

WORKERS' UNITY

Organ of the South African Congress of Trade Unions

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AFTER SOWETO: the road ahead

During the past six months, South Africa has been shaken by the greatest mass upsurge in the revolutionary struggle of the black working people since the early 1960s. Since the police massacred young demonstrators in Soweto on June 16, the oppressed people have risen in defiance in almost every big town and city. In the country areas, too, there have been angry stirrings.

Now, for the time being, there is a pause. Before long the struggle will move forward again even more fiercely. All the shootings, beatings, arrests and torture have failed to crush the spirit of the people. The determination to fight on is stronger than ever before. But for the moment the mass movement is pausing to catch its breath. It may take time before the black workers and young people are mobilised to action again in their tens and hundreds of thousands.

Of course the apartheid regime is making the most of this relative calm. The police are tightening their grip. The house-to-house searches, the arrests of suspected militants by the hundred, the torture of detainees, infiltration by informers and the systematic intimidation of workers and students — all these have been stepped up. These measures will not succeed: in the past months the currents of the revolution have run too deep.

But we, on our side, must also make the most of this period. It is now urgently necessary to draw the main conclusions from what has taken place, to understand the stage of the struggle through which we are passing, and to set out clearly the tasks which confront us.

The question

What is the way forward? This is the question uppermost in the minds of all militant workers and students, and all who have shown their courage through the great events of the past months.

To answer this question correctly is the task of all leaders at every level, in the factories, schools and organisations of the people. But to do so, we must grasp clearly what lies at the root of the struggle: What exactly are we struggling against? What are we struggling for? What are the main forces that can be relied on?

From Soweto and Alexandra to Langa, Guguletu and Athlone, to Mamelodi and wherever the black people have risen up, they have begun by their actions to answer these questions in the plainest terms.

Firstly, they are emphasizing that the main battle-ground in the struggle against apartheid lies in the big cities, in the industrial areas where the power-houses of production have been built up.

They are showing, secondly, that in this struggle nothing can take the place of the mass power of the oppressed people themselves. Only when the toilers, young and old, rise to action in their tens and hundreds of thousands



against all the forces and institutions of the state, is the racist regime seriously challenged and its authority shaken.

Thirdly, they are showing what apartheid really means to the majority of black people — to the workers and working-class youth. It means far more than racism, far more than discrimination on grounds of colour. It means far more than just the denial of democratic rights or the humiliation of inequality. To the working people, apartheid is part and parcel of the system which exploits them economically. It holds them in utter poverty, it controls their every movement through the pass laws and the contract labour system, and it yokes them as mere oxen of labour in the service of the capitalist class.

Fourthly, they are showing that once the struggle against apartheid breaks out into the open, it rapidly becomes a social struggle against the ruling class. It becomes a struggle of the working people against the employers.

All these lessons were made clear as the events of the past months unfolded.

An effective blow

On June 16, when the school-children demonstrated peacefully in Soweto against compulsory teaching in Afrikaans, they were shot down by the police in cold blood. Although the young people returned to the streets day after day, marching unarmed against bullets, they soon realised that bravery alone was not enough. They had shown their willingness to die if need be for the liberation of the people — many hundreds have paid that price — but they lacked the means to strike an effective blow.

For this reason they turned to the black workers — to their own parents, older brothers, cousins, friends, etc. — the labour force on which the whole capitalist economy in South Africa rests. They realised that without the labour of the workers there is nothing: no production in the factories, no transport, no deliveries, no communications. Everything would grind to a halt.

The workers were slower to move than the students, but when they did move they immediately raised the entire struggle to a new and

higher stage.

On two occasions, in August and again in September, black workers successfully carried out three-day political general strikes which paralysed industry on the Witwatersrand and in the Cape. On the second occasion more than 500 000 African and Coloured workers were on strike in Johannesburg and Cape Town alone.

What is the significance of these strikes?

* Firstly that so many workers were prepared to strike in spite of the threat not only of arrest, beating and shooting by the police, but also of mass dismissal from their jobs. Unemployment among Africans in South Africa is approximately 2 million, or 20%, and many unemployed workers face the additional threat of deportation to the reserves under the pass laws.

* Secondly, that the strikes were carried out on such a large scale with such skill, discipline and maturity by a working class which has, for more than a decade, been deprived of open political leadership and organisation, and which lacks even basic trade union rights.

* Thirdly, that for the first time in the history of our struggle the Coloured workers (and indeed also the youth) have rallied in their thousands to the side of their African brothers.

* Finally, and most important, it was the strike action of the black workers which really shook the confidence of the regime and of the whole capitalist ruling class.

The roots of apartheid

The struggle in South Africa is not against apartheid "pure and simple", not against white domination alone, but also against the whole system of class exploitation which underlies it. Why are black people so oppressed in South Africa? Why has this monstrous apartheid system grown up? Is it because there is some special evil in white people? Of course not!

At the root of it all is an economic system in which the wealth of our country, the mines, the factories and the big farms, are owned by a tiny minority. This ownership enables them to exploit the labour of the working people for their own profit.

Everything which is produced is made by the labour of workers. But instead of enjoying the

benefit of the wealth they produce, black workers are paid wages which are just enough to survive — and to keep on working. For the bosses it is different. Simply because they own the mines, factories, land, etc., they take from the workers whatever is produced and become the holders of vast fortunes which they can manage as they please. This makes them the masters, not only of "their" workers, but of society as a whole. They are the real power behind the government and it is for their benefit above all, and for the protection of their property, that the repressive forces of the South African police state are set to work.

Apartheid serves the interests of this capitalist system in South Africa. To suit the needs of the employers, it moves black workers like cattle from place to place under the strictest control, by means of the pass laws, "Bantu administration" and the contract labour system. It uses the reserves ("bantustans") as great dams of unemployed labour, where Africans are made to wait until the bosses call. It denies black people democratic rights. It bans their political organisations and imprisons their leaders. And now it is trying again to suppress their trade unions. It imposes an "education" system whose stated aim is to prepare blacks only for the role of menial labourers.

In these and many other ways apartheid holds the black working class in conditions of near-slavery. *To maintain and develop the exploitation of the workers is the basic purpose of the apartheid system.*

Driving force

In South Africa today the working class, growing in numbers and inner strength with every passing year, has become the driving force of the approaching revolution. The heroic action of the past months has brought to the fore the enormous power of the black industrial workers in South Africa. The power of the workers to stop production *strikes at the roots of the apartheid system.* This is a power which must be built up as the struggle goes on.

When the black workers went on general strike they showed that they understood the link between the racial system which oppresses them and the economic system which exploits them. This frightened the whole ruling class and its fear was instantly felt by the masses themselves.

From this point on the question of the general strike has become a central focus of the mass struggle against apartheid. Every militant at every point will now ask himself or herself the question: "Are the workers prepared to strike?"

But workers never use the strike weapon lightly. They know that strikes have serious consequences. A strike can only succeed when careful preparation has been made and when large numbers of workers have clearly understood its purpose and are determined to carry it through.

Workers' organisation

It is only through *organisation*, developed through long months and even years of *hard and careful work among the workers themselves*, that the fighting strength of the working class will be made equal to the tasks ahead. In the day-to-day battles, for higher wages, for better working conditions, for trade union rights, against victimization, for an end to this or that mean practice of the bosses, the *organisation and consciousness* of the workers will be built up. In a period of relative calm this type of struggle becomes particularly important.

Of course all this will not be enough. The rulers in South Africa are conducting a war against the black working people. Every imaginable form of brutality is being employed. To defend themselves against these attacks, to protect their organisations, and to ensure that the struggle is not defeated by the armed force of the apartheid regime, the workers themselves will have to arm. This will take place; it is inevitable. Already too many defenceless people have been slaughtered by the regime.

Within the townships, the people are taking measures for their own protection against

WHY 'WORKERS' UNITY'?

"Workers' Unity" is the official newspaper of SACTU and will come out every two months. The choice of name for the newspaper is important, and reflects SACTU's attitude towards the organisation of all workers. The following principles have been a part of SACTU's Constitution since it was formed in 1955:

"The future of the people of South Africa is in the hands of its workers. Only the working class, in alliance with other progressive-minded sections of the community, can build a happy life for all South Africans, a life free from unemployment, insecurity and poverty, free from racial hatred and oppression, a life of vast opportunities for all people.

"But the working class can only succeed in this great and noble endeavour if it itself is united and strong, if it is conscious of its inspiring responsibility. The workers of South Africa need a united trade union movement in which all sections of the working class can play their part unhindered by prejudice or racial discrimination. Only such a truly united movement can serve effectively the interests of higher wages and better conditions of life and work as well as the ultimate objective of complete emancipation for which our forefathers have fought.

"We firmly declare that the interests of all workers are alike, whether they be European or non-European, African, Coloured, Indian, English, Afrikaans or Jewish. We resolve that this co-ordinating body of trade unions shall strive to unite all workers in its ranks, without discrimination, and without prejudice. We resolve that this body shall determinedly seek to further and protect the interests of all workers, and that its guiding motto shall be the universal slogan of working class solidarity:

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL."

Racism divides the workers in South Africa. It breeds fear and suspicion, it sows confusion and prevents all workers from joining together in a common struggle against exploitation.

The basic conflict in South Africa is between those who own the factories, mines and farms — the employers — and those who own nothing and are forced to sell their labour in order to survive — the workers. The workers are dependant upon their jobs for survival, and as long as they are disunited and unorganised they can be held at the mercy of the employers.

But when the workers are organised and united, they can shift the balance in this great struggle and challenge the employers' power. Without labour there can be no production. It is because of the enormous power which organised workers can use that the employers do their utmost to sow disunity and discord. They "buy off" the white workers on the one hand and hold down the black workers on the other.

THE PROBLEM OF WHITE WORKERS

The support of white workers for the ruling system in South Africa has been purchased over many years by means of special privileges: high wages, protection of skilled jobs against competition from blacks, and political and trade union rights. It is maintained also by means of racial prejudice. The rulers rely on the white workers for political support and to man the armed forces.

But can the factory and mine owners afford to "buy off" the white workers for ever? South Africa is in deep economic crisis. Production is falling, unemployment is rising and prices are going up. The high living standards of the white workers are coming under attack. Already, some white trade unions have withdrawn their support for the government's anti-inflation campaign, which is basically a trick to get the workers to tighten their belts so that the employers can protect their profits. The "alliance" between the factory owners and the white workers is coming under increasing strain.

Can white workers join hands with black workers in a common struggle? Over many years, fear and suspicion has been built up on both sides. White workers have been taught to fear that the blacks will take their jobs. Black workers see white workers supporting apartheid and assisting in their oppression. But those who understand that the basic struggle in South Africa is between the employers and the workers must look ahead.

The situation is fast approaching when the jobs and living standards of all workers will be attacked. Deep economic crisis will close down factories and throw workers out of jobs. It is in this situation develops that confusion will grow in the ranks of the white workers, when the realisation will come that apartheid cannot protect them forever. Slowly, painfully, some white workers will turn to the black workers for support in the struggle for survival. It is the black workers who carry the struggle forwards, with the slogan of jobs and decent living standards for ALL working people.

LIGHTING THE WAY

African, Coloured and Indian workers experience oppression and exploitation most acutely; they can see the enemy the most clearly. Upon them rests the responsibility of lighting the way ahead for all workers of all races. Already we have seen the magnificent unified strike action of African and Coloured workers. Let this be the first step to a great, united and militant trade union movement.

known informers and agents of the police. In the factories, too, workers are dealing with spies. These are early signs of the ways in which the experience gained over the past months is being put to use.

But all the defences of the working class, and their ability to carry the struggle forward, depends on the development of *organisation*, especially within the factories themselves. Here the new leadership which is emerging, and which has managed to escape arrest by the police, should carefully bring together in small groups those workers who have shown themselves to be absolutely reliable. In secret the problems of the struggle should be studied and discussed. Gradually a firm network of organisation must be built up, both within and between the factories, *secure from the police* and capable of leading the workers forward with clear aims when the mass struggle resumes.

Support for trade unions

At the same time the trade unions and other similar organisations of African workers which have been built up over the past four years *should be supported*. These organisations are

under fierce attack by the government, which has recently banned many of their leaders, but it is necessary to support them as they can help the workers in putting forward such things as wage demands and in the open struggle for full trade union rights for Africans. But it must be remembered that action will probably be taken before long against any new leaders who reveal themselves in these organisations.

In future issues of this paper we will be looking in more detail at some of the problems of worker organisations.

Certain victory

The events of the past six months have shown that the road to victory is the road of the workers' struggle. The task now is to build up the organised strength of the working class. In the course of this much more hard work and even more determination and courage will be required.

Since Soweto the black working people of South Africa have made an enormous advance. They have felt their power and have shown beyond question that eventual victory is certain.

International notes...

African unionists to work jointly on S.A.

The Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), J.D. Akumu, and the General Secretary of SACTU, John Gaetsewe, met in London last month to review events in Southern Africa. In a joint statement they condemned the bannings and detentions of trade unionists in South Africa.

They welcomed the decision of West European trade unions to initiate action against the South African regime, beginning in 1977. This is to include an arms boycott, the grounding of aircraft servicing South Africa, and the refusal to handle South African cargoes in European ports.

They agreed that SACTU and the OATUU would work closely together both in Africa and elsewhere. They welcomed the decision by the workers' group of the International Labour Organisation to sponsor a world trade union conference against apartheid. In addition, SACTU and the OATUU, together with Swedish trade unionists, are sponsoring a solidarity conference next year in one of the countries bordering off South Africa, to discuss problems and plans for action.

Call for action on bannings

In a statement after the banning of trade unionists in November, SACTU called for united action by the international labour movement in support of the oppressed workers of South Africa. While many hundreds had been killed, thousands wounded, and while the jails were filled with political prisoners, it was

still necessary to draw special attention to these bannings. They revealed the systematic attack conducted by the regime against the growing black labour movement. The rulers feared the organisation and militancy of the workers, who have the power to crush racism and end exploitation. For this reason workers' leaders were being imprisoned and banned.

British workers plan action against apartheid

More than 280 delegates from the British trade union and labour movement attended a conference in London on 6th November, organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement. They met to discuss action to be taken by British workers against the South African regime.

Twenty-six trade unions were represented by members of their National Executive Committees, while 145 delegates came from trade union area committees and local branches. Representatives of the ILO, WFTU and ICFTU addressed the conference.

One of the speakers was the General Secretary of SACTU, John Gaetsewe. He said that black workers in South Africa, by their powerful strike action, were showing the way forward in the struggle. Workers in South Africa and abroad faced a common enemy — exploitation — and only their united strength could bring it to an end. He called on workers in all countries to force an end to foreign investment in South Africa and all other forms of collaboration with apartheid.

Workers from British Leyland and from a number of other firms and trade unions described action which had been taken and could be taken by British workers to support their fellow workers in South Africa. This conf-

erence has made an important contribution to international working-class solidarity in the South African struggle.

General strike in Spain

Since the death of the dictator, General Franco the Spanish workers have continued their determined struggle to put an end to fascist rule. On 12th November 1976 more than one and a half million workers in Spain held a one day general strike, called by the underground trade unions. The police tried to prevent the strike by arresting more than 250 trade union activists.

In addition 7000 striking bus workers fought daily battles with riot police who used rubber bullets, tear gas and smoke bombs against them. Some were forced into their buses to work at gun point.

Forty people have been killed in Spain in the past year, most of them by the police. But the workers' movement has been growing so strong that even some police have gone on strike in support of the workers.

So this is change?

The South African government believes it is making changes in its policies. So says Mulder Minister of the Interior. But, says Mulder in a speech given in London recently, the change have already been made! We quote: "I want to emphasize the fact that we brought about our announced changes long before the trouble in Soweto ... long before the first bus or classroom was burned down in Soweto."

So there we have it. Perhaps those who have been telling the black working people to wait patiently for the government to end apartheid will now be silent and let them get on with the struggle.

Transkei: no independence for workers

Flags, bands and a 101-gun salute! With plenty of ceremony, the Transkei became officially "independent" on 26 October last year. But it is all a fraud. Like the whole Bantustan system, Transkei "independence" is in fact an attack by the apartheid regime on the African workers in South Africa. It threatens even the pitifully few rights they have.

Under the apartheid system the rights of African workers to remain in the towns and cities where they work have been taken away. Only a small proportion of Africans, such as those who have remained continuously in a particular urban area ever since birth, may live

there without permission from Bantu Affairs officials. For the rest, Africans are treated as "temporary sojourners" in the urban areas. Any one who remains in an urban area for more than 72 hours without the necessary stamp in his "pass" may be arrested and "endorsed out" to one of the rural reserves.

About 600 000 arrests under the pass laws take place in South Africa every year.

Control of workers

Does Transkei "independence" change any of this? No, on the contrary: it strengthens the power of the apartheid regime to control

African workers. All Xhosa-speaking African in South Africa, without their consent, have been made Transkei "citizens" and stripped of their South African citizenship by a law of the white Parliament. This is an old trick of the South African government: by a device which sounds as though it is giving rights, rights are in fact being taken away. Transkei "citizenship" is nothing more than an addition to the pass laws.

Despite "independence" the Transkei is still what it was before: a labour reserve. Unemployed African workers are forced to remain there until they are recruited on "contract" to work on the farms, in the mines and in the factories of "white South Africa". Even then they are forced to leave their families behind.

Within the Transkei itself there is no future for the workers and their families. The land has long been overcrowded. Each year 26 000 additional Transkeians become eligible for employment — but there are still only 11 000 jobs in total which have been created there. The only hope of work lies outside the Transkei, in the towns and cities.

Oppressive laws

What prospect is there for the few workers with jobs inside the Transkei? Matanzima has said that he will not allow trade unions in the Transkei. Wages are to be kept low so that super-profits can be offered to capitalist investors. He has also taken over some of the most oppressive laws of South Africa, such as the Terrorism Act and the Internal Security Act. A state of emergency has been in force in the Transkei since 1960, and scores of opponents of the regime have been imprisoned including candidates standing against the ruling party in elections!

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Matanzima receives a white horse from the South African Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha.

Dockworkers in S. Africa

This is the first in a series of articles dealing with the conditions of workers in South Africa's major industries.

Dock workers in South Africa have set a high standard of militancy. Their struggles for higher wages and improved conditions have played an important part in the struggle of all the oppressed people for liberation, as the following events show:

* The dock workers' strike in Cape Town in 1919 led to the formation of the ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union).

* Dock workers in Durban began the struggle against passes, poll tax and beerhalls in 1929—1931.

* Dock workers carried on the struggle against the use of convict labour in the Port Elizabeth docks in the 1950s.

* During the 1960 stay-at-home, the Cape Town dock workers brought the docks to a stand-still.

Conditions at work

Why have dock workers played such an important part in the general struggle of the workers? We can see some of the reasons in their conditions at work.

* They do particularly heavy and dangerous work.

* Their wages change from week to week because of changes in the ships moving in and out of the docks.

* Because dock workers live and work in groups, they quickly learn to work closely with each other to get the work done and to avoid accidents. They have understood the need for unity among the workers, and the strength which comes from this.

Dock workers in South Africa are mainly migrant workers, who work in the cities but are forced to leave their families in the reserves. Every year these workers have to return to the reserves for a new contract, and can only keep their jobs if they have a call-in card. This means that they can never build up a legal right to live in the cities and make a life there with their wives and children. This is one of the main grievances of the workers.

While in the cities, the dock workers are housed in compounds or hostels. The conditions there are dreadful as the bosses provide only the bare minimum to make sure the workers are kept on the job.

Low costs, high profits

The system of migrant labour lies at the root of oppression in South Africa. The low wages and bad working conditions suffered by workers in the docks show clearly how the system works in the interests of the bosses, keeping costs down and profits up.

In Durban, the basic weekly wage for dock workers is only R16.70,* and the daily allowance is added if there is work. In the following table, in the case of Durban, we have assumed a full five days' work.

	Stevedoring hand	Winchman	Breadline
Cape Town	R24.60	R27.10	R31.49
Port Elizabeth	R22.70	R24.20	R28.83
East London	R22.15	R23.65	R29.79
Durban	R22.70	R26.20	R29.44

All these wages fall far below the breadline, let alone what is needed for a decent life. Only by working long hours of overtime can the workers manage to make ends meet.

In Britain, for example, dock workers receive pensions, and are paid when the ships do not come in. In South Africa the bosses are saved these expenses, mainly as a result of the migrant labour system. When the workers are too old or sick to work, or when there is no work to be done, they are simply sent back to the reserves. There they are without the means to feed,

*R1 = approx. £0.70 or \$1.15



Durban dockers at work, watched by their supervisor.

clothe and shelter themselves and their families.

No compensation

When dock workers are injured they can be endorsed out of the cities as soon as they come out of hospital. There are hundreds of dock workers who never get the workmen's compensation which is due to them, as they are sent to the reserves and thus fail to apply for it. Their names can be seen in the Government Gazettes. There are no redundancy payments to workers who are no longer of use to the companies.

Many workers die in the docks because of the dangerous work, but their widows do not even get the money they should in terms of the Unemployment Insurance Act because the stevedoring companies have been exempted from paying into this fund. This saves the employers a lot of money.

Long struggle

British dockers fought long and hard to gain the payments they now receive. Likewise the dock workers of South Africa have had to struggle for even the little which they get. Organisation in the docks is very difficult. Trade unions are not recognised and workers know well that the bosses often send back to the reserves those workers who stand up for their rights and demand improvements. The bosses also bring in the police to control the workers, as during the 1959-1960 stay-at-home when the dock compounds were placed under armed guard.

Many have died carrying on the struggle of the dock workers. One of the most famous of the dock leaders was Johannes Nkosi, who led the workers in Durban in the struggle against the passes and the poll tax in 1931. He said: "Down with slave laws! Burn the passes!" Nkosi's determination won him the hatred of the employers and the police, and he was shot down on Dingaan's Day in 1931. Many others also died, laying down their lives for their comrades.

Labour supply companies

In the past the struggle for higher wages for dock workers went along with the demand for

regular work in the docks. In 1959 SAU demanded that the workers be paid on a weekly and not a daily basis. Instead of negotiating with the workers, the employers introduced labour supply companies to control the workers. In Durban, the Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company was resisted by workers in a long struggle. Eventually, they were all fired, endorsed out and replaced that the company could get going.

These labour supply companies are agents, like J.B. Buthelezi in Durban, who on the workers and victimize those who try to organise trade unions.

The struggle for higher wages for workers intensified in 1972 when the Board investigated the industry. The Durban workers and the University Wages Commission demanded a basic wage of R18 per week which daily allowances and bonuses would be calculated. The workers crowded into Department of Labour offices when the Board met; more than a hundred went to attend to put forward their demands. The same thing happened at Cape Town.

Employers frightened

This was something new and it frightened employers. After these meetings the Employers' Association said that it was unable to sit and talk about wages with workers breathing down their necks. A new wage was made to enable the employers (like the dockers) and the government to fix wages without hearing the workers. The employers took advantage of this and did not hold public meetings.

Only determined struggle can bring improvements for the workers. In Durban, the workers are joining the Transport and General Workers' Union, despite the hostility of employers. In Cape Town the workers formed their own committees and have secured overtime bans to support their demands. Bosses will do all in their power to prevent workers from organising. The vicious system always stands as a threat to the workers. BUT WE MUST ORGANISE AND FIGHT ON RELENTLESSLY!

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As for segregation, Matanzima has assured industrialists that "socially unacceptable elements" (that is to say working people) will not be allowed to swamp "sophisticated" public amenities.

Military force

The rulers of the Transkei are kept in power with the help of the South African military and police force. Without Pretoria they are nothing. They are both the puppets of apartheid and its partners in exploiting the working class. While the rulers grow fat with corruption and from all the land they are grabbing for

themselves, the workers will continue to suffer all the miseries of the apartheid system.

When the workers, through their struggle, put an end to apartheid and the exploitation of the working class in South Africa, they will at the same time liberate the Transkei and about the unity of all our people.

"Workers' Unity" is intended for workers and trade unionists both in South Africa and abroad. To continue producing this and other publications SACTU urgently needs financial support. Res outside South Africa are asked to send donations to SACTU's London Office at 49 Rathbone Place, W1A 4NL.