

TRADE UNION APARTHEID

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THE WORKING CLASS of South Africa is deeply divided on lines of race and colour. The basic division, of course, is that between the relatively privileged white workers on one side and the non-white—African, Coloured and Indian—workers, on the other. But the ruling classes have also played on differences among the non-whites, reserving different categories of employment for different nationalities, with the Africans almost invariably occupying the hardest and worst-paid jobs and the least security or rights. Even among the whites, cultural differences and competing national loyalties serve to keep Afrikaans- and English-speaking workers apart. The English and Afrikaans bourgeoisie have been able to exploit these differences with great success, bribing the privileged sections, above all the whites, at the expense of the great mass of African workers.

Although some South African trade unionists, including a minority among the whites, have struggled long and hard to overcome these cleavages, they have never succeeded. Disunited and splintered into competing groups, the labour movement has never been able to present a united front against the exploiters. Today, with nearly all the principled fighters for workers' unity and against apartheid victimised and driven out of the trade unions by fascist legislation such as the Suppression of Communism Act, the 'legal' trade union movement is at its lowest ebb.

Since its formation in March 1955, the one trade union co-ordinating body which consistently opposed the theory and practice of apartheid and the colour bar has been the *South African Congress of Trade Unions* (S.A.C.T.U.). In terms of its constitution, S.A.C.T.U. is open to unions, both registered and unregistered, without distinction of race or colour. If in practice it consisted mainly of African (and therefore 'unregistered') unions, together with a few registered unions mainly of Coloured and Indian members, this was not because of any barrier in the Constitution or policy, but because it never succeeded in securing the affiliation of the white workers' unions. S.A.C.T.U. laboured valiantly to organise

the masses of unorganised African workers: to secure a national minimum wage of 2 rands (£1) a day; to oppose the pass laws and other anti-African legislation and gain the trade union and citizenship rights denied to the great majority of the population. S.A.C.T.U. endorsed the revolutionary Freedom Charter, and formed part of the Congress Alliance around the African National Congress, the spearhead of resistance to white supremacy and apartheid.

During the past few years, the leaders and members of S.A.C.T.U. and its affiliated unions have been subjected to ferocious repression by the fascist government. Its national president, Steven Dhlamini, is in jail as a political prisoner, hundreds of senior officials and rank-and-filers of affiliated unions have been banned, imprisoned, detained under the notorious 90-day and 180-day laws, banished or driven into exile. On November 6, 1964, despite world wide protests, the dockers' leader, Vuyisile Mini and two other S.A.C.T.U. comrades, working men of Port Elizabeth, Wilson Khayinga and Zinakhele Mkaba, were hanged. Under such conditions it is clearly impossible for S.A.C.T.U. to function properly as a co-ordinating centre, a focus of organisation and trade union education. But its spirit remains alive among its fifty thousand members and countless supporters, its affiliated unions and their branches and factory committees, usually forced to resort to clandestine methods of meeting and organisation for the workers' needs.

There are four other trade union centres in South Africa, beside a number of unions not affiliated to any centre. The largest of these is the *Trade Union Council of South Africa* (T.U.C.S.A.), whose history and policy will be dealt with below. The *Koordinierende Raad van Vakunies* (Co-ordinating Council of Trade Unions) consists of Afrikaner trade unions which broke away from the former Trades and Labour Council in 1947, and established the *Raad* in 1948, the year when the Nationalist Party first assumed office in the Government. Consisting of the unions of white miners, building workers and iron and steel workers, it is fanatically racialist and openly supports the apartheid regime.

The *S.A. Federation of Trade Unions* (S.A.F.T.U.) consists of craft unions which broke away from the former T. and L.C. in 1950, demanding that that body enforce a colour bar in its constitution. Although as we shall see the T. and L.C. eventually complied with that demand in 1954, destroying itself in the process, the S.A.F.T.U. unions have remained in isolation. These unions traditionally opposed the entry of African and Coloured workers to the skilled trades. S.A.F.T.U. excludes affiliation of African unions. There are now no Coloured unions affiliated, but even when there were some, the S.A.F.T.U. executive was an all-white one.

The *Federal Consultative Council of S.A. Railways and Harbours Staff Associations* is virtually a state 'company union'. The railways and harbours are state-owned, and the Nationalist government has blatantly used this opportunity to favour its supporters in these, as in all state undertakings and the civil service. The Staff Associations of white employees have not resisted this process, but they have exploited their position as public servants to enforce a strict colour bar in all jobs other than unskilled labour. These Associations have never held out a helping hand in the many efforts over the years of their fellow-workers to form a non-European railway workers union; rather they have acted as police to help the government to suppress trade unionism among the African and other non-white railwaymen.

T.U.C.S.A.—A Sorry End

T.U.C.S.A., under its present leadership, is a sorry end-product of the once flourishing trade union movement founded, mainly, by emigrant artisans at the end of the nineteenth century, which wrote many stirring chapters in the history of the international labour movement. The Witwatersrand miners and Kimberley diggers, the railway and other transport men, the engineers, printers, and other pioneers of the labour movement, headed by such stalwarts as Bill Andrews, conducted many heroic, and sometimes bloody, fights against the employing class, fights which are little cherished or even remembered by their successors of today. But that movement always contained the germs of the cancerous racialism which—apart from the valiant spirits of S.A.C.T.U.—have now virtually destroyed it as a living trade union body, and made it the tool of the most reactionary regime in Africa, indeed, one of the worst, most anti-labour regimes in the world.

In 1954 the old Trades and Labour Council was dissolved by a majority vote. For a quarter of a century it had been the only national co-ordinating body in the country with a claim to represent all sections of the working class. Thanks to the influence of the Communist and other Left and genuine trade unionists, its constitution contained no formal colour bar. Its conferences repeatedly passed resolutions demanding the amendment of the Industrial Conciliation Act to permit African unions to become registered, and thus recognised. But in practice, due to right-wing domination of the big unions, little was done to compel the implementation of such resolutions, or to organise the rightless African workers to assert their trade union and other rights. No non-white ever found a seat in the upper councils of the T. and L.C. After the accession of the Malan government (1948) and the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act, the first full-scale drive was launched against the trade unions. Hundreds of Communist

and other Leftist trade union leaders were proscribed and hounded out of the movement by the government. New laws were introduced to enforce compulsory segregation in the unions, and job reservation for racial categories in employment.

Instead of resisting these onslaughts a considerable section of the trade union leadership (already much weakened by bannings and proscriptions) embarked on a policy of retreat and appeasement of racialism. Some of the right-wing unions demanded the T. and L.C. introduce a colour bar by banning African workers outright, and when this demand was not met they disaffiliated—as we have seen above—to form such bodies as the *Raad* and S.A.F.T.U. The T. and L.C. leadership, by and large, failed to protest against the bannings; failed to mobilise and educate the workers for a struggle for hard won rights and for trade union unity. In 1954 they capitulated altogether and proposed to dissolve the T. and L.C. so that it could be replaced by a new body which would formally ban African participation in its constitution. This move was bitterly resisted by a number of genuine trade unionists as radically opposed to the entire spirit and meaning of the labour movement. Leaders of the textile, food and canning, laundry and other unions fought to the bitter end at a T. and L.C. special conference called to bury that organisation. But the big battalions, backed by opportunists from the garment and other unions which once claimed to be militant, won the day. The T. and L.C. was dissolved. The new body (without the genuine unions, who united with African unions to form S.A.C.T.U.) was duly set up, in October 1954.

Such were the beginnings of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (T.U.C.S.A.). Its constitution specifically confined membership to 'registered' unions. And, of course, since Africans can neither join registered unions nor gain registration for their own, separate, unions, T.U.C.S.A.'s constitution conformed to the government's policy of enforcing a colour bar against Africans.

But this blatant colour discrimination of the T.U.C.S.A. leaders began running them into more and more trouble in a field in which they are particularly sensitive, that of international relations with such bodies as the British T.U.C., the I.C.F.T.U. and the International Labour Office (I.L.O.). T.U.C.S.A.'s prestige was seriously damaged when the credentials of their representative at an I.L.O. conference were successfully challenged by S.A.C.T.U., on the grounds that the organisation, excluding Africans, was not truly representative of the workers of the country.

I.C.F.T.U. Intervention

They were further embarrassed by the activities of an I.C.F.T.U. delegation which visited South Africa and interviewed both T.U.C.S.A. and

s.A.C.T.U. representatives. The I.C.F.T.U. spokesman, following the usual practice of this body to meddle in internal African trade union affairs, told s.A.C.T.U. to break its connections with the Congress alliance and the World Federation of Trade Unions; when this insolent demand met with the rebuff it deserved he branded s.A.C.T.U. as 'Communist' (a criminal 'offence' in South Africa) and refused any support for the campaign to organise African workers. But T.U.C.S.A. did not fare much better. True, they convinced the I.C.F.T.U. beyond doubt that they were sufficiently 'anti-Communist'. But they were told that they could not affiliate, since their colour-bar constitution would be an embarrassment to Tom Mboya and other I.C.F.T.U. contacts in Africa. Therefore the T.U.C.S.A. leadership contacted a small group of dissident African trade unionists, supporters of the Pan-Africanist Congress, who had the dual advantage both of being black and vehemently anti-Communist. Acting in collusion with the I.C.F.T.U., and with its financial backing, they got them to set up yet another organisation—the Federation of Free Trade Unions of South Africa (F.O.F.A.T.U.S.A.) with the object of 'capturing' s.A.C.T.U.'s African unions. At the same time the T.U.C.S.A. leaders decided to amend their constitution.

Thus it came about that at its 8th annual conference in March 1962 in East London, T.U.C.S.A. made a significant change in policy. It revised the constitution to open its door to all 'bona fide' trade unions. Unfortunately one cannot ascribe this development to a genuine change of heart and a recognition that the betrayal of 1954 had been a tragic blunder. The T.U.C.S.A. leaders explained that by co-operating with F.O.F.A.T.U.S.A. and building 'tame' unions for African workers they would be able to win members away from s.A.C.T.U.—then as now under heavy fire from the government—with its militant policies. 'We will put s.A.C.T.U. out of business,' they boasted. Secondly, the racialist element who objected to the lifting of the colour-bar, were told that unless this were done it would be impossible for T.U.C.S.A. to attend international conferences and there answer overseas critics of apartheid. T.U.C.S.A. representatives who had attended I.L.O. and other international conferences pleaded with the delegates to accept the changed constitution. 'They could not expect recognition abroad', delegates were told, 'unless they took in African trade unions'.

The constitution was amended. The P.A.C.-orientated F.O.F.A.T.U.S.A. was admitted to association with the T.U.C.S.A.—in fact accepting a policy of subordination to the white supremacists who administer T.U.C.S.A. and shape its policies. But having done this job, the F.O.F.A.T.U.S.A. leaders dissolved the organisation in 1966, urging its unions to affiliate to T.U.C.S.A. As a result of these manoeuvres,

T.U.C.S.A. now has several affiliated African unions, of workers in the baking, brewing, chemical, clothing, glass, leather, sweet, tobacco and box-making trades. Needless to say, these unions have no effective voice in policy-making and are not represented in T.U.C.S.A.'s leadership.

If African workers had their say, they would certainly not agree with the main strands of T.U.C.S.A. policy. Abroad, T.U.C.S.A. concentrates on undermining the international solidarity actions with the oppressed non-whites, organised by the labour movement and democratic public opinion. At home, in company with the government and other right-wing elements, it campaigns against the so-called menace of 'Communism', ignoring the real danger of fascism which is rampant and in the saddle in South Africa.

T.U.C.S.A. vigorously opposes calls for international sanctions and boycotts against the apartheid regime, initiated by U.N., the African countries, the W.F.T.U. and even by the I.C.F.T.U. Its propagandists argue that these calls are inspired by 'communists', that they will harm the interests of the non-white workers and put them out of work. They say that such sanctions will harm the economies of the 'Western bloc'. In other words, T.U.C.S.A. leadership is firmly opposed either to international action to help end apartheid or to mass struggle inside South Africa to end white supremacy.

In 1964 the I.L.O.'s general conference condemned the 'degrading, criminal and inhuman racial policies' of South Africa as being a 'violation of fundamental human rights and thus incompatible with the aims and purposes of the I.L.O.' It called on the governments, employers and workers of all states to combine in appropriate action to 'lead the Republic of South Africa to heed the call of humanity and renounce its shameful policy of apartheid'.

T.U.C.S.A. to the Rescue

T.U.C.S.A. came to the rescue of the South African government. It published a pamphlet in January 1965, rejecting the I.L.O.'s criticism. It appealed to the 'trade union movement of the western world' to abandon all forms of boycotts, sanctions and 'politically-inspired' expulsions from international organisations. It condemned the British T.U.C., the American A.F.L.-C.I.O. and the Australian Council of Trade Unions for supporting the boycott of South African goods. It defended government policies by claiming that Africans in the Republic have the 'highest standard of living' on the Continent—using statistics from government propaganda sheets for this purpose. It claims that 'more and more of them are earning £1 a day in a country where the cost of living is one of the lowest in the world'.

It is astonishing to hear that an alleged trade union body should be claiming that living costs are low, or that it considers £1 a day is an adequate wage. One may be sure that the privileged white workers who make up the bulk of T.U.C.S.A. membership would not be satisfied with even £2 a day. It was not T.U.C.S.A. but S.A.C.T.U. which campaigned and fought vigorously from 1957 onwards for a national minimum wage of £1 a day—a campaign in which S.A.C.T.U. got no help from T.U.C.S.A. The truth of the matter is that the vast majority of African workers are getting far below £1 a day. T.U.C.S.A. cannot claim ignorance of these facts. It is well known in South Africa, indeed all over the world, that the wages of the African workers are insufficient to meet their essential needs. The Johannesburg *Star* (January 20th, 1967) reported that twenty-eight African quarry workers were convicted and fined R50 (£25) each for taking part in a 'go-slow' strike in support of their demand for higher wages. The court case revealed that they were being paid £2 15s. per week, and the Labour Department official in his evidence said that 'this was actually in excess of the legal minimum of £2 per week'.

In its propaganda for overseas consumption T.U.C.S.A. does not only distort the reality of economic conditions in South Africa. It completely ignores the fascist nature of the regime. It makes no mention of the vicious pass laws, the expulsion of Africans from urban areas, the breaking up of homes in African townships, the suppression of the African's national liberation movement, the 10,000 political prisoners, the execution by hanging of political and trade union leaders, the denial of elementary rights of political representation, organisation, residence, movement, employment. Nothing is said about the attacks on the trade union movement, or the denial to Africans of the right to organise trade unions and negotiate collectively with their employers.

This silence on these matters may seem less surprising when we remember that T.U.C.S.A. never protested against these abominable anti-trade union actions in South Africa, that it never raised its voice in protest against innumerable discriminatory and oppressive laws and measures introduced by the fascist government.

Thus T.U.C.S.A. which began its existence by surrendering the basic principle of working class unity, has step by step moved into the position of apologist and propagandist for the bloodstained Vorster regime. The T.U.C.S.A. leadership stood by while scores and hundreds of fellow-trade unionists were being victimised, jailed, tortured and hanged for standing up for trade union principles. They bought immunity from persecution by sucking up to the government and playing its game. But in the process they have allowed the trade unions of the privileged workers to be thoroughly tamed and drained of class

consciousness, militancy and ability to resist. Today they are only tolerated by the fascist regime and permitted to operate so long as they can be of service to it. They serve it, internally by fighting S.A.C.T.U. in the name of anti-Communism and spreading the corrosive virus of anti-Communism among the working people. Externally these poodles of the neo-Nazi government and the boss class do an invaluable service too, one they cannot do for themselves.

In the outside world, particularly within the labour movement, the whole concept of apartheid and white baasskap is hated and condemned, and properly so too. If an open representative of the South African regime attempted to address himself directly to labour and democratic circles abroad, he would receive short shrift. But T.U.C.S.A., posing as champions of 'non-racial trade unions' and boasting of their affiliated African unions, have access to trade union centres abroad that close their doors to the avowed adherents of apartheid such as the *Ko-ordineerende Raad*, the S.A.F.T.U. or the railway Staff Associations.

T.U.C.S.A. has in fact become an arm of the South African Government Information Service and of the South African Foundation—a body established by the millionaire capitalists of the country in 1961 to counter the international anti-apartheid movement, oppose world boycotts and sanctions, and canvass for trade and investments in South Africa. Though the Foundation consists of capitalists and T.U.C.S.A. of white workers, both are intent on the same job of weakening the struggle against apartheid and defending the structure of white supremacy. While the Foundation sends lecturers and salesmen to meet business circles, T.U.C.S.A. sends its officials and 'research officers' to tour the United States, West Germany, Switzerland and Belgium, meeting trade unions and urging them to 'understand the special South African position' and 'not to isolate South Africa'.

In the Enemy Camp

In its fierce attack on the trade union and national liberation movements, the South African government relies heavily on the hysterical 'anti-communist' campaign it took over from the Hitlerites. Thousands of trade unionists and others have been banned and victimised under the 'Suppression of Communism Act', a law directed against not only Communists but also non-Communist militants, socialists and democrats. By its servile and eager support of this anti-Communist racket, the T.U.C.S.A. leaders have sunk to the lowest levels of political deception and renegacy.

According to its amended constitution T.U.C.S.A. is dedicated 'to vigorously opposing Communism in all its forms'. In a series of study

classes it ran in 1965, the first lectures were devoted to 'discuss and expose the role of Communism in South Africa and the world'.

Recently T.U.C.S.A. issued an expensively-produced brochure attacking 'Communism'. Since it is published in English and French only (the latter language is not spoken in South Africa) it is apparently intended for overseas distribution. In this brochure T.U.C.S.A. claims 'to stand in the forefront of the fight against Communism'. (Not, be it noted in the forefront of the fight against poverty and racialism!) It maintains that the workers are worse off under communism than under 'enlightened capitalism'. T.U.C.S.A., it declares is 'four square in the camp of the International Free Trade Union Movement'.

T.U.C.S.A. asks the fascist government to 'recognise' African trade unions—not because that is the elementary right of the African workers, but in order to save them from 'Communism'. It adds that in the past some African unions have 'fallen under Communist leadership'—thus not only condoning the government's banning, torturing and detention of African union leaders, but also encouraging further atrocities of this sort. If some African unionists have elected Communist fellow-workers to leading positions this is hardly surprising in view of the fact the Communists pioneered trade unionism among the low paid and oppressed African workers, fought and sacrificed for full equality for African workers, and continue to do so today despite the combined opposition of the government, the employers and the white-supremacists of T.U.C.S.A.

T.U.C.S.A.'s anti-Communist campaign is inspired not only by the Vorster government, but also by the C.I.A.-directed and subsidised strategy of the Meany leadership of the American A.F.L.-C.I.O. and the I.C.F.T.U., a strategy directed against the national liberatory and socialist forces the world over. The T.U.C.S.A. renegades thus align themselves in the camp of the enemies of trade unionism—from the battlefields and villages of Vietnam to the brutal racism and fascism of South Africa, for which they bear a full share of responsibility.

Enough has been said to make it clear that T.U.S.C.A.'s leaders have abandoned whatever claim they may have had to speak for the masses of South Africa's workers. By their cowardly pandering to apartheid and racialism, they have betrayed the principles of the labour and trade union movement. But those noble principles have been proudly upheld by others, by those who have braved house arrest and detention, banishment, life imprisonment and even death, in their struggle to win a better life, equality of rights and opportunities for all, human dignity and brotherhood, in a free South Africa.

There are several conclusions which may be drawn from this brief survey of apartheid in the present day South African trade union

movement. Perhaps the first is that to pander to racialism spells death for the labour movement, and is diametrically opposed to its very existence. The South African Labour Party was once a quite strong organisation, with a number of members of parliament and even cabinet ministers, members in provincial councils and even a majority and a Labour mayor in the city council of Johannesburg, by far the biggest city in the country. But because it admitted and appeased racialism and colour prejudice the Labour Party today is as dead as the dodo. The Trade Union Council of South Africa will suffer a similar fate. Today it has allowed itself to become completely dependent on the toleration and goodwill of a government and a political party which is utterly inimical to the very idea of trade unionism, even in the debased and residual form of the T.U.C.S.A. Once they can no longer serve a useful purpose, the fascists are likely to dump them overboard with little compunction. They will soon be forgotten.

But, on the contrary, the brave working men and women who braved dungeon and gallows and who kept aloft the banner of true trade unionism, the banner of S.A.C.T.U., will never be forgotten. S.A.C.T.U. will survive every blow and its members will play a leading part in rebuilding the free South Africa that will arise following the inevitable overthrow and collapse of the hateful structure of white supremacy.

In the meantime, T.U.C.S.A. should be seen for what it is. Neither trade unionists abroad nor African workers in South Africa should have any truck with it.