

Campaigning underway in South African elections

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10 January 2014

South Africa's *Business Day* reported January 4 that the Independent Electoral Commission has opened the process allowing South Africans living and travelling abroad to register to vote in the 2014 elections while overseas, in line with the provisions of the Electoral Amendment Act 2013.

Émigré South Africans, who tend to be wealthier whites, are an important constituency for the opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA). Meanwhile the DA is trying to expand its provincial lead in the Western Cape, where it is the governing party. It is seeking to wrest the majority from Gauteng's incumbent African National Congress (ANC) government by appealing to the black middle class vote in the country's smallest and wealthiest province.

Three other bourgeois parties, each with less than one percent of seats in the National Assembly, have joined the Congress of the People (COPE) in a coalition called the Collective for Democracy. COPE is an ANC split-off formed by Thabo Mbeki loyalists in 2008 in protest at his humiliating removal from national office after he lost the presidency of the ANC to Jacob Zuma at the party's 2007 Polokwane conference. Like the ANC, the Collective has nothing to offer the poor.

On the nominal left, the only parties making any appeal to workers are the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of expelled ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, and the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), which is aligned via the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) to the pseudo-left Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

The DSM states on its web site that it took the decision to form the WASP "Together with mineworkers' committees." It boasts of the support of the National Transport Movement, a breakaway from the SA Transport and Allied Workers' Union, and is seeking relations with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, which is in conflict with the National Union of Mineworkers. The DSM was formerly called the Marxist Workers Tendency (MWT) of the ANC.

WASP/DSM realised as early as the beginning of the southern summer that the withdrawal of electoral support for

the ruling ANC by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) would result in a bloc of working class voters without a political home in the upcoming elections. Accordingly, WASP has been sedulously courting NUMSA for months.

Both NUMSA and WASP pretend that the widening rift in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is between pro-capitalist and pro-socialist factions. NUMSA General Secretary Irvin Jim, President Andrew Chirwa and Treasurer Karl Cloete naturally fall into the "socialist" camp along with suspended COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, for whose continued survival they are all fighting.

WASP's website proclaims that the party is a product of the worker and grassroots resistance that climaxed in the police attack at Marikana on August 16, 2012 that left dozens of miners and community members dead. It mentions nothing of substance about WASP's ties to the opportunist CWI.

The specialty of this petty bourgeois tendency is to neutralise and corral the working class into regressive positions under cover of leftist rhetoric. For example, as part of Germany's Left Party, the CWI's Socialist Alternative (SAV) is culpable in the Left Party's push for intensified Western action against the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, and thus in favour of the CIA sponsored "revolutionary militias" opposing it.

WASP fares little better. "How do we account", asked the WASP website in its eulogy on late former President Nelson Mandela, "for the fact that today's self-enriching ANC leadership is removed by light years from the liberation movement of yesteryear? [...] The reason is simple: the ANC reached an accommodation with capitalism rather than ending it."

This is a flight of fancy. WASP wants to pretend that the bourgeois nationalist ANC and its Stalinists allies in the once-underground South African Communist Party (SACP) were nevertheless, thanks to leaders like Mandela, some redoubt of virtue.

In the first instance, the abuses of the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe commanders against rank-and-file guerrillas in training camps like Angola's Quatro are well documented.

More importantly, there is the matter of the ANC's "accommodation with capitalism rather than ending it."

The incestuous relationship between the ANC and the SACP was politically based on the "two-stage" theory of proletarian revolution, through which the Stalinists opposed (and betrayed) workers' uprisings internationally and deferred to some unspecified future the dictatorship of the proletariat in favour of alliances with "progressive" bourgeois parties. The ANC adopted anti-imperialist and socialist rhetoric supplied to it by the Stalinists because this legitimised the Freedom Charter perspective of establishing a supposedly democratic and capitalist South Africa, through the ending of apartheid.

We may as well take the word of Mandela, who was recently revealed as a member of the SACP, on this crucial issue. According to him, enacting the ANC programme meant that "the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."

The accommodation that the ANC reached with capitalism, rather than ending it, was always its aim. It presupposed the intensified exploitation of South African workers, beginning in the 1990s in competition against, above all, workers in China as the globe's pre-eminent cheap labour platform. This was partly necessary to pay for the elevation of the black political elite into the fold of a bourgeoisie that was not required to relinquish one red cent of its apartheid-era gains.

In the wake of its myth-making, which seeks to disguise the true ANC line, WASP now wants to present itself as the political vehicle to which NUMSA should hitch its mass base. WASP's open letter to the union calls on NUMSA "to go a step further than merely withdrawing support for the ANC and to support the formation of a mass workers party."

It boasts, "WASP is formally backed by the National Transport Movement (a 50,000-strong split from [the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union]) and the Transkei region of [the South African National Civics Organisation]. [...] WASP is organised in a democratic and federal way that would allow NUMSA to nominate its own candidates to stand for election under the WASP umbrella."

The rogues' gallery to be found in such a formation would turn on workers as readily as has the ANC's Tripartite Alliance with COSATU and the SACP. The main requirement for a spot under the WASP umbrella seems to be a rift with the Zuma camp and the parroting of a leftist slogan or two. Hence last October, WASP looked forward to

an urgent "agreement for collaboration on the electoral field" with the EFF of Malema.

Talks collapsed mere days later. The parties could not reach agreement among other things on the content of the demand for "nationalisation."

"Our demand for nationalisation is not an end all by itself," said WASP representative Mametlwe Sebei. "The EFF's position is nationalisation to bring sectors of the economy into state control, which doesn't resolve the problems of the working class."

For workers, none of the unions or union officials, including Irvin Jim and Zwelinzima Vavi, show any way forward. The *Mail & Guardian* reported April 1, 2010, "Noluthando Vavi, the wife of COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, is being paid R60,000 [\$US5,500] a month to market financial products to union members. And the company she acts for is so anxious to keep the deal secret that it offered the *Mail & Guardian* a bribe of R120,000 to suppress the story."

Being in the union bureaucracy in South Africa is a passport into the bourgeoisie proper. Through the ANC's Black Economic Empowerment policies, former unionists including Cyril Ramaphosa, Jay Naidoo, and Mbhazima Shilowa have since gone on to join the ranks of the country's high net-worth individuals.

In opposition to the efforts of WASP and others to present the union bureaucracy as the great hope of the poor, workers, students and the unemployed, only a Trotskyist party can guarantee the political independence of the working class. Workers must build the South African section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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