

Potential for working class unity in new mass party

The working class must seize the opportunity!

Not since the advent of democracy has the crisis of capitalism and its political parties revealed itself as starkly as it is now. Despite the ANC government's measures, directed by domestic and international capital, matters are only getting worse. The claims of the stimulus package with no new money and more austerity, the pitiful investment pledges and the job summit promises are all contradicted by reality. Ramaphosa's budget in effect tipped the economy into recession. Unemployment is now at historic levels edging towards ten million. The bosses are not making any plans to invest or create jobs. Economic growth projections are repeatedly being revised downwards.

The crises in all the major parties – the ANC, DA and increasingly the EFF – are rooted in the reality that capitalism is in a dead end. It must be overthrown. Only the working class has the interest and the capacity to abolish capitalism and lead society towards socialism.

The economic and political crisis underlines the importance of the declarations of the Working Class Summit (WCS) that Saftu convened in July which were endorsed by the federation's October Central Committee. The summit of 147 working class organisations (see WASP website) adopted a declaration that *"a clear majority agreed on a need to build an independent, democratic and revolutionary working-class political party..."*. It further agreed that this party must stand for working class power and socialism.

The Saftu Central Committee *"...agreed in principle that creation of the working class party is of critical importance..."* It emphasised *"...that in the current capitalist crises, the only way forward is through building a Workers Party."* We agree and welcome this statement. It reaffirms the necessity for the working class to decisively enter the political battlefield.

Until now, the working class has reacted to the growing economic and political crisis by mass protests on the ground and mass abstention, or tactical voting to punish the ANC, on the political plane. Now, for the first time in the democratic era, the working class has the opportunity to unite its struggles on the ground – in the workplaces, the communities and on the education campuses – and to enter the struggle on the political plane, united, with its own platform and programme of action.

Of crucial importance is Saftu's and the WCS's recognition that the primary task is to unite the working class. The creation of a workers party belongs to the entire working class and cannot be the exclusive property of just one section of it. The Summit represented the first steps in assembling the forces capable of uniting the working class in its hundreds of thousands. This is enough to begin.

Party of struggle

Any new party must first and foremost be a party of struggle. The working class is already moving. Workplace strikes and community protests are at record high levels. A new party must connect with these struggles and help to unite them. Both the WCS and Saftu declarations recognise this. It must be this side that is given the overwhelming emphasis in building the new party.

Implicit in the WCS declaration is a recognition of the necessity for a federal structure – one that allows existing working class organisations to affiliate whilst maintaining their own identity, including revolutionary political parties and community organisations. This can allow open and democratic discussions and debates of different working class and revolutionary ideologies. WASP will put forward our views about what the creation of socialism will require and others must do the same.

Federalism does not have to be a 'once and forever' principle. But we believe it is a necessary starting point to assure the already existing different political and ideological groupings and community organisations that they are equal participants in a process to create something new together.

Ultimately, it will be the new party's experience of struggle that will do most to clarify ideas. The new party must be armed with a programme of action on wages, job creation, service delivery and housing, healthcare and education if it is to connect with the mass of working class people.

2019 elections

We believe it is possible to use the upcoming 2019 elections to build momentum for the new party. It does not need to be a 'finished product' beforehand. An election campaign can be an act in the creation of the party. Saftu and the WCS organisations are capable of creating an inclusive and democratic process for this. Even a handful of MPs clearly proclaiming for socialism and working class power could electrify the working class. The platform could be used to convene the founding congress of the party with an appeal to every workplace and working class community to send delegates.

Saftu's follow-up strike demanding a R12,500 minimum wage and against the attacks on the right to strike is planned for the first quarter of 2019 – ahead of the elections – it must place the creation of a workers party at the centre of that struggle.

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