

"An injury to one is an injury to all"

WORKERS' UNITY

Organ of the South African Congress of Trade Unions

Issue No. 3, May 1977

Unemployment crisis in all capitalist countries

Why are there no jobs ?

Unemployment and falling standards of living are threatening millions of workers throughout the capitalist world. In Britain, there are close on 1½ million unemployed workers; in Japan, nearly the same number are unemployed. In the United States of America, over 8½ million workers are out of jobs, and in Italy well over ½ million workers suffer the same fate.

The International Labour Organisation estimates that in 1975 there were close on 18½ million unemployed in the industrialised capitalist countries alone — the highest level of unemployment since 1945. This figure does not include the millions of unemployed in India, Africa, South America and elsewhere, where the mass of the working people live in extreme poverty.

Prices, too, are increasing rapidly. Last year, prices in Britain rose by 15%, in Italy by over 21% and in Japan by over 10%.

Workers everywhere are fighting back, demanding the right to work and a decent living wage. More and more, the workers are confronting the bosses, and the whole system of exploitation that traps them and threatens them with increasing poverty. Political unrest in Egypt and India, massive strike action by workers in Britain, Italy and elsewhere, show the determination of the workers to resist and fight back.

Crisis in South Africa

We have seen the effects of the crisis in South Africa. It was against the background of increasing unemployment and falling living standards that the uprisings of Soweto and elsewhere took place. African unemployment in South Africa now stands at approximately two million, and is increasing rapidly. Prices are rising by over 12% each year, eating into wage packets and causing widespread starvation.

The immediate causes of unemployment are easy to see. Stocks of unsold goods are piling up, forcing the bosses to close down factories or go onto short time. In the developed capitalist countries, taken as a whole, manufacturing output dropped by 12% between 1974 and 1975. Chemical production dropped by 14%, and output from metallurgy by about 10%.

The workers know what this cut back in production means — *unemployment*.

Always a threat

Unemployment is not a new problem for the workers in the capitalist countries. Unemployment is *always* a threat to them, and is used by the bosses to keep wages low and to hamper organisation. But the present cut backs in production are dramatically swelling the ranks of the unemployed.

Cut backs in production are taking place in South Africa as well, causing unemployment to rise rapidly.

But why are these cut backs taking place?

In South Africa: Workers wanting jobs ...



Are there not millions of people in South Africa, for example, who *need* more food, clothing and better housing, while the production of these very things is being cut back?

Take the building industry for example. In November last year, Coronation Brick decided to close down its No. 5 works in Durban, having already closed the Briardene works in August. Some 250 jobs were threatened, and the production of bricks was cut by 50 million per year. And yet in Cape Town *alone*, there are over 200,000 homeless people!

Why?

Why can't the workers who want jobs use the bricks to build homes for those who are without?

The reason for this is that production in South Africa, or in any other capitalist country, is *not organised to meet the needs of all of the people*. South Africa is a capitalist society — that is, one in which production takes place in order to make profits for the small number of capitalists who own the mines, big farms, factories and banks. The *desire for profits*, not the needs of the people, decides what will be produced and in what quantity.

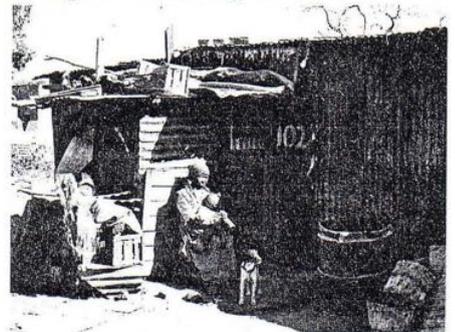
These decisions to produce are *not* made on a *planned* basis. They are made by factory and mine owners, bankers and farmers, all driving after bigger profits, and competing for bigger markets for the goods produced. They are firmly united only in their determination to exploit the workers, because it is only through the exploitation of the workers that profits can be made.

Their problem

While the employers can only *make* profits by exploiting the workers, they can only *reap* these profits once they have *sold* the goods produced.

Because production is not planned, and because each capitalist is competing with others to produce as much as possible as cheaply as possible, they always end up producing too many goods for the available markets.

People wanting homes ...



So why are unused bricks piling up and brick factories closing down?



BANNED

The first issue of "Workers' Unity" has been banned by the South African government. Readers in South Africa should take care not to be found with the paper in their possession.

Too many goods? Do the workers, then, have too much? Every worker will shake his head in amazement! But this is the point exactly. Too many goods *for the available markets*; and "the available markets" mean (ultimately) the amount of wages in the pocket of the ordinary working people, with which they can buy the goods which are produced.

This is a fatal dilemma of the capitalists. On the one hand, they must keep wages down in order to make profits. But, on the other hand, they can't sell the goods produced in their factories, etc., because the workers have been paid too little to buy them!

Forced to cut back

When "overproduction" occurs, *as it must do periodically*, and when the markets shrink both overseas and inside South Africa, the bosses are forced to cut back on production. This only makes the crisis worse, as unemployment increases and the buying-power of the working class falls further.

All capitalist economies are constantly moving between periods of economic expansion, when production is increased; and slump, when production has to be cut back.

In South Africa, for example, production expanded between 1946 and 1957. Then

★ from 1957 until 1963, production slowed down;

★ from 1963 to 1970, the economy was expanding again;

★ from 1970 to 1972, the economy slowed down;

★ from 1973 until the end of 1974, the economy picked up a little;

★ from 1974 until the present, South Africa has been gripped by the most severe economic recession of the post-war period.

Unemployment even in boom times

While this constant movement from boom to slump explains why unemployment sometimes *increases sharply*, it does not explain why, *even when the economy is booming*, when factories are being built or extended, unemployment is still a threat to the workers.

The explanation for this lies in the fact that the bosses, desperate to produce more and more goods as cheaply as possible, in order to reap bigger and bigger profits, are forced constantly to improve the methods of production in the factories, in the mines and on the farms.

This means *mechanisation* — introducing bigger and better machines, which make labour more *productive* and increase the production of goods.

Mechanisation has been taking place rapidly in South Africa, particularly since 1945. Since 1972 alone, the value of machinery per worker in South Africa has increased by about 33%.

Today, in mining, a more mechanised way of removing blasted ore is being developed. In the newspaper industry, it is anticipated that new electronic methods could reduce the labour force by 50 to 75%. In agriculture, massive new tractors are being introduced which can reduce the labour force on farms by as much as 75%.

Some jobs created, more destroyed

So, during periods of economic expansion in capitalist countries, we find two processes at work. On the one hand, *some* jobs are being created by the opening up of new factories and by enlarging existing ones; while on the other hand *more jobs are being destroyed* by the introduction of more and more machines.

In a socialist society, in which production is planned and its benefits are shared by all, mechanisation brings tremendous advantages to the whole population. New and more efficient methods of production, requiring *less human labour*, mean that *all workers* can enjoy shorter working hours while their standards of living are at the same time improved.

But under capitalism, mechanisation leads to

Pass Laws are the African workers' handcuffs



This picture shows the burning of passes in a township outside Johannesburg during the early 1960s. The pass laws have long been resisted as "Enemy Number One" by the masses of the African people in South Africa. Why is this so?

African workers are keenly aware that the pass laws are the main method by which they are oppressed and exploited. The pass is the worker's handcuffs, keeping him under the strictest control.

Life for African workers is a life of *permission*. Permission for everything. Permission to be in an area; permission to seek work; permission to be employed; permission to leave any employment; permission to live in any township; permission to lodge in any house. Bantu Affairs officials and the employers are able to control every aspect of African workers' lives by means of the pass system.

Every African above childhood has to carry a pass at all times. Women wear their passes, like badges of slavery, on chains round their necks. Any policeman or official can demand the pass at any time. Failure to carry one or to have it in perfect order leads to immediate arrest and imprisonment. Over the years prosecutions under the pass laws have averaged about 600,000 per year.

The pass records all personal details, including place of origin, tax payments and employment. Permission — to reside, take up work, or merely be present for more than 72 hours in an urban

area — is indicated by means of a rubber stamp in the pass. Employers sign the worker's pass every month and must sign him off when the job ends.

Today, with unemployment around two million and rising, even a blind person can see how the pass laws are used to remove what the bosses call "surplus" Africans from the cities to the reserves.

A worker finds that as soon as the employer signs off the pass there is no longer a legal right to be in the urban area. African workers are being hounded by the Bantu Boards and police to leave immediately.

The newspapers are full of statistics of the increased number of African workers who have been arrested and charged under the pass laws. The government is now increasing the fines for pass offences, which will mean that the prisons will be full of workers who cannot pay the heavier fines.

Now there is news that the courts are further interfering with the limited rights of Africans under Section 10 of the Bantu (Urban Areas) Act. They now say that only those who qualified under the section by 1952 have the right to remain in the urban areas!

By using controls such as the pass laws, the rulers are forcing African workers to carry the full burden of unemployment and the bosses' economic crisis on their own shoulders.

workers becoming "redundant" (from the point of view of the bosses' profit system). In large numbers they are simply thrown out of their jobs and onto the dustheap.

Always a "reserve army"

Unemployment is thus *always* a threat to the workers in capitalist countries. At all stages, during boom or slump, there is always a "reserve army" of unemployed workers, which the bosses use to keep wages down and to make

organisation difficult. Workers fighting for higher wages know how easily they can be sacked and sent back to the reserves, to be replaced from the vast ranks of the unemployed. The fear of replacement makes the organisation of trade unions in South Africa very difficult.

The workers can only secure an end to unemployment and low wages by taking control of production *themselves*, and organising the production of food, clothing, housing, etc., in the interests of *all* of the people.

WORKERS WITHOUT HOMES

As the economic crisis deepens and unemployment increases, more and more black working-class families are becoming homeless in the big cities. They are forced to find shelter for themselves under scrap wood and corrugated iron in the growing squatter camps.

In the Durban area alone, for example, 45,000 families are waiting for housing according to official application lists. Estimates of the total number of homeless people there range up to 350,000. In the Cape Peninsula there are approximately 200,000 African squatters, living in 30 to 40 camps. The number of Coloured people who are homeless is not known, but press reports have put the total of squatters in the Western Cape as high as 500,000.

Lack of basic facilities

The conditions in the squatter camps are deplorable. In most, not even the most basic facilities such as lavatories and fresh water are available. There is a constant threat of bulldozers demolishing the people's homes.

Why is the number of squatters increasing every day?

Many of the squatters are migrant workers who have lost their jobs. They know that the only chance of getting a job is to search in the towns. They live in constant fear of being endorsed out to the reserves where they know there are no jobs and not enough land to support their families.

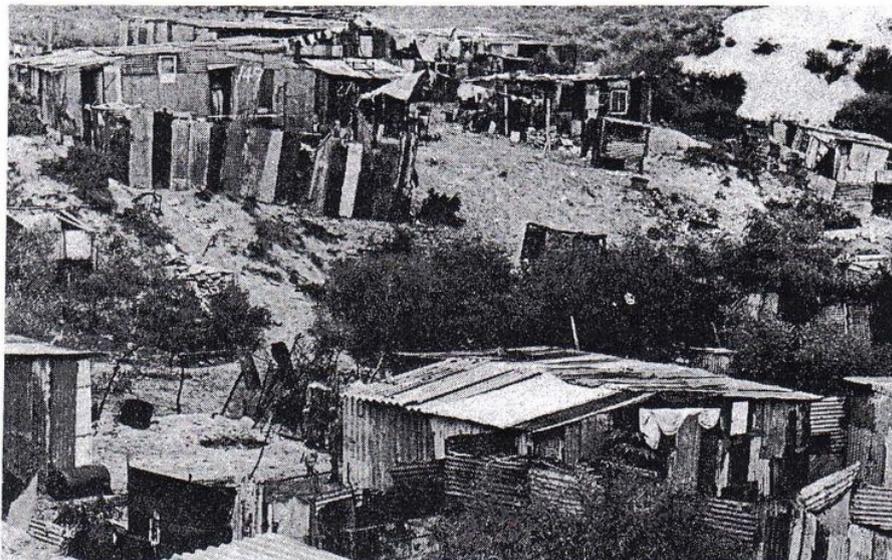
The so-called "independence" of the Transkei has also caused a big increase in the number of squatters. Both employed and unemployed Xhosa-speaking workers have "gone underground" in the squatter camps, so as to avoid contact with Bantu Administration officials. They fear that they will be forced to take out Transkei "citizenship" documents and to leave the urban areas.

Lack of housing

It is not only unemployed contract workers who are forced to squat. There is a drastic shortage of housing in the townships, even for the employed "legal" town dwellers.

Lack of housing has led to terrible overcrowding in the small rooms and shacks in the townships. A survey has shown that in African townships all over the country there is an average of 17 people per home. The vast majority of the working class live in slum conditions.

Overcrowding and the pass system are



Part of a squatters' camp at Modderdam near Cape Town

together forcing tens of thousands of families to make homes for themselves in the bush. African families who simply want to live together often have no alternative but to live "illegally" in the squatter camps, hounded by the fear that fathers, mothers or children may be arrested and sent away.

Rent increases

For those workers fortunate enough to be allocated housing in the townships, there are now huge rent increases. In Soweto, for example, rents have been increased by between 80 per cent and 130 per cent! This has led to a fresh wave of resistance, and the government has been forced to suspend the increases for the time being.

Many who cannot afford to pay higher rents are forced to get out and become squatters.

How is the government responding to this desperate situation? It would have to spend at least R100 million to provide even basic housing for those African workers officially allowed to live in the townships. A Stellenbosch Professor has said it will cost a lot more than that; and he has also calculated that it would cost R500 million to solve the Coloured housing shortage in the Cape Peninsula.

Not interested in the workers

State spending on housing has been minimal. In the African townships of Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu in Cape Town, for example, not a single additional family dwelling unit has been built during the past two years. At the massive Mitchell's Plain project for Coloured housing, only 1500 houses (out of a planned 40,000) have been built and only 6,000 more will be completed under existing and new contracts.

Although the government has increased its budget allocation for housing by 39 per cent, to R153 million, this will not relieve the housing shortage and is intended mainly as a stimulation for the building industry.

The capitalist state is not interested in spending vast sums of money improving the living conditions of the workers, especially in the middle of an economic crisis. No. The state wants to get rid of unemployed workers and their families. They want to bulldoze the squatter camps and send the people to the over-populated and poverty-stricken reserves.

Burned and bulldozed

At Werkgenot, the authorities simply burned and bulldozed squatters' homes without warning in the middle of the night. At Crossroads and elsewhere they have acted with similar callousness and brutality. Impatient with even the minor legal obstacles which have been raised against this, the government is now changing the law so as to permit "illegal" homes to be demolished without notice.

Squatters organising

As more and more workers defy the pass system, the more the illegal squatter camps grow, and the more determined the workers become to fight for the right to stay in the urban areas and to live with their families.

At Modderdam, Kraaifontein and Kliptown, squatters are organising to defend their homes from demolition. Coloured and African families are acting in solidarity together.

Workers demand decent housing. This is a basic right. We demand the right of all workers to live where they wish with their families; for decent houses, street lighting, proper sanitation, electricity in the homes, sports grounds and recreation centres. That is an absolute minimum.

But the present system in South Africa can never provide these things. It is a thoroughly rotten system, a system of private profit-making by the rich, which has all along depended on keeping the mass of the working people in miserable poverty and slum conditions. It can never provide a decent life for our people.

Obituary

Comrade Vic Syvret died recently in the German Democratic Republic. He had been very ill for some time. In South Africa he was a member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, a trade union of white artisans, but he devoted his life and work to organising African workers.

As a result of a bad accident at work in the factory he had lost a leg. The Amalgamated Engineering Union employed him in their office for some time, but he spent a great deal of time assisting to organise metal workers for the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

He always used to set aside a large part of his monthly income, and distribute this to SACTU, to the ANC and other organisations, despite the fact that he and his wife were left barely sufficient to live on.

Vic is survived by his widow, Ouida, who lives in the GDR and to whom we extend our deepest sympathy. Both Vic and Ouida were supported by the GDR trade unions, and their support for Ouida continues.

SACTU raises support for workers' struggle

In recent months, SACTU representatives have attended international conferences and addressed meetings in many countries.

SACTU's Chairman attended the Pan African Conference on Solidarity with the Workers and Peoples of Southern Africa, which took place in Luanda between 31st January and 2nd February. The conference adopted a programme of action and agreed to promote an international trade union committee against apartheid at the forthcoming International Trade Union Conference in Geneva.

Other comrades have recently visited a number of countries in Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, Scandinavia and Australia and New Zealand, in order to raise support for the South African workers' struggle.

"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. Readers outside South Africa are asked to send donations to SACTU's London Office at 49 Rathbone Street, W1A 4NL

Don't confuse the issue!

The South African Labour Bulletin,* in its last issue of 1976, has called for foreign capitalists to invest more money in South African industry. THIS IS DISGRACEFUL. It is a move which strikes a blow at the working class and puts the editors of the Labour Bulletin on the side of the enemies of the workers' struggle.

Let us be clear about this. The campaign being carried on overseas, especially among the workers and trade unionists there, to force foreign capitalists to end their investment in South Africa, is very important to the workers' struggle. Foreign capital, loans to South Africa, trade and so forth, have all along been an essential pillar maintaining the system of oppression and exploitation in our country.

Any loss of international business confidence in South Africa, any drying up of investment or of foreign financial aid to the South African government and ruling class, at once weakens the system enormously. Therefore, the campaign against foreign investment, etc., assists the workers' struggle to overthrow that system and to put an end to capitalist exploitation.

What they argue

The Editors of the *Labour Bulletin* argue the case for foreign investment, the case for more capitalism in South Africa, by suggesting that this will ease the burden of unemployment.

In another article in this issue we have talked about the unemployment in South Africa, which is causing so much extra suffering to so many workers and their families. We have tried to show how unemployment grows out of the capitalist system of production itself.

Unemployment is not necessary — except under capitalism. Under a system of planned production, democratically controlled by the working people themselves, there would be jobs for all and big rises every year in the standard of living. Such a thing, however, is impossible as long as the factories, mines, banks and most of the land are owned and controlled, not by the people as a whole, but by the rich few for their own private profit.

Where the profit system leads

It is the profit system which leads to factories standing idle, to low rates of economic growth, to poverty wages and bad working conditions. And it is the profit system also which lies at the root of apartheid and all the brutality of the bosses, their government, and their officials and police. Every black working-class family knows that repression has got worse precisely as the profit system has developed in South Africa.

All the tactics of the labour movement, all the ideas put forward in the day-to-day bread-and-butter struggles of the workers, must consistently point towards this understanding: that only by ending the profit system can the workers bring about their own emancipation. Every step in the struggle must be to build the organisations, leadership and class-consciousness of the workers' movement towards that end.

Their standpoint

But what is the standpoint of the *Labour Bulletin*? People who oppose the campaign against foreign investment — who call for more capitalist investment in South Africa — no doubt do so for many different reasons. But they all have this in common: they have a capitalist, ruling-class mentality.

They want to strengthen the capitalist system; they do not want to see it overthrown. Consequently, however much they may sincerely wish to see improvements in the workers conditions, they are opposed to the complete liberation of the workers from exploitation. This, unfortunately, puts them in the long run on the side of the exploiters. If this cannot be

seen clearly now, it will become clear as the struggle intensifies.

All the more deplorable

The capitalist mentality of these people determines all their actions and manoeuvres. And it is all the more deplorable when they are found putting forward their call for more foreign investment apparently from within the ranks of the workers' movement! The *Labour Bulletin* is associated with the Institute of Industrial Education in Durban, and is thereby linked indirectly with the African labour movement.

Thus the editors of the *Labour Bulletin* appear to speak with the authority of the workers. If they were asked about it they would, of course, have to confess that it is not so — but the absolutely false appearance nevertheless remains.

No doubt the banks and big capitalist companies have already pounced on the *Labour Bulletin* and are quoting it all over the place to justify their profitable investments in South Africa (and their underhand support for the South African regime).

So dangerous

This is why the errors of people such as the editors of the *Labour Bulletin* are really so dangerous to the workers' movement. They are also dangerous because they confuse many workers with whom they come into contact and who have been encouraged to rely on them.

Now, the problem of the educated elements, people from middle-class backgrounds, who wish to play a part in the workers' movement — this is something which has concerned the movement in all countries for well over a hundred years. And the great teachers of the working class have written a lot about it.

The essence of what they say is this: The workers' movement can benefit greatly from the help of educated elements from the universities, etc. But these people, if they are to advance the struggle and not hold it back, must truly "come over" to the working class in every possible way. In particular they must abandon completely all their old capitalist, ruling-class ideas.

Instead, they must learn to think in the way of the workers; to look at life concretely, through workers' eyes. They must 'wholeheartedly adopt the proletarian outlook' — something which they can only learn from the workers, especially the most advanced and politically conscious workers, themselves.

Miserably failed

Regrettably, the editors of the *Labour Bulletin* have miserably failed to abandon their old ruling-class (bourgeois and petty-bourgeois) ideas. Instead, they smuggle these into the labour movement in the guise of advanced economics or sociology.

All their arguments on the subject of foreign investment are designed quite plainly to prove that the continuation and strengthening of capitalism, of the bosses' system in South Africa, is actually in the best interests of the workers!

Working in a police state

Quite possibly the reader may say: "Hold on! You must not be unfair. They are producing a publication inside South Africa, subject to severe censorship and no doubt constant scrutiny under the security laws of a most vicious police state. There is surely a limit to what they can say." And the reader will be right. There is a limit.

Nobody can rightly criticise those within South Africa who, for their self-protection, hold back from openly stating the whole truth, from pointing out in plain language the

necessity of revolution and all the tasks, short-term and long-term, which face the working class. On many things it may be necessary to remain silent.

But there is a world of difference between that and actually misleading the workers; between remaining silent and telling what amount to lies. Lies to the bosses, to the foremen, to Bantu Affairs officials, to the police and so forth — yes! These are part of the essential equipment of every militant worker and trade unionist for daily use in carrying on the struggle. But lies to the workers? Never, under no circumstances. These can only serve the enemy.

People who muddle the issues, spread myths, and blow the smoke of confusion in the workers' eyes, are really striking the workers' movement a treacherous blow.

What they say about wages

Unfortunately, the editors of the *Labour Bulletin* do not limit themselves to spreading confusion on the subject of foreign investment only. We have space here to mention only one other example, which certainly the workers will find the most striking.

One of the editors of the *Labour Bulletin* is quoted in the same issue on the subject of Poverty Datum Line wages (that is, wages at the level of bare subsistence — a level which the wages of most African workers fail to reach). Here is what she said: "If this economy can afford more, then the PDL is unjust; if the economy can afford less, then the PDL is utopian." (Our emphasis.)

Can any clearer example be found of the capitalist mentality — and here masquerading as the friend of the workers' movement? "This economy" of which this person speaks is nothing other than the capitalist economy — the bosses' profit system. But for her it is the "only" economy. Like a horse with blinkers, she does not give the slightest thought to anything outside or beyond the present system.

When it comes to wages, the workers are taught to believe that even their bare survival may be "utopian" — an unrealistic dream world! — if this proves necessary from the point of view of capitalism! (Or perhaps she does not dare put such a thing forward in the presence of workers themselves.)

What we say

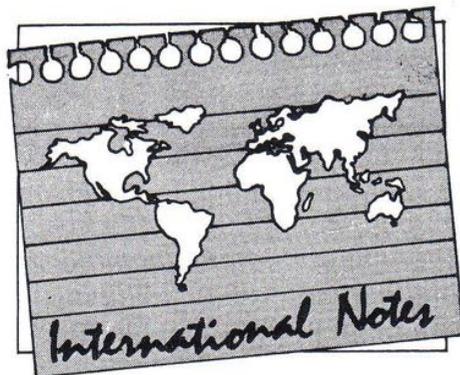
Workers know that it is their labour which produces all the wealth of society. But under capitalism the workers' wages are held down, while the bosses seize the benefits of this labour for themselves. Workers should never hold back their wage demands to the miserably low levels which the bosses say they can "afford". If the bosses' system cannot "afford" a decent living to the working people — and it has proved that it cannot — then what excuse can there possibly be for keeping it?

Do these thoughts even enter the heads of those who produce the *Labour Bulletin*?

A painful task

It gives us no pleasure to have to make these criticisms. But the matter is one of very considerable importance to the whole development of the workers' movement. To our mind a very difficult, very painful, but very necessary task faces the class-conscious workers — to see to it that people who insist on putting forward capitalist ideas in the movement, who stand in the way of development instead of helping it on, are carefully weeded out and the reason for this made clear, as far as possible, to the workers as a whole.

*The S.A. *Labour Bulletin* is a journal which is published privately in Durban, and appears ten times a year. It claims to specialise "in the analysis of labour matters from the trade union and workers' viewpoint."



Forty weeks on strike

One of the longest strikes in recent years is still under way at the Grunwick Film Processing company in Willesden, England.

In August last year the workers at Grunwick came out on strike for the right to belong to a trade union. Not being union members, as most British workers are, they were suffering severe hardships at the hands of the Grunwick management.

Management, who have been accused by the strikers of running a "sweatshop" and of paying near-starvation wages, have tried everything in their power to break the strike which has now lasted for 40 weeks. They have employed young schoolgirls as strike-breakers, driving them to work and locking the factory doors behind them.

Since the strike began a picket line has been held by the strikers outside the factory. They have been assisted by fellow workers in the local trade union movement who have supported them on the picket line, on demonstration marches and raised money to keep them going. The strikers have also turned their attention to other sections of the working class for support.

At one stage last year members of the Union of Post Office Workers stopped collecting and delivering mail to the company. This action, which almost succeeded in bringing management to its knees, was stopped by the intervention of the courts. As the strike continues, the morale of the strikers is reported to be very high and further action by the combined trade union movement is expected.

Mozambique: the tasks of building socialism

In his opening speech to the Third Congress of Frelimo, held in Maputo during February, President Samora Machel spoke about the tasks facing the people of Mozambique.

He said that in the course of the struggle "the most conscious among the Mozambican labouring classes understood that to win the class battle against foreign and national reactionaries, the labouring classes had to be united, organised, conscious of the ultimate objectives of their struggle, and armed with their scientific ideology."

It was now necessary to develop the revolution in order to build a society free from exploitation. The building of socialism in Mozambique involved hard class battles — economic, political and ideological. A new stage of intensification of the class struggle had been reached, he said. To achieve socialism, the workers, in close alliance with the peasantry and with progressive elements of other labouring classes, needed a vanguard party guided by the scientific ideology of the proletariat.

The Congress agreed to create a Marxist-Leninist party to lead the continuing struggle. It adopted an extensive programme for the party. Its objective in the sphere of labour and social

policy is to "create conditions for dignifying work as the motive force of society's development and the criterion for the distribution of the results of production."

The elimination of unemployment through the expansion of agricultural and industrial production was a priority. It was also necessary to develop workers' organisations which would play a decisive role in furthering workers' political consciousness and in defending the interests of the labouring classes.

Southern African unions agree to link up

At a recent meeting in Dar es Salaam, representatives of the Zimbabwe Congress of African Trade Unions, The National Union of Namibian Workers and SACTU agreed to form a Joint Committee to consult on all issues and problems of mutual interest.

It was decided to send a joint delegation to Accra to meet the Executive Committee of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity, so as to ensure united action on all matters affecting Southern African trade unions.



Grunwick workers picketing outside their factory

New Transkei taxes will ruin poor families

Heavy new taxes are being imposed on people living in the Transkei. Poor people on the land will be forced by these taxes to give up their beasts and huts. What will become of them?

Every South African worker whose family is kept in the Transkei reserve under the pass laws will find that these taxes amount to a *reduction in their wages and a threat to their survival.*

Totally dependent

The people living in the Transkei are totally dependent on the system of migrant labour. Over 80 per cent of the adult male workers work as migrants in other parts of South Africa.

Families in the Transkei cannot survive without the wages sent to them by the young men working on the mines and in the factories in the big cities like Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town.

At the same time, *they cannot survive on these wages alone.*

Low wages

The bosses, helped by the slave-system of the pass laws, security police powers and the restrictions against African trade unions, greedily force the workers' wages down *below the subsistence level.* They argue that the workers' families can live off working on the

land in the reserves.

In this way the bosses squeeze the greatest possible profits out of the workers, and force whole families into labour. Although the women, children and old people have to work on the land in order to scratch a living, they are in fact indirectly working *for the bosses in the cities.*

Increasing the burden

Now the Transkei regime is increasing the burden of exploitation on the poor people.

Contract workers from the Transkei have to pay taxes from their wages to the South African government. In addition they had, until recently, to pay a yearly hut tax of R1 to the regime in the Transkei. But this hut tax has now been increased to R10 a year!

Also, a new *stock tax* has been introduced which applies only to those people whose *cash earnings in the Transkei are too low* to be taxed! Under this new scheme, donkeys are to be taxed at R10 each, cattle at R2, horses and mules R1, and 50 cents each for sheep and goats.

Had to be changed

Matanzima and his cronies originally wanted much higher taxes than these. The original

proposal was for a tax of R10 on cattle and donkeys; horses and mules R5; and R2 for sheep and goats. So great was the opposition to this that the taxes had to be changed twice in three weeks!

What do these taxes mean? The Matanzima regime admits that it is using the taxes to *force the poorer families to sell their animals.* In this way the poor people will be forced off the land, and the land taken over by the rich elite, the chiefs and headmen who support Matanzima's party.

Attack on workers

So these taxes are yet another attack on workers and their families. There is huge unemployment in South Africa. The Transkei and the other reserves are dumping grounds for the unemployed. From every side the ordinary working people are being driven to starvation for the benefit of the rich.

The authorities will encounter mass anger if they try to enforce these taxes. All workers must support the struggle against the taxes! The Transkei is part of the same system of oppression and exploitation which runs through the whole of South Africa. The struggle must be directed against this whole system — not only against the Transkei regime, but also against the South African government and ruling class.

South Africa's construction workers

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

The construction industry is the fourth biggest employer of labour in South Africa, after mining, agriculture and the government. It employs one third as many workers as all other manufacturing industries put together.

The following table shows both the growth of the industry from 1945 to 1976, and the rising percentage of black workers employed in it.

	1945		1976	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
Africans	21,692	64.2	327,700	73.3
Whites	8,502	25.2	60,500	13.5
Coloureds	3,539	10.5	52,900	11.8
Asians	57	0.2	5,800	1.3
	33,790		446,900	

Construction workers build all the factories, offices, shopping centres, houses, roads, bridges and dams. In 1973, the total value of everything they built was R3,094 million. About two-thirds of this was building work on houses and factories.

Hit by slumps

The construction industry, more than any other, feels the effect of slumps in the capitalist economy. When capitalism is expanding, we see many new buildings — new factories, huge shopping centres, housing estates — going up. But when the economy slumps, *building is the first type of production to be cut back.*

This means that building workers are the first to be hit in times of economic decline, and they are hit the hardest. This is what is happening today in South Africa. Thousands of construction workers are laid off when they have finished work on particular building sites. When the African workers go to re-register as "work-seekers" at the Bantu Labour offices, they are told there is no more work for them. Many are then endorsed out to the reserves under the pass laws.

Fierce competition

Last year the amount of construction work out to tender fell by 25%. There is fierce competition among the building firms for the few contracts available. The big companies like Roberts Construction, LTA and Murray & Stewart, are squeezing out the smaller companies. These big companies can afford, for a time, to lower their prices to a point where the small firms cannot compete and are forced out of business.

But it is, of course, *the workers who are made to suffer* the worst effects of the economic slump.

Losing their jobs

Last year *over 15%* of all workers in the construction industry lost their jobs. This meant that 60,000 African workers, and 10,000 Coloured, Asian and White workers were laid off.

The large number of unemployed makes it very difficult for those workers who do manage to keep their jobs to fight for higher wages.

Low wages mean high profits. Despite the fact that last year was one of the *worst ever* experienced by the building industry, the profits of the giant Anglo-American subsidiary, LTA, *shot up by 12.2% between April and September.*

African wages low

Wages for African building workers are very low. They are kept down because of the pass



Construction workers are hit hardest

laws, and the denial of trade union rights to African workers. Most of the African construction workers are classed as "migrants" from the rural areas. This is very convenient for the bosses because it means that when a job is over, or business is slack, the bosses can send the workers to the reserves and need not sign up any more. They are spared the expense of having to cover the workers in any way during bad times.

The building firms also employ many workers who live in the cities "illegally" (that is, without the necessary permission), at very low rates of pay. These workers have no protection. They are employed as casuals, so that the bosses can dismiss them without notice whenever they please. The police know that many "illegal" Africans work on building sites, and carry out frequent raids to check on passes.

The legal minimum

In 1975 the minimum wage for Africans in construction was R0,53 an hour. On a 40-hour week, this worked out at R110 per month.* With the heavy overtime worked in the industry, the average African earnings per month in 1975 stood at only R115.

The average monthly wage for Whites in the industry was R539, Asians R299 and Coloureds R215 in 1975.

Whites in the construction industry are employed as artisans (plasterers, fitters, welders, etc.) or as supervisors. Many Coloured and Asian artisans are also employed in construction, but in the Cape most of the Coloured workers are unskilled or semi-skilled.

Job reservation

Job reservation is very tightly enforced in this industry, with the artisans' unions trying to "protect" the positions of their members by racist measures excluding Africans (and in many areas also Coloureds and Asians) from skilled jobs.

During the boom in the construction industry from the mid-sixties to the early seventies, there was a huge shortage of skilled labour. To overcome this, the bosses made a deal with the government and the artisans' unions to allow a certain relaxation of job reservation. Bosses were allowed to employ Africans in

certain skilled jobs at wages much lower than those paid to Whites, Coloureds and Asians working in the same grades. Elaborate conditions were imposed to ensure that the basic apartheid restrictions on black workers were not dismantled.

No longer

The present crisis is reversing all this. There is no longer a shortage of skilled labour and the jobs of skilled workers are threatened. During 1976 over 8,000 White, Coloured and Asian artisans were laid off in the construction industry. One union secretary claims that in some centres like Durban, 20% of all construction artisans will be out of work by June 1977, and this level will be reached throughout the country by December. There has also been a lowering of artisan wages.

As a result, the exemptions allowing Africans into Grade One jobs were withdrawn at the end of March this year — though employers could re-apply for special permission to use skilled African workers.

Employers have begun to replace African operatives with White and Coloured trade union members, and many Africans are being dismissed to make way for unemployed artisans. All down the line the racial structure is used to off-load the heaviest burdens of the crisis onto black workers.

Mass wage struggles

African building workers were prominent in the mass struggles for higher wages in 1973 and 1974. In 1973 and the first half of 1974, there were 32 strikes in the construction industry involving 3,640 African workers. A total of 34,000 hours of production were lost. Often the bosses simply fired the strikers, but in some cases the workers won significant wage increases.

African building workers who are trying to organise themselves to fight exploitation face severe difficulties. Their jobs do not last long and they have to move frequently from one building site to the next. They know that there are a great many unemployed workers looking for jobs. If they go on strike, it is easy for the bosses to fire them and hire other workers at the same low wages.

The bosses do not hesitate to call in the police to break organisation and strikes. The registered unions for skilled White, Coloured and Indian construction workers are very hostile toward African workers who they fear might get their jobs.

Determined resistance

Despite all these difficulties, there is determined resistance to the bosses and police on building sites. Construction workers know well the tactic of working slower in support of their demands. Industrial sabotage is frequent. During one pass raid on a big building site in Johannesburg, construction workers on the high scaffolding "accidentally" dropped bricks on the police.

However, isolated acts of resistance will never be enough. The difficult struggle to organise has to be carried on at all times.

For African construction workers to become powerfully organised, they will have to join together in large numbers — both with fellow workers on all other building sites, and with workers in other industries. Also, they should unite with Coloured and Asian unskilled and semi-skilled workers, who are largely without trade unions. The strength of the ordinary workers lies in numbers! UNITE AND ORGANISE!

*R1 = approx £0.67 or \$1.15