racism  
and the Class Struggle (WASP)

**Reading 2:** Africanism vs. Marxism (WASP)

**Reading 3:** The Third International After Lenin,  
selected chapters (Trotsky)

**Reading 4:** African Socialism Revisited (Nkrumah)

## Topic 12

**The revolutionary party & democratic centralism –  
organising a Bolshevik party**

**Reading 1:** Our Organising Principles (WASP)

**Reading 2:** A Letter to a French Syndicalist (Trotsky)

**Reading 3:** The Class, the Party and the Leadership (Trotsky)

**Reading 4:** Tactics & Revolution,  
selected articles (Lenin & Trotsky)



# WASP

Workers & Socialist Party

## What we stand for

### Work & Income

1. Decent jobs for all – end unemployment through a massive public works programme of socially-useful jobs including the building of houses, roads, schools and hospitals; struggle for a living wage of R12 500 per month for all full-time workers; end outsourcing, labour broking and make all contract workers permanent. Organise the unorganised.
2. For a 30 hour working week and the sharing out of work with no loss of pay to address unemployment, improve workers' quality of life and lay the basis for workers' control of the economy
3. For a basic income grant of R8 000 for all those not in work – unemployed, pensioners, disabled and struggle veterans

### Service delivery

4. For free, sufficient and accessible public services for all; stop cut-offs and evictions
5. End homelessness with a mass public works programme to build decent homes for all those in need, roads and free, accessible and sufficient electricity, water, sanitation and social services for all
6. For publicly funded, free, accessible and high quality education for all from nursery to university; cancel student debt and end financial and academic exclusions
7. For publicly funded and free, accessible and high quality health care for all run under the democratic control of patients, communities and health workers; nationalise the private health providers, insurers and pharmaceutical companies
8. For an affordable, efficient and integrated public transport system; scrap e-tolls
9. For a mass public waste recycling programme linked to creating sustainable and quality jobs

### Economy

10. Nationalise under democratic working class and community control the banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and big businesses.
11. A publicly owned and democratically planned socialist economy to meet the needs of all and not the profits of the capitalists.

### The Land

12. Nationalise the 36,000 commercial farms that control 95% of agricultural land; support and debt cancellation for small and subsistence farmers
13. Democratically elected community committees to determine the use of non-agricultural land – home-owner occupiers and small business premises exempt

14. Rapid re-direction of energy generation toward renewable sources; redirection of polluting industries and agriculture with retraining and guaranteed jobs for all workers; no fracking or new nuclear or coal-fired power generation

### Fighting for rights

15. End the racist legacy of apartheid by ending the real capitalist economic foundations upon which racism rests. Transfer genuine economic and political power to the predominantly black working class majority through nationalisation under working class control. No to the ANC's elitist capitalist Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies.
16. Joint struggle against xenophobia and racism; trade unions must organise immigrant workers
17. Women and men fight together against gender-based violence and rape and for gender equality in every sphere of society, including equal pay for equal work, access to jobs, housing, free pre-school for all to give women genuine freedom to end abusive relationships
18. United struggle and solidarity to end hate crimes against LGBTI people

### United struggle for socialism

19. One country, one federation – build the principled unity of the trade union movement on the basis of class independence from the bosses, democracy and workers' control. Campaign in every federation and union for a programme of revolutionary trade unionism – linking workers' struggles on day-to-day issues to the struggle for socialism.
20. Build the Socialist Youth Movement as part of the struggle to create a mass, revolutionary movement of working class youth and students
21. Unite and coordinate the service delivery protests under one banner with a common programme of demands; build a country-wide socialist civic federation
22. Forge the fighting unity of the working class in a party of mass struggle. Build a socialist mass workers party to unite the struggles of the workplaces, the communities and the youth as a vital step toward the creation of a mass revolutionary party
23. Build the Workers and Socialist Party as the nucleus of a mass revolutionary party
24. For workers' democracy and a socialist government based on democratic working class and community committees
25. For a socialist SA, a socialist Africa and a socialist world

***For further explanation and expansion please read our website***