

The making of the WORKING



Black workers on strike surrounded by mounted police

IN the last issue of FOSATU Worker News we described the growth of a black population which lived permanently in the towns. This group grew even faster during the First World War (1914 - 18) so that by 1921 the number of black workers in towns had reached 385 321. In this issue we look at the response of black workers in the towns to their worsening conditions and the establishment of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU).

The 1920's was a decade (i.e. 10 years) of resistance. The conflict began in the towns. During the First World War small factories were established in larger numbers than before. Until then most of the black workers were employed on the mines or on the farms. Now, many were pulled into the factories in the towns. The conditions they found in the towns were bad. No serious attempt was made to provide workers with adequate housing or with adequate health and educational services. Black locations were frequently placed near sewerage farms causing black leaders to claim that this was intended to kill off the black population. Near the end of the war prices also began to increase rapidly, while wages stayed just about the same. Dissatisfaction began to grow. On the Rand black municipal workers struck in the 'shilling' strike of July 1918. They were immediately arrested and sentenced to prison with hard labour for breaking their contracts. The harsh treatment handed out by the employers and the courts, as

well as the growing militancy of the masses, persuaded some sections of the Transvaal Native Congress (TNC) to organise a general strike. One of the TNC's more radical leaders addressed a mass meeting and said: 'The capitalists and workers are at war in every country. The white workers do not write to the Governor General when they want more pay. They strike and get what they should.'

When the government realised that a general strike was likely, they released the municipal workers from prison, but even then some mine

workers still took part in a short strike.

The next period of unrest came in April 1919. This time the problem was passes and money. Passes forced the workers to accept contracts for fixed amounts of money. If they broke the contract they could be arrested. At a meeting on March 30 1919 the Transvaal Native Congress discussed this issue and decided that 'passes prevent money'. The Congress therefore started an anti-pass campaign. Passes were collected and torn up. Hundreds of people were arrested on the Rand, before the campaign was finally crushed.

**INDUSTRIAL & COMMERCIAL
WORKERS UNION OF AFRICA.**

Established January, 1919.

Branches throughout the
Union of South Africa and
South-West Protectorate.

• HEAD OFFICE •
24 LOOP STREET, CAPE TOWN.

CLASS

PART TEN: ICU FORMED

Two problems faced the Congress in these campaigns:

* It was not strongly enough organised in the townships, and had almost no organisation in the factories.

* The state used all its strength to crush these campaigns.

POLICE CRUSH MINERS' STRIKE

The same problems can be seen in the biggest strike that happened during this time. On February 19 in 1920 a mass strike broke out on the mines. Twenty-one out of thirty-five mines on the Rand were affected. 71 000 workers took part in the strike. Again, the strike was not strongly organised. There was no union organising black workers on the mines. Workers on the West Rand mines went out on strike a week after those on the East Rand mines when the East Rand miners had already been forced back to work. Police sealed off the compounds and stopped food going in. They also stopped miners moving between different mines. Finally they attacked workers in some compounds and forced them back to work. The strike showed clearly that the government would not tolerate any threat to the profits of the mines, which were then the most important part of the South African economy.

Conflict spread to most of the major towns in South Africa in this period - to Bloemfontein, East London, Potchefstroom, Durban and Pietersburg. There was even a general strike among miners at Pilgrims Rest. But the two most important areas of conflict in addition to the Rand were Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. It was here that the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) first began to grow.

ICU FOUNDED IN CAPE TOWN

The ICU was founded in Cape Town in 1919. Its general secretary was Clements Kadalie who had been born in Nyasaland. It first organised among Cape Town dock workers and recruited both African and so-called coloured workers from the docks. It helped organise a strike on the docks in 1919. The ICU expanded during the 1920's until it numbered between 100 000 and 200 000 members. It had branches in most of the large and small towns in South Africa, and stretched even as far as South West Africa and Rhodesia (as they were called then).

Until 1924 the ICU was based in the Eastern and Western Cape. In the Eastern Cape dock workers started to organise themselves in 1920. Their leader was Samuel Masabalala. In 1920 a dock workers' strike was called. The strike was crushed and Masabalala was arrested. Hundreds of people demonstrated outside the prison. The crowd was fired on by police and some local whites. Twenty-three blacks were killed and the workers called for a general strike. Negotiations followed (led by Selby Msimang who was organising in Bloemfontein) and a small wage increase was given. Masabalala joined the ICU in 1921.

The ICU was a general union. At its first conference in 1920 it decided not only to organise workers in the towns but also to organise farm labourers and women. They opposed pass laws and other discriminatory legislation. But to begin with it does not seem to have tried hard to carry out these aims. Very few farm workers were recruited until

1926. Workers were not mobilised in the factories and other places of work and there were very few strikes before 1924. The ICU criticised the ANC leadership at the time and called them 'good boys' but the ICU does not seem to have been much more militant than the ANC.

Although the ICU leadership up until 1925 was mainly drawn from workers, it spent most of its time sending deputations to the white political

parties and trying to get concessions from them. The reason they thought this strategy might succeed was because some Africans in the Cape had the vote. In 1924 the ICU leadership supported the Afrikaner Nationalists in the elections. By November 1924 they had 11 000 paid up members.

Much of this was to change after 1925 when the ICU began organising in the Transvaal and Natal. We cover this in the next issue.



ICU leaders Clements Kadalie (left) and AWG Champion

The Victors of wars,
But then retreat.
The Builders of nests,
But then like an ant-eater
you then desert.
Heavy are your blows,
They leave the employers
unnerved.

On your side are your
brothers even at the New
Jerusalem
Let it be workers! they say,
The heaven above also
approves.

Ngudungudu, the woman
who married without any
lobolo,
Busy boiling foreigners'
pots,
Yet yours are lying cold.

The humble bride,
Affianced with the
bridegroom's consent.
Yet others are affianced
with their father's consent,
Even the Japanese have now
come to be your
bridegrooms,
So! Bride why entwined by
chains,
Instead of being entwined
with gold and silver like
others.

The Black mamba that
shelters in the songs,
Yet others shelter in the
trees.

Ancestors of Africa rejoice,
Here are the workers
coming like a flock of
locusts,
Here is the struggle,
Sikhumba and Mgonothi
are mesmerized,
Asking what species of old
mamba is this?

Dying and resurrecting like
a dangabane flower.
It was stabbed good and
proper during the day,
At Sydney Road right on
the premises,
To the delight of the
impimpis,
And the the delight of the
police.
There were echoes of
approval there on the TV at
Auckland Park saying:
Never again shall it move,
Never again shall it revive,
Never again shall it return,
Yet it was beginning to
tower with rage.

The old mamba that woke
up early in the morning at
St Anthony's,
On rising it was multi-
headed,
One of its heads was at
Mobeni,
Njakazi, the green calf of
MAWU, can bear me out,
Another of its heads was
at baQulusi land at
Ladysmith,
On rising it was burning like
fire.

Even Sikhumba - the
leather that overcomes the
tanners,
Sikhumba who knows no
race,
Who stabs an old man and
a young man alike,
Using the same spear.
Who stabs a man's bone,
Inflicting pain in the heart.
But he is now showing a
change of heart,
Let's sit down and talk, he
now says.

The spear that thundered at
dawn at St Anthony's,



A Praise Poem to the Dunlop workers written by Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo (above) who works at Dunlop Sports in Mobeni.

The spear that devoured the
father and the sons and the
daughters,
Then the men came
together,
Devouring them whilst
singing,
Yet the songs were just a
decoy.

Rife are the rumours,
That those who defied the
unity have sunk,
To the throbbing hearts of
employers.

You black buffalo,
Black yet with tasty meat,
The buffalo that turns the
foreigners' language into

confusion,
Today you're called a
Bantu,
Tomorrow you're called a
Communist,
Sometimes you're called a
Native.
Today again you're called
a foreigner,
Tomorrow again you're
called a Terrorist,
Sometimes you're called a
Plural,
Sometimes you're called an
Urban PURS.

You powerful black
buffalo,
Powerful with slippery
body,
The buffalo that pushed
men into the forest,

WORKERS AND TALKERS

The labour cage is still locked
So, workers started taking stock

Whiteman is boss
For 300 years we are at a loss

He dreams, his might is right
But he forgets, RIGHTS is a greater might

Talking all the time did not help
Less wages, education, opportunities, and of oppression
did we yelp

We know we are Blacks
So better fast
Of Africa, the last
Get off our backs!

Written by Jamalludien Hamdulay, Western Cape

The Black mamba rises again in victory

In bewilderment the police
stood with their mouths
open.

Rife are the rumours,
That those who defied
being pushed into the
forest,
In exile they are,
One Smit is in exile across
at the Bluff,
One Madinana is in exile
across the Umgeni river,
Both can bear me out.

Praise poets, messengers,
observers,
Run in all directions,
Stand on top of the
mountains,
Report to Botha at Pretoria,
Report to our heroes on the
island,
Report to the angels in your
prayers,
Say unto them - here is a
flood of workers,

The employers have done
what ought not to be.

Why tease the mamba in its
century old sleep?
The writing is on the wall,
No stone shall stand on top
of the other till eternity,
Tell them - the borrowed
must be given back,
Tell them - the chained
must be chained no more,
Tell them - these are the
dictates of the black
mamba,
The mamba that knows no
colour,
Tell them - these are the
workers demands,
By virtue of their birth
right,
By virtue of their struggle.

Dunlop workers I'm taking
my hat off
I'm bowing to you with
respect.

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