

COMMENT

THIS edition of FOSATU Worker News looks at the major international trade union organisations and at the worker struggle in Brazil.

Now, why look outside of South Africa when such important events are taking place right here?

The answer to this is that as workers we need to understand and learn from international experience. Our worker struggle cannot avoid being part of an international struggle, because the multinational companies we organise in South Africa also dominate world production and trade.

For this reason, it is clear that the worker movement will have to be strong enough to do battle against powerful international capital.

In South Africa we may have many allies in our fight against the evil of apartheid. But as workers we are not only oppressed racially, we are also exploited by these giant multinationals. To change this we can only rely on the strength and determination of our own worker organisation linked to the solidarity of worker organisation internationally.

This is why FOSATU has always sought out international contact. We have benefited greatly from these links with workers employed by the same multinationals in other parts of the world.

In their hunger for profit, multinationals seek out countries where they can pay low wages in order to keep profits high. They are even prepared to shift factories right across the world to wherever they find these conditions.

Brazil and South Africa are just two of the many countries where the profit seekers of Europe saw a chance to acquire great wealth. But to do this they needed millions of workers – but now these workers are organising. This organisation will stop the multinationals from using worker against worker in their endless drive for more profits.

In Brazil, Chile, South Africa and many more countries, the story has been much the same. Industries grew at the same time as there was massive repression. Workers suffered the most under that repression. But no longer! Workers are not prepared to be led like lambs into the political slaughterhouse. During the 1960's and 1970's they have organised themselves but now they must form links with one another.

Unfortunately in the area of international worker contact there is too much power politics and not enough worker solidarity.

FOSATU has tried to avoid these problems by following certain policies but now as new and greater pressures have arisen we are now discussing and reviewing our international policies.

Our aim in the years ahead is to benefit from international worker solidarity and to avoid the pitfalls of international power politics. Just as in South Africa we will continue the struggle for liberation from apartheid in a way that does not weaken the worker struggle.

THE history of the present international trade union organisations is long, complicated and very often controversial. It is often the case that the story of what happened will change depending on who is telling it.

However, without any knowledge of this history – a history which still affects what is happening today – workers here in South Africa will not truly be able to decide on international matters.

International trade union co-operation has been organised through two main kinds of organisations:

- * International Confederations of the trade union organisations (what are called national centres) in different countries
- * International Trade Secretariats – which join together unions from different countries that are all in the same type of industry.

'European unions form the International Trade Union Secretariat'

In 1902 the International Trade Union Secretariat (ITUS) was formed. It consisted of most of the European national trade union federations. To begin with it co-operated very closely with the Second or Socialist International, an organisation to which the socialist and social democratic parties of Europe had affiliated. In its early years it concentrated solely on factory floor issues and left political questions to be discussed by the Second International.

Later, as the different trade unions in various European countries began to operate more independently of political parties, the International Trade Union Secretariat began to concern itself with wider issues as well.

The ITUS was made up only of European trade unions. The American Federation of Labour (AFL), a federation of craft unions, in the United States was hostile to socialism and to the European socialist political parties, and so refused to participate.

'The socialist Industrial Workers of the World alarms British and German Trade Union Federations'

Later on a rival, socialist trade union body – the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) – grew in power and influence in the United States and tried to participate in the ITUS. This alarmed the British and German trade union federations who thought the IWW was too radical. In 1911 they persuaded the AFL to join so as to prevent the affiliation of the IWW. The name of the international was then changed to the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). However after the First World War socialist trade unions in the United States were severely repressed, and al-

THE BEGINNING OF INTERNATIONAL



A mass meeting held in New York in the 1930s

most crushed. Now the AFL had less to fear from socialist trade unions and did not need to worry about their joining the IFTU.

Since the AFL was also hostile to the socialist influence in the IFTU it therefore withdrew and it only rejoined in 1937.

Three important developments that were to affect international trade union organisation took place in the Second World War. Firstly some of the most effective resistance to the German armies in the occupied European countries came from communist parties and communist organised trade unions. Secondly Britain and the USA joined forces with Russia, despite their fundamental political differences, to fight Germany. Thirdly the British and American Labour movements became closely involved with their governments in fighting the war and in advancing the foreign policy of their countries.

However when the War ended these developments were to have complicated effects.

A LOOK AT THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

BRAZIL is a very big country. It has a population of 120 million people which is about four times the size of South Africa's population. It covers a land area that is about seven times larger than that of South Africa.

But it is the recent workers' struggle in Brazil that is more interesting. The history of the worker struggle in Brazil is a long one.

In the 1930's labour laws were introduced to put the unions under State control. But by 1960 workers had once again started to organise unions outside the official State controlled unions. However in 1964 the Generals of the Army seized power from the more liberal President Goulart.

The generals ruthlessly suppressed all opposition – murdering, torturing

and detaining. All political opposition, including urban guerilla uprising and the unofficial trade unions were crushed.

Behind this repression Brazil experienced an 'economic miracle' with economic growth rates between 1968 and 1974 of 10 percent per year (compared to about 5.5 percent in South Africa). But it was a miracle for the rich not the poor but by 1978 even the rich man's miracle had ended.

To try and deal with the growing problems, General Figueredo who was elected president in 1979 started to talk of reforms or what the Brazilians call abertura.

The reforms were intended to give more political freedom. However, the Generals still kept a tight control and they did little to change the economic crisis.

The Brazilian working class and industry had grown amazingly. The majority of the factories

are concentrated in the city of Sao Paulo which

has a population of about 13 million – three times bigger than Johannesburg. The factories are very big and the one Volkswagen factory in Sao Paulo employs 34 000 workers.

STRIKES

It was the workers in metal and textile in Sao Paulo who started to re-organise the unofficial unions. Every year since 1977 workers have struck in support of recognition and better wages. In 1979 more than 100 000 metal and motor workers went on strike over demands for a living wage, job security and democratically elected shop stewards. They were joined by 250 000 government workers.

Out of this, the Workers Party was started in order to represent workers in the planned elections. This



In-plant march by steelworkers supporting the wage demands of the Sao Paulo metalworkers October 1978.

INGS OF TODAY'S

IONAL FEDERATIONS

However certain disagreements continued in the ICFTU. The ICFTU was a child of the Cold War and disputes developed over how that war should be fought. The AFL, which provided one quarter of the ICFTU's budget, and which felt it should have a correspondingly large influence over the policy demanded a militantly hard line anti-communist and anti-colonial position. It was reluctant to support even neutral trade union federations.

'Tensions in the ICFTU lead to the withdrawal of American Unions'

Other ICFTU delegations felt that the AFL would support any anti-communist union whether or not it had any real worker support. Tensions grew as the AFL (later with the CIO in the AFL/CIO) began to operate independently of the ICFTU in Asia, Africa and South America, as some of the European powers and trade union federations became interested in co-operation (detente) with Eastern Europe. These tensions continued and led to a decline in the influence of the ICFTU. Eventually in 1969 the AFL-CIO withdrew from the ICFTU and only returned in 1982. The ICFTU survived and in fact probably grew in influence in some areas without the AFL-CIO presence. However, it was clear that to have the major Western national centre out of the ICFTU could not continue forever. Whether the ICFTU will now grow and overcome differences will have to be tested in the years to come.

At the beginning of the century Christian (mainly Catholic) trade unions began to emerge. In 1920 they formed the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (best known by its French initials of CISC). This organisation continued till 1968 when it changed its name to the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). This happened because many of its affiliates no longer restricted themselves to being Christian unions only.

'International Trade Secretariats formed in 1889'

International Trade Secretariats (ITS's) also started at about the same time as the first Confederation. The first ITS was founded in 1889. Many more were established in the next 20 years. Each trade secretariat was confined to one industry. Their job was to share information and organise assistance to trade unions in different countries which were organising in the same industry (e.g. Metal). Unlike the International Confederation they accepted more than one affiliate from any one country (so two rival unions could affiliate to the Secretariat). The AFL unions also played an important role in the ITS's. ITS's did not involve themselves in political matters. However they refused affiliation to any communist union or to any union from a country governed by a communist party.

* Thirdly, during the war the national centres had worked closely with their governments, the military and the secret services to help in fighting the war. Since worker organisations were very active in resisting German occupation in Europe it is easy to see why the trade unions became so actively involved.

'Bitter hostility between America and Russia develops into the Cold War'

However, after the War a bitter hostility grew between the governments of the USA and Soviet Russia. This came to be called the 'Cold War' and quickly also involved the other Western Allies.

So as the 'Cold War' opened between the Western Allies and Soviet Russia the trade unions became part of it because they were still so closely linked with the government and secret services. So for example the British TUC and the American AFL played important roles in campaigns against communist unions in Greece, France, Italy and Germany. The aim was to prevent them taking control and bringing in pro-communist governments. Russia also poured money and resources into the communist unions. Both West and East expected the federations they supported to follow their political line in the 'Cold War'. The trade unions became a major political battlefield in post-war Europe.

The links between East and West during the war gave rise to a move for a new international trade union federation. This gave rise to the formation of the WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions) shortly after the end of the war. National Centres from both East and West affiliated. However from the USA the AFL did not affiliate. A rival group, the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) which tended to have more militant industrial unions, did affiliate as many tended to a socialist political position.

However, as the 'Cold War' developed the chances of the WFTU surviving with affiliates from East and West grew slim. In 1948 the TUC decided to press for the dissolution or reorganisation of the WFTU. The pro-communist national centres opposed this and a split immediately followed.

In December of the same year 261 delegates from 59 countries met in London to form the ICFTU to which the American AFL and CIO both affiliated.



led by the Industrial Workers of the World

* Firstly communist parties were able to use their influence and support from trade unions together with money and resources from the Soviet Union to come to power. This happened first in Czechoslovakia in 1948, and soon after in other East European countries (e.g. Hungary, Roumania). Communist trade unions were also powerful in France (C.G.T. - the most important national federation) and Italy, (C.G.I.L. - also the most important national federation) and were seen as a threat by Britain and the USA as well as by non-communist groups in Europe.

* Secondly despite their basic political differences the British and American allies had joined forces with Soviet Russia to fight against Germany, Italy and Japan. So in many areas close contact and respect was built as a result of the bitter struggles that were fought. This was also true between the worker organisations in the different countries. It was these links that first influenced worker organisation at the end of the War.

T IN BRAZIL

was met with great opposition from the State, other political parties and the official trade union leaders.

Since 1980 Brazil has suffered a very serious economic depression. Employers are fighting back against workers. In the motor industry they are introducing robots to replace workers.

When the election took place in November 1982 the Workers' Party did quite well but it is far from being a nationally based party.

LAND

In Brazil there is also a very serious land problem and massive unemployment. The economy has serious problems and just as in South Africa, the government is trying to solve them by methods which make things worse

for rural people and workers.

Again in the last few months strikes have occurred and there have been massive riots by the unemployed. The worker struggle has continued and attempts are being made to unify the official and unofficial unions.

Clearly we should know about this struggle and learn from it. In 1981 when one of the Brazilian union leaders was asked how he saw the struggles in Poland and South Africa, he replied:

'It is confirmation that we are not alone in our struggle to build up trade union independence and this is the best way for workers in different parts of the world to establish an independent presence. It is also the basis for the building of a society based on justice and equality'.



Walter Citrine (right) the general secretary of the ICFTU takes a party of Soviet delegates of the Anglo-Soviet Committee round British war factories prior to the Cold War