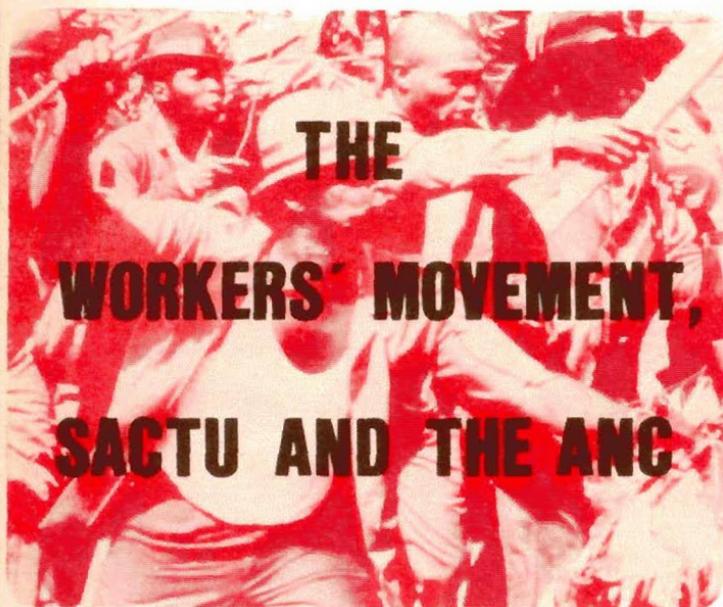


**South Africa:**



**THE  
WORKERS' MOVEMENT,  
SACTU AND THE ANC**

**- a struggle for Marxist policies**

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# Introduction

On 17 January 1980, the ANC office in London made a public attack in the British press on four ANC members. It stated that Paula Ensor, David Hemson, Martin Legassick and Robert Petersen had been suspended from the ANC and faced possible expulsion for "factionalism" and for circulating a document allegedly "attacking the movement".

The report of the ANC's statement, first published in the "Guardian", was immediately taken up by the South African press also, and later by the BBC World Service. Thus a political dispute, previously confined within the ranks of our movement and among sympathisers, was brought to the notice of the public.

In a statement to the press on 18 January, the four comrades who were specifically attacked defended themselves by explaining the political issues involved and correcting the false impression created in the original reports by the ANC spokesman.

But the attack is wider in its implications than these four comrades. It is directed against the entire Marxist left wing of our movement, who stand for socialist policies. By labelling as an "attack on the movement" the discussion document "The Workers' Movement and SACTU—a Struggle for Marxist Policies", the leadership has declared its hostility to the ideas put forward there. Those ideas are not the property of individuals, but belong to the revolutionary workers' movement itself.

To defend those ideas against this public attack, we are now compelled to bring the material in the original document before a wider readership. This will be demanded by all those comrades in South Africa and in exile who, in the months since the document was first produced, have associated themselves with its political line. It is hoped that publication will lead to a full discussion of the political issues throughout the revolutionary movement at home and abroad.

This booklet, then, is our defence against the allegations made to the press by the ANC office in London. It traces the development of a protracted struggle which began within the ranks of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, over the future course and development of that organisation. This struggle of Marxist activists in SACTU centred on vital questions concerning the policy and political direction of SACTU, in order for it to be built as a genuine workers' organisation in South Africa.

We argued that SACTU should be built underground as an organisation of militant workers in their tens of thousands, in the mines, factories, docks, offices and on the farms. This would lay a basis for strengthening and extending the struggle for full and open trade union and political rights. In fulfilling this task, SACTU would be participating in the mobilisation of the workers for the ultimate victory of the socialist revolution.

The present exile leadership of SACTU, the ANC and the CP is opposed to the building of SACTU for this task. In a series of bureaucratic actions, the leadership repressed discussion on these vital questions. When all channels for debate were closed to us in SACTU, we produced the document entitled "The Workers' Movement and SACTU—a Struggle for Marxist Policies", for discussion within our movement's ranks, and among active supporters. The material in this document is reprinted here in full from pages 7 to 64.

Far from "attacking the movement" as the ANC office falsely claims, this document is a contribution towards building and arming our movement politically on Marxist lines. It raises questions not only crucial to SACTU's own development, but crucial also to the success of the revolutionary struggle in South Africa as a whole.

The SACTU leadership has not responded to the document by taking up the political questions posed. Instead, it has resorted to lies and personal slander in an attempt to undermine the thrust of our political argument.

On 26 October 1979 the Regional Political Committee of the ANC based in London suspended the four comrades named above from all ANC units and activities. This action was contrary to the ANC constitution, and was taken without giving the comrades concerned the opportunity to defend their point of view before fellow members of the ANC.

The 'charges' laid against the four comrades are contained in a letter sent to them by the RPC, a copy of which is reprinted on page 67. The answer to these charges is set out in a letter from the comrades to the RPC in London, reprinted here on pages 69 to 76.

As the letter to the RPC emphasises, the ANC leadership has not suspended these four comrades, as it claims, for their part in circulating a document. It has suspended them because of their political views—because of the profound differences which exist within our movement over the future course of the revolutionary struggle.

All the documents in this booklet raise the perspective of a socialist revolution in South Africa. We have argued that apartheid in South Africa is rooted in the system of capitalist exploitation. National liberation for the black majority can only be secured through the overthrow of capitalism—through the seizure of state power by the organised working class, drawing all layers of the oppressed behind them. Only on this basis, on the basis of a democratic workers' state, can our country be freed from poverty, homelessness, unemployment and tyranny.

But the leadership of the ANC, SACTU and the CP are opposed to a socialist programme, holding out the perspective instead that it is possible to achieve national liberation on the basis of capitalism. This underlies the involvement of the ANC leadership with Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, an agent of capitalist interests and a figure upon whom the regime will increasingly lean in its attempts to hold back the tide of revolution.

The refusal of the leadership to advance a socialist programme explains their reluctance to build SACTU as a force within the workers' movement in South Africa. It explains also the hostility of the ANC, SACTU and CP leadership to the activity of Marxists in the ranks of the movement.

We have stood for the need to arm the mass movement of the oppressed, led by the organised workers, against the apartheid regime of the employers. Every black worker knows that the struggle in South Africa cannot achieve victory without arms. But the working class must be organised and mobilised in their hundreds of thousands, under a clear revolutionary programme and leadership, before the task of armed insurrection is placed on the order of the day.

The leadership of the ANC, SACTU and the CP opposes this perspective. Instead, it is torn between the policy of guerillaism, which is incapable of securing a revolutionary victory in South Africa, and leaning towards the pro-capitalist Buthelezi.

It is no accident that action is being taken against Marxists in the ANC at the same time that the leadership has been holding discussions with Buthelezi.

But such action will not succeed in separating the ideas of Marxism from the revolutionary movement. The ideas set out in this booklet are shared by increasing numbers of the rank-and-file comrades of our movement at home and in exile.

We will continue to struggle and win fresh support for these ideas within the ranks of the ANC, SACTU and the CP, and in the organisations of the working class and revolutionary youth at home, linking the perspectives of Marxism to the day-to-day fight of the working masses.

In the mines, docks, factories and townships there is an unprecedented thirst for a clear understanding of the way forward to victory over national oppression and capitalist exploitation. Hopefully this booklet will be a contribution towards clarity on this question and will play a part in the vital struggle for Marxist policies within the working-class movement at home.

The action taken against comrades by the SACTU and ANC leadership is only one episode at a very early stage in an unfolding struggle. The forces of genuine Marxism contend with the forces of capitalism (however disguised) to determine the programme, strategy and tactics, and hence the future, of all the organisations of our movement. In the long run, this struggle will decide the victory of the coming revolution.

The ideas for which we stand have been developed and confirmed through generations of struggle of the working class internationally. In South Africa in the months and years ahead, as hundreds of thousands of oppressed workers and youth move into action again and again, through the experience of events far greater even than the uprisings of 1976, we are confident that the perspectives and tasks put forward in this booklet will be abundantly confirmed.

The working class faces the present period of struggle stronger than ever before in its history. With the ideas of Marxism prevailing in its ranks, enabling it to harness its forces scientifically, its power will become invincible and exploitation and tyranny will be swept from the face of South Africa.

February 1980.

# **PART ONE**

**(Reprint of the document first circulated in August 1979)**

**THE  
WORKERS' MOVEMENT  
AND  
SACTU**

**A struggle for Marxist policies**

## Foreword

“ *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 emphasising 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...

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 task now is to build up the organised strength of the working class. ”

From “*Workers' Unity*,” Issue No. 1, January 1977.

The documents published here bring out into the open a struggle which has been taking place, in exile, over the political direction of the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

To publish this pamphlet, including material which was originally written for internal discussion within SACTU bodies, is not a decision which has been taken lightly. The documents themselves (all of which are published with the approval of their authors) give the background to this publication and explain why it cannot be avoided.

The documents deal with issues which are of very great importance to the workers' struggle in South Africa, and vital to the future of SACTU. At the very least, these issues deserve to be thoroughly studied and seriously discussed. Sad to say, however, the present leadership of SACTU has been totally unwilling to do this. Instead it has acted, month after month, to stifle any discussion of them.

This is happening at a time when, inside South Africa among the organised workers in the front rank of the struggle, there is a thirst for the ideas which can show the way forward to the overthrow of the apartheid regime and the capitalist system which it protects. It is hoped that this pamphlet will make a contribution towards answering some of the burning questions of the workers' movement in South Africa today.

The central document published here (page 23) is concerned to analyse the character of the South African revolution and the tasks which flow from this for the workers' movement. It was originally submitted by the Editor of “*Workers' Unity*” to the National Executive Committee of SACTU as a memorandum for discussion at its meeting in April 1979. At this meeting, however, the NEC—refusing even to table the memorandum for discussion—dismissed the Editor from his post and from the Editorial Board as a whole.

The political significance of this decision and the events leading up to it, are set out in the letter from the dismissed Editor to the NEC and other SACTU formations. (Page 55.)

The letter from members of the Technical Sub-Committee in London (page 60) deals with another side of the same political struggle within SACTU—the attempts by SACTU activists to raise the issues of the Editor's dismissal, the Wiehahn Commission and the urgent tasks of SACTU at home, for full and democratic discussion through the available channels of the organisation in exile. All these attempts were rebuffed by the NEC, which eventually closed down the Technical Sub-Committee itself in order to prevent discussion.

The facts recounted in these documents all point to one regrettable but unavoidable conclusion: The leadership of SACTU in exile seems determined to turn SACTU back from the revolutionary working-class policies and the tasks which it proclaimed in the first 14 issues of "Workers' Unity" and in the pamphlet "Looking Forward", and which were foreshadowed in the declaration of principles in the SACTU Constitution itself. The serious consequences of this retreat both for SACTU and, in the long run, for the workers' movement as a whole—plus the closing of all avenues for debating these matters within SACTU bodies—have compelled us as a last resort to publish the facts, and to lay the arguments before the rank-and-file members and supporters of SACTU and the revolutionary workers as a whole.

The most urgent question facing the workers' movement in South Africa today is how to fight the Wiehahn-Riekert strategy of the capitalists and their apartheid regime. Repeated requests for a discussion on this question with members of the SACTU-NEC were consistently ignored. At the same time, neither in the NEC's statements on the Wiehahn Commission nor in the 15th issue of "Workers' Unity" (which has appeared since the dismissal of the former Editor) is any lead given to workers struggling in South Africa.

In this pamphlet (pages 13-22) we republish our own contribution to the discussion of the Wiehahn-Riekert attacks, which is taking place among the organised workers at home. Because of the urgency of the issues, the contribution on Wiehahn-Riekert was originally circulated separately in South Africa early this month.

The documents published here reflect a political struggle which has been taking place within a trade union organisation: SACTU. The questions which they raise are raised within a trade union context. Yet these questions are just as important and just as relevant for the revolutionary movement as a whole.

As time passes, the political issues which have now come to a head within SACTU will more and more clearly pose themselves also within the African National Congress (with which SACTU has been allied since the 1950s) and within the South African Communist Party.

From the standpoint of the oppressed workers—the mass of the people of South Africa—it is possible to pose the basic issues of our liberation struggle in very stark and simple terms: Who will rule South Africa—the workers or the capitalists? Will our revolution against apartheid also bring an end to poverty and exploitation? Will our revolution be victorious like the Russian Revolution of October 1917, or will the workers be held back from power and suffer a bloody defeat as in Spain in the 1930s and Chile in 1973?

All the political differences in our movement revolve round different attitudes to these fundamental questions.

Many comrades in the workers' movement in South Africa are aware that different political tendencies contend within the organisations in exile, just as they do at home. At the root of all the political differences are class differences, and class interests.

Many workers look to the South African Communist Party and its

leadership to defend the interests of the working class against attempts by middle-class nationalist elements (whether in or out of the Congress alliance) to subordinate the black workers to their own ends and hold the struggle back. Comrades who study the documents in this pamphlet may well ask: What was the role of the SA Communist Party and its leaders in the political struggle which has taken place in SACTU?

SACTU is an organisation which, from its formation, has proclaimed itself a workers' organisation, based on the principle of working-class independence. Within the ranks of SACTU, one might ask, can middle-class nationalist elements exercise any significant influence? Yet Marxism has suffered a set-back in SACTU at the hands of a right wing which is resolutely opposed to the mobilisation and organisation of the oppressed workers of South Africa for socialist aims. How can this set-back have occurred?

The tragic fact is that the key role in forcing the present retreat by the SACTU NEC from the policies of the past period; the key role in securing the dismissal of the Editor of "Workers' Unity" and changing the paper's line; the key role in blocking democratic discussion of the crucial issues facing SACTU—has been played by individuals who are well-known members of the SA Communist Party.

The leadership of the SACP has the undoubted capacity to prevent such right-wing and anti-working-class activities by party members (activities which are surely a disgrace in any organisation claiming the traditions of Marx and Lenin). Why has the leadership of the SACP tolerated these activities by its members? Does the CP leadership endorse the right-turn on the part of SACTU away from revolutionary policies and tasks? What is the attitude of the CP to the standpoint put forward in the documents published here?

The political struggle in SACTU has boiled down to this: Will SACTU be developed to play its part in building a mass revolutionary working-class movement against national oppression and capitalist exploitation? Regardless of the outcome of this struggle in SACTU, the tasks remain for every revolutionary to confront.

August 1979

# RESISTING THE WIEHAHN-RIEKERT ATTACKS

—A contribution to the discussion in the workers' movement from Marxist activists in the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

At this time, the single most important struggle of the workers' movement in South Africa is to **resist** the Wiehahn-Riekert strategy of the bosses and the apartheid regime.

The Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions, and the resulting developments in government policies, are the response of the ruling class to the **growing strength and militancy of the mass of the workers.**

Since the early 1960s the black working class has grown enormously in **numbers**, while at the same time occupying **new strategic positions in production**. In the 1970s the workers have shown their strength in wave after wave of struggle, against the employers and against the state. The high points in this struggle—the Natal strikes of 1973; the unrest on the mines; the political general strikes in 1976—are beyond anything achieved before in the workers' movement in South Africa.

It is the militant struggle of the oppressed workers which the ruling class fears above all else, for it threatens the survival of the apartheid regime and the system of capitalist exploitation. The Wiehahn report spelt this out very clearly. It also pointed out the dangers for the ruling class in the growing support of the international labour movement for the struggles of South African workers.

The workers of South Africa have long experienced brutal repression. Further attacks of a different kind have now been prepared by the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions—to undermine the workers' movement by cunning instead of **solely** by brute force. The workers must be prepared for these attacks. What are the reasons for this change of strategy by the ruling class? How must the workers set about defeating these attacks?

## Capitalist crisis

The roots of the present great upsurge of the workers' struggle in South Africa lie in the **economic crisis** in the country. This crisis is a part of the **world-wide crisis** of the capitalist system.

The long economic boom after the Second World War **has come to an end**. World capitalism is in decay. In place of the boom has come, not a sudden slump, but the beginnings of a long downward trend, interrupted only by occasional, short upswings.

In all the capitalist countries the bosses, seeing their profits falling, are attacking the living standards of the workers. Everywhere under capitalism the workers are facing the **problems of rising prices, unemployment and cuts in real wages**. And the working class, strengthened during the boom, is fighting back!

The effect of the post-War boom was mainly in the advanced, industrialised capitalist countries. In the colonial and ex-colonial countries, economic development during the boom was only partial and uneven, **with the standard of living of the masses in most countries actually falling**.

Now, with the new convulsions of world capitalism in decline, the revolutionary explosions of the past 25 years in Asia, Africa and Latin America **will be multiplied on an even greater scale**. In the world centres of capitalist power, **the mighty organised working class is once again taking to the road of militant struggle**.

The **power of the world working class**—both in the workers' states and in the capitalist countries—plus the **bankruptcy of the capitalist system**, accounts for the weakness of the imperialists, and for the extreme instability of most of the capitalist régimes (whether 'democratic' or military-police dictatorships). These same factors are at the root of the victory of the national liberation struggles and the overthrow of capitalism even in very poor and under-developed countries like Mozambique and Angola.

## The crisis in South Africa

In South Africa the boom, particularly during the 1960s, led to a massive expansion of industry. Mechanisation has drawn in black workers in their hundreds of thousands into semi-skilled, operative, assembly-line work. But the growth in production has produced few, if any, economic benefits for black workers. Politically, their oppression is worse than ever.

The slide of South African capitalism into recession has worsened conditions for the workers very sharply. **Through the regime of apartheid, the bosses are loading the main burden of the crisis onto the backs of the black working class**.

To restore their profits, the capitalists aim to cheapen the products of industry so that they can sell these in the world market. To do so, they have to mechanise more, speed up production lines, lengthen the working day

and drive down real wages.

Wages already at starvation level are cut even further as the prices of food, rent, fares and clothing rise. For the sake of the bosses' profits, jobs are cut back—while those on the line are worked harder. The pass laws are toughened and enforced more fiercely than ever to control the workers and the unemployed. The jobless and homeless are driven from the cities and dumped in the Bantustans, to make South Africa 'safe' for the ruling class.

## Workers' struggle

Against this **tightening noose** of oppression and exploitation, the black workers have launched themselves into battle. In the mines, docks, factories and farms, in the schools, the townships and the reserves struggles are waged—for higher wages; against higher rents, fares and prices; against sackings; for trade union rights; for housing and education; against evictions and removals; against the pass laws and the migrant labour system; for political rights.

Each strike, each protest, brings the workers' movement into direct confrontation with the apartheid régime. Each strike, each struggle, exposes the **bankruptcy of capitalism and of the ruling class**—its inability to develop the economy, to provide jobs and a decent living for the people, or to take society forward; its ability only to suppress and enslave society for the greed and profit of the rich and few.

Each strike, each protest, brings to the fore the link between the capitalists and their state, and poses **the need to defeat their power with the revolutionary power of the organised and armed mass of the working class**. Each strike and each struggle points a small part of the way forward to a new organisation of society; a society under the control of the working people, with production planned for need not profit; a society of national liberation, democracy and socialism.

## Political crisis

The economic crisis, and the **strength of the working class**, have led to **political crisis** for the ruling class.

No capitalist class can rule alone. In South Africa, until now, the ruling class has been able to dominate and control the majority of the workers (the blacks) by depending on the white middle class and privileged labour aristocracy for support. **But the increasing strength and militancy of the black working class has made this an insufficient basis of political rule**.

The ruling class is forced to **modify** the method of its dictatorship over the workers: firstly, by trying to cultivate the **black middle class** as a buffer against the power of the black workers and as an agent of capitalist control; and secondly, by trying to create **new divisions** in the ranks of the working

class.

The ruling class has left this turn too late to give it any lasting prospect of success. In this period, as events have shown, half-hearted concessions directed towards small sections of the oppressed people merely sharpen the thirst of the masses for their freedom and provoke greater demands. However, for the ruling class to delay the changes, means to pile up even bigger problems and dangers for itself in future.

At the same time, to cheapen products, the capitalists are compelled to undermine the privileges and job security of white workers, displacing them by cheaper black labour. This is provoking resistance among the lower layers of the whites, although **initially** it is taking a reactionary and racist direction.

Thus the regime begins to lose its stability; it is forced to twist and weave. The indecision over the new constitutional proposals, 'Muldergate', the threatening splits in the Nationalist Party, and the confusion in **all** the capitalist parties are signs of this. **They are signs of a ruling class that is losing its ability to rule.**

**The rising strength of the working class; the growing weakness of the ruling class—these are the main facts of the present period in the South African struggle.** But, however favourable the objective circumstances may be, these cannot **decide** the outcome in favour of the workers. The key element remains the **subjective factor—the organisation of the working class and its leadership.**

Without a **clear understanding** in the workers' movement of the Wiehahn-Riekert strategy of the ruling class; without **correct tactics** based on this understanding; without a firm determination on the part of the workers' **leaders to organise and fight—our struggle could suffer a setback, even a temporary defeat.** That is why we have felt it our duty to put forward these general ideas for consideration and discussion in the workers' movement, as our organisations prepare to confront the new strategy of the enemy.

## The Wiehahn-Riekert strategy

The weakening of the ruling class provokes it to greater cunning and greater ruthlessness. The Wiehahn-Riekert strategy is an attempt by the bosses to recover the initiative before there is a new explosion of the mass struggle, such as in 1976.

The capitalists aim to **tighten their control over the working class inside and outside the factory.** Both the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions pointed out that the workers' struggles have been weakening and defeating the old methods of control. Now **new methods** are proposed.

Our rulers will continue to repress the workers' struggles wherever they can by victimisation, the pass laws, police violence, etc. But they have found that these methods are not enough. To **control** the workers, they know that they have to **divide** the workers.

The most important of the old divisions has been **race.** But the

development of industry has been undermining the old divisions. As more and more workers are turned into machine-operators, divisions of skill and craft break down. 'Migrant' and 'settled' workers, African, Coloured and Indian (and sometimes white) women and men, are thrown together in production. **The basis for workers' unity is strengthened.**

The Wiehahn-Riekert strategy probes the working class with a knife, testing out points of weakness where new lines of division can be cut. Their central aim is to separate the 'settled' workers (those with Section 10 rights) from the migrants by promising some concessions to the settled workers. This aims to isolate the migrant workers, who have spearheaded many struggles in the recent period, from the rest of the class. It is a cynical manoeuvre to try and reopen the scars of the division which emerged among the African workers for a short time in Soweto and Cape Town in 1976, and which were healed as the struggle developed. It is an attempt to load the heaviest burden of the economic crisis onto the migrant workers.

The first battles against the Wiehahn-Riekert strategy of the ruling class are already being fought. **Crossroads is an outstanding example.** In Crossroads, the working people have been resisting the attempt by the regime to demolish their homes and evict them to the Bantustans. Through careful preparation and organisation, through a **firm, united and militant resistance,** they have fought back against repression and forced the regime to back down.

This is a **gain** which was wrung from the regime, not by the liberals or the churches or the Urban Foundation, but by the mass organisation and struggle of the people of Crossroads themselves. The firmness and clarity of their stand won support very quickly, at home and around the world.

**The lessons of Crossroads are very important for the whole workers' movement to study and build on.** Each move by the regime to impose its new strategy must be resisted. The conditions for resistance are favourable. A **firm and clear stand** now by the workers' movement can create the conditions for moving forward rapidly in the future.

## The independent unions

During the 1970s, the forward movement of the workers has laid the basis once again for mass open organisations to develop, widening the sphere in which legal struggle is possible. The new growth over the past six or seven years of independent African unions **outside the strait-jacket of the government's labour laws** is a result of the strength and militancy of the workers in this period.

**If the ruling class had the power simply to destroy the organisations of the working class it would always do so.** But the ruling class in South Africa understands clearly that such a policy towards the trade unions today would not succeed—the workers would continue to organise underground and the movement would not suffer a defeat.

It is this recognition of the strength of the workers which has persuaded

our enemies to look for **new methods** of bringing the organised workers under control. If they are now offering 'legal recognition' to African unions, it is solely for the purpose of bringing the unions under **state control**. That is what the government intends by offering to the independent unions the 'benefit' of **registration**—while threatening penalties against those which refuse to register.

**This legislation can result in a crisis for the workers' movement unless the government's purpose is clearly understood and its new tactics firmly resisted.**

The terms on which the unions will be granted registration, the restriction and supervision of their activities by the state, the powers given to the Manpower Commission and the Industrial Court, are all designed to **strike at the heart of independent workers' organisation**. Clinging for the present to the old restrictions on racially mixed unions, the regime is at the same time preparing new divisions and new attacks on workers' unity. **The most serious threat is that of excluding 'migrant' and 'commuter' workers from the right to trade union membership.**

**It is the responsibility of the whole workers' movement to fight these attacks on the independent unions.** In working out tactics, it is vitally important to recognise that the **general character** of this period is one of the growing weakness of the ruling class in the face of working-class advance. There must be no giving in to the poisonous 'concessions' offered by the regime to the trade union movement in the proposed legislation. **No registration at the price of division and state control over the unions!**

## **Combine legal and illegal resistance!**

Great strides have been made towards the **unity in struggle** of all workers by the independent unions in the last few years. The movement of the African workers has encouraged other sections of the workers into action. The formation of FOSATU reflects the striving on the part of rank-and-file union members for a strong, united trade union movement that can take the struggle forward. Drawing 'registered' unions into association with 'unregistered', FOSATU points away from state controls towards independent unionism based on the African majority of the workers.

All the independent unions have a major responsibility to mobilise workers' resistance through the unions against the Wiehahn proposals.

Of course, everyone can see that there is a limit to what the legal organisations can do in the struggle, because they have to work openly right under the hammer of state repression. But this fact must not be allowed to become an **excuse for anyone** in the unions to hold back from struggle. For the legal limits are not absolute, and every effort must be made to widen the field in which legal mass organisation is allowed. **Only struggle** can force our rulers on the retreat and loosen the chains by which the law binds us.

When the regime or the bosses retreat, we press home our advantage. But we can afford no illusions to creep into the workers' movement as a result of

the expanding opportunities for legal work. In the situation of crisis, the ruling class cannot afford to allow any gains by the workers' movement to stand unchallenged for long. The more the ruling class is cornered, the more it will grow desperate. At any sign of weakness in the workers' movement the already heavy weight of repression can be suddenly and savagely increased.

**At the same time the ruling class will try to turn the leadership of the workers' organisations into instruments of control over the workers. The ruling class searches incessantly for elements who can be corrupted and turned against us.**

Therefore, while we press forward our struggle through working legally in the open unions, we must at the same time **build the foundations of our resistance underground**. Here our work can be protected against the police, and defended against pressures towards reformism and capitulation to the power of the bosses and the state. From the underground base we can work to keep the legal unions on course, **building them as weapons of the resistance**. Here there can be developed the links between our immediate demands and the all-round struggle to **break the chains** that bind us, through the overthrow of the apartheid regime and the capitalist system.

## **The tasks of SACTU**

Because of its history, its long involvement in the liberation struggle, and the sound principles of workers' unity and working-class independence established in its Constitution nearly 25 years ago, SACTU is an organisation with a clear responsibility to **build underground trade union organisation** in South Africa today. But for more than 15 years SACTU has been confined almost entirely to an exile existence. In the recent period, militants inside and outside the country have struggled in SACTU to urge on the leadership (based in exile) the **pressing need** to fulfil its responsibility to the workers.

"Workers' Unity" was started up as the official paper of SACTU from January 1977 mainly in order to become an organising weapon for underground work in South Africa. The tasks of building underground trade unionism were also the central focus of the SACTU policy document, "Looking Forward" (January 1978).

But the struggle to take these tasks forward in SACTU has unfortunately encountered serious opposition. It was clear from the start that "Workers' Unity" could develop as a real workers' paper only to the extent that SACTU fulfilled its purpose of becoming an organisation of the workers, rooted in the everyday struggles within the country. But there is no sign that this development is taking place. In fact, the signs are to the contrary.

The Editorial Board of "Workers' Unity" became increasingly **bogged down** in conflict which reflected serious political differences on what the role and tasks of SACTU were.

In April this year, as a contribution to the discussion and resolution of these problems, the Editor of "Workers' Unity" submitted a memorandum

to the National Executive Committee of SACTU. The memorandum argued:

- That the lack of urgency and commitment to the task of building SACTU at home (and with it, developing the paper) was a result of a lack of political clarity within the organisation and among the leadership on the character and tasks of the South African revolution.
- That the cornerstone of SACTU's approach to the revolution must be the recognition that neither economic gains, nor national liberation, nor democracy, can be secured for the black workers on the basis of capitalism, but only through an uninterrupted struggle to overthrow capitalism and begin the building of socialism.
- That the black working class is the only social force capable of leading this revolutionary struggle in the interests of all the oppressed, and, to undertake this task, must be organised first and foremost as workers.
- That the workers must be mobilised with the aim, at the decisive point, of defeating the armed force of the state with the revolutionary armed force of the mass movement.
- That the path to this goal lies in giving clear priority to building organs of mass struggle, so that at every point the politics of the mass struggle exercise command over the gun and the bomb.

The NEC made no response to the memorandum submitted by the Editor of "Workers' Unity". **Instead, it dismissed him from his post and removed him from the Editorial Board of the paper.** The NEC informed the Editor that he was dismissed for "putting forward policies which were not those of SACTU"—but it has refused to say what it means by this allegation.

SACTU activists who have given support to the building of "Workers' Unity" as an organising weapon for the workers' movement cannot fail to see the dismissal of the Editor as a **serious political step** taken by the NEC. Yet the NEC has shown itself quite unwilling to discuss the issues raised by this dismissal with those activists who have tried to raise the question within the available channels in exile. Instead the Editor, and those who agree with his point of view, have been barred from speaking on behalf of SACTU at solidarity meetings.

The leadership of SACTU in exile appears unwilling to confront the very difficult problems and decisions that have to be confronted if SACTU is to carry out its tasks at home, after the organisation has been in exile for fifteen years.

Regrettably, all these events would seem to confirm the fears of many SACTU activists that the leadership is unwilling seriously to take up the tasks that are its responsibility: of building SACTU as a genuine,

independent, underground trade union organisation inside South Africa. **Yet, to build the underground remains the most vitally important task.**

We are committed to carrying this task forward to the best of our ability, together with the workers in South Africa, and we will continue to raise in SACTU, in whatever ways are open to us, the responsibilities which the organisation should confront.

Inside South Africa, workers in many areas have for years already, on their own initiative, had to create secret groups and underground networks as the basis for mass strikes and other struggles. These comrades are pointing out the tasks and showing the way forward to the whole workers' movement. **They are laying the foundations for the great battles which lie ahead—against the bosses, against the apartheid regime; for workers' power, national liberation and socialism.**

## FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENT UNIONS!

Two articles in "Workers' Unity" (Nos. 12 and 13) anticipated the main thrust of the Wiehahn proposals, developed fighting slogans, and set out the basis for resistance. We must build on these foundations.

Our trade unions must be independent from regulation by the bosses' state! Workers in the 'open' trade unions expect their leaders to oppose all measures which will chain the unions to the policies of the bosses' state.

We must make clear that all workers oppose Wiehahn. In our shop steward meetings, factory committees, regional meetings, branch executive committees, national conferences, works committees, and even liaison committees, let our voice be heard.

Now is the time to defend the trade unions we have built at such great cost. Now is the time to make them stronger by **bringing in** those workers who are not yet organised.

Now is the time for complete solidarity with migrant workers and those under attack in squatters' camps. All forms of organisation among migrant workers must be strengthened and linked to the 'open' trade unions.

Now is the time for meetings against Wiehahn where organised and unorganised workers can shout a firm NO.

We must resist Wiehahn by strengthening our organisation in every mine, factory, farm, and in the docks.

Democracy is the lifeblood of the workers' organisation. The factory and all places of work must become the centre of the union's

life! The leaders we elect must carry out the will of the rank-and-file.

Democracy in the unions can only be guaranteed with regular elections, leaders subject to recall, and salaries no more than the average union member (plus working expenses). Democracy in workers' organisations can only be secured outside of state regulation and on the basis of the widest working-class unity.

We who are united in the factories are divided by race in the trade unions. For too long the leaders of registered unions have argued the 'benefits' of control under the Industrial Conciliation Act. We must win over those workers in registered unions to stand firm with the 'open' trade unions. Now is the time to consolidate our strength in unions including all workers. Away with apartheid trade unionism!

We must use illegal and legal methods to advance the struggle! Our open organisations are under attack as in 1974 and 1976. The only basis for the **permanent** organisation of the workers lies in the underground. Only from the bedrock of **underground** organisation can revolutionaries work to influence and effectively lead the 'open' unions and challenge bureaucratic leadership in the registered unions.

Have discussions with trusted comrades on building the backbone of resistance secretly in the factories, compounds and townships; on how to lead the struggle of the workers.

**BUILD THE UNDERGROUND!**

**INDEPENDENCE FOR THE TRADE UNIONS!**

**DE-REGISTRATION OF UNIONS!**

**THE UNCONDITIONAL RIGHT TO STRIKE!**

## SOUTH AFRICAN CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

# MEMORANDUM

TO: The National Executive Committee of SACTU  
FROM: The Editor of "Workers' Unity"

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Comrades,

After an absence of 14 years, "Workers' Unity" reappeared in January 1977 as the official newspaper of SACTU, to present our ideas and policies to the workers of South Africa and to the world. Now, more than two years later, and after 14 issues have been produced, it is necessary to draw up a balance sheet of what has been achieved, what we have failed to achieve, and what tasks now confront us.

It is in this regard that I would like to submit some thoughts for the consideration of the comrades who, as members of the National Executive Committee, have the future of SACTU in their hands. Regrettably, I am prevented from being present to discuss these matters personally with comrades.

Although, apparently, "Workers' Unity" has been left out of the agenda for the NEC meeting, I hope that it will be given the necessary time.

## THE FUTURE OF "WORKERS' UNITY"

I believe that the publication of "Workers' Unity" over the past two years has been an important step forward for SACTU. But, at the same time, we have only made a small beginning and what has been done so far is only a drop in the ocean in comparison with what still has to be done.

There is really only one way that we can thoroughly test our work, and that is by measuring it against the tremendous tasks which the workers' struggle at home places upon us. How does "Workers' Unity" measure up to this test?

### A workers' paper and an organising weapon

When we launched "Workers' Unity" at the end of 1976, we did not intend it mainly as an international solidarity paper (although it was expected to, and certainly does, cover that area as well). We intended "Workers' Unity" as an **organising weapon for the workers' struggle inside South Africa**. We wanted it to become a **genuine workers' paper**.

"Workers' Unity" is today a paper written for workers—but it is not a single step nearer to being a **workers' paper** than when it appeared over two years ago. We have to frankly acknowledge this weakness, so that we can tackle it and overcome it without delay.

Many comrades, constructively criticising "Workers' Unity", have remarked that it is not sufficiently agitational; that articles are too long and

abstract; that the style is too sophisticated; that the paper is sorely lacking in hard news from the factory floor; that the commentary is often too general and does not show a feel for the actual situations which the workers face—the concrete details, the personalities, the tactical twists and turns of the daily struggle at home. **These comrades are quite right.**

Where does the solution lie? The hard reality is that ours is a paper produced in exile by an organisation based in exile. We need to strike the right balance between the more theoretical articles and the vitally necessary agitational pieces. **But we cannot 'agitate' out of thin air.** The living details of factory and township life from day to day, the facts of strike situations and the small but important changes in conditions which are constantly taking place—these are the raw materials from which agitation is made. We cannot draw them merely from inspiration. To attempt to 'agitate' without the facts is no solution—it always rings false, as empty boasting or bravado.

There is only one solution. **"Workers' Unity" can fulfil its purpose of becoming a workers' paper only to the extent that SACTU as a whole fulfils its purpose of becoming an organisation of the workers, rooted in the living struggle at home.**

### Isolation from the workers' movement

To illustrate the present isolation of "Workers' Unity" from the workers' movement in South Africa, let us note a few facts.

Take the **distribution** of the paper. Well over 50,000 copies have been printed in all—yet the number which have been transported **through our organisation** into South Africa **cannot total more than a few hundred copies over these two years!**

... \*

**Only the tiniest fraction even of the organised workers in South Africa can be said EVER to have seen a copy of "Workers' Unity", let alone to receive it regularly.**

The point must be taken further. A genuine **workers' paper** does not rely solely on **distribution** to workers. It relies on **receiving** a constant stream of information, reports, criticisms, suggestions and eventually whole articles from workers in the field of struggle. Like a plant, dependent on the flow of sap from the roots, our paper needs the life-juices of the workers' own experience, their own ideas and their own ways of expression—if it is to survive.

In the space of more than two years, unfortunately, we have not received a

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\* Certain passages of this memorandum have been omitted here for security reasons. The omissions are indicated at the relevant points by the insertion of dots. The passages deal with organisational questions and facts which are not crucial to the political argument.

single contribution to "Workers' Unity" from any SACTU machinery which may exist in South Africa. In recent weeks we have, for the first time through SACTU, received some very welcome comments on "Workers' Unity" from within South Africa—but these can still be counted on the fingers of one hand. Responses which have from time to time reached us independently of SACTU's organisation, are alone sufficient proof of the enormous impact "Workers' Unity" could have in the workers' movement if only it reached the workers.

But we are not reaching the workers.

A year ago I pointed out to certain of the comrades who are members of the NEC that, if "Workers' Unity" was not drawn closer to home (not in the sense of its production and printing but in the sense of its content) within the course of the year, it would begin to become noticeably sterile.

Cast a critical eye over the 14 issues. In the 6 issues of the first year, "Workers' Unity" clearly went through a period of forward development. Each issue tackled a subject of immediate importance to the workers' organisations in their practical struggle. And each built progressively upon the ground laid in the ones before.

The leading articles in each issue show this:

- **Issue No. 1:** An analysis of the lessons of Soweto and the road ahead.
- **Issue No. 2:** Why it is necessary to fight for independent unions.
- **Issue No. 3:** Unemployment; why reformist policies hold no way out.
- **Issue No. 4:** Our programme of fighting demands, linking these to the struggle for state power, national liberation and the end of capitalism.
- **Issue No. 5:** How do we organise? The explanation of the need for underground trade union organisation, the role of SACTU and a call to establish SACTU groups in the factories with definite tasks.
- **Issue No. 6:** An explanation of our wage demand: a R50-a-week national minimum wage, with automatic future increases linked to price rises.

During 1978, the development of "Workers' Unity" levelled off. The change was not noticeable immediately, or in any single issue, but taking issues 7—14 as a whole we can see the following:

We have continued to put forward and explain our **general standpoint** and policies on **general subjects**. But the general has begun to take up more and more of the paper. Our content has become increasingly abstract and timeless—in the sense that it would not matter in which issue or even which year many of our articles appear. Only in two cases (when we eventually dealt with the Wichahn Commission, and when we printed a very general solidarity article on the struggle for Crossroads) can it be said that we have tackled any new subjects of burning importance to the workers' movement at home. We have been frustrated, for example, in our intention to write on the struggle over the schools because we have no contact with the developing situation on the ground.

Our news reporting on factory and township struggles is drawn entirely from already published material—and almost always from the South

**African bourgeois press.**

Since Issue No. 5 (September 1977) we have not carried a single article on how to organise, nor have we even dealt in general terms with methods and problems of underground work. Since Issue No. 3 (May 1977) we have not analysed critically a single development or current of thought within the trade unions.

## The consequences of isolation

The strength of "Workers' Unity" up to now is the same as the strength of SACTU itself—our principles and general policies; our clear working-class standpoint; and the method by which we analyse and explain the issues facing the workers.

And, on the other hand, the weakness of "Workers' Unity" is exactly the same as the weakness of SACTU as a whole—our weakness at home. Unless this is overcome in our organisation with the greatest urgency, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain even the present standard of our paper.

Its 'exile' character—unavoidable perhaps at the start—will become increasingly obvious and unacceptable. Our readers may have tolerated this until now on account of the infancy of the paper, but as time passes this will lead to very serious questions being raised, not only about "Workers' Unity", but about the character of SACTU.

Detached from the living movement of the workers in South Africa, the style of the paper will tend to become stereotyped and the content increasingly 'hack'. Our readers at home who have been excited and pleased to receive the paper will tend to lose interest and may object to having to take the risk of receiving it. Our readers abroad, who tend to like the paper precisely because it is written for workers in South Africa, will be disappointed and our subscriptions, presently rising, could well start to fall. Our capacity to generate funds for SACTU in the solidarity field would likewise fall off.

This is not alarmist talk—it is simple fact. A paper is a living thing: it must either develop or perish. "Workers' Unity" cannot survive unless SACTU develops into a real, fighting workers' organisation inside South Africa. The future of "Workers' Unity" (and it could have a great future) is completely bound up with the rebuilding of SACTU at home.

## Should "Workers' Unity" now move to Africa?

Over the past year I have given a lot of thought to the question whether the isolation of "Workers' Unity" from the workers' movement at home could at this stage be solved by moving the editorship and production of the paper to Africa. I believe it is clear that the answer is no. The problem will not be solved by such a step until SACTU has built an underground organisation in South Africa on a scale large enough to maintain a constant flow of ideas, information and guidance backwards and forwards between

our cadres active in the field of the workers' struggles and the editorial board of the paper.

As soon as our organisation has developed at home to the point where "Workers' Unity" could have constant contact with significant numbers of organised workers, I would strongly favour moving the editorial centre of the paper as near as possible to the borders of South Africa without delay.

In time, of course, our aim must be not only to move the paper to Southern Africa, but to develop our ability to reprint and eventually produce "Workers' Unity" clandestinely inside South Africa.

### How "Worker's Unity" could develop

Based on an underground organisation at home, actively involved in the day-to-day struggles of the workers, "Workers' Unity" would rapidly develop from its present style as a propaganda organ into an agitational paper in the thick of the action. Publication in African languages and in Afrikaans would become feasible. The practical problems of distribution and of production would take on a completely different character in these circumstances.

There are no short cuts to the solution of the problems facing "Workers' Unity". The only answer is the building of SACTU in South Africa.

In this work itself, of course, "Workers' Unity" has a very important role to play. We must see "Workers' Unity" as an organising weapon and we must make full use of it for that purpose.

As a very first step, we should be forming groups of workers in different parts of South Africa to read and discuss the ideas in "Workers' Unity", and the policies it presents. The groups of SACTU militants which are formed in the factories should make the paper a central focus of their discussions and training, and its circulation to other workers one of their most important tasks.

As it develops, "Workers' Unity" would be able to spread the spark of ideas across the length and breadth of the country, establishing communications between tens of thousands of workers who are physically isolated from one another, and generalising their experiences.

In an underground organisation, the paper would serve as a vehicle for the vitally necessary democratic discussion within our ranks, without which effective central decision-making and discipline in action is impossible.

Real living contact with workers' organisation would at once bring "Workers' Unity" into its own. Every hundred copies printed and secretly distributed among workers would act as another SACTU organiser, supplementing our efforts where we could not be present ourselves: raising the issues, stimulating discussion, explaining policies, reviewing tactics, advancing slogans and demands.

Let this be the future of "Workers' Unity"!

## THE NEED TO BUILD SACTU IN SOUTH AFRICA

The situation in South Africa today cries out for the building of SACTU as a revolutionary trade union organisation of mass proportions. The most favourable conditions exist for the swift growth of our forces and the extension of SACTU's influence in the workers' movement throughout the country. The possibilities are great, but time is short. Can we frankly say that our whole organisation is really committed to this task—straining every nerve and muscle to build SACTU among the workers at home? I fear that we cannot.

In January last year, the NEC adopted as its policy a Political Report by the General Secretary (published as a pamphlet entitled "Looking Forward"). There the urgency of building SACTU was repeatedly stressed. SACTU's most essential task, it was said, the one to which all others must give precedence, "is that of building and helping to build the organised forces of the black workers within the mines and factories, and on the farms. To build, build and build again our forces and cadres within the country! It is to this task that our main energies must be devoted." (Page 21.)

But have these words produced any decisive change in our orientation, in our recruitment, in our training of cadres, in the setting of our priorities, in the allocation of our human and material resources between solidarity work and the work at home, in the urgency with which we are tackling this work, in the efforts we are making to distribute our publications in South Africa...?

When it comes to our tasks at home, a strange paralysis still grips SACTU. What is the root cause of it? I would like to submit for the consideration of the NEC that the root cause is political. We are affected by a lack of clarity about SACTU's role and future. There are deep differences of opinion within our ranks on the importance of trade union work; on the relationship between the workers' movement and the struggle of all the oppressed; on the relationship between national liberation, democracy and socialism; on SACTU's position in relation to armed struggle.

SACTU can only grow at home on the basis of clearly worked out political perspectives. If we are to build, as we have promised, an underground trade union organisation in South Africa "to mobilise and lead the workers in their everyday struggles, linking the economic and political sides of the struggle together" ("Looking Forward", page 3), our cadres will have to come to grips with all the problems facing the future development of the mass movement, and point out a clear way forward to the trade unions.

SACTU is a trade union organisation, but it is compelled nonetheless to address itself to all the basic political questions of the South African revolution. It is precisely the question of the political basis upon which SACTU must go forward—the only basis on which our organisation can be

built, and "Workers' Unity" with it—that I wish to bring to the fore in this memorandum.

## The crisis of the system

As has been explained many times in SACTU publications, the apartheid system developed in South Africa to suit the needs of capitalism. The political system of national oppression has been built upon foundations of class oppression and exploitation of the black workers. Now the system, economic and political, is suffering a crisis more acute than at any other time in its history. The incurable sickness of **world capitalism**, and the particular features of that sickness in the South African economy, provide the basis on which all the social contradictions built up during the decades and even centuries of oppression and exploitation now demand to be resolved.

The outlines of this crisis, a crisis of apartheid and of capitalism woven together, have been set out in "Looking Forward". It was clearly recognised there that this is no temporary crisis, despite its ups and downs. The capitalists are well aware of the cancer that affects their system. The slight recovery of the economy is accepted to be short-lived. Divisions within the white population, reflected especially in the crisis in the Nationalist Party, are now deeper than at any other time since the early 1920s.

Around the world the tide of social revolution is rising, not least in Southern Africa itself. At home, the combativity of the oppressed masses, particularly of the black working class, is repeatedly expressed in action under the most difficult conditions—in the struggle over education, for higher wages, trade union rights, transport and housing, over rents and removals, over the pass laws and the migrant labour system, and demands for political rights.

During the long period of the economic boom in South Africa, mining, agriculture, industry and commerce were massively developed and dazzling riches—the profits from cheap labour—poured into the pockets of the ruling class. But from this great expansion of wealth and productive power, the black working class derived only hardship, poverty and suffering. The first onset of economic stagnation only multiplied the weight upon the backs of the people.

Today, as capitalism lurches from one crisis to the next on a world scale, **it can afford no substantial or lasting concessions to the mass of the working people of South Africa.** Our rulers know this only too well. To the extent that the ruling class is putting out feelers in the direction of 'reforms', it seeks to win the collaboration of the black middle class against the power of the workers.

The **incapacity** of the system to carry out significant reforms is shown by the emptiness of the gestures made by the ruling class in that direction, accompanied by the more and more intensified repression and the slide towards increasing militarisation.

The black working people need **jobs for all.** Capitalism answers this need

with two million unemployed, with a rise in this figure of 30,000 a month, and with the certainty of mass unemployment persisting so long as the profit system remains.

The black working people need a **living wage** (at present that would be at least R50 a week minimum for all workers). Capitalism answers this need with an **average wage for black workers which is well below the breadline**—in some Bantustans as low as R5 a week. It answers with price rises which have meant as much as 20—30% a year on the cost of living in the townships.

The black working people need **trade union rights, and an end to the pass laws and the migrant labour system.** But the denial of trade union rights, the pass laws and the migrant labour system are nothing but measures developed by capitalism in South Africa to chain the workers in the service of profit.

In "Workers' Unity" we have taken up these and many other demands. In doing so, however, we have been under no illusion that the system in South Africa can grant these things. We know full well that **capitalism means more unemployment, more poverty and more oppression for the working class.** In demanding concessions and reforms from the capitalists and the apartheid regime, we have sought to gain new footholds and strengthen the fighting capacity of the workers for revolutionary ends. We have explained again and again that even the most basic economic demands of the workers can only be secured through the victory of the struggle to **smash apartheid and end the profit system.**

The struggle for democracy has exactly the same implications. The ruling class realises that for the working class, democratic rights are not ends in themselves, but means to an end. They understand that workers demand political rights because they intend to use those rights to carry out a revolution in the conditions of their life and work—to end poverty, starvation and unemployment; to provide homes, clothing and comfort for their families and education for their children; to progressively free themselves from all discrimination, inequalities, privilege and dictatorship.

**National liberation and democracy cannot be secured by the black workers of South Africa on the basis of capitalism, but only through the liquidation of capitalism and the building of socialism.** There can be no separation of stages in the South African revolution between its national democratic aims and its socialist aims. This understanding must be the cornerstone of SACTU's approach to the revolution.

## The need for workers' power

Just as national oppression is rooted in class exploitation, so the national liberation struggle is rooted in class struggle. The two great opposing poles of action and attraction in the struggle are, on the one hand, the capitalist ruling class and, on the other, the rising power of the black working class.

**In the struggle for power, the whole of society will inevitably divide itself**

between these two poles. The state power will more and more blatantly reveal itself as a sledgehammer wielded by the capitalist class against the movement of the black working class and its allies.

This central conflict between capital and the black working class determines the path of development of the South African revolution. If liberation is to be achieved, capitalism must be confronted with the full power of the only force that can liquidate it—the workers.

The black working class in South Africa—because of its position in production and society; because it has no property to protect, no privileges to defend, and 'nothing to lose but its chains'; because the full weight of national oppression presses on its shoulders—is the only consistently democratic and anti-capitalist class, and the only social force capable of leading the revolutionary mass struggle for national liberation and socialism. Only under the leadership of the organised workers can the revolution be carried through to its conclusion and its gains be secured against counter-revolutionary attack.

For the black workers to lead the struggle for national liberation, democracy and socialism—to challenge the capitalist ruling class at the head of all the oppressed people—they must be organised first and foremost as workers. We can afford no shyness on the question of the leading role of the working class, or on the need for independent organisations of the workers to guarantee that leading role. SACTU's historic task is to fill with a revolutionary content the idea of working-class independence in the trade union field. Any hesitation or shyness on this matter will weaken the struggle for national liberation and open up possibilities for counter-revolution and defeat.

The ruling class fears nothing more than the awakening of the black workers, class-conscious and organised. More and more the repression and trickery of our rulers will be concentrated on attacking the growth of effective organisation among the workers, and on undermining its independence.

The ruling class understands only too well the connection between the struggle for national liberation and the struggle against capitalism. It understands the threat to its property and privilege which this struggle represents. The full force of the armed state is brought to bear against every national and democratic demand of the masses of the oppressed people because these struggles can only be brought to victory in the socialist revolution.

We must remember that capitalism in South Africa (in contrast with most other countries of the colonial or former colonial world) is in an advanced stage of growth and development, is very deeply rooted, and is maintained in power by large social forces. Deep as the crisis may be which affects this system, capitalism in South Africa will not easily be pushed aside.

The ruling class—the relatively small number of big capitalists who own the mines, banks, industries and big farms—rely for the stability of their power over the mass of the people on numerous intermediate layers of the middle classes and the white labour aristocracy. These forces of real or potential reaction are concentrated in the white population, but are being

deliberately extended to an increasingly noticeable extent among the small elite layers of the black population as well.

To undermine, divide and paralyse the social reserves of reaction potentially at the disposal of our enemy—to draw them in growing numbers to the side of the revolution—will prove impossible unless we clearly link the struggle for the overthrow of apartheid to the promise of a new social order which can guarantee the liberty and material well-being of all the people of South Africa, with equality for all.

The struggle for national liberation and democracy will either achieve victory through consciously linking itself at every step to the struggle against capitalism, under the leadership of the working class, and by passing over without interruption to socialist tasks—or else it will reach an impasse, a blind alley, and open the way to capitalist counter-revolution and defeat.

Even in 1955 it was clearly recognised in the Freedom Charter that the establishment of democracy in South Africa is impossible without a fundamental attack on capitalist property and power. All subsequent experience has richly confirmed this fact.

Our freedom, as we have emphasised in "Workers' Unity", cannot be achieved "unless the power of the exploiters is replaced by the power of the workers and the wealth of our country restored to the people as a whole." (Issue No. 5.) It is precisely the recognition of this iron necessity of our struggle which separates revolutionaries from every brand of reformism, whether blatant or disguised.

It is this, too, which explains why the road forward leads of necessity towards the armed seizure of state power.

To establish genuine democratic people's power in South Africa, which can only be secured on the foundation of workers' power, means to smash the South African state—not merely as an apartheid state, but equally as the capitalist state which it essentially is. Victory in this is inconceivable, and it has always been inconceivable, without the armed uprising of the working class.

## Arming the mass struggle

The great Marxist teachers of the working class, summing up the experience of the workers' struggle in all capitalist countries, long ago explained that the capitalist state—and the South African state is no exception—boils down in the last analysis to armed bodies of men, defending the property of the ruling class in the land, mines, factories and banks against the struggle of the working people to seize that property and organise production for their common benefit.

The harsh experience of our movement in South Africa, especially since the 1950s, has schooled the most advanced and conscious workers and fighters in one lesson above all others: our struggle is not for the pipedream of reform from above, but for revolution from below. It is not a struggle for concessions from our masters, but to take state power in order to end the

rule of all masters. The struggle for the seizure of state power takes many forms and many courses linked together, but at the decisive point that struggle can only be won by defeating the armed force of the state with the revolutionary armed force of the masses.

The turn of the Congress movement in the early 1960s to the use of armed force, does not signify that the victory of the liberation struggle was previously possible without arms. It was rather that events themselves, especially the Sharpeville massacre and its aftermath, exposed the futility of a strategy of confining the struggle to unarmed methods of action. In the early 1960s, broad masses of the oppressed people became conscious of the fact that not even significant reforms could be expected from the apartheid regime, and that it was necessary to overthrow it entirely.

After Sharpeville and Langa, there was a spontaneous straining of the masses, especially of the black working class, towards the use of armed force against the state, towards striking at the oppressor with all the means at their disposal. It was from the experience of those times that there developed among the black people, in particular among the workers, the overwhelming popularity of the idea that armed struggle is necessary if the liberation struggle is to succeed. The whole of subsequent experience has confirmed this conviction.

It is true that some people, when they speak of 'armed struggle', regard it merely as a means of increasing the pressure on the regime and ruling class to give concessions and reforms. But such a view does not represent the interests or the standpoint of the black workers of South Africa. It cannot be the standpoint of SACTU.

Likewise, the most advanced and politically conscious layers of the working class have never counterposed armed struggle to mass struggle, as if they were different things. For them and for us, it is a question of the organisation, mobilisation and arming of the mass of the people, headed by the organised workers, towards the eventual armed insurrection and seizure of state power.

## The paramount importance of mass organisation

A revolutionary strategy directed towards armed insurrection—the only genuinely revolutionary strategy possible in South Africa—requires at every stage that clear priority must be given to building organisations of mass struggle.

It means the building of illegal and underground organisation as the vital foundation of all the legal and open organisations which are used by the people as weapons in their struggle, whether in township, mine, factory or farm, in every part of the country.

It means a struggle to lead these organisations through all the tactical phases, the advances, the unavoidable retreats, the turns and re-advances necessary to unite the workers and draw behind them the oppressed people as a whole. It means giving central importance to political mobilisation

around slogans and demands which are constantly being tested and reformulated in order to build an unbreakable bridge between the immediate needs and consciousness of various groups and layers of the working people and the seizure of state power. It means to build through struggle a mass consciousness of the necessary link between genuine national liberation, democracy and socialism.

It means that armed struggle must not be separated from mass struggle, but fused with the development of the mass movement at every stage. It means that politics—the politics of mass struggle—must at every point command the gun.

It means the fullest participation of militarily trained revolutionaries in the day-to-day struggles of the people, as political cadres first and foremost, involved in the mobilising, educating, training and arming of the mass movement.

It means that the armed action on our side should in its early stages have mainly the character of organised self-defence by the mass movement against the terror tactics of the state. It means armed defence, in favourable circumstances, of strikes, demonstrations, 'squatter' camps and schools; against police raids, pass arrests, forced removals and so forth. As the mass movement gains strength, confidence and fighting skills, as the camp of the enemy weakens and divides, the basis will be laid for passing over to the offensive.

Our revolution needs the aid of the bullet and the bomb in order to carry out its work, but the bullet and the bomb do not produce the revolution. The essential conditions for revolutionary victory are in the first place political, and only in the second place military.

The weakening and division of the forces at the disposal of the ruling class; the power, unity and determination of the revolutionary forces; and the quality of the revolutionary leadership—these are the basic ingredients in the development of a revolutionary situation in South Africa and the preconditions for the successful armed seizure of power.

The crisis of the economic and political system has already been referred to. Out of this crisis emerge the most favourable objective conditions for the rapid maturing of a revolutionary situation.

In the vital process of strengthening the revolutionary forces, and weakening and dividing the forces in the hands of the ruling class, the single most important factor is the organisation and unity of the working class. In South African conditions, this unity, arising from struggle, can most rapidly take root among the black workers. With the black workers on the march, militant, class-conscious and united, all the rest of the oppressed people would fall in behind them and the basis would also be laid for sections of white workers and youth to break decisively with the ruling class. The struggle for workers' unity opens up the shortest and surest way to the revolutionary conquest of power.

It has been necessary to dwell on these matters here because they have the closest bearing on the whole development of SACTU. An independent, revolutionary trade union organisation, though it concentrates its activities in a definite field of struggle, can only carry out its responsibility to the

workers if its whole strategy for trade union work is directed towards the aim of eventual armed insurrection and the seizure of state power by the working class.

## The upsurge in the struggle

The struggle of the oppressed people, to which the movement of the black workers has supplied the fore-runners, the initiative and the driving force, has entered a **qualitatively new stage**. Beginning with the waves of industrial strikes from 1972-3 onwards, followed by the mass resurgence of student radicalism and reaching its high point in the uprisings and political general strikes of 1976, the movement has raised itself more or less spontaneously to the point where even the heroic actions of the 1950s and early 1960s have been overshadowed.

At the present moment, we are passing through a period of **relative lull**. But this should be only a very temporary period, giving way again to a new upsurge of resistance. Inevitably, after the titanic battles of 1976-7, the black workers and youth are recovering their energies, reflecting on their experiences, weighing up the lessons and doing whatever they can to map out the way ahead. One of the pointers to the **temporary** character of the present lull is the fact that the uprisings and the general strikes which followed the first Soweto massacre **were not defeated**—they were at most held at bay. The slaughter of school-children by the regime might, under different circumstances, have led to demoralisation and the collapse of the mass movement, but in fact it had the opposite effect. A most striking feature of the struggle in this period has been the **death-defying courage** (primarily of the black youth, but infusing also the ranks of the workers) with which our people have thrown themselves into action, time and again, virtually bare-handed against gas and guns.

Despite the current lull, the spirit of confidence in the black working class runs deep. This is shown, for example, in the movement of the workers into the trade unions after the Soweto uprisings, in the growing unity of different sections of the black workers and the renewed outbreak of industrial strikes in 1978, all the more remarkable for taking place when there are over two million unemployed. (A **reflection** of the pressure among workers towards greater unity is the setting up of FOSATU by trade union officials, as a new federation to the left of TUCSA.)

The mood and capacity for struggle of the working class in this period is clearly shown by the magnificent resistance of the people of Crossroads against the threatened demolition of their homes and their forced removal to the reserves. **In the face of this resistance the regime has been compelled to draw back.**

There has been a great **strengthening and hardening of the revolutionary class consciousness of broad layers of the black working class**. As was said in the Political Report last year ("Looking Forward", page 12):

"The long-standing hatred of the oppressed masses for white

supremacy in South Africa and for all the institutions of apartheid, has itself become sharpened and refined over the years as the system has developed. With the enormous growth of the black proletariat and its harsh experience of township life, and of mine, farm and factory labour, its political and class-consciousness too has advanced enormously. The connection between apartheid and capitalism is part of the living experience of the majority of our people. This is being demonstrated to us every day, not only in the older black workers, but also in the youth, their actions and their statements. No distinction can be drawn in the struggle, and no distinction is drawn by those in the thick of it, between the system of racial oppression and the system of economic exploitation.

This consciousness, hardened in the heat of battle over the past eighteen months, has in fact been the product of whole decades of the rapid development of capitalism in apartheid South Africa."

This entire period of renewed mass struggle in South Africa has indicated the extent to which the workers, digesting the experiences of the repression during the 1960s, have developed organisation and leadership hidden from public view and protected against easy attack by the bosses and the police. The Natal strikes of 1973, and the political general strikes of August and September 1976, are the clearest examples of the effectiveness of this underground organisation, built mainly through the initiative of the workers themselves.

We could not wish for more favourable conditions for the building of our own organisation underground among the workers. These conditions have now existed in South Africa **for years**. But what sign is there that we are placing our stamp upon events—upon tactics, slogans and mass demands?

The spontaneous forms of organisation developed in the mass movement in the heat of struggle are a magnificent gain. But at the same time they are afflicted by inevitable limitations, which must become more serious the more the mass movement advances towards its task of conquering power. Are we not compelled to acknowledge that there has not yet been built in South Africa the necessary, nationally co-ordinated, revolutionary underground organisation **for leading the mass struggle in all its forms** to the arming of the people and the insurrectionary seizure of state power?

**It is the task of SACTU to address this problem in the field of trade union organisation.** I think it is necessary to draw out here some of the implications of this problem in trade union work, because it underlies all the current questioning which is taking place in our ranks about **the role of SACTU, the future of "Workers' Unity", and the further development of our policies.**

## The renewed struggle for independent unions

The new period of the struggle in South Africa, beginning in the early 1970s, has seen an enormous resurgence of African workers' organisations

and sustained attempts to build independent unions. Available statistics (always to be taken, of course, with a pinch of salt) show that at least 60,000 African workers are trade union members. This compares favourably with the situation in 1960 - 1961.

This is, admittedly, only a fraction of the industrial working class, but in the conditions of vicious repression and harassment it represents a tremendous step forward and a sign of the renewed militancy of the black working class.

Since 1918 there has never been a time in South African history when African trade unions were entirely absent. The regime has never succeeded in eliminating entirely the open organisation of African workers into legal unions. At the present time, the regime and the ruling class are faced with serious problems in this regard: the more the new independent unions develop, the more the workers organised in them represent a threat to the stability of the system, yet the more politically dangerous and difficult it becomes for our rulers to attempt simply to destroy the unions by outright repression.

The main task of the Wiehahn Commission (whose report has still not been published) has been to propose to the government alternative and indirect methods for containing the movement of the workers and frustrating the growth of independent unions. (See "Workers' Unity", Issue No. 13.)

Trade unions of black workers which operate exclusively legally invariably have a **dual character**. On the one hand, when the state and the ruling class are unable politically to suppress the unions completely, every effort is made to deform the unions into indirect organs of bourgeois control over the working class. This is the purpose served by the growth of bureaucracy in the trade unions and the cultivation of reformism within them.

On the other hand, however, the trade unions represent for the workers weapons which they can use to advance their economic struggle and defend their gains. But, as we have seen, not one of the vital material needs of the working class (jobs for all; a living wage—to name but two) can be secured on the basis of capitalism. Every partial gain by the workers in the economic struggle is immediately placed in jeopardy and sooner or later stolen back again by the employers and their apartheid state. The economic struggle is thus doomed to frustration unless it is linked to the revolutionary struggle for state power, the destruction of apartheid, the expropriation of the capitalists and the building of the foundations of socialism.

This dual character of the trade unions makes them an arena of continuous conflict between two basic opposing tendencies—the reformist and the revolutionary. This struggle, whether more or less open or disguised, is a constant feature of the legal trade union organisations built up by black workers in South Africa.

What fundamentally distinguishes the revolutionaries from the reformists in trade union work is this: Consciously revolutionary trade unionists take as their starting point, as the point which governs their whole orientation, the necessity of the workers **seizing state power**, and strive to mobilise and organise the workers through **day-to-day struggles for concessions and**

**reforms** towards that goal. Reformists take as their starting point only the immediate demands of the workers, making these the self-sufficient aim and object of the trade union movement.

In Issue No. 5 of "Workers' Unity", we set out SACTU's general policy towards the efforts which have been made during the past six years in South Africa to build again open, non-racial trade unions (and similar organisations), within the legal strait-jacket imposed by the regime. We said:

**"To avoid being smashed they have been forced to take up a public posture of being non-political—concerning themselves exclusively with the 'economic' hardships of the workers.**

Within them and among their leaders, various tendencies are to be found. There are, of course, not a few reformists, opportunists and even collaborators—but there are also many who walk a tightrope of personal danger in truly serving the struggle of the working class...

These organisations are forced by the repression to keep themselves cut off from the liberation struggle as a whole, but we do not oppose them. Our policy is to fight for independent unions and to give these new organisations our support—in as far as they advance the workers' struggle."

We also, of course, encourage all forms of international solidarity in support of the struggles of these unions for recognition and for the demands of their members. We explain our support for these unions as follows:

**"Ours is a revolutionary struggle. Every means, legal and illegal, open and underground, on issues small and large, must be used to build the fighting strength of the working class.**

Tens of thousands of black workers are using the new organisations to put forward wage demands, take up complaints in the factories, defend themselves against victimisation, gain training and experience, and press for full trade union rights."

We support to the full every struggle to defend and extend the field of legal activity for the trade union movement.

But that, of course, is only one side of the question. As we go on to say in "Workers' Unity":

**"...at the same time, the immense pressures of intimidation, arrests, bannings and so on, take their toll on these unions. The regime picks off the best elements among the leaders and officials, thus clearing the way for those whose inclination is to bend the unions to the will of the bosses, and surrender to government pressure. In many subtle ways the ruling class cultivates this trend.**

As the narrow circle of legality is drawn steadily tighter round the necks of these organisations, the difficulties of keeping them on course as real instruments of the workers' struggle, will increase enormously."

From this we conclude that the **foundations** of the workers' movement in

South Africa have to be built underground. "Only by organising ourselves on this secure foundation can we be sure that our struggle will advance strongly, and the necessary link be maintained between our trade unions and our whole liberation struggle."

That is the central task to which SACTU has committed itself—but how much have we actually done to give effect to these words?

## The role of SACTU as a revolutionary trade union organisation

The monstrous growth of state repression, the relentless attacks by the regime against militant trade unionists, the wholesale bannings, detentions, and murder of active fighters against apartheid and capitalist exploitation in South Africa, have since the early 1960s rendered it impossible for SACTU to organise openly in its own name on the basis of the principles and policies for which it was formed.

The organisational structure embodied in our Constitution—a structure which reflected the situation and conditions of struggle in the labour movement in the mid-1950s—has thus been superseded by events.

But while events have overtaken our original organisational structure, they have more and more strikingly confirmed the correctness of the declaration of principles on which our Constitution is based.

Expressed in the language of the time,

- the Constitution declares the vital importance of the organisation of the workers into effective trade unions;
- it emphasises workers' unity as the basis of progress in the workers' movement;
- it proclaims the leading role of the working class in the struggle to liberate South Africa from oppression and exploitation;
- it insists that this great task and responsibility of the working class depends on its unity, its strength, its consciousness and its ORGANISATION.

Since its foundation on the basis of these principles, SACTU has maintained consistently the standpoint that the trade union struggle of the working class is bound up with its political struggle.

No organisation in South Africa which maintains and expresses these policies can remain within the narrow bounds of 'legality' imposed by the apartheid regime. Consequently, in the face of the systematic repression against SACTU and our allied organisations which was launched by the regime from the early 1960s onward, it was the task of the leadership of SACTU to turn more and more to underground work, there to build the foundations of the mass revolutionary trade union movement of the future.

When, in the article "How do we organise?" in Issue No. 5 of "Workers' Unity" (September 1977), we explained this task, we were merely repeating

the ABC of what must have been obvious among experienced militants for at least 15 years.

SACTU is an organisation of workers or it is nothing. It was for the purpose of organising workers that SACTU was created. It was as an organisation of workers that SACTU grew to prominence, co-ordinating the efforts of tens of thousands of union members and attracting to its banner in the course of struggle some hundreds of thousands more.

From 1955 to 1963, SACTU established itself in the consciousness of large numbers of the oppressed workers as their legitimate organisation and leadership in the trade union field.

SACTU's claim to speak on behalf of the workers of South Africa stemmed from the accomplishments of that period. It is true that our organisation represents the workers of South Africa in the sense that our principles and policies are the only ones by which the working class can secure its liberation from exploitation and oppression. In another and equally important sense, however, we can only claim to represent the working class to the extent that we are active in the workers' own field of battle; to the extent that we are growing among the advanced guard of the organised workers in the factories, mines and on the farms; to the extent that we are organising, mobilising and drawing wider and wider layers of the working class into conscious struggle.

### How does SACTU stand in the light of this test today?

In asking these questions, no disrespect is intended to comrades engaged in the most difficult and dangerous work of our struggle, the work at home, nor indeed to those heroes of SACTU's history who have made great personal sacrifices and accepted great suffering, even death, as a result. It is rather out of loyalty to them and to the whole future development of SACTU and the workers' struggle that we need to ask frankly and try to answer questions about the adequacy of our own methods and work.

It is a striking fact of the 1970s that the resurgence of trade unionism among African workers, and the building of new open independent unions especially since 1973, has not been matched by our efforts to build the revolutionary underground trade union organisation which we have acknowledged to be essential.

I would ask comrades of the National Executive Committee to consider what the root cause of this is. Is it not the result of a lack of political clarity in our own ranks about the importance of trade union work and the role of a revolutionary trade union organisation in the struggle for power?

## Common misconceptions which hamper our work

### (a) About the effect of repression

It is sometimes said that repression by the regime has prevented the building of underground organisation on the part of SACTU. Surely this cannot be the answer. On the contrary, it was the repression which created the necessity for underground work. Admittedly repression has brought

with it some very serious difficulties, great dangers and great risks—but the task of leaders of underground organisation is precisely to adapt the methods of work to the difficulties imposed by the enemy.

The remarkable development of informal underground co-ordination and leadership, revealed in the 1973 Natal strikes and the recent general strikes, shows what the workers on their own initiative have been able to achieve. This is no substitute for our own work, but it shows that some of the foundations have already been dug. It is a sign to us of SACTU's own **great potential**, through concerted and correct work, to build very rapidly an organised network of definite underground links between the factories, extending in due course to the mines and farms.

In the conditions of repression in South Africa, with the extreme sophistication and brutality of the police methods, it is not every kind of 'underground' work which can succeed. **Inward-looking** conspiratorial groups, for example, tend to be short-lived, suffering elimination one by one. Only underground organisation which is a living part of the concrete existence and everyday struggles of the **mass** of the oppressed workers, can survive and flourish in South Africa.

We all recognise that the necessary basic form of organisation in these conditions must consist of small groups of active workers, kept secret from the bosses and the regime. But it is only when the task of building and linking these groups has been carried out on a **large scale**, that our underground organisation will be innoculated against destruction by informers and preserved from the constant war of attrition by the regime.

This is the basis of the golden rule of underground organisation that the only effective underground work is mass work. This is the secret which underlay the success of the **M-Plan** in the areas where it was implemented, and it is of equally vital importance in the revolutionary trade union field.

From small beginnings, from foundations carefully and precisely laid, from even a handful of dedicated and trained cadres guided by **policies and perspectives clearly worked out in advance**, our underground organisation could rapidly expand to embrace the whole active layer of the black working class. To accomplish this, it is necessary to have confidence in the workers themselves, their initiative, boldness, inventiveness and courage.

Is this the approach which has characterised the very limited amount of organised underground work which we in SACTU have carried on over the past 15 years? Has SACTU's work really been devoted to the building of the foundations of a **mass revolutionary trade union movement**?

## (b) About trade unions in a revolutionary struggle

It is sometimes argued that the realisation on the part of the Congress movement in the early 1960s that liberation could only be achieved in South Africa through force of arms has rendered SACTU's work as a trade union organisation irrelevant.

This argument is completely wrong—it is the very **opposite** which is true.

There is no contradiction between trade union organisation and armed struggle for state power in South Africa—and those who maintain that there is, misunderstand **both** trade unions and armed struggle.

A genuine revolutionary strategy for the seizure of state power in South Africa is a strategy based on **mass mobilisation and organisation** leading to the **arming of the mass of the people for insurrection**. Some of the implications of such a strategy have been noted earlier in this memorandum.

To think that 'armed struggle' renders trade unions irrelevant is to get the whole thing twisted round the wrong way. Someone who takes this view really has the illusion that the seizure of power is simply a military question—whereas it is **primarily a political question**. This mistake of **militarism**, if it ever took a firm hold in our ranks, would have far more ruinous consequences for our struggle than could ever be the case in less industrialised countries.

It is an elementary duty of revolutionaries to make work in the trade union movement in South Africa one of the top priorities of the whole struggle. This work is indispensable if we are to find a road to the mass of the workers, to unite them through concrete struggles towards armed self-defence and the eventual forcible seizure of power.

**This is where SACTU's role and future lies.** Yet there is, it seems, no clear consensus on this within our ranks. There is, for example, the tendency (represented both on the NEC of SACTU and on the Editorial Board of "Workers' Unity") which holds the view that SACTU's role is to serve as a 'signpost', directing the workers to Umkhonto we Sizwe. Whatever the loyal motives of the comrades who hold this view, it can only have a damaging effect on our **whole struggle**. Of what use is it to the mobilisation, organisation and eventual arming of the **mass movement** if SACTU, which should be building a stable underground network of class-conscious workers to take the lead in collective action in the factories, mines and farms, collapses itself instead into a mere agency for the recruitment of individuals for guerilla training? Or if all the best, most advanced and most politically conscious workers' leaders are to be removed from their living contact with the everyday struggles of the class? This 'signpost' idea is really nothing short of a formula for the liquidation of SACTU. Yet how widely is the view held in SACTU itself?

Along the same lines is the peculiar argument that all trade unions operating in South Africa are 'yellow' unions; that anyone who is not dead, in jail or out of the country is a 'traitor'; etc., etc. In these ideas are reflected only bitter frustration and extreme distance from the workers' movement at home. Is this to be our message to the tens of thousands of black workers battling in South Africa for trade union rights and recognition at this very moment? To the women sacked at Eveready in Port Elizabeth when they went on strike to demand recognition of their union? To the 500,000 African, Coloured and Indian workers who united to carry out the political general strikes in 1976? Or to the heroes of the youth and students' movement who are still carrying on their struggle at home?

No. Such notions are not an expression of the principles of SACTU over nearly 25 years. They are in complete opposition to the whole approach and content of "Workers' Unity", SACTU's official organ for the past two years. They are contradicted by the letter and the spirit of every page of the policy statement in "Looking Forward", from which it is necessary here to quote only these few concluding lines:

**"Our efforts must be doubled and redoubled to build up the organisation which we need in order to co-ordinate and lead the workers' struggle IN THE PLACES WHERE THE WORKERS ARE."**  
(Page 22-3.)

### **(c) About reformism in the trade unions**

A third argument which one often hears, and which tends to run closely in step with the other ideas previously mentioned, is the argument that trade unions in South Africa are 'inevitably' reformist. This, too, is altogether incorrect. In the conditions of South Africa, economic organisations of the black workers are **potentially** extremely explosive and revolutionary. Is there in fact any country in the world where trade unions are **less inevitably reformist or more potentially revolutionary?**

As was explained in "Looking Forward", the crisis of apartheid and capitalism in South Africa "will force the ruling class to mount greater and greater attacks on the position of the workers, their jobs and their living standards." (Page 12.) Our rulers will be forced to "maintain and even increase the intensity of the repression against the masses of our people. No concessions or reforms of any real significance can be offered to ease the burden of the black workers and their families." (Page 13.)

Every serious economic clash in South Africa confronts the black workers with the murderous state power of the enemy, and may thus pose sharply for the workers the need for the conquest of state power. For revolutionaries working in the trade unions, the economic struggle presents opportunities at every moment to educate and raise the consciousness of their fellow workers about the political struggle; to extend a revolutionary underground base beneath the open union structures; to campaign against reformist bureaucrats who control the unions from the top; and eventually, by painstaking work, to transform the unions into organs of the workers' own revolutionary struggle.

So direct and obvious is the link in South Africa between the economic and political struggle, that reformist leaders are compelled (and will increasingly be compelled) to **renounce the economic demands of the workers**—to water them down, depress wage claims, obstruct economic strikes, stifle inner-union democracy, advance policies of appeasement towards the bosses and even (in some cases) engage in underhand collaboration with the bosses, the labour department and the security police against the workers.

**The only firm platform for the economic struggle of the working class is a revolutionary platform.** The trade union movement can only fulfill its

responsibility to the working class, and indeed to the whole of society, by consciously linking the struggle for better wages and conditions to the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the apartheid regime and the expropriation of the capitalist exploiters.

For revolutionaries to turn their backs on the trade unions means to **abandon** these organisations to opportunist and reformist leadership. If there is anything that needs explaining, it is not how revolutionaries can work in the trade unions, but how reformists have managed to maintain a grip on the black workers' unions in South Africa in these revolutionary times.

The only basis on which it can be said that trade unions are 'inevitably' reformist in South Africa, is if it is imagined that they must 'inevitably' confine themselves to legal work. But that is precisely the question to which SACTU is called upon to supply the practical answer!

**Could reformists retain their grip on the trade union movement in South Africa if we devoted every ounce of energy and determination to really building SACTU as a revolutionary underground organisation inside South Africa?**

### **Imperialist influence on the trade union movement**

At the present time the efforts of the imperialist powers to frustrate the revolutionary struggle in Southern Africa are being stepped up enormously. The struggle in South Africa itself is more and more preoccupying the attention of these powers, whose central aim is to keep our country under capitalist rule and thus subject to imperialist control and exploitation.

While great numbers of trade unionists in the imperialist countries are rallying to the support of the oppressed workers and people of South Africa, there are to be found in certain of the western trade union bodies elements who actively further imperialist aims.

**From these quarters a sustained campaign against SACTU is presently being mounted.**

At the root of this campaign is a hatred and fear of SACTU's revolutionary principles and policies—the integral connection which SACTU potentially represents between the workers' economic struggle and the whole liberation movement. But, ironically, they dare not attack us on the basis of these policies, which are overwhelmingly acceptable not only to black workers in South Africa but to broad layers of the rank and file of the trade unions in their own countries.

Remaining silent on the subject of our policies, these elements proceed to promote their own reformist policies among the trade union officials in South Africa, oiling their way with large sums of money. Their aim is precisely to bind the unions to a 'non-political' (!) course; to separate the workers from the liberation movement; to confine the workers' struggle to the most conservative economic demands.

**What is the present thrust of their campaign against SACTU? That we are doing nothing in South Africa—that SACTU is a clique of exiles.**

## THE POLICIES OF SACTU

The strength of SACTU and of "Workers' Unity" lies in our basic principles and policies. The established policies of SACTU provide a continuing firm foundation for all the new situations which arise and which our organisation has to prepare itself to meet. Over the past two years in "Workers' Unity", in numerous articles on various subjects:

- We have shown the inseparable connection between the apartheid system and capitalism; between the oppression of the black working people and their exploitation.
- We have explained why the struggle against apartheid is rooted in class struggle, and why freedom cannot be secured without smashing the power of the capitalist class.
- We have emphasised the leading role of the working class in the struggle for national liberation, and the central importance of mass struggle.
- We have stressed the vital importance of workers' organisation in South Africa on the basis of policies of workers' unity and the independence of the trade unions.
- We have stated SACTU's task of working to build the necessary underground foundation for a revolutionary trade union movement in South Africa.
- We have affirmed the alliance between SACTU and the ANC.

### Demands as bridges to the revolution

In taking up the great social issues of unemployment, homelessness and poverty, we have explained that these stem not only from the oppression of blacks under apartheid, but fundamentally from the capitalist system. **Not a single serious and lasting improvement in the conditions of life of the mass of our people is possible while this system remains.**

We have therefore explained the revolutionary conclusions that must be drawn from the daily hardships and suffering of our people.

In advancing our demands, we have sought to build bridges from the economic to the political, from the desire for reforms to a realisation of the necessity for revolution. Thus, our economic demands are formulated in such a way that they clearly answer the concrete needs of the people in their daily lives—but cannot be secured in practice **except through the overthrow of the apartheid regime and (because they come up against the barriers of the capitalist system) on the basis of the transition to socialism.**

By organising and struggling on the basis of these demands, the mass of the workers will be drawn through experience towards revolutionary consciousness and action.

Regardless of the sources from which this now comes, we have to recognise that this is a **very damning charge indeed**. Can it be effectively countered by pointing to any concrete evidence that we are building our forces in South Africa? Under clandestine conditions it is, of course, never possible to provide details—but the extent of our activities and influence, our presence or absence from the field of struggle, will always make itself visible by indirect means.

One of the surest tests of the work of any underground organisation is the extent to which its sections abroad are clearly in touch with the mood of the masses, and the intricacies of various disputes and strikes. It is frankly embarrassing to find that, in the case of almost every major workers' action that occurs in South Africa, we know less about it than either the international press or the reformists at the head of some of the trade union bodies in the imperialist countries.

The result of this is that, through our own deficiencies, we are actually supplying the political ammunition for the imperialists to use against us.

Even more serious, of course, than the charges which the international agencies of trade union reformism fling against us, are their own unimpeded activities in the trade union field in South Africa. The heightened interest and intervention in South Africa by leading officials of bodies such as the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO have as their aim to ward off the danger of revolution through the cultivation of reformist leadership and policies in the black trade unions.

We have the responsibility to see to it that these efforts do not succeed—but we can only do that if we are ahead of them in the field! Our answer to them must be to **organise, organise, organise**—and fight on that basis until reformism and all opportunity for imperialist influence has been rooted out of the workers' movement in South Africa.

### SACTU is vital to the victory of the workers' struggle

In pointing to our weaknesses and deficiencies, I do not wish at all to strike a negative note. The workers of South Africa have never more urgently needed a trade union organisation with the principles and policies of SACTU than they do today. Our task is to build SACTU to answer that need.

SACTU is the only organisation presently in existence and with a tradition of working-class allegiance, which is capable of combining:

(a) national leadership and co-ordination of the workers' struggle in the trade union field on the basis of policies of non-racialism, workers' unity and the genuine independence of the workers' movement

WITH

(b) the necessary building of underground organisation to sustain the trade unions on a revolutionary course, and effectively link them to the whole liberation struggle.

Despite the weakness of our own work over the past 15 years, our organisation remains vitally important to the victory of the workers' struggle and to the liberation of South Africa.

It is necessary to dwell a moment on this question because there is often a confusion among revolutionaries about the importance of the immediate 'economic' demands of the workers in a struggle for state power. Some think that economic demands cannot be revolutionary because they are asking for improvement **under the present system and the present regime.**

The answer to this is that revolution arises precisely out of the inability of the regime and the system to satisfy the concrete needs and demands of the working people, including first and foremost their economic demands. Thus the task of **conscious revolutionaries** is to **link** the everyday demands of the working people to the necessity for the seizure of state power and the building of a new social system that can and will satisfy these needs.

The mistake of thinking that economic demands are not and cannot be revolutionary, leads one down a slippery slope into a whole number of other mistakes as well. There is a very close connection here between this first mistake and some of the confusions referred to earlier—e.g., the idea that trade unions are 'inevitably' reformist; that everyone who wants to struggle must leave the country; etc. Also related to it is the tendency which one sometimes finds for people to merely repeat slogans calling for the seizure of power—without showing the **concrete steps** which the mass struggle needs to take in order to reach that point. This invariably leads to frustration when the masses do not instantly respond to the rousing appeals, and this in turn is only one step away from **desperation**, the abandoning of the mass movement, and the attempt to **substitute** for it the more obedient explosive power of dynamite and guns.

The answer again can only be an all-round strategy for the mobilisation of the masses and the arming of the mass movement for the eventual seizure of power.

**How do we correctly link the workers' economic demands to the revolution?** This is an art which we can fully master only when we are actively involved in leading the actual struggles of the mass of workers themselves. But there is one basic rule, which we have tried to follow in "Workers' Unity". This is to put forward demands which are supported by the workers as clearly right and reasonable, but which strike at the very roots of apartheid and the capitalist system. They are demands, in other words, which cannot be conceded by our enemy—in some cases not at all, in others at least not on any permanent basis.

**Within the framework of these demands, we then struggle to advance and defend every partial gain made and victory won, but always bringing to the fore our full programme and the necessity for revolution.**

While SACTU, as a trade union organisation, stresses economic demands, we do not content ourselves with the purely economic. Consistent with SACTU's approach since its foundation, we strive to generalise the workers' life experience of factory and township, mine and farm, to its necessary political conclusions. We have to bring out in practice—**not merely through the demands, but through struggles organised round the demands**—the total incapacity of the system in South Africa (or any reforms within that system) to provide a decent life for the working people.

For example, our wage demand combines two aspects. Firstly, it sets the minimum wage at an entirely **reasonable** level of R50 a week for all workers—approximately what the workers know they need to live a basically decent and healthy life. This is impossible to achieve while capitalism has its strangle-hold on the development of the South African economy. Secondly, our wage demand adds another element. It prepares the workers in advance for the old trick of the capitalist class under pressure—to raise wages and then, in order to maintain profits, to eat the wage increase away again at the first opportunity with higher prices. Therefore, the minimum wage demand also insists that the bosses must agree to automatic future wage rises whenever prices rise. This also completely undercuts the capitalist argument that wage rises **cause** price rises.

In the few countries of the world where the ruling class agreed, during the economic boom, to link wage rises automatically to price rises, they are now engaged in serious struggles with the organised workers to force a retreat from this position. A demand by the workers for 'index-linking' is **no substitute** for their own strength and action, but rather an important focus for struggle and the development of revolutionary consciousness among the workers.

Perhaps the clearest combination of concrete demands, formulated so as to bring out their revolutionary character, which we have so far carried in "Workers' Unity", is to be found on page 5 of Issue No. 9 (May 1978). There we deal with a number of questions arising out of the negotiations between the registered unions and the bosses in the metal industry over wages and the job colour bar. The **political implications** of these demands are obvious.

- For a national minimum wage of R50 for a 40-hour week!
- For reasonable differentials in the wages of skilled workers, on a single wage scale agreed among all the workers before any negotiations with the bosses! No separate bargaining with the bosses by skilled workers or by workers of different races!
- Automatic future increases for all workers, linked to price rises!
- Abolish all discrimination on the basis of race or sex, in jobs, wages and working conditions!
- Equal pay for equal work!
- No redundancies! Work-sharing with no loss of pay!
- Technical training for all workers to be paid for by the employers!

Our approach has been to build our fighting demands as solid bridges to the revolution. In practice, however, it will be impossible to develop or even sustain this approach **unless we are actively involved in organising workers and engaging ourselves in the struggles of their daily lives.** SACTU's set of 15 fighting demands will not endure like the tablets of Moses—they need to be constantly updated, checked against the changes taking place in the factories and townships, tested against the successes and failures of real battles, and so on.

As things now stand, it is becoming increasingly difficult in "Workers' Unity" to make a practical contribution, whether through general guidance or the putting forward of specific demands, to any actual struggle involving

workers in South Africa. We simply lack the facts—and we shall not get the facts until we are working on the ground.

## Policies on tactics

Every bit as important as the formulation of our demands is the role which we must play in providing answers and leadership in relation to the main tactical questions which arise in the workers' struggle. Again, we have to fight for **revolutionary tactics**—tactics leading the workers' movement towards the eventual seizure of power—against the reformist tactics which are put forward in order to frustrate this development.

Questions of tactics provide some of the most difficult and complex problems that the organised workers' movement has to deal with, because correct tactics are generally impossible without the deepest and clearest **political understanding**. We cannot play our vital part in helping to resolve these problems, and in providing and training **tactical leadership** in the workers' everyday struggles, if we remain on the sidelines or fail to commit our full energies to the work at home.

Fundamental questions of **how to organise** and **how to struggle** which confronted the trade union movement of the black workers in the early 1960s, with the systematic repression in the aftermath of Sharpeville, remain **unanswered in practice to this day**.

With the resurgence of open trade union organisation among African workers since 1972, a whole number of important tactical (or even, in some cases, strategic) questions arose. Anyone who has been active in the field during this period knows the intense discussions and debates—many of them still not entirely resolved—which have taken place among those concerned.

Here are just a few examples of questions which had to be answered:

Whether the organisation of African workers under the present repressive conditions should take the form of public and open trade unions, seeking the tolerance of the law. If so, whether the unions should be built on an industrial basis; or rather as general unions with an industrial sub-structure.

What the policy should be towards the government's works committee system. Whether works committees, like liaison committees, should be totally boycotted. Or whether the policy should be to make use of the cover of works committees, as elected bodies of workers alone, in order to safeguard the work of activists in laying democratic foundations for trade unions. How changing conditions in different areas have affected these tactics.

**Has SACTU ever fully considered and taken policy decisions on these questions?**

In the struggle at home, of course, many other and more difficult questions have also arisen:

- What emphasis should be given to education and training, including

literacy training, in the development of the trade unions. What content these courses should have, what line they should reflect and how far they can afford to go within the limits of legal work.

- How to conduct a struggle against reformist tendencies, and tendencies towards bureaucracy and undemocratic manipulation by union officials.
- How to oppose correctly the efforts made by Buthelezi to take the Natal unions under the domination of his bourgeois-nationalist Inkatha organisation.
- What, in practice, the **independence** of the workers' organisations means. How to fight for independence and defend it.
- How to work towards the unity of African workers with all other black workers. How, in practice, to maintain towards the white workers also the standpoint of the necessity for workers' unity.
- How to orient the independent unions towards the rank-and-file of the registered unions in order to win them in action to a programme of the unity of the working class.
- How to prepare the independent unions for the serious practical difficulties which are being prepared for them by the Wiehahn Commission.

In reality, the answers to these questions can only be found in the **field of practice, through the effective combination of legal and illegal work**. Since the resurgence of the African trade unions from about 1972, can we say that **SACTU has really come to grips with these questions and played a leading role underground among the workers to show the way forward?**

Yet, these are only a **small part** of the issues and problems confronting the workers' movement in South Africa. Far more difficult and important are the great questions of the tactics needed fully to develop the organised workers' movement towards its revolutionary goals and the seizure of power.

## Towards power

These are some of the practical issues which SACTU ought already to be studying and discussing, and which "Workers' Unity" and our other publications ought to be writing about:

- The possibilities and the limitations of strike action under present conditions in South Africa.
- Other forms of force which are available to the workers to use in an organised and collective way in support of their demands.
- The relationship which it is necessary to build, through our underground work, between factory or purely trade union struggle, and movements which include the townships and the community at large.
- Tactics which are open to the workers in the struggle to extend effective control over their daily lives, at home and at work, to push back and hold at bay the dictatorship of the bosses, supervisors and

police.

- Lessons which we can learn from the experience of the workers' struggle in other countries, especially under extreme repression, such as in Spain under the dictatorship of Franco.
- The significance of the general strike in our revolutionary struggle in South Africa. Its strengths and limitations. Precisely what kind of organisation and mobilisation is necessary to support such action.
- The role in the struggle to be played by occupations of factories and in what circumstances. How we envisage the mass movement of the workers developing to the point where seizures of mines, factories and farms becomes possible.
- How we envisage the arming of the organised workers eventually to take place. What our views are on the circumstances in which it is tactically correct for workers organised in trade unions to resort to force of arms in the course of strikes and other struggles, and in what circumstances this is likely to be tactically incorrect and self-defeating.
- The role which the trade unions should play in the eventual insurrection and armed seizure of state power.

These and similar questions will have to be tackled if SACTU's work of building an underground trade union organisation and leadership is to be seriously undertaken and carried to its conclusion. Of course, for the most part, such questions cannot be answered in the abstract, or purely theoretically. It is only by applying our policies and method in the course of practical work that these questions can be properly resolved to the advantage of the whole struggle.

Even, it seems to me, our tactics in regard to such a relatively straight-forward matter as the Wiehahn Commission, and our policy towards FOSATU (the new trade union federation in the arena of legal work), can only be fully worked out from the vantage point of active engagement in the organisation of workers.

The Wiehahn Commission, and the legislation which follows it, will almost certainly lead to a major crisis for the independent unions. Will SACTU be prepared to meet that crisis in the field of organisation at home? Will we be ready for the next wave of industrial strikes, like Natal 1973? Will we be ready for the next general strike and the next Soweto uprising?

As was said in the 1978 Political Report ("Looking Forward", page 23): "The South African struggle has entered a period of tumult in which every organisation—trade union and political—will be put to the severest test. Events will fall like a sledgehammer on those which fail to measure up." History has so far dealt us no final blows. But every day developments at home are preparing to confront SACTU with test after serious test.

**If "Workers' Unity" is to progress, if SACTU is to fulfil its potential and play its vitally important role in the revolutionary struggle of the workers of South Africa, 99% of our energies, time and resources will have to be devoted to a single task: THE BUILDING OF SACTU WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA.**

## No turning back!

We have very big tasks, and the comrades on the NEC who lead SACTU have a very big responsibility. To gear our whole organisation for the tasks at home will not, I believe, be accomplished without a struggle. In our own ranks we will have to overcome the tendency to confine SACTU to the comfort of a diplomatic role in exile. There is the tendency, referred to earlier, to minimise and subordinate SACTU's role in the revolution—a tendency bound up with the misconceptions and confusions about trade union work which have already been described.

If we are to be frank about it, even on the Editorial Board of "Workers' Unity", it has been necessary over the past year or more to wage a struggle in order to defend the line of the paper and of the green pamphlet, "Looking Forward", against a tendency to dilute it and reverse it.

There are comrades who would prefer us not to speak so clearly about the working class, about its tasks, its leading role and the need for its independent organisation. They seek to separate the struggle for national liberation from the struggle against capitalist exploitation. They say SACTU is against the capitalists, but not against capitalism! SACTU has never stood for socialism, they say, despite the fact that our **Constitution itself** (in the carefully chosen legal language of the 1950s) proclaims the "ultimate objective of complete emancipation."

In recent weeks it has even been necessary to struggle on the Editorial Board for approval to include in "Workers' Unity" a demand for an end to first-class, second-class and third-class carriages on the railways! This is a symptom of the obstacles we now face in trying to defend and develop the revolutionary working-class standpoint of SACTU in the pages of "Workers' Unity".

Comrades, there must be no turning back. The clear principles and basic policies of SACTU, so well set out in our Constitution, have more than stood the test of time. The application of these policies and principles to the present situation, in the first year of "Workers' Unity" and in the General Secretary's Political Report of 1978 ("Looking Forward"), has already been **fully endorsed** by the NEC at its meeting last year.

Since then "Workers' Unity" has maintained and expounded the same **basic approach**. There is room for improvement—yes, considerable improvement of the kind already described—but **its basic lines have been correct**. Let us go forward together on these lines with a clear lead from the NEC.

The acid test of all our words will be provided by the workers at home, as we tackle the task of **rebuilding SACTU** as an underground organisation in **the mainstream of the mass movement**.

Robert Petersen  
Editor of "Workers' Unity"

London  
8 April 1979

# LETTER TO NEC FROM THE DISMISSED EDITOR (17.7.79)

(Copies to the Secretariat and to other SACTU formations with responsibility for work.)

Comrades,

My dismissal as Editor of "Workers' Unity" by the NEC, at its April meeting in Dar es Salaam, is of very little **personal** significance. I have always been willing to make my contribution to the workers' struggle in any capacity.

This dismissal is, however, of **considerable political significance**—because it indicates a turn by the leadership away from the revolutionary working-class standpoint and the tasks which SACTU has put forward over the past period.

For the past 3 months these matters have been hidden from the rank-and-file members and supporters of SACTU and from the working class at large, even though nothing less than our entire future conduct of the struggle is at stake. This cannot be allowed to continue. I am writing this letter in the hope that the vitally necessary discussion in our ranks, which is already long overdue, may be set in motion.

To understand clearly why the present situation has arisen, it is necessary to look at the development of "Workers' Unity" during the past 2½ years and the growth of the political struggle in SACTU over its political line.

I was the editor of "Workers' Unity" from the time we launched it at the end of 1976 until the 14th issue (March 1979). During the period of the tremendous upheavals at home, after the Soweto events of June 1976, when the black working class, young and old, were on the march, it was possible to put forward in "Workers' Unity"—**with the unanimous consent of the Editorial Board**—a clear revolutionary working-class position against national oppression and capitalist exploitation. This was fully consistent with the principles of SACTU laid down in our Constitution nearly 25 years ago.

The first 6 issues of "Workers' Unity" were whole-heartedly endorsed by the NEC at its meeting in January 1978. At the same meeting, the policy statement in the pamphlet, "Looking Forward", which expounds the same revolutionary ideas, was adopted unanimously.

However, as time passed, with a temporary lull affecting the black workers' struggle at home, right-wing and anti-working-class pressures began to reassert themselves forcefully in exile. Whispering campaigns began against "Workers' Unity", denouncing its militant workers' point of view.

The right wing wish to limit our movement to an 'anti-apartheid' struggle, and refuse to develop the crucial link, through the organisation and mobilisation of the working class, between the struggle for national liberation and the struggle for socialism. The right-wing represents middle-class interests against the interests of the workers.

Regrettably, these right-wing pressures also found an echo in SACTU and on the Editorial Board of "Workers' Unity".

From early in 1978, mounting attempts were made to force the paper to retreat from its established political line, to abandon the standpoint set out in "Looking Forward", and to hold "Workers' Unity" back from tackling the burning issues of the practical struggle of the oppressed workers at home.

It became necessary for comrades who stood by the original ideas, to wage a struggle on the Editorial Board to defend the paper. The continuation of the original line of "Workers' Unity", more or less intact, up to the 14th issue, was only made possible by a determined struggle against the proposals and obstructions of the right wing.

One of the things which increased the displeasure of the right wing over "Workers' Unity" was the fact that the ideas which the paper put forward, awakened such a strong response among supporters of SACTU, both in South Africa and also in the trade unions and solidarity organisations abroad.

The leadership of SACTU-in-exile has always welcomed diplomatic and financial support. But the support aroused by "Workers' Unity" was more than diplomatic—it was active support; rank-and-file support in the international labour movement; positive support for our ideas and a desire to see SACTU put into effect at home the policies and the practical tasks which "Workers' Unity" proclaimed.

The more campaigns were organised to support SACTU on the basis of the policies put forward in "Workers' Unity", the more expectations were raised among our supporters and the more questions came to be asked about the progress made by the leadership in building SACTU in South Africa.

The questions asked of SACTU abroad are only a small reflection of the burning questions in the minds of the class-conscious workers who read "Workers' Unity" at home.

Increasingly, the leadership was brought face to face with vital questions about its intentions, and vital choices affecting the future of SACTU itself. Either SACTU had to be developed inside South Africa to fulfil its potential as a revolutionary trade union—an independent workers' organisation linked to the liberation struggle—or its credibility would more and more be called into question before the workers of South Africa and of the world.

"Workers' Unity"—by its analysis, by its demands, by the practical tasks it put forward—was casting a spotlight upon SACTU itself.

The revolutionary road ahead was clear: SACTU had to break with the passivity of the past 15 years in exile and begin seriously to organise among the workers of South Africa.

But to the right wing, who fear the independent organisation of the working class, the alternative was to remove the 'irritation' of "Workers' Unity"—by taking it under their control, and reversing its original political line. That has been the essence of the strategy of the right wing in SACTU in the political struggle of the past year. Their intention is to lace SACTU up in a strait-jacket in exile, and tame its workers' voice.

At first the Marxist left wing in SACTU (of which I consider myself a part) was supported in the defence of "Workers' Unity" by some comrades among the leadership. But the right wing, regrettably, enjoys a bureaucratic power in exile which it would not retain for long if the oppressed workers of South Africa could be the judge of its merits. As time passed, those leading comrades who had supported us wavered. Because of their conservatism, political uncertainty, and fear of a struggle, the good intentions of these elements fell prey to the pressures of the right wing.

It was not only in London that these pressures were brought to bear. In Dar es Salaam, I am told, the point was reached where the pamphlet, "Looking Forward", was placed under an informal 'ban'—with leading comrades in SACTU keeping their own official policy document locked away and undistributed.

As is usually the case with those whose ideas cannot stand up to open discussion and criticism, the right wing did not fight their battle against the policies of "Workers' Unity" by means of a free and full debate in SACTU.

Around mid-1978, it became common knowledge that certain members of the Editorial Board were expressing dissatisfaction about "Workers' Unity" outside Board meetings, and outside the ranks of SACTU, while at the same time giving their formal (if grudging) consent on the Editorial Board to the contents of every issue published.

One member of the Editorial Board (who is also on the NEC) reported these facts to the Board at the time, describing what was taking place as "a dirty campaign against SACTU."

We immediately urged that a special meeting be held to bring all the issues into the open for full discussion, so that all complaints could be properly aired, properly resolved, and the work of SACTU taken forward. This meeting was agreed to, but never held.

More than 6 months before the NEC met in Dar es Salaam, it had already come to my attention—from Africa, Britain and elsewhere in Europe—that moves were going on behind the scenes to have me removed as Editor. Even in solidarity circles, the word was put out that I was soon to be removed for my political views. In Africa, during January, I heard the news that I was 'no longer' the Editor of "Workers' Unity"...but that was at least a little

premature!

On the Editorial Board the debates had become increasingly intense, and deadlock repeatedly arose over crucial political issues. I was accused, together with another comrade on the Editorial Board, of always wanting "Workers' Unity" to put forward Marxist ideas! Yes, precisely—because it is only on the basis of the scientific ideas of Marxism, and under Marxist leadership, that the workers' movement in South Africa can be victorious.

By the early part of this year, the right wing were making it clear that they expected the April NEC meeting to "resolve" the deadlock over "Workers' Unity". For my part, I hoped that this might be done by the NEC conducting a full discussion, throughout the ranks of SACTU, and a thorough study of all the issues involved—so that our work could be taken forward.

But the anti-Marxist right wing on the Editorial Board and among the leadership of SACTU had a different outcome in mind. They were determined to have me removed as Editor of "Workers' Unity". They saw this as a necessary step to be able to take the paper firmly under their own political control.

The NEC has cleared the way for the right wing to do just that. The consequence will be to stifle the independent workers' voice with which the paper has spoken in the past.

I shall leave aside the fact that the NEC dismissed me in my absence, without a hearing, and without informing me in advance that it was to consider any complaint against me or any proposal to remove me. I shall leave aside, too, the 'inability' of the Secretariat to secure my clearance to enter Tanzania, so that I was conveniently prevented from attending the meeting.

The important issues are the political ones—and they involve nothing less than the future of our organisation and its role in the workers' struggle.

I sent a memorandum to the NEC raising for its consideration vital matters of policy, strategy and tactics, on which all the political differences in SACTU hinge and on which the future of SACTU itself depends.

Refusing formally even to consider the memorandum, the NEC resolved to dismiss me from my post. I was also removed from the Editorial Board.

The NEC can remove me as an individual, but it cannot remove SACTU from the very serious questions and problems facing it—if it is to take up its task and duty of organising the workers at home. The desire of the NEC to avoid these questions, and to turn its back on these problems and tasks, is shown by its failure to give me reasons for my dismissal—other than to say vaguely: "you were putting forward policies which were not those of SACTU."

What policies? And where am I said to have put them forward? In "Workers' Unity" over the past 2½ years? In my memorandum to the NEC?

On these questions the NEC maintains a stony silence—despite the fact that nearly 3 months have now elapsed since my dismissal and despite my

repeated written requests to the NEC during this period.

I have asked for the reasons to be specified in writing, not for my personal satisfaction, but because the issues raised by "Workers' Unity" and by "Looking Forward", and which are elaborated in the memorandum, are very important matters for the whole of SACTU, and indeed for the whole working-class movement in South Africa to consider and debate.

As for my own politics, I repeat what I have written to the NEC before: I stand for the principles set out in the Constitution of SACTU; for the SACTU policy statement in the pamphlet, "Looking Forward"; and for the line expressed in the first 14 issues of "Workers' Unity", the official organ of SACTU. I stand, furthermore, for the ideas in the memorandum which I submitted to the NEC on 8 April.

If, as I believe, the leadership of SACTU-in-exile is now turning its back on the principles and policies set out in the Constitution, in those 14 issues of "Workers' Unity" and in "Looking Forward"—and is instead now dictated in its course by the disastrous policies of the right wing—this cannot be allowed to occur without full discussion throughout our ranks and WITHOUT THE FULL IMPLICATIONS BEING BROUGHT HOME TO THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT.

By refusing to spell out the precise political reasons for my dismissal, the leadership hopes to prevent discussion and to carry through its right turn behind the backs of the workers and supporters of SACTU. Surely this is a situation which is wholly unacceptable in an organisation basing itself on the principles of working-class democracy?

I would be failing in my revolutionary duty, and in my loyalty to the working class and to SACTU itself, if I knowingly allowed such a thing to pass in silence. The situation is made all the more urgent by the crisis facing the trade union movement in South Africa in the wake of the Wiehahn Commission, and the essential tasks of SACTU at home among the workers at the present time.

These are added reasons for me to associate myself with the statement made today to the NEC by members of the SACTU Technical Sub-Committee in London—which I have also signed.

Fraternally in the struggle,

Robert Petersen  
(Formerly Editor of "Workers' Unity")  
London

# LETTER TO NEC FROM MEMBERS OF SACTU TECHNICAL SUB-COMMITTEE (17.7.79)

(Copies to the Secretariat and to other SACTU formations with responsibility for work.)

Comrades,

We have, over the past few days, been informed of the decision of the NEC (London) to close down the Technical Sub-Committee which was established only six months ago. We have been told that the reason given by the NEC for its decision is that, with the expanding work of SACTU, the contribution of the committee is no longer required.

We are deeply disturbed by this decision. It has been made and communicated to us in an arbitrary way, without discussion, so that it is only through this letter that we are able to express our views on it. We are also disturbed by the reasons put forward by the NEC for closing down the committee. Growing demands are being placed on SACTU in the carrying forward of its work at home and abroad, and this pressure of work requires the drawing in of more, not fewer, activists to assist in this work. When the committee was closed down, its members were involved in a number of ongoing projects and its work was expanding.

In communicating its decision to dissolve the committee, the NEC has thanked us for our work. We appreciate these thanks, but at the same time we wish to make it clear that our commitment to this work is a commitment to carrying forward the tasks of SACTU at home and abroad. Progress in this direction is the reward we seek. It is for this reason that we are protesting at the decision to close down the committee, and at the explanation given for it by the NEC.

Our experience during the life of the committee has raised numerous questions in our minds. These questions are greatly reinforced by the arbitrary action of the NEC. We are left with the impression, to be blunt, that the closing of the committee is a **deliberate political act** to stifle debate in SACTU on vital issues facing the organisation and the workers' movement. We will explain what we mean by this.

The Technical Sub-Committee was set up by the NEC in January this year as a working committee to help co-ordinate SACTU's expanding work. The

committee consisted, not of SACTU office-bearers, but of SACTU activists, many with recent practical experience in the workers' movement in South Africa. Most had, during their time in Britain, addressed envelopes, licked stamps, distributed "Workers' Unity", undertaken research and the preparation of memoranda, helped in administrative work, addressed meetings, etc.

Until six months ago, such work for SACTU had been conducted in an isolated and ad hoc manner. The comrades involved had no access to any forum within SACTU to discuss the work they had been assigned and how it fitted into the work of the organisation as a whole, or the general policies of SACTU and their own ideas on them. One comrade, for example, wrapped, stamped, and despatched "Workers' Unity" for two years without being included in any SACTU group or committee, before the Technical Sub-Committee was finally created. It was largely in response to the frequently expressed desire by such comrades for proper integration into the work of SACTU that the committee was formed.

Most comrades drawn into SACTU here during the recent period, devoted themselves with enthusiasm to the work particularly because of the potential development of SACTU reflected in the re-emergence of "Workers' Unity", and in the content of that paper. For over two years "Workers' Unity", as the official organ of SACTU, took a militant working-class and anti-capitalist approach to the struggle against the apartheid regime. In addressing questions of working-class organisation in the country, "Workers' Unity" was confronting issues and tasks which many had felt were long overdue for SACTU to take up. On the committee there were many staunch defenders and supporters of the line developed in "Workers' Unity" (and in "Looking Forward", which took up the same position).

At the first of the fortnightly meetings of the committee, the General Secretary outlined its functions: to help with the distribution of "Workers' Unity", with research, memoranda and background briefings, and with speaking engagements. It was to be involved in the co-ordination of a solidarity campaign within the British trade union movement, involving a considerable increase in the number of speaking engagements for SACTU.

But from the start, limits were placed on the character of the Technical Sub-Committee which restricted its potential to contribute in the most effective manner to the tasks of SACTU as a whole.

The proposal by some members of the committee that its office-bearers should be democratically elected was over-ruled: the committee was forced to accept the decision by the NEC to appoint the Convenor and Secretary. The committee's decision-making powers within the sphere of its own work were never defined. It was hampered by the all too rare attendance of NEC members at its meetings, and by the absence of reports from the office on the progress of SACTU's general work. However, despite these unnecessary difficulties, the whole committee was committed to carrying out its work as best it could.

The committee felt that an indispensable part of its work must be political discussion of the vital issues facing the workers' movement, and the policies

of SACTU on these questions. Much of the work of the committee (speaking, research, preparation of a slide-tape) could not be effectively undertaken without such discussions on the committee itself, and where necessary jointly with the NEC members in London.

One key issue which came up during the existence of the committee was the publication of the Wiehahn Commission's Report. We identify the proposals of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions as the most urgent question facing the South African trade union movement at this time, and the central question for solidarity organisations of the international labour movement to address.

To undertake its tasks more effectively, the committee made repeated requests to the NEC for joint meetings to discuss the progress of the committee's work, the Wiehahn Commission's Report and other important questions. The NEC consistently delayed in responding to these requests. The request for a meeting on the Wiehahn Commission, for example, was first made in early May. At the time of the dissolution of the committee, over two months later, the NEC had still not responded. The same was true of our other requests, despite repeated reminders. By the time the committee was dissolved, it had never been able to hold a joint meeting with the NEC members in London.

This apparent lack of interest by the NEC in the views of rank-and-file SACTU activists was most seriously displayed after the NEC's decision to dismiss the Editor of "Workers' Unity", who was also a member of the Technical Sub-Committee. The committee was informed of this decision in May. In view of the strong support of many of the members of the committee for the positions put forward in "Workers' Unity", we saw this decision by the NEC as a serious action, with important implications for our work. The whole committee registered its concern. It was told that the Editor had not been given reasons for this decision, other than that he was "putting forward policies which were not those of SACTU." Which policies?

The Editor of "Workers' Unity" submitted a memorandum to the meeting of the NEC in April—the meeting which decided to dismiss him. This memorandum was subsequently circulated to the members of the Technical Sub-Committee. The memorandum addresses issues and problems of vital importance to the workers' movement in South Africa and to SACTU, in a manner fully consistent with SACTU's principles. We agree with the position taken in this memorandum, regarding it as a scientific analysis of the character and tasks of the South African revolution and the role of SACTU in the struggle.

In conjunction with other requests by the committee to meet with NEC members, a request was also made to meet them to discuss the dismissal of the Editor of "Workers' Unity" and the policy questions facing SACTU. It was urgently necessary to have clarification of the reasons for the dismissal of the Editor, and whether or not this represented a fundamental change in political line away from the militant working-class positions of "Workers' Unity". If this was the case, we could not allow this to happen without a full and open discussion throughout the ranks of SACTU.

We first requested a meeting on these questions on 3 May. The request

was repeated at fortnightly intervals. When the committee was dissolved, this request had still not been answered. During the period of its existence, the committee was never given an explanation for the Editor's dismissal, or told what policies he was dismissed for putting forward.

The uncertainty that was raised in the ranks of SACTU by the dismissal of the Editor, and the apparent refusal of the NEC to justify, explain or even discuss it, was sharply thrown up over the issue of speaking on public platforms for SACTU. The intensified solidarity campaign was leading to a rapid increase in the demand for speakers—sometimes four engagements on a single day. These speakers were expected to put forward clearly SACTU policy on a wide range of questions. Those of us committed to the positions of "Workers' Unity", "Looking Forward", and the memorandum, wanted to know if we could continue to speak on this basis on public platforms. While we waited in vain for the NEC to clarify the political issues, the Editor was in fact prevented from speaking at a trade union solidarity meeting for SACTU. (This meeting was actually cancelled because no SACTU speaker other than the Editor was available.)

This placed a question mark over all those who agreed with the political views of the Editor. The committee was divided on how to approach this. But, while speaking engagements continued to pour in, the NEC never clarified this question.

At the time the committee was closed down, every one of these requests by the committee for meetings with NEC members—on its work, on Wiehahn, on the dismissal of the Editor, on the political direction of SACTU—remained unanswered. The last request for an answer was made by the Secretary of the committee to the General Secretary over the phone on Monday 9 July. He replied that the NEC was at that moment meeting, and that the issue would be raised. What he did not say was that the letter dissolving the Technical Sub-Committee had already been written, and must indeed have already been sitting on the Convenor's desk!

How, given this series of events, is it possible to accept that the committee has been closed down because the expanding work of SACTU no longer requires its contribution? This reason is ridiculous. It must surely have been given to conceal some other reason. Our experience on the committee forces us to the conclusion that the NEC has dissolved the committee because it is unwilling to discuss the issues that have been raised—all central to our work and to the workers' struggle.

The NEC has recently issued a statement on the Wiehahn Commission. This statement represents a fundamental departure from the approach put forward in "Looking Forward" and in issues 12 and 13 of "Workers' Unity", and gives no clear lead to the workers struggling in the country. This, together with the dismissal of the Editor of "Workers' Unity", indicates to us that a rightward shift in the position of the SACTU leadership is taking place—a shift which is being effected without reference to or regard for the rank-and-file activists of the organisation. The removal of the Editor was the first open sign of this change, but his dismissal proved insufficient to effect a smooth change of policy. A further obstacle presented itself. A layer of activists, committed to working-class unity and

independence, the fundamental principles of SACTU, also had to be silenced. This, we believe, is the real reason for closing down the Technical Sub-Committee.

Since political differences exist within the ranks of our organisation over its future course and the manner in which it is to be built, it is vital that these are openly and fully discussed, in accordance with the democratic traditions which belong to the workers' movement. Our revolutionary duty requires us to continue the struggle for a clear and consistent working-class position in SACTU. We are committed to continuing the work needed to build SACTU as a revolutionary trade union organisation in whatever ways may be left open to us.

We protest against the closure of the Technical Sub-Committee and we call for its immediate re-instatement, as well as the re-instatement of the Editor of "Workers' Unity". At the same time we call on the comrades of the NEC to open a full, free and democratic discussion throughout the ranks of SACTU (at home and abroad) on the political issues raised in the memorandum of the Editor, and to circulate this memorandum together with the NEC's position on it. We call on the NEC also to open up a discussion of the same kind on the Wichahn and Riekert strategy of the ruling class, its implications, and how it is to be fought.

So vital do we consider these issues, and so enormous the consequences for SACTU if they are not clarified and resolved, that if the NEC refuses to open up this debate, we shall have no option but to do so ourselves. We therefore call on the comrades of the NEC, within the next two weeks, to undertake to open these discussions. Failing this, we shall be compelled, on our own initiative, to place the issues before the rank-and-file members and supporters of SACTU, and before the oppressed workers of South Africa—who must be the final judge.\*

Fraternally in the struggle,

Peter Collins  
Paula Ensor  
David Hemson  
Martin Legassick  
Robert Petersen

London

## PART TWO

\* No reply was received .

# LETTER FROM THE RPC OF THE ANC (26.10.79)

This letter was received by each of the following comrades:

Paula Ensor  
David Hemson  
Martin Legassick  
Robert Petersen

re: **Suspension from all ANC Activities and Units**

It has come to the attention of the Regional Political Committee (RPC) that you are a signatory to a Document entitled "The Workers' Movement and SACTU—a Struggle for Marxist Policies".

After careful consideration of this Document the RPC has concluded that you have seriously breached the code of conduct governing membership of the ANC in that:

a) as you are undoubtedly aware all members are obliged to raise whatever disagreements they may have with our movement's policies within our ranks to seek the resolution of such disagreements within the established structures of our movement. This you have not done;

b) instead you, together with the other signatories, have seen it fit to attack the policies and leadership of the revolutionary alliance led by the ANC in public and have thereby sought to weaken the position of our movement among the general public at home and abroad;

c) you have therefore announced yourselves as an organised faction within our movement, with your own independent organised existence and your own political perspectives.

In view of this the RPC suspends you forthwith from all activities and units in which you have hitherto participated and has now referred the matter to the NEC of the ANC for further consideration.

Y. Zungu  
Chief Representative  
& Chairman of the RPC.

# LETTER TO RPC (UK) OF THE ANC FROM FOUR SUSPENDED MEMBERS (27.12.79)

Comrade Y Zungu  
Chief Representative of the ANC  
and Chairman of the Regional Political  
Committee (UK)

For attention of the Regional Political Committee

Comrades,

**Re: Our suspension from all ANC activities and units**

We have received your letter of 26 October with feelings of great disappointment and sadness. We believe that the decision of the Regional Political Committee (UK) to suspend us from all activities and units of the ANC, and to refer the matter to the NEC for "further consideration", is politically very wrong. It will do great harm to our movement as a whole and to the ANC.

To begin with, the suspension violates the ANC Constitution. Clause 23 (c) of the Constitution states: "**Before** any disciplinary action is taken against any member... , such member... **shall**, in the absence of extraordinary circumstances justifying the contrary, be given an opportunity to appear before the relevant tribunal and there admit, deny or otherwise account for the conduct complained of." (Our emphasis). Suspension is specifically included in the "disciplinary action" referred to. The "tribunal" to which the clause refers is the Committee making the suspension—that is to say, in this case, the RPC.

All the Committees empowered to take disciplinary action in terms of the ANC Constitution are, in principle, **elected** bodies. The RPC in the UK, unlike its counterparts elsewhere, is for some reason **not** elected. But, even assuming the power of the RPC to take disciplinary action against ANC members, there can be no justification for its action in ordering our suspension without first giving us a hearing.

Moreover, Clause 23 (e) of the Constitution states: "When a member is suspended, the committee suspending him shall state the **period and conditions** of such suspension." (Our emphasis). This was not done.

The RPC's action in suspending us is, for these reasons, plainly unconstitutional. As recently as January 1979, "Sechaba", the official organ of the ANC, reprinted in full the ANC Constitution. The RPC must be fully aware of the provisions of the Constitution to which we refer, but has chosen to ignore them. **We call for the immediate lifting of the suspensions.**

The RPC's disregard of the constitutional rights of ANC members is a serious matter—but more serious still are the political errors which it has committed in taking this action against us.

Comrades of the RPC: our 'crime' in your eyes is that we are signatories to a document entitled "The Workers' Movement and SACTU—a Struggle for Marxist Policies". Actually, the document as such has no signatories; but it is quite true that, together with other comrades, we produced the document concerned and our names appear within it.

What is this document? It is the end result of a long political struggle within the ranks of SACTU over the whole future course of development of that organisation. In that struggle we have argued:

- That the cornerstone of SACTU's approach to the revolution must be the recognition that neither economic gains, nor national liberation, nor democracy can be secured for the black workers on the basis of capitalism, but only through an uninterrupted struggle to overthrow capitalism and begin the building of socialism.
- That the black working class is the only social force capable of leading this revolutionary struggle in the interests of all the oppressed, and, to undertake this task, must be organised first and foremost as workers.
- That the workers must be mobilised with the aim, at the decisive point, of defeating the armed force of the state with the revolutionary armed force of the mass movement.
- That the path to this goal lies in giving clear priority to building organs of mass struggle, so that at every point the politics of the mass struggle exercise command over the gun and the bomb.

These are the political ideas for which we have fought in SACTU. These, we believe, are the only ideas on which SACTU can be built as a revolutionary underground trade union organisation in South Africa.

What are your charges against us? Your first charge is that we failed "to seek the resolution" of disagreements "within the established structures of our movement". This charge is wrong, both factually and politically.

As our document clearly shows, we repeatedly raised our concerns **within the channels of SACTU** and called for discussion of them to take place. But we were denied access to any "established structures" within SACTU for a democratic resolution of the issues raised. It was this fact, and only this, which compelled us reluctantly and after serious consideration to produce

and circulate our document within SACTU, among workers, and among sympathisers in the struggle. Had we remained silent, no democratic discussion whatsoever on the crucial issues facing SACTU could have taken place.

Surely this fact alone disposes of the first charge against us. Or is it possible that something more is meant by it? Are we charged, perhaps, with failing to seek the resolution of **differences in SACTU** by using "established structures" of the ANC? If so, the charge is based on a non-existent 'rule' which would imply the power of ANC bodies to dictate to SACTU and to every organisation which may be allied with the ANC. Is this what you seek to do?

There is a very important principle which has come to be accepted in the revolutionary struggle of the working class, in South Africa and internationally. This is that **workers' organisations** must be **independent** of control by other classes and their organisations.

The ANC is not, and has never claimed to be, a workers' organisation, but rather to represent a broad combination of oppressed people with different class interests. Within the ANC, working-class and middle-class interests struggle for dominance. Despite the fact that the ANC acknowledges, in some of its policy statements, the leading role of the working class in the South African revolution, there are many within the ANC who wish to push the working class into a secondary role, who wish to hold the workers back from realising their class interests, and who wish to restrict the aims of our movement by separating the struggle for national liberation from the struggle for socialism. For these reasons, it is necessary for workers' organisations in South Africa, while struggling in or together with the ANC, to maintain at the same time their own independence of it.

Indeed, even between a workers' party and a trade union, there ought to remain a relationship of autonomy. Revolutionary political parties and tendencies of the working class, while fighting democratically for their ideas, policies and influence within the trade unions, ought never to attempt bureaucratically or by manipulation to subordinate the trade unions to their command. These principles are, we believe, an essential part of the genuine heritage of Marxism, confirmed through the experience of succeeding generations of the world working-class movement.

Because, as it is presently constituted, the ANC is an organisation combining different and conflicting class interests, it is doubly necessary that the independence of SACTU, as a **workers' trade union organisation**, should be respected. SACTU is **allied** with the ANC. It should not be **subordinate** to the ANC.

It would have been entirely wrong if we, when the channels for discussion through SACTU committees were arbitrarily closed to us, had proceeded to fight out the particular issues—the question of the role, strategy and direction of SACTU—through ANC units and committees. We would then rightly have been accused of seeking to make the ANC a court of appeal over the SACTU leadership. Thus the **only** correct and responsible course open to us was to produce the document of which you now complain.

In contrast, your action against us sets an extremely dangerous precedent for the future.

In time, will ANC committees claim the right also to intervene, for instance, in political struggles within the SA Communist Party, and to suspend from ANC membership those of the Communist Party rank and file who may give voice to differences with the leadership of the Party?

In passing, we would like to note that among the key members of the RPC are the very same right-wing individuals who, through their positions in SACTU, took the lead in suppressing our democratic rights and in closing down an "established structure" of SACTU in order to prevent the discussion of vital issues. Comrades, this charge—that we "failed" to use "the established structures of our movement" to air differences—rests uneasily on your lips!

Your second charge is that, in producing the document, we have sought to "weaken the position of our movement among the general public at home and abroad." This accusation is a disgraceful slander. The purpose of the document, as anyone who reads it can see, is exactly the opposite. It defends in painstaking detail the Marxist policies and strategy which we believe to be essential if SACTU is to play its part in helping to make our movement victorious.

In a measured, comradely and constructive tone, in a manner entirely free of personal attacks, with scrupulous attention to security, we have put forward our view of what is vitally needed to gain strength, to gain public support, and above all to win the mass of the workers' movement at home to the trade union banner of SACTU. There is not a word in the document which could give the slightest comfort to the enemies of our movement. On the contrary, it advances policies which would ensure the elimination of the enemy's power, root and branch, from South Africa. It explains, in fact, the need to arm the masses, headed by the organised workers, to overthrow the apartheid regime and the power of the capitalists which the regime sustains. How can this be intended to "weaken the position of our movement"?

Your third charge is that we constitute "an organised faction". What in fact links us together, and with many other comrades in our movement at home and abroad, is the ideas which we share. As our document shows, we make no secret of these ideas. We believe they are an essential part of what is needed to equip our movement to secure its eventual victory.

Differences always arise in organisations, and no less so in revolutionary organisations. It is quite correct in general that the hardening of differences into organised factions, where this is unnecessary or avoidable, is not a development to be encouraged. But even in a revolutionary workers' organisation, the overcoming of factions is a matter for skilled, responsive and convincing leadership and never a matter for arbitrary prohibition.

How much more is this true within the ANC, an organisation in which there exists a wide variety of ideological tendencies, reflecting the interests and the pressures of different classes among our people! We believe that members of the ANC must have the right to campaign for their

revolutionary ideas, both individually and in an organised way if they so choose. From the standpoint of the workers who are members or supporters of the ANC, it is absolutely essential that those groupings and tendencies seeking to promote workers' interests within and through the ANC should have the fullest possible freedom to campaign for their own ideas on policies, strategy and tactics. Any unreasonable restriction of this freedom can only have the effect of stifling democracy and strengthening within the ANC, especially in exile, the hold of the right-wing and middle-class elements whose aims and interests are in conflict with those of the workers.

The democratic rights of members do not contradict the necessity of discipline in action against the enemy. In fact, the experience of all revolutionary movements shows that without democracy there can be no effective discipline in action.

The harmonious combination of democracy and discipline—which can only find its complete expression in a revolutionary workers' organisation—is democratic centralism. This is the method of organisation learned through the experience of the international workers' movement for well over a century. Democratic centralism means maximum democracy in discussion and decision-making; maximum freedom to criticise and disagree—but maximum centralism of command and discipline in action.

Every worker who has taken part in effective strike action knows the basics of democratic centralism at first-hand. There is thorough discussion among the workers of the issues and basic tactics before the decision to strike is made—then total unity in the strike itself and no toleration of strike-breakers. There is constant rediscussion and criticism of the decisions made and the tactics adopted—but each time, when action is decided, the workers act together as one.

In our conduct as members of the ANC, we have always acted in this spirit. And no complaint has ever been raised over the way in which we have worked and participated in ANC units and activities.

In contrast to democratic centralism, bureaucratic centralism grossly exaggerates command from the top, combining this with the stifling of free discussion through the ranks and the erosion of the voting powers and other democratic rights of members. This is the opposite of the revolutionary method.

Democratic centralism in a revolutionary organisation includes the right of members to struggle in a concerted way to promote definite ideas, perspectives and policies within the framework of the revolutionary aims of the movement. It is precisely this which you would condemn as 'factionalism'.

The RPC accuses us of forming a "faction", and suspends us from ANC activities on these grounds. But, comrades, this is not consistent.

What about the SA Communist Party? Does it not operate as the most organised of factions within the ANC? Yet, quite correctly, the faction rights of SACP members in the ANC are not denied.

We ourselves, as is well known, have profound differences with the

policies and practice followed by the SACP. As our document makes clear, we do not accept the 'two stage' theory of the South African revolution which the CP leadership expounds. We believe that that approach spells disaster for the working class and, in fact, for all the people of South Africa.

We are critical of the gulf which separates many of the radical statements made by CP leaders (especially in leaflets for home consumption) from their actual political practice in exile. We believe that despite their acknowledgement of the 'leading role' which the working class must play in the revolution, the CP leaders fail to give these words any practical effect—something which can only be done by **building the movement of the workers inside the country**. While claiming to be a workers' party, the CP fails to organise within the working class at home, does not root itself within the mines, farms, factories and docks, and is neither shaped nor led by the class-conscious vanguard of the struggling black workers themselves.

For the CP leadership, the 'leading role of the working class' has been translated to mean little more than the occupation by CP members of official positions in the ANC-in-exile. And yet, having gained effective control of the ANC apparatus, it conspicuously fails to use its power to transform the ANC into an organisation promoting the revolutionary socialist aims of the workers' movement in a struggle for workers' power. Instead it helps to prop up and defend within the ANC the influence and interests of the middle class, even when the basis of support of these elements within the mass movement at home is so rapidly being swept away. And, as the struggle in SACTU has shown, the CP leadership has played a crucial role in the efforts of the right wing to undermine SACTU's independence and to turn SACTU back from revolutionary working-class policies and tasks.

In short, our political differences with the SACP—essentially differences with its bureaucratic leadership rather than with the comrades of its rank and file—run very deep. **But nevertheless we stand for the right of the SACP to organise within the ANC and SACTU, to advance its own ideas, perspectives and programme, and to compete democratically for positions of leadership and influence.**

**That same right must be extended to all revolutionary tendencies basing themselves on the struggle of the oppressed workers, and on the claims of the workers and their interests to predominance in the ANC.** Indeed, it is the inescapable duty of Marxists to struggle for the transformation of our entire movement in order to give real effect to the workers' leading role in a mass struggle for national liberation, democracy and socialism.

Comrades, the charges made against us are factually and politically wrong, and their implications are very dangerous for our movement. But it is not enough for us to leave the matter there. We must ask the question: **What is the real purpose of the extraordinary action taken against us?**

It is not questions of procedure or a "code of conduct" that are really at issue here, but questions of **politics, of programme and strategy.** Unfortunately, the facts of the matter are that **one political faction within**

**the ANC—comprising the middle-class right wing and leadership of the SACP—having gained positions of decisive power within the ANC-in-exile, is now using those positions bureaucratically to begin to eliminate from the ANC those who struggle for Marxist policies...on the pretext of acting against factions.**

That and that alone lies behind the decision of the RPC (UK) to suspend us from units and activities of the ANC and refer the matter to the NEC for "further consideration".

Moreover, and perhaps not coincidentally, this action against Marxists has been mounted at the same time that leaders of the ANC have been holding discussions with Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and other leaders of Inkatha.

It is necessary constantly to underline that, despite his pretences, Buthelezi is no friend of the working class. He is a defender of capitalist interests, and as our struggle mounts he will be used by big business in an attempt to restrain the movement of the workers from carrying out its revolutionary tasks. Can it be imagined that such meetings of the ANC with Buthelezi, which only foster illusions in him especially among the less advanced layers of the working class, are anything other than damaging to the cause of national liberation and socialism in South Africa? Why else have the bourgeois newspapers and even the Security Police in South Africa commented favourably on these meetings?

Comrades of the RPC, you know better than we that the same political differences which have openly emerged in SACTU run also through the ranks of the ANC, and for that matter the ranks of the Communist Party as well. It is only that the struggle has come to a head in SACTU earlier than elsewhere. In trying to uphold Marxist ideas in SACTU we have done no more than the simple duty of every Marxist in every part of the movement.

By the action you have taken against us, you have dealt us personally a severe blow. But this action will not succeed in cutting out Marxist ideas, Marxist policies and Marxist influence from the ranks of our movement. On the contrary, Marxism can only grow in influence, rooted as it is in the rising movement of the working class, in the world-wide struggle for liberation and socialism. It is no accident that our enemies, whose main fear is the power of the working class, point day after day in their press and journals in South Africa to the danger of the ideas of Marxism.

Today you have the power to act in exile against us, as Marxists. But as the struggle at home rises in intensity, the leadership of the ANC, SACTU and the Communist Party will ignore the demands and pressures of the mass movement of the working class at their peril. For the rising tide of the workers' struggle inside the country will lay the basis for the authentic ideas of Marxism, of workers' internationalism, of workers' democracy and the socialist revolution to become an unstoppable force within the ranks of our movement.

We call on you now to reverse the decision you have made to suspend us from units and activities of the ANC. We ask you, as the responsible committee of the ANC in this area, to pass on to the NEC a copy of this

letter. Furthermore, we ask that you ensure that all units and "established structures" of the ANC, at home and abroad, are informed both of the charges against us and of the contents of this reply.

But whatever your efforts to exclude us from the ranks of the ANC, we will not be separated from our comrades throughout the movement, in the trade unions at home, in SACTU, in the ANC and in the Communist Party. If we cannot stand shoulder to shoulder with them in the ANC, SACTU and the CP, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them **alongside** the ANC, **alongside** SACTU and **alongside** the Communist Party. We will not give up the struggle until it is won.

In conclusion, we extend to you the courtesy which is customary in our movement, but which you omitted to extend to us in your letter of 26 October:

Fraternally in the struggle,

Paula Ensor  
David Hemson  
Martin Legassick  
Robert Petersen

Those who have no other (safer) means of contacting the authors of this pamphlet may do so through the following address:

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Printed by Cambridge Heath Press Ltd (TU), Mentmore Works, 1 Mentmore Terrace, London E8 3PN