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A CRITICAL COMMENT ON THE WASP

The call for the formation of a mass workers' movement is in tune with the present conditions of struggle in our country. The appropriateness of such a call, however, should not be confused with the historical process of its actual, practical formation. Unfortunately the launch of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) is short-circuiting the organic process of the formation of such a mass political movement.

Why appropriate?

There is a general understanding amongst progressive militants that the uprisings of the mine and farm workers marked a decisive turning point in the class struggle in our country. Their dramatic entry onto the industrial and political stage fundamentally reordered the class relations in our country. Now for the first time since 1994, the political and social forces are available for the emergence of a new mass political movement. It showed that the discontent of the working class with the current political order runs extremely deep. This deep-seated discontent is fuelling the resistance against the neo-liberal agenda of the ANC government and continually throwing up the forces of resistance.

The mass strike wave of last year thus did not come out of the blue. It encapsulated the militant and determined struggles of the communities and social movements of the past decade or so. One can say that the miners and farm workers drew their inspiration and determination to resist from this decade-long chain of struggles. Further for the first time we had a real organic interaction between workers and communities. Both struggles were marked by wide-spread community support, especially the farm workers'



strike. Unpacking some of the dynamics of the miners uprising one can see that it rapidly took on overtly political undertones and became also a struggle against the ANC government.

The political rupture between the masses and the ruling class was given further impetus by these uprisings. This political rupture has been long in making through the resistance of the communities. The miners and farm workers deepened the crisis of legitimacy of the ruling class. Presently within the country there is no political authority or entity that can appeal to the working class to accept the imperatives of capitalist accumulation. The masses have had enough of poverty and empty promises of a better life. For them a better life will come through their struggles.

In the country we know that the political rule of the capitalist class is exercised and maintained through the

political parties (in particular the ANC), trade union movement (COSATU), NEDLAC, the law and order apparatus and other regulatory institutions like the CCMA. None of these institutions are able to bring about any stability and reason among the working class. Many formations of the masses have concluded that the ANC and DA are two sides of the same capitalist coin. COSATU lost the respect of workers and is caught in the web of managing the contradictions of capitalism.

This alignment of class forces places the imperative of a new working class political movement on the agenda of the class struggle.

Why short-circuiting?

Between the call for a mass political organisation and its actual realisation in practice there exists a historical process of struggle for political and ideological

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ILRIG website — www.ilrig.org

EGYPT: ON THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION?

In February 2011, people in Egypt rose up and forced Mubarak and his corrupt ministers to leave office. With this, people involved in the uprising, whether Tahrir Square protestors or striking workers, expected their lives to improve, wages to be raised, and direct democracy established. Unfortunately, the ruling class had other ideas and since 2011 it has been trying to blunt the gains people have made through struggle. Nonetheless, large sections of the working class have once again risen up, and are taking their struggles even further: for many the demand is not only the removal of corrupt officials but genuine equality and freedom. As such a full-scale class war is underway in Egypt. This article traces the events around this, including how strikes and protests have intensified in 2013.

The ruling class tries to blunt revolution

When Mubarak was ousted, the military stepped in immediately to shore-up the state and capitalism. Within weeks, it took complete control of the running of the state and began cracking down on protestors to stop the prospect of a social revolution ever becoming a possibility. Top military officials also tried to put policies in place to further capital's interests. In fact, the Egyptian military generals are capitalists in their own right and, through the companies they own, they control up to 35% of the economy. The working class, however, did not take this lying down. A new wave of strikes and protests broke out against military rule, and pressure forced the military to implement promised elections in 2012.

While agreeing to implement elections, top military officials, however, began looking for allies to share power with to stabilise the situation in favour of the ruling class. By 2012 they had found those allies in the Muslim Brotherhood.

Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power

The Muslim Brotherhood, which was banned under Mubarak, initially supported the Tahrir Square protests. Many of the Muslim Brotherhood's leading figures are, however, prominent capitalists. Under pressure from the uprisings, the military struck a deal with these leading figures and began to make plans to incorporate them into the state.

The military wanted a deal as they knew the Muslim Brotherhood had some

support amongst the working class and could use this to try and blunt the protests. The military also suspected that due to this support the Muslim Brotherhood would win a large part of the vote if an election was called. An agreement was struck, which saw the military allowing elections in return for the Muslim Brotherhood ending their support for the protests and agreeing to combat them. The Muslim Brotherhood in the end won the elections, although it did not get a majority, and its leader, Mohammed Morsi, became president. With this, the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership were drawn into the state to share power with the military. Many people, though, viewed the elections as a farce, and almost 50% did not vote as they suspected that their interests would not be met under the type of 'democracy' being offered.

The Muslim Brotherhood, with the military's backing, soon revealed its agenda once in the state. Almost immediately, subsidies for petrol were slashed. Planned cuts in food, water and electricity subsidies were also announced. Worse still, the possibilities of a new round of privatisation and an increase in sales taxes were mooted.

The military, state officials and Muslim Brotherhood suspected that large sections of the working class would resist these plans. As a result new attempts were made to crack down on activists. A new constitution went as far as omitting basic rights for workers and women. Morsi tried to build on these authoritarian actions when he granted himself, as president, unlimited powers in November 2012.

The working class fights back

Workers, students, the unemployed and the majority of women were outraged and protests erupted once again in late 2012. Some people that formerly supported the Muslim Brotherhood also left it, disillusioned with its policies. Under pressure, Morsi reversed the decree granting himself unlimited powers. Growing poverty, a lack of true democracy, and the continued abuse of workers and women, however, meant the protests did not end. By January 2013 protests and strikes against the state and economic inequality had spread across the country. Many people in these protests were demanding direct democracy, food, better wages, and women's equality. Protestors in the city of Mahalla went as far as throwing the governor out and under popular assemblies and committees they declared impudence from the state.

The intensity of the protests increased even further in February 2013 revolving around the state's decision to execute 21 football fans, mostly from the city of Port Said, accused of orchestrating a massacre in 2012. According to the state, these fans had attacked opposing supporters of the Al Ahly club at a football match. Most people, including many Al Ahly fans, did not buy this story.

Al Ahly fans played a key role in the Tahrir Square protests, and many have continued to be in the forefront of protests against the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. Most people suspect the massacre at the Port Said football match was undertaken by state



agents in order to punish Al Ahly fans for their involvement in the continuing uprisings. When the death sentence was given to the football fans, people felt it was a cover-up by the state to deflect attention from its role in the massacre. Hundreds of thousands of people joined the ongoing strikes and protests as a result. In Port Said, people as part of this kicked out the police from the city and began running large parts of the city via popular assemblies.

In response the state declared an emergency in February. This saw thousands of troops deployed across the country and Muslim Brotherhood supporters attacking protestors. The strikes and protests, however, have continued. Indeed, the ruling class and working class are involved in a massive stand off. The working class looks as if it is in the process of building a counter-power - based around popular assemblies and some independent unions - that could in the future fundamentally challenge the ruling class and its state. As such, the basis for a social revolution might be in the process of being built. The ruling class are desperately trying to stop this, by rolling out the military, and it is clear they will try and intensify repression. Egypt's future is being decided, but the direction it will take is unclear and dependent on struggle and whether the working class can build enough power of its own to ultimately defeat state repression.

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clarification, testing out of perspectives, the schooling and selection of its mass militants, and the coherence into a formidable and united mass force.

The coming present period is going to be characterised by more uprisings and revolts. Already the strike wave has found another outlet in the coal mining sector where thousands of workers are striking without the permission of their union. The key task is to find the path whereby these various battalions of the working class can coalesce into a politically coherent force. And this is first and foremost a task of political and ideological clarification. The developing of the programmatic understanding of the common tasks requires a sharing of political perspectives, an intense period of common struggles and the summing up of lessons.

The organisational premise of such a new political entity must be based on the variegated organs of struggle of the masses – the farm workers committee, the miners' strike committees, the community organisations and social movements, and progressive branches of the trade union movement. These organs of self-organisation and self-initiative, and the many others still to emerge, must constitute the blocks of the any political formation. For instance the National Strike Committee (now the National Workers Committee) has an outstanding task. That is to

urgently sum up the political lessons and perspectives of its struggles – especially its demands, attitude towards organisation, trade unions, crisis of the mining industry, workers' democracy and control. On the basis of its perspectives the miners must build the organisational and political links with other struggles and engage in common battle with them.

It is this organic process of the coming together of the various battalions of the masses that is going to ensure that a real political mass force is going to emerge in our country. We need a force that will have the necessary political authority, mass implantation and the capacity to resist and overturn the agenda of the ruling class. The organisational form of such a unified mass movement is to be discovered in the process of struggle. No one can put a time-frame or end date to the process of building – it could be compressed or protracted. But as matters stand now we are entering a protracted period of organic building that is going to be marked by flows and ebbs.

The launch of the WASP is substituting these important tasks of generalising the resistance, of working out of perspectives and of discovering the appropriate organisational form of the new mass political movement. In this sense the WASP is premature.

WHAT'S THE BUZZ ABOUT WASP?



Delwyn Verasamy/M&G

Strike committees

- Strike committees were constituted by the wild-cat strikers at the different shafts and localities across the mining belt.
- In October 2012, a National Strike Committee was formed to co-ordinate the strikes that had spread from the platinum mines, to gold, coal, iron and diamond mines in Gauteng, Limpopo, North West and the Free State.
- The National Strike Committee has been renamed the National Workers' Committee which has now endorsed WASP and committed to its launch on the 21st of March.

Wary of the WASP

While it seems that the DSM and the National Workers' Committee are determined to press on with the new workers' party, others are cautious.

There are those that feel that the launching of a *campaign* for a workers' party would have been a better idea. This, they argue, would allow campaigners to test support for the idea of a workers' party over a period of time. Those who have put forward this idea also feel that more emphasis, as part of a campaign for a workers' party, should be placed in reaching and winning over COSATU's rank-and-file. They feel WASP has not done this, despite saying that the party should "provide a political platform to unite the struggles of the working class".

Those holding this position argue this is key as they feel that the battle inside COSATU between those wanting a 'sweetheart' federation and those championing the independent interests of the working class (at least in words) has begun to hot-up significantly.

Kabelo Radebe, a member of the Sinethemba Youth Front, based in Merefong, also had the following to say about WASP:

"I first heard of WASP during the mine workers' strike. The DSM was busy discussing the workers' party...and I was happy to see that at last we were going to get a worker and community based political party".

He, however, went on to say that:

"I am not sure whether WASP should launch on the 21st March...I feel a bit wary of this. The community is also not sure.... The community raised various local issues...and they seem more concerned about these. It may be too soon to ask the community to vote for the WASP..."

There is also another view on the left that differs from the above by arguing that all energies should be focused on building the worker/strike committees; and not a party. Those holding this view feel that these committees could be vehicles through which the working class could fight its struggles, especially if they draw in community movements. As such, people holding this view believe the idea of a party is a distraction, and if worker/strike committees and community organisations could come together in struggle based on organic direct democracy - and this could be extended across the country - these could in the long run form a counter-power that could challenge the ruling class.

The Workers' and Socialist Party's (WASP) official launch, on the 21st March, is a reflection of a huge shift in South Africa's political landscape. Tens of thousands of miners have been politicised as participants in an unprecedented strike wave. Now many of them have rallied around the WASP initiative.

At the centre of the WASP initiative is the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), which intervened in the strike wave and succeeded in winning support for the idea of a mass workers' party among a core of the strike leaders.

According to the DSM's newspaper, *Izwi Labasebenzi*:

"On December 15, 2012, twenty delegates representing the strike committees and dismissed workers committees of six different mines...together with a delegation from the Democratic Socialist Movement...founded the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP)."

At a meeting in Rustenburg, on 3 March, representatives of the local strike committees from the Northern Cape, North West, Limpopo, and Gauteng endorsed WASP's launching. The DSM said at this meeting "the rank-and-file leaders of the mineworkers nationwide have come out in support of WASP."

Those supporting WASP argue that the working class needs a political party to fight its political battles, and that the time is now - as a result of mass struggles on the mines - to launch this party. WASP plans to contest the 2014 national elections.

Democratic Left Front (DLF) on WASP

The DLF has given active support to the struggles of the miners in the wake of the Marikana massacre. In a statement in October 2012 it said: "We have not made the call for workers to form a Workers Party. The DLF is not a vanguard organisation and neither is it a political party...it is a democratic grass roots anti-capitalist movement supporting the strike committees in the mining industry. We seek to build working class unity and link workplace and community struggles for an alternative eco-socialist South Africa."

In response to WASP's launch, while declining to elaborate, the DLF has indicated that it considers WASP a "fraternal organisation" and stated that the DSM is still formally a member of the DLF.

The unions and WASP

The wild-cat strike wave that ensued after the Marikana massacre has led to mass disaffiliation from NUM. Once COSATU's biggest affiliate, NUM has lost tens of thousands of members.

AMCU has perhaps been the major beneficiary. AMCU was a breakaway from NUM and has had a presence in the mining sector since 1999. Its membership has grown many times over in the past year, with estimates now at over 100 000. Its leadership has tended to refer to AMCU as a non-political union, which would suggest it would not be inclined to give overt political support to WASP. This could change though if AMCU members demanded it.

On a smaller scale, GIWUSA is the other union to have gained membership from miners deserting NUM. GIWUSA has 1600 members at the Bokoni mine in Limpopo. GIWUSA is also actively following up other membership prospects in the North-West and Gauteng.

At the moment GIWUSA has no formal position on the question of WASP. However, the Bokoni strike committee has fully endorsed WASP. The union will have to wait until its national congress later in the year to adopt a formal position on WASP.

Questions still to be answered

- Will WASP constitute itself as a truly mass party of and for the working class in South Africa?
- What are the other alternatives for the working class?
- Will WASP advance or undermine a fighting unity of workers and communities, regardless of party affiliation, around all the burning questions facing the working class (e.g. living wage, decent housing and services, free quality public education)?
- Is it a mistake to immediately *launch* - as opposed to a *campaign for* - a workers' party?
- Or is the task now to build the worker committees and community movements - and begin working towards uniting these in struggle - and build a counter-power based on these organisational forms without a party?
- Will WASP's reliance on the base of mine-workers prove too narrow for a party with national ambitions?
- Will WASP's launch, without a serious sounding out or democratic consultation of COSATU's rank-and-file, block worker unity and backfire?

The immediate future will clarify things and no doubt raise new questions.

RAPE, CAPITALISM, PATRIARCHY AND THE STATE

On a daily basis, children, women, gays and lesbians are subjected to rape and gender based violence. Two incidences recently brought this into the spotlight once again, and made worldwide headlines. One was the brutal murder of 17 year-old Anene Booysen, who was gang raped and mutilated. The other, more than a week later, involved Oscar Pistorius charged with murdering his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp.

As terrible as these incidents were, over the same period there were numerous other acts of violence against women, including the elderly, which never made it to the newspaper front pages or TV news. These included:

- *the rape of a partially blind 110-year-old grandmother in her mud house in the Jojweni village near Butterworth*
- *the rape of a 91-year-old granny by a 23-year-old-man in KwaDindi in the Vulindlela area outside Pietermaritzburg.*
- *the rape of an 82-year-old woman from Xilinxu village in Nqgamakhwe*
- *the rape and murder of a 98-year-old grandmother by a 33-year-old man from Mahikeng*
- *and the rape of a hearing impaired and partially blind 69-year-old grandmother by a 20-year-old man from Dutywa in the Eastern Cape*

Unfortunately, even these stories are a tip of an iceberg. The Medical Research Council estimates that up to 3,600 rapes happen daily in the country: a rate which is one of the highest in the world.

A media bias

Many of the rapes in South Africa occur in poor, often rural, black working class communities. Most never hit the headlines. Poverty and oppression mean that the voices of rural and poor women often remain excluded in the mainstream media. This is not a coincidence: the South African media itself contains a racial, class and urban bias. This is why the murder of Steenkamp received such publicity – it involved wealthy, white individuals and hence was seen as newsworthy – while the rape and murder of an old black woman

in a poor remote rural village goes largely unrecorded.

A justice system that fails the working class

Poor, and especially rural women, too face a state and justice system whose response to rape and domestic violence has always been problematic. The recent alleged rape of a woman by police force members at Wierdabrug police station, when she went to report a case of domestic violence, is indicative of a sick, misogynistic and patriarchal justice system. The problem is that the government has not taken the scourge of rape seriously. It has failed to guarantee the rights of citizens, in particular children and women, to lead lives free from brutality and poverty.

The rape trial of President Zuma himself, in which he was acquitted, also demonstrates how skewed, selective and misogynistic the justice system is. Zuma's defence team was allowed by the judge to bring up the sexual history of the complainant during cross-examination. Evidence included a private written record by the complainant of how she was raped at ages 5, 13 and 14. These are some of the obstacles rape survivors face within our legal system: a legal system that is deeply patriarchal and that favours elites.

Gender-based violence and poverty

Who bears the brunt of violence is also mediated through the experience of class, race and gender. Statistically, therefore, the black working class is most impacted on by violence, especially women. The unfortunate reality is that this too is not an accident.

South Africa has a notoriously violent and authoritarian history. During colonialism, segregation and apartheid, it was often black women that were subjected to violence, including at the hands of the state. Many were forcefully kept in the impoverished rural homelands by the state. Even after two decades since the formal end of apartheid, systematic violence and control is the order of the day for the majority of poor women.

The living and working conditions of working class women, in particular rural communities, have barely improved since 1994. Most rural women are expected to walk several kilometers to get water and wood from rivers and forests. Most rural families still stay in mud houses, rondavels or poorly built RDP houses. Current access to housing, where there is a backlog of an estimated 2.3 million units, continues to reflect the inequalities of the country's history. The quality of mud and RDP houses makes people, especially women, more susceptible to regular burglaries, floods and fires. Personal safety from not having well built formal houses, street lights, water, sewerage and sanitation risks women's lives. If these services were provided, women especially in rural and informal settlements would be less exposed to violent crimes.

No change since Polokwane

Under Zuma, after the Polokwane Conference, the ANC has not undergone any radical policy shift. It has not spread the economic benefits to the majority of the working class. Instead the ANC leadership has focussed on accumulating wealth and power for themselves, while creating a conducive environment for the multi-national corporations to profit. There have



been no meaningful attempts by government to create employment, build decent houses or adopt a rural development strategy outside the neo-liberal framework. In South Africa, as elsewhere, neo-liberalism, privatisation and commercialisation have contributed significantly to job losses coupled with worsening working conditions and deteriorating public services. It is in this context that there has also been a rise in drug/human trafficking, crime and a growing sense of alienation and despair in working class communities.

Conclusion

For many women forced or coerced sex happens in the same underlying context as other HIV risk factors, such as poverty, low educational status, poor job opportunities, inadequate public housing, and lack of an adequate social security net. Systematic rape and violence against women has become a normal part of our society and the reality is that South Africans are confronted with an epidemic that is not vigorously challenged by civil society, the media, the state and in particular the women's movement. Night vigils, attending victim's funerals and court cases are just once off reactions that are not necessarily aimed at changing the status quo. The increase in service delivery protests that have resulted in the deaths of Andries Tatane, mine and farm workers, are desperate struggles of the poor against the daily injustices bred by severe poverty and inequality. It is also in this underlying context of oppression, patriarchy, poverty and inequality that violence against women and children takes place and activists, therefore, should take an anti-capitalist stance on struggles against rape and violence against women.

AFRIKAN HIPHOP CARAVAN

The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan was organised by a number of collectives - Soundz of the South (South Africa), Uhuru Network (Zimbabwe) and Wasanii Mtaani (Kenya) - to allow thousands of young people to experience Hiphop Culture at its' finest: as an elevating, playful and creative, but revolutionary, counterforce to all forms of oppression.

The idea of organizing regional Hiphop events and creating a network of like-minded artists and collectives has been raised and discussed in different forms in radical African Hiphop circles for a number of years. This particular initiative - The Afrikan Hip Hop Caravan - has its roots in conversations amongst political arts collectives and activists at the 2011 World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal. In this meeting, as well as the ones that followed, it was recognized that there was a strong need for political arts collectives, which are dedicated to Hiphop's original vision as the voice of the oppressed, to interlink and organise to strengthen the conscious and political Hiphop movement on the continent.

In fact, for the founding members of the Caravan, Hiphop is an acronym standing for 'Her Infinite Power Helping Oppressed People' and, in its essence, is understood as a counterculture that is valued for its potential to build revolutionary consciousness and challenge the values of the ruling class.

Thus, the key aims of the project are: (1) to build a sense of agency and self-empowerment among politically-conscious, community-based street artists, who often due to challenging socio-economic realities and political repression feel marginalized and isolated; (2) to transcend borders to enable artists, activists and communities to share their skills, resources, organisation and struggle experience, as well as to build a sustainable network amongst radical arts collectives themselves.

The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan, which strives to be an annual movement-building event, kick-started in



Cape Town on February 13th and subsequently moved to Johannesburg, Harare and Nairobi. As part of this, there was a week of performances and educational events in each city. The final event in this year's caravan will take place at the World Social Forum in Tunis from the 26th to the 30th of March.

Although the program slightly varied in each of the four cities, the key organising collectives hosted shows in working-class neighbourhoods and Hiphop Symposia.

The aim of the shows was to offer a platform to cultural activists who fight against oppression, and therefore often find themselves literally 'in the underground', to speak about socially-relevant issues afflicting their communities. The vision of the Hiphop Symposia was to offer a unique space to scholars, cultural practitioners and civil society activists to debate the state of African Hiphop by exploring a whole range of topics, including Hiphop's relevance to youth empowerment, identity, and revolution.

In Cape Town, Soundz of the South opened the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan with a Symposium at Community House on February 13th. This event was followed by two Hiphop shows: a Hiphop Slam

on February 15th at Zula Bar in the city centre and an afternoon Hiphop Concert at Lookout Hill in Khayelitsha on February 17th. In Johannesburg, the coordinating committee convened a Hiphop Symposium and Slam at the Goethe Institute on February 20th. At the next leg, in Harare, Uhuru Network convened a Symposium and Hiphop Café at the University of Zimbabwe on February 27th as well as a Hiphop Show at Book Café on March 1. In the same week, the host collective in Nairobi organised four events – two shows and two symposia – in different neighborhoods across Nairobi: Ngara, Mathare, Kangemi and Kibera, the largest so-called urban slum in Africa. In addition, Wasanii Mtaani will be

hosting a Hiphop Symposium at the local chapter of the Goethe Institute on April 18th.

In line with the Caravan's vision to promote revolutionary Hiphop and to empower local cultural activists, activists from Uhuru Vibes (Zimbabwe), Ukooflani (Kenya) and Soundz of the South (South Africa) performed at the different shows in the four different cities. At the events in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Harare there were also performances by US based cultural activists Mic Crenshaw and DJ Klavical, which was in line with the Caravan's aim of linking up with comrades globally to take forward the struggle against capitalism. At the five symposia a balanced number of artists, scholars and

activists shared their views on African Hiphop. Indeed, the ensuing debates highlighted the need to theoretically explore Hiphop culture and to create a platform that facilitates a dialogue between academics, practitioners and cultural activists.

The next Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is set for November 2014. The founders hope that the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan continues to grow, that in the process the borders of Africa are transcended by activists and that the Caravan reaches different regions across the globe.

For updates and more information please visit:

www.facebook.com/AfrikanHiphopCaravan
www.afrikanhiphopcaravan.tumblr.com



New Forms of Organisation: Movement building after Marikana

The 2013 ILRIG April Seminar

26th and 27th April 2013

This year ILRIG's Conference will be a platform that brings together activists involved in the mine and farm workers' strike along with recent community struggles. Key organisations involved in these struggles have, therefore, been invited to send participants and speakers to the seminar to share their experiences of these struggles and the lessons that can be drawn from them.

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22 September to 27 September

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