

**TRADE UNIONS AND
THE NATIONAL
STRUGGLE FOR
LIBERATION**

by

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Introduction

This very important subject demands of us a thorough-going study. But as this is only an introduction, only its mere salient features can be dealt with. Like the questions on the Franchise, the Land-Struggle and Education for a Slave-Race, which were all fully discussed yesterday, it has to be related to the background of our National Oppression.

We saw how the plan of the Herrenvolk as far back as 1910, at the time of the Union, was to exclude the Non-European from being a member of the South African Nation, by denying him Direct Representation in the House of Assembly. We now understand why this was done; in order to make available a continuous supply of cheap African labour for the mines, farms and towns by a deliberate policy of driving the African people off the land and the creation of a landless peasantry. And even by pleading at the Bar or by testing in the highest courts of the country the validity of the Acts of discrimination, there would be no redress. The State had become the exclusive monopoly of the White Herrenvolk.

OPPRESSION IS INDIVISIBLE

When Mr Honono gave us figures to show the number of African male youths being thrown out of schools by the Retardation Scheme, he was teaching us a valuable lesson, namely, the link between the Herrenvolk's so-called education policy for the African people and their demand for cheap African Labour. This is further illustrated by the statement made by the Minister of Labour, Mr Ben Schoeman ("Cape Times" March 31, 1951) in which he announced:

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"That an inter-departmental committee has been appointed to investigate and make recommendations on steps that can be taken to expand employment in industry for Native juveniles on the Witwatersrand and Pretoriathe committee's terms of reference are to investigate and make recommendations on the desirability or otherwise of:

- (1) prescribing lower wages and other conditions of employment for such juveniles. OTHER THAN THOSE FOR NATIVE ADULTS;
- (2) compelling employers to employ a minimum number of juveniles in relation to adults;

¹ This article is a summary of a paper delivered by Dr. Gool at the Seventh Unity Conference held on 2nd-3rd April 1951.

(3) applying measures to ensure that Native juveniles who are placed in employment in industry. WILL REMAIN IN EMPLOYMENT UNTIL THEY BECOME ADULTS".

This inter-departmental committee of the White Herrenvolk

"will welcome the submission of evidence information or relative data WITHIN THE SCOPE OF ITS INQUIRY."

The very fact that the Minister of Labour appointed an INTER-DEPARTMENTAL Committee shows clearly that the White Herrenvolk has long ago recognised that oppression is indivisible. Conversely, as we have emphasised and re-emphasised: the struggle for liberation is indivisible. We have never looked at the trade union question as something apart from the whole.

POLICIES OF UNITED PARTY AND NATIONALISTS INDISTINGUISHABLE

At the fourth Unity Conference we pointed out that under the SMUTS Government it was already necessary for them to create a Utility Corporation to recruit African males between the ages of 14 and 19. These African adolescents would be hired out to employers for 5 years and would receive in the first year 3 pence a day, the second year 9 pence, and at the end of 5 years 18 pence. The Malan Government is merely putting this plan of the Smuts Government into practice. Smuts proposes and Malan disposes. Their policies are indistinguishable.

EXPLOITATION OF THE NON-CITIZEN

We can safely say that the degree of exploitation of the Non-European worker depends upon his political oppression. The lower his political status, the greater his exploitation, whether as a semi-citizen (Coloured and Indian) or as a non-citizen (African).

How familiar is the phrasing of labour legislation that excluded the African worker, the non-citizen, from its benefits:-

"The Native is not an employee within the meaning and definition of this Act."

We shall merely list a few of these Acts:

1911 - Mines and Works Act (Colour Bar on mines);
1918 - Factories Act (Colour bar in industry)
1922 - Apprenticeship Act (Colour bar cuts off Non-European youth);
1924 - Civilized Labour Policy (Non-European labour ousted by rehabilitated WHITE unskilled labour from country);
1924 - Wage Acts (State protects living standards of white workers and exposes Black workers to greater poverty);
1934 - and subsequent legislation where inferior or no compensation is given to Africans; the ousting of African building workers from City work.

This then is the position of the non-citizen in the economic life of the country.

THE CITIZEN-WORKER AND THE NON-CITIZEN WORKER

Let us now discuss the role of the non-citizen worker within the flywheel of the national economy, the mines. The wage of the non-citizen worker on the mines is 44 pounds and 10 shillings a year. There are 420 000 non-citizens (African) miners. The citizen (White) earns 566 pounds a year. There are 50 000 Citizen (White) miners. The **wage-ratio** of the citizen-worker to non-citizen worker on the mines is approximately **13.5 to 1**.

On the farms the non-citizen (Non-European) worker earns 20 pounds in cash and goods a year. There are 830 000 non-citizen labourers employed on the farms. Citizen (White) Labourer earns 200 pounds in cash a year on the farms. The **wage-ratio** of citizens to non-citizens on the platteland is **10 to 1**.

In the urban industries the non-citizen worker earns 110 pounds a year. The citizen worker earns 375 pounds a year. The **wage-ratio** in factories of citizen workers to non-citizen workers is **33 2/3rd to 1**.

On the railways there are 97 000 citizens (White) workers **earning 2 to 5 times** as much as 90 000 non-citizen (Black) workers.

THE LANDLESS NON-CITIZEN

As we have said, the flywheel of the national economy is the mines, in particular the gold and diamond mines. The non-citizens in the mines bear the main weight of the slave state on their shoulders. Moreover they are the basic sector of the non-citizen workers in South Africa. **They are landless peasants.** They are the whole productive force on the mines.

They are under contract and herded in male compounds. The discussion on the land showed clearly how the people were driven off the land and converted into cheap, migrant, landless peasants. Once in the towns these landless peasants are forcibly herded into compounds, completely divorced from a healthy family existence, and completely shut off from the amenities of urban life.

This same landless peasant - compounded, contracted, migrant labour-runs the heavy sector of secondary industry (power, engineering and chemical which is 33% of secondary industry).

67% of mining, industrial, commercial and transport are landless peasants; and these peasants operate the basic sectors of the national economy.

THE "SETTLED" NON-CITIZEN WORKERS

The remaining 33% are settled in the towns, in locations, with no freedom of movement, cut off from the cultural life of the town (libraries, universities, theatres, etc.)

Even with the so-called workers there is, in the case of Africans, a section which is in continual movement between urban location and rural Labour-Reserve, i.e. there is even amongst the "settled" Non-European workers a section which is a floating population, having ties with the land.

And it is from this section that the unregistered African unions have been formed. The membership of these unions is not a stable one. In addition the formation of an African trade union is virtually illegal. Despite non-recognition by the Government these workers have forced limited concessions from employers.

THE ORGANISED CITIZEN-WORKER AND THE UNORGANISED NON-CITIZEN WORKER

The State itself, has, particularly since 1924, encouraged the formation of trade unions for the citizen-workers. There are 410 000 workers organised into trade unions in the Union. Of this number 75% are citizen-workers (Whites). The other 25% organised into registered unions are the semi-citizen workers (Coloured and Indian). There are 187 of these recognised and registered trade unions.

90% of productive urban non-citizen workers (African) are not organised in trade unions. Figures available show that there are 35 unrecognised and unregistered African trade unions with a membership of only 62 000

WHO PRODUCES THE WEALTH? CITIZEN OR NON-CITIZEN?

In the mines, the African non-citizen produces £105 profit a year. THE CITIZEN WHITE MINER IS A DEAD LOSS of £416 pounds a year. The non-citizen factory worker produces £265 pounds profit a year and the citizen factory worker produces 1 (one) pound profit a year.

CONCLUSIONS

In presenting you with these facts and figures our sole aim was to give you a clear picture of the whole economic and political background of the citizen and non-citizen worker in the economic life of the country. Our work in the trade union field will be futile and purposeless unless we keep this background always in view.

We have shown:

(1) The striking and unique wage-ratios of skilled White Worker to unskilled Non-White Worker. It is a difference between a citizen and a non-citizen. **In a democratic state** the wage ratio of skilled to unskilled is roughly **13 to 11**.

(2) That the citizen-worker and employer form a specially privileged group which lives off the labour of the ever-exploited non-citizens, who produce the entire wealth of the country.

(3) That the basic sector of the non citizen worker operating the fundamental fields of the national economy, is a landless peasant, completely shut off from all normal urban life.

(4) That the "settled" urban non-citizen workers, from whom the Non-European organised trade unionists spring, are unstable, likewise divorced from all democratic urban life, and operate the subordinate and peripheral sectors of the urban economy. This situation makes the

task of organising the non-citizens into trade unions unusually difficult, but certainly not insurmountable.

How can the gap between citizen, semi-citizen and non-citizen worker be bridged?

It is our considered opinion that the gap cannot be bridged and the workers cannot be united along the lines of "pure" trade unionism, that is, while the trade unions remain hostile to and aloof from the struggle for full citizenship for all. This hostility of the citizens to the semi-citizens and non-citizens is deliberately organised by the Herrenvolk parties, including open fascist groups, which the citizen workers support against the non-citizens

How ridiculous and ludicrous then is the attitude of the Non-European trade unionist who still believes in the rulers' lying slogan "No politics in the Trade Unions."

If I am asked in twenty years' time "What did you think about the 1951 Unity Conference?". I would say:

'The theme of this Conference was the birth of a nation. a seeping in of national consciousness.

And this birth. like every other birth. is a very painful process. The acceptance of these new ideas and the creation of a nation is like birth painful trying and self-sacrificing. We are in that process now; for a nation is being born.

On this note I shall stop."

We shall have to consider very seriously the training of Non-European trade unionists along the lines indicated. I feel confident that within the next few years we will have trade unionists firmly planted on the soil of our national struggle. For no national movement can come to a successful conclusion unless and until the workers take their rightful place at its head.