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# RULING CLASS ATTACKS ON WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS



**Protest by SAFTU against amendments to LRA**

Source: Workers World Media Productions

## EDITORIAL

In this edition of Workers World News there is a focus on how the state and employers are attacking workers and their organisations, such as trade unions, in the current period. It is not an accident that this attack is happening in the context of a capitalist crisis both locally and internationally. For the ruling class to protect its interests during a crisis, its main weapon is to try and weaken the working class and furthering exploitation to retain its wealth and maintain profits. While the current edition focuses on the attacks workers are under, we also cover how workers are resisting and have resisted in the past too, notably women workers.

In this edition, Mthetho Xali unpacks how workers and trade unions are coming under pressure from the state through the amendments to the Labour Relations Act, which places limits on the right to strike, limits on the right to picket and interferes in the internal operations of unions. Xali argues that the best way to deal with the attack is for workers to begin to organise democratically and to fight for accountability and workers control in their organisations. Politically though it is also important for workers to confront the reality of what states are: structures that serve and are controlled by the ruling class; rather than neutral entities.

In the Education Series Jonathan Payn takes up the issue of looking at the role of the state, including why and how it is not neutral. He argues that the reason why some working class formations believe they can use the state – whether the current one or even workers' state in the future – to bring about positive and fundamental changes for the working class is due to a misreading of what states are and a misreading of who constitutes the ruling class – it is not just simply capitalists, but also those who directly head the state. Payn argues all states, because of the hierarchical nature, centralise power and create rulers – hence no state can be revolutionary if the aim is to bring about an egalitarian society.

There is also a guest article by Rafael Viana da Silva. In it he looks at some of the history of working class struggles in Brazil and how through struggle workers and the poor won concessions, such as social security, from the state and Brazilian ruling class. He outlines how these have been rolled back as part of class war from above in the last few decades and how this has increased under the far rightwing Bolsonaro regime.

In this edition we also look at how the working class has resisted today and made gains through self-organising in the past. Alex Hotz unpacks the struggles that are currently taking place in Sudan against military rule. She argues that this struggle so far has avoided the pitfalls of the earlier struggles in North Africa and the Middle East that were termed the Arab Spring. She argues that the revolution underway in Sudan is going to be a lengthy process and international solidarity, including from workers and the poor in South Africa, is crucial.

Emma Smith looks at the Commercial Stevedoring Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) strike at Oak Valley in Grabouw. There farm workers have been demanding R 250 a day and an end to racialized hostels for African workers.

The state and bosses have launched a series of attacks on workers and trade unions. In this article we look at the limitations on strikes and pickets, state interference in the internal affairs of trade unions, court interdicts as well as retrenchments.

The Labour Relations Amendment Act of 2018 that came into effect on 01 January 2019 makes additional limitations on the right to strike and constitutes an attack on workers and trade unions. The Constitutional right to strike has always been subject to limitations by the Labour Relations Act (LRA). Under the LRA unions must first refer the issue in dispute to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration or Bargaining Council (CCMA). Secondly, 30 days must lapse from when the dispute was submitted to the CCMA or Bargaining Council. Thirdly, CCMA or Bargaining Council must issue a certificate noting that the dispute remains unresolved. Fourthly a strike notice stating the commencement of the strike must be sent to the employer at least 48 hours before the strike starts.

In addition to the above, the Labour Relations Amendment Act of 2018 requires that picket rules are in place before a certificate of non-resolution of a dispute is issued. The amendments also require trade unions to include in their constitutions a clause that provides that they must conduct a secret ballot before calling a strike. The above restrictive requirements work in favour of the bosses to ensure that their businesses continue to function during the strike. A failure to follow the outlined requirements can result in Labour Court interdicts, which effectively criminalises the strike.

The LRA amendments also allow for an advisory arbitration panel to be set up if the Minister of Labour or the CCMA thinks it is in the public interest. Any party to the dispute can also ask for the advisory arbitration panel. The panel can be set up when a strike is protracted with no immi-

nent resolution. It can also be set up if there is threat of violence or potential breach of Constitutional rights. The additional condition for setting up the panel is when the strike has the potential to affect the social or economic functioning of society. The trade unions are required to indicate if they accept or reject the panel's award. If they disagree with the award they are required to provide reasons. Any challenging of the reasons of the panel is likely to be utilised by employers to try and discredit the strike.

The notion of setting up an advisory panel on conditions outlined above is a response to the 2012 platinum mine workers' strike and the subsequent 2014 six month long platinum mine workers' strike. The LRA amendments constitute an attack on workers and trade unions in that they effectively blunt and limit the effectiveness of strikes.

**The second attack on trade unions and workers is the state interference in the internal affairs of trade unions.**

One such interference in the affairs of the trade unions as explained above is the provision that trade unions must conduct a secret ballot before going on a strike. A failure to comply with this may result in the deregistration of the union. Further, if a strike is not preceded by the secret ballot it can be interdicted by the Labour Court.

The other form of state interference is the threat to deregister any union if it does not comply with the LRA requirements. The current Labour Registrar has issued notices noting non-compliance to more than 100 unions since

his appointment in May 2018. The non-compliance by the targeted trade unions according to the Registrar ranges from failure to host constitutional meetings like elective congresses, to the failure to submit audited financial statements.

The Registrar can place trade unions under administration or deregister them if they do not comply with their constitutions and parts of the LRA that govern trade unions. The issues that relate to meetings and finances are best handled and monitored by active participation of union members to ensure accountability of its leaders. To minimise state attacks that use non-compliance is for the trade unions to run democratically and develop ways to ensure that they are worker driven and controlled. The dominance of union officials in trade unions, many of whom are corrupt, is not making things easy to counter state attacks. Part of the counter strategy to state attacks must also speak to how to deal with union officials whose self-interest will be threatened by a worker driven and controlled initiatives.

**The third attack on trade unions and workers are court interdicts that criminalise strikes and pickets and thus further reinforce limitations on the right to strike and picket.**

For example, Labour Court interdicted NUMSA's strike at Mahle Behr for not first conducting secret ballot as per LRA amendments. In another case the Labour Court suspended picketing by Dis-chem Pharmacies' workers who did not stick to the agreed picketing rules. The Labour Court has justified its court interdicts by arguing that it seeks to deal with what it calls unlawful behaviour, violence, and intimidation during strikes and pickets. What the courts though do not pronounce on is the violence of the police and private security companies during strikes.

**...a strike notice stating the commencement of the strike must be sent to the employer at least 48 hours before the strike starts.**

## Pull-out poster

Free pull-out poster available with this issue.  
Artwork by Anastasia

### Lead article continued:

What is also not dealt with by the Courts is the use of scabs by employers in fuelling violence during strikes.

However, the question of violence within the working class is the question that those that are for a just society must confront. One of the ways to minimise state attacks on the working class is to seek to win others over to our cause, be it a strike or in the picket line, through persuasion and making of gains and not through intimidation. Most of the persuasion noted here must also

happen before the strike as part of the preparation for the strike.

### The fourth attack on workers and unions is the ongoing retrenchments.

Many unions are engaged in discussions on retrenchments with management of various companies. The retrenchments not only contribute to increase to high unemployment, they also weaken trade unions and worsen poverty and inequality. In the first quarter of 2019 alone 237 000 jobs were lost while companies at the Jobs Summit promised to avoid retrenchments. The employers are the destroyers of jobs and profit making is their bottom line.

The attacks launched by the different arms of the state on workers and unions as outlined above show that the state is on the side of the employers - the bosses. This must be taken to account when developing a response to the ruling class attacks on workers and trade unions. The counter attack of the working class will also require a rethink on how workers' organisations are run democratically and also a rethink of methods of struggle that do not accommodate violence within the working class. ■

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### Editorial continued:

During the strike the union has faced violence and oppression from Oak Valley and the state. Numerous people were arrested in the strike and Oak Valley has been attempting to get the Department of Labour to deregister CSAAWU. While the strike is now suspended, massive pressure was placed on Oak Valley due to solidarity from community members. Smith argues that for any strike to succeed such community solidarity is vital along with workers being willing to experiment with new forms of organising.

Deirdre Hogan examines the struggles of women organising in the past during the Spanish Revolution in her article. She argues that these women saw self-organising and women's only spaces as vital in making gains during the Revolution and contesting the male dominance of political organisations, including revolutionary trade unions. She argues that we can draw lessons from such organising for our own struggles and formations today. The struggle for women's freedom has to be part of any struggle for socialism, but such struggles cannot be separated too far from class struggle. ■

## GENDER NEWS by Deirdre Hogan

# MUJERES LIBRES - FREE WOMEN OF SPAIN

In the previous editions of *Workers' World News* we looked at a feminist revolution taking place today in Rojava Syria. In some ways, the Rojava Revolution echoes the events that took place in Spain in 1936.

In 1936 there was a revolution in Spain and one of the key pillars was the struggle of women to attain freedom. This struggle continued until May 1937 when the Revolution was defeated by the Communist and Socialist Parties. In this article, we look at the feminist struggle that was part of the Spanish Revolution as there are lessons for struggles in South Africa and internationally today.

Conditions for the majority of people in Spain in the 1930s were appalling. For women they were especially bad. There were extreme gender divisions. Most women were economically dependent on men. Household chores and childcare were women's domain and women's wages were lower than men's. Due to the traditional role of women only a minority were involved in unions or other political organisations.

In response to the need to address women's situation, two years before the 1936 Revolution, two groups of anarchist women (anarchists are socialists that seek to get rid of all states as part of a revolution and replace these with working class self-governance through revolutionary trade unions, workers' councils, community councils and democratic militia to defend the revolution) in Barcelona and Madrid began organising. In preparation for the revolution, they built up a network of women activists which would merge to form the Mujeres Libres (Free Women) organisation.

### Revolution

On the 17th of July 1936, fascists in the military undertook a coup to try and prevent the working class undertaking a social revolution. The workers in the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) - which was an anarchist trade union with 2 million members - had been preparing throughout the early 1930s to undertake a revolution. Ironically, the military coup sparked off the much awaited revolution.

The military coup was crushed in Barcelona and other areas of Spain where anarchists had a strong influence. Immediately, workers' militias were organised and set out to wherever the frontline against fascism was. Women fought alongside men as equal members of the militias.



The military coup was crushed in Barcelona and other areas of Spain where anarchists had a strong influence.

### Women in the collectives

Immediately after the failed coup, workers took over farms, factories, mines, hotels and hospitals and began running them democratically. These workplaces were collectivized - they belonged to working class people as a whole and not the state or bosses. The collectives were inspired by the ideas of the anarchists.

Although some collectives paid men and women equally regardless of what type of work was done, in general the work women did was undervalued. In the cities there had traditionally been a high proportion of women working in the textile industries. Many women had done 'piece work' from home. This was abolished during the revolution and an increasing number of women flooded into the new collectivised factory jobs.

However very often wage differentials continued to exist between men and women. Much like today, women had the multiple role of working outside the home and then after work coming home to take care of children and housework. This meant that for many it was difficult to attend union meetings and with such little participation in union leadership, issues of concern to women were often not prioritised.

### Mujeres libres

Many people were acutely aware of the problems that existed for women. In September 1936 a women's anarchist organisation, Mujeres Libres, was established which, during its short two year existence, came to number 30,000 women.

Mujeres Libres had two main strategies.

The first was what was called "capacitacion" which aimed at preparing women so that they could realise their full potential and participate as equals in the new society that was being built. The second strategy was "captacion" - which meant the active incorporation of women into the anarchist movement.

Mujeres Libres from the start made great efforts to involve more women in union activities. Many women had difficulties going to union meetings because of their childcare responsibilities, so one of the first activities Mujeres Libres engaged in was to set up flying day-care centres, primarily for women who were interested in serving as union delegates.

Education was an important part of the work done by Mujeres Libres. They wanted to tackle the problem of illiteracy. They set up education centres offered range from elementary reading, writing and maths to classes in mechanics, agriculture, and also classes in union organisation, sociology and economics.

Mujeres Libres believed that education and consciousness raising would empower women to free herself from her triple enslavement: her enslavement to ignorance, her enslavement as a producer, and her enslavement as a woman. This would enable women to take a more active role in the revolution.

Mujeres Libres co-operated with unions in running numerous employment and apprenticeship programs to facilitate women's entry to the workplace. As well as technical training they urged trainees to fight for full equality within the workplace.

In public contexts within the union movement women generally found that they were not taken seriously and were not respected. For these reasons Mujeres Libres always insisted on organisational autonomy. They believed that women needed a separate organisation whose main focus would be issues of particular concern to women. They argued that only through their own self-directed action would women be able to participate as equals in the movement.

However Mujeres Libres refused to separate the struggle for women's emancipation from class struggle. They rejected mainstream feminism whose ambition was to give to women of the middle and ruling classes the opportunity to participate more fully in the existing system of privilege. Instead, they treated women's subordination as part of a larger system of hierarchies.

Revolutions bring about dramatic changes. Old expectations and ways of behaving begin to be questioned. Mujeres Libres was a vital organisation for raising issues which would never have been brought forward by other left-wing organisations at the time.

### End of the Revolution

The fate of Mujeres Libres was tied to the fate of the entire revolution. In 1937, the leadership of the CNT took a decision to be part of a government headed by the Communist and Socialist parties in the name of fighting fascism. With this decision the revolution died. In May 1937, the Communist Party and Socialist headed military attacked the anarchist stronghold on Barcelona. In Spain, it was the middle classes that influenced the Communist Party and they wanted the revolution crushed as much as the fascists.

The CNT aligned workers in Barcelona defeated the attack of May 1937, but were called on by the CNT leadership to lay down their weapons and focus rather on the struggle against the fascists. They did so, and the Communist and Socialist led state crushed the revolution afterwards. The Communist Party and Socialist led state ended the worker collectives and pushed back women's liberation. In 1938, the Communist Party and Socialist led state was defeated by the fascists, but the revolution had already died on the streets of Barcelona in May 1937. ■

INTERNATIONAL NEWS By Alex Hotz

# THE SUDANESE UPRISING



Protests in Sudan  
Source: www.libcom.org

The Sudanese Uprising is by no means a spontaneous eruption that has just begun in 2019. It is a response to what has been referred to as the ongoing process of counter-revolution since the period of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North African region in 2011.

What is happening in Sudan and as well as in Algeria are movements against authoritarianism and exploitation. There have been mass demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins and stay-a-ways across Sudan as a challenge to the autocratic regime of Omar-al-Bashir. This has resulted in the stepping down of Omar Al-Bashir but the protests continue because power still remains in the hands of the Military in Sudan. In an interview with the Jacobin, Gilbert Achcar describes what is happening in Sudan as a "long-term revolutionary process that started in 2011 for the whole Arab-speaking region. The central cause for the revolution unfolding in Sudan is the social and economic crisis that exists because of IMF imposed neoliberalism and the authoritarian political system that is funded and supported by the United States. In Sudan the trigger point of the revolution was when al-Bashir announced the cut in wheat and fuel subsidies that saw the bread price increase astronomically. In the first wave of revolution that has been called the Arab Spring in 2011, political and economic crisis is what drove the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya. Achcar, believes that it would be a mistake to characterize the Sudanese Revolution just like the revolutions in 2011 as 'Spring'. A 'Spring'

eludes that it is a period of unrest that would last a few months but what we are seeing unfold is a long-term revolutionary process that comes out of the regions' structural crisis and it will come with a long period of counter-revolution as seen across the region from Egypt to Syria.

#### Arab Spring, Counter-Revolution and the lessons learned:

In the last few years since the revolutions that took place throughout North Africa and the Middle East between the period of 2011 to 2013, the region has been dominated by what Achcar describes as Counter-Revolution. This period has been characterized by the consolidation of the military regimes the revolutions were trying to oust and, in many instances, has led to long and protracted civil war. Therefore, it is no surprise that the revolutions in Sudan and Algeria would emerge, the military regimes cannot and will not provide solutions to the ravaging social and economic crisis that the Sudanese and Algerian people are facing.

It is clear that the Sudanese Revolution has learnt important lessons from the 2011-2013 period and is thus the most organised and politically advanced revolution in the region. The Sudanese Revolution is led by a coalition of Groups called the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change (FDFC), this coalition is formed by some banned professional and worker unions/associations, leftist political parties like the Communist Party and Liberal Muslim parties, movements fighting ethnic oppression and importantly feminist movements and organisations. These progressive political forces have helped to shape the politics of the revolution and have learnt the lessons from the revolutions across the region. Womxn and feminist organisations who have formed part of the FDFC have played a very prominent role in leading the revolution and shaping its politics, they have pushed for feminist demands to be central to the FDFC's program and political demands. An example of this is the demand that 40% of the new legislative council consists of womxn.

The lessons that the Sudanese have drawn from the revolutions in the region can be seen not only in their demands but in the character of the

Revolution. One important element is the non-violent character of the movement – they have used various strategies like the mass sat-ins outside the military command, general strikes, mass protests and stay-a-ways. While violence in all the revolutions were started by the regimes that they were trying to oust, in most instances what violence has led to is foreign intervention that has led to civil war and the protestors in Sudan did not want this repeated. Despite the non-violent nature of the Sudanese Revolution the military has perpetrated violence seen in the massacres, rapes, etc of ordinary Sudanese people. This has resulted in an outcry from people across the world which has resulted in an authoritarian tactic by the military to shut down the internet so that Sudanese people cannot communicate what is happening. A huge strength of the Revolution has been its ability to not only win support of the masses of people in Sudan but to win support of the ordinary rank and file of the army and the lowest-ranking officers. The military faced a challenge as many of the low ranking officers protected protestors from the violence of the military and police.

The Revolution in Sudan continues despite the fall of Omar al-Bashir because the biggest lesson that the Sudanese have learnt is that the state is much deeper than Omar al-Bashir and his allies, but that the Military command of Sudan is not an ally to the people's revolution. In the case of Sudan, al-Bashir's regime contained two elements that meant that the Sudanese Revolution cannot be hijacked in the same way in which the revolution was hijacked in Egypt and the rest of the region. Al-Bashir not only ruled through a military dictatorship but also through the support of Islamic fundamentalists. In the case of Egypt and other regions the Islamic fundamentalists were able to hijack the revolution. The demands of the FDFC are clear – they do not want a two-year interim military rule, they want power to be immediately handed over to civilian-led transition government that will eventually lead to democratic elections.

The revolution in Sudan is going to be a long process and International solidarity is thus crucial as Sudan is becoming increasingly isolated. The Revolution in Sudan is not only challenging the military regime but it is challenging all imperial forces in the region and globally. It is important to expose the role of the regional forces but also the US and other imperial forces. A central task is to support the demands of the Sudanese revolution and to disseminate those demands as well as the unspeakable violence committed by the Sudanese military. ■

MY STRUGGLE By Emma Smith

## GRABOUW FARMWORKERS HIGHLIGHT LESSONS FOR LABOUR IN 2019



CSAAWU protest in Grabouw  
Source: AIDC

The 2016 Robertson Winery strike was described by many as a David versus Goliath struggle.

Less than three years after and in the wake of the implementation of a new national minimum wage, the David union - the Commercial, Stevedoring and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) - has again found itself in battle against a Goliath company in the Grabouw region, Oak Valley Estate.

The strike, which began on 6 May, saw workers rallying around a demand of R250 a day, an end to labour brokering and for the apartheid-style single-sex hostels to be transformed into family units. These three demands are at the core of some of the major issues which labour in South Africa must confront in 2019.

Firstly, the wage demand represents the obvious failures of a new minimum wage of R20 per hour, which excludes both farm workers and domestic workers (where hourly rates are set at R18 and R15 per hour respectively). By demanding an increase in their basic wage from R162 to R250 per day, Oak Valley workers have boldly counteracted government rhetoric that states that these legislative changes represent any kind of fundamental upliftment for the working class.

Secondly, despite last year's Constitutional Court ruling on labour brokers, the strike has reiterated that the issue of triangular employment relationships - which labour brokering only forms one part of - must be a priority for any progressive organisation concerned with the future of work in South Africa.

Thirdly, the strike action has also reiterated that, perhaps now more than ever, a successful strike relies on the support of a larger community. In a changing agricultural sector, where most workers don't live on farms like in the past, a demand around housing broadens the scope of the strike and highlights the interlocking nature between what happens inside and outside the workplace.

For CSAAWU, the issue of solidarity has always been at the forefront of the union's ethos and contributed greatly to the success of the Robertson Winery strike. In Grabouw, a few weeks into the strike, the closing off of the N2 by some community members in support of the strike demonstrated a similar approach that was taken in 2016. Workers were supported by SAFTU, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP)

# EDUCATION SERIES: CLASS STRUGGLE, THE LEFT AND POWER

The first part of this series stated that, despite various well-intentioned efforts by forces on the extra-Alliance and independent left over recent years to unite working class struggles in South Africa, these largely have and will continue to fail to resonate with the working class, help build unity in struggle and form the basis of a new movement because of the theoretical understandings of class and power – and their strategic implications – on which they are founded and which are prevalent on much of the left.

This article will give a basic overview of these theoretical understandings of class and power and their strategic implications and limitations and why it is therefore necessary to refine and develop understandings of class and power more capable of responding to the context of the neoliberal restructuring of the working class in order to advance the class struggle in pursuit of socialism.

## Theoretical foundations of numsa's non-moment

The strategic approach that Numsa's bureaucracy and permanent leaders have taken since its 2013 Special National Congress, from calling for the launch of a "United Front against to neoliberalism", exploring "the establishment of a Movement for Socialism" to the launch of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) is, like Cosatu and the SACP, informed by its class analysis. In fact, it is informed by the same class analysis.

According to this analysis capitalism is a class society in which the ruling class minority (bourgeoisie) exploits the working class majority (proletariat) in order to extract a profit (surplus value) to become even more rich and powerful. It is able to do this because it holds private ownership of the means of production (factories, land, mines etc.), which is legally recognised and protected by the state. Because the working class owns nothing – due to "primitive accumulation" (e.g. colonialism, dispossession of land and the means of production from the direct producers) – workers are forced to sell their labour in exchange for a wage in order to buy the goods they need to survive (commodities) on the market. Class is defined primarily in terms of one's relations to the means of production: the ruling class owns the means of production but doesn't do productive

work, the working class sells its labour for a wage at the point of production but doesn't own it.

This, inevitably, gives rise to the class struggle for greater economic gains and an extension of rights and freedoms, in which the (permanently employed) industrial proletariat is identified as the only revolutionary subject because of its location at the point of production (factories, mines) and, therefore, its ability to withdraw its labour by going on strike. Because they are not considered to have the potential to be revolutionary other sectors of the working class, such as the peasantry (small farmers and rural workers) and "lumpen proletariat" (the unemployed, people working in the informal economy etc.), are typically ignored.

Something which might help explain why, despite all their lip service to the contrary, all the major unions – whether Cosatu, Saftu or others – have by and large not only failed but never seriously tried to organise precarious labour broker, casual and short-term contract workers.

However, according to this theory the working class, including the revolutionary subject (industrial workers), is struggling so much just to survive that they cannot develop a revolutionary consciousness and their demands and struggles are only centred around so-called bread and butter issues. Because the working class is only capable of reaching this, what Lenin called "trade union consciousness" it needs to be led by a political vanguard of so-called revolutionaries organised in the form of a political party that seeks state power in order to implement socialism through the state.

Sectors of the working class outside of the permanently employed industrial proletariat are not only ignored or dismissed for not being revolutionary but even looked down on with disdain by this self-declared revolutionary vanguard – which might explain both the Numsa leadership's reference to community struggles as "leaderless and disorganised" and the heckling by Numsa delegates to the Working Class Summit when, for example, unemployed community activists and farmworkers expressed different opinions.

## Strategic implications & limitations thereof

As mentioned, the ruling class minority is able to get away with this situation of exploitation and injustice with the help of the state. The state, according to this analysis, is a neutral institution that can function in the interests of the working class or ruling

class depending on what forces are in control of state power. Because the state is understood to be neutral state power is therefore something that, if under the control of a socialist or workers' party, can be used in the interests of the working class and in pursuit of socialism.

The implication of this analysis, besides overlooking the creative revolutionary potential of the vast majority of the working class, is that the building of a political party to contest state power is both necessary and inevitable. This can either be done by contesting elections (reformist socialism) or an armed uprising (revolutionary socialism).

Because, again according to this analysis, the broader working class is supposedly incapable of being revolutionary and therefore requires an en-

Sectors of the working class outside of the permanently employed industrial proletariat are not only ignored or dismissed for not being revolutionary...

lightened revolutionary vanguard to take control of the state and implement socialism from above; and because power is seen to lie primarily in the state and as something to be "seized" or "taken" so-called mass movements, such as unions, social movements and the United Front, are but a means to an end. That end is to build support for the party and help get it into state power – either as voting or through revolution.

However, because the state by its nature is an authoritarian and hierarchical institution that centralises decision-making and other power, which flows from the top down, so too does every political party whose aim it is to gain state power replicate this structure. Moreover, because the leaderships thereof – including socialist and workers' parties – inherit the privileges and power of the predecessors they disposed of, instead of destroying exploitative class relations they tend to and have, historically, simply reproduced them in the name of the workers and poor.

The next installation in this education series will look at a more nuanced theoretical understanding of class and power and the strategic implications thereof for building working class unity in struggle that offer an alternative to the tried, tested and consistently disappointing state-centric one on which the SRWP and much of the left is based. ■



...capitalism is a class society in which the ruling class minority (bourgeoisie) exploits the working class majority (proletariat) in order to extract a profit (surplus value) to become even more rich and powerful.

## My Struggle article continued:

and United Front. In addition, crucial legal assistance has come from the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI). These forms of support in a variety of spheres has helped to ease some of the pressures felt by the union. However, this action did represent a number of complications – with multiple arrests and push-back from community members not involved in the strike. The strike, which has seen high racial tensions, also points to a larger problem which labour faces: finding ways to counteract apartheid-style racial divisions and hierarchies that management continues to exploit.

For now, the strike is suspended. The decision to do so came from the strong feeling that management are not prepared to bring an end to the strike by meeting worker demands. The union has felt the administrative burden of the draconian amendments to the LRA with regards to picketing

rules and secret ballots and are still entangled in paperwork being hurled from the expensive labour consultants at Oak Valley's disposal. While it is true that the playing field has never been equal, the amendments to the LRA are exacerbating these inequalities.

During negotiations, the union has pushed for the following: a 6.5% increase overall and an 8% increase for those workers earning R162 per day; a R300 housing allowance per month for all workers to be paid with immediate effect, with an additional R150 per month to be implemented in the next six months to equalise payments between workers. Furthermore, the union has maintained that hostels must be transformed and that none of these demands are to be linked to the eviction of workers from hostels. On the other hand, management have put forward a R300 housing subsidy to be included in a wage package of 15.5% increase which only applies to

permanent workers living outside of the farm. The union has called this move divisive on the part of management and have reiterated that even workers who live on the farm and did not partake in the strike should receive the same increase.

The strike, which began on 6 May, saw workers rallying around a demand of R250 a day, an end to labour brokering and for the apartheid-style single-sex hostels to be transformed into family units.

The matter of the single-sex hostels has been taken up in the Equality Court and awaits judgement. All individuals who were arrested during the N2 shutdown have been released and are set to appear in the Grabouw Criminal Court on the 18th of July.

The issue around the permanent employment of labour brokers is still to be discussed separately in order to negotiate the details. On 9 July, permanent workers returned to work while contract workers have not been permitted into the workplace, with HR stating that their contracts had ended. While the union regards these workers as permanent, the company's HR do not regard this action as a lock-out. Alternative labour continues to be used.

It is always noteworthy when a strike can be organised in a repressive climate and even more so when it is done in a sector which is renowned for being difficult to organise. The Oak Valley strike is a stern reminder that management is organised and will continue to invest capital in maintaining this organisation. An antidote to this lies in forms of organising which are worker-led, community-based and with broad networks of solidarity. ■

# CLASS WAR IN BRAZIL: IN DEFENCE OF SOCIAL SECURITY



**Far right wing Bolsonaro regime in Brazil**  
Source: LaTuff

During the government of the Brazilian President Washington Luís, on referring to the syndicalism of the 1920s, said that “The social question is a police case”. That phrase summarises how the Brazilian political elites have treated movements of social justice.

Brazil was experiencing a first wave of industrialisation, the union organisations came from an upsurge in syndicalist struggles that culminated in the 1917 general strike and the 1918 insurrection, with the hegemony of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. The demands of the subaltern sectors were translated into numerous social protection laws that would be formulated in the following decade. It was a way for the elites to pacify the class conflict.

Thus was born the germ of social security in Brazil, with the creation of the Retirement and Pensions Fund in 1923, considered the country's first social security law. The law provided for medical aid and pensions. Initially the law only provided for railway workers but was soon extended to other sectors. Other social protection laws were passed in the 1920s, such as the Holiday Act (1925) and the Child Labour Regulation Act (1926/27) and were part of a broader framework, where working class struggles imposed a scheme of minimum social protection that would be institutionalised in the following decades.

In Brazil, the institutionalisation of the social security system tied the minimum protection

of rights to the control of trade unionism by the state, operated by the Vargas government in the construction of the labour pact. The logic of the game was simple. The workers would support Vargas who, in turn, would guarantee them small economic gains. In the 1950s and 1960s, the populist pact ran out of breath and the political and economic elites constituted a bloc of interests that opposed the national-reformist bloc. Supported by businessmen, politicians and American imperialism this bloc imposed a military dictatorship and crushed the organised working class,

...political elites were to increase the rate of surplus value by cutting rights and increasing working hours.

but kept a minimum of social security. The new social welfare system born with the end of the military dictatorship in 1985 was built with the pressure of a vigorous popular and union movements that intervened in the discussions of the new Constitution of 1988, helping to establish a set of acts involving Health, Assistance and Social Welfare, using the term “Social Security”.

In the 1990s, Brazil was to be integrated into the globalised economy. The solutions of the political elites were to increase the rate of surplus value by cutting rights and increasing working

hours. The Brazilian bourgeoisie tried to resolve the bleeding of the unequal competition of global capitalism by increasing the exploitation of the Brazilian working class. This was done by the presidencies of the liberal governments of Fernando Collor de Melo and Fernando Henrique Cardoso with changes that increased the working hours.

## A new class pact and the failure of conciliation

The 13-year rule of the Workers' Party (PT) government was based on a class pact between workers and bosses, where an economy focused primarily on the domestic market and commodity export would guarantee robust gains for Brazilian employers and increase access to consumption for millions of workers. The structural elements of the reproduction of the inequality of Brazilian society remained intact, but

the gap between the poorest and the middle class diminished.

This scheme worked efficiently, albeit with internal contradictions until the 2008 economic crisis. The crisis didn't affect the second mandate of the Lula government much (2007-2011), but its consequences fully affected his successor, President Dilma Rousseff (2012-2016). Both in the Lula government and the Dilma government retirement changes were made that attacked workers but, at the same time, they conceded small economic crumbs of access to consumption and credit that helped reduce class tensions; while maintaining the illusions of sustained growth in accordance with capital. These illusions were totally broken in 2013 with the increasing economic crisis and the political polarisation between two distinct projects of capital management.

The 2013 protests were characterised by the defence of social rights and, in their second phase, were already dominated by a conservative coalition.

This coalition of neo-pentacostal churches, right-wing groups and ultra-liberal think-tanks radicalised the Brazilian political agenda towards the extreme-right in the following years, deposed President Dilma Rousseff and put the ultraliberal agenda in power with the Temer government, Dilma's Vice. With the help of political elites dissatisfied with the class pact and stimulated by anti-Workers Partyism, these forces elected the proto-fascist Jair Messias Bolsonaro in 2018. With this new economic and political bloc in power, they articulated initiatives deepening capitalist exploitation, total subordination of the Brazilian economy to the international financial system, destruction of the internal market, together with attempts to criminalise social movements. The dismantling of social security would be the most important part of this plan.

## The attacks on social security and the June 14 2019 standstill

The Bill to be approved increases retirement age, decreases the value of the benefit that will be received upon retirement, imposes rules that make it difficult to receive the full value of the benefit, hinders retirement due to work related accidents, increases social and gender inequalities and makes the general living conditions of the Brazilian working class very precarious. There are also big interests of the financial system in the so-called private pension system in appropriating workers' funds and putting them into the financial system casino.

June 14th, despite being planned as a general strike, was limited. This scenario is a symptom of the inability of the major union federations to mobilise their bases. Union bureaucratisation and

In the 1990s, Brazil was to be integrated into the globalised economy.

coopted by 13 years of the PT government has had its mobilising capacity increasingly reduced.

With some exceptions, the most radical actions of blockading roads were carried out mainly by the most precarious sectors (homeless, landless etc.) and revolutionary political groups outside the major union federations. Even so, these groups alone didn't have the capacity for wider intervention.

Working class support in general was also modest, due to the erosion of bureaucratised unionism and the conservative consensus, which has gained strength from 2015 until now. Despite this, the 14th was important to regain strength in the streets.

With 12.5% unemployment and a stagnant economy, Bolsonaro's social base is beginning to crumble, but still maintains a hard core of bourgeois, military and middle-class reactionary sectors and part of the wage earners in its defense. The battle against the pension reform will decide not only the future of workers' rights in Brazil, but also the fate of the Brazilian political regime for the coming years. If the government doesn't approve the reform, the country's chance of again entering a spiral of political crisis may lead Brazil to a new crossroads. May the working class see the crisis as an opportunity to defend and advance their rights! ■



# A CRY IN DEFENCE OF ORGANISED WORKING CLASS

By Karl Myx

This is a cry!  
 This is a cry!  
 A cry for liberation  
 A cry for the abolition of capitalist exploitation  
 This a cry!  
 With hope and resilience refusing to die  
 Abasebenzi fighting the best way they know how  
 That is a cry!  
 For every aching bone  
 Crushed by the masters of neo-liberal oppression  
 A cry not of tears  
 But a cry of outright expression and direct action  
 A cry loud enough to pierce the sky  
 A cry against this system of exploitation and violence  
 For our blood sweat and tears we refuse to be silenced  
 We won't go sheepishly to be sacrificed  
 On the golden altars of the tyrants  
 Disenfranchised and disempowered  
 By the bosses and the Pharos of the modern times  
 The brutal keepers who give stones for bread  
 Living off the sweat of your brow  
 Jackboot you to a factory floor  
 Till you fracture your spine  
 Labour brokers sucking you dry  
 As you Continue to spin and weave  
 To the very end of your existence  
 a cry in defence of organised working class.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

# 2019 ILRIG Political Schools APPLICATIONS OPEN!

Instead of having one national Globalisation School this year ILRIG, breaking with 16 years of tradition, will host two smaller provincial political schools: one in the Western Cape and one in Gauteng.

While attendance is by invitation only, for activists with which we work, ILRIG will consider applications from other progressive and working class activists depending both on what we think they would stand to gain from participating, and what they could contribute to the school (in terms of bringing new experiences, theories and insights etc.).

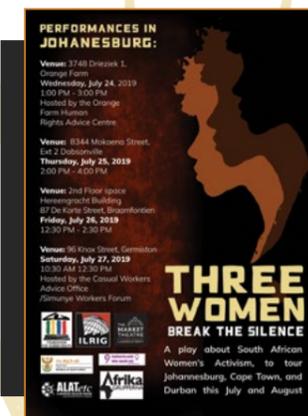
- Applications must include your:
- Name, age and gender.
- Where you are from (geographically and organisationally);
- What struggles you are involved in or constituencies you work with, and;
- Motivate why you want to participate in the School (i.e. what you think you can contribute to the school, and what you hope to gain from it).

Send applications by email, fax or private message to the contacts listed below.

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Are you involved in progressive struggles or grassroots workplace/ community organising that needs solidarity or that you think more activists should be made aware of? Do you have an analysis of or insights into a struggle or social/political/economic issue or development – whether local, regional or international – that is of interest or relevance to progressive/working class activists and struggles in South Africa that you would like to share? Do you have questions/comments about or disagreements with something published in Workers' World News?

Send us your article (max. 600 words) by email or Facebook private message and we will consider publishing it in a future issue.



## CALLING ALL CULTURAL ACTIVISTS

We would love to feature your artwork advocating for alternatives to capitalism, fascism and patriarchy. Please help us make this an inspiring publication by sending us your poetry & songs, photography & graphic design, paintings & drawings, reports & manifestos of cultural activist interventions etc.

## CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AND JOIN CURRENT DEBATES

[WWW.ILRIG.ORG](http://WWW.ILRIG.ORG)

The site allows viewers to find out more about ILRIG, its history, staff and board. It provides an interactive space for interested people to engage with ILRIG's work on globalisation, read articles, contribute to discussion, and order publications. Website members will receive regular updates on issues of interest.



Room 14, Community House, 41 Salt River Road, Salt River, Cape Town  
 info@ilrig.org.za 021 447 6375 021 448 2282  
 ILRIGSA / Workers World News #ILRIG

# PERFORMANCES IN JOHANNESBURG:

**Venue:** 3748 Drieziek 1,  
Orange Farm

**Wednesday, July 24, 2019**

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Hosted by the Orange  
Farm Human  
Rights Advice Centre

**Venue:** 8344 Mokoena Street,  
Ext 2 Dobsonville

**Thursday, July 25, 2019**

2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

**Venue:** 2nd Floor space  
Hereengracht Building

87 De Korte Street, Braamfontien

**Friday, July 26, 2019**

12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

**Venue:** 96 Knox Street, Germiston

**Saturday, July 27, 2019**

10:30 AM 12:30 PM

Hosted by the Casual Workers  
Advice Office  
/Simunye Workers Forum



# THREE WOMEN BREAK THE SILENCE

A play about South African Women's Activism, to tour Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban this July and August