

A RECOGNISE BLACK TRADE UNIONS - CHIEF GATSHA TELLS THE BOSSES

Chief Gatsha Buthelesi addressed Natal employers on the 25th July 1974. He urged employers to "allow our people to have the rights of industrial workers, which are enjoyed throughout the civilised world. This they can only have if industry recognises Black Trade Unions."

"APPALLING CONDITIONS":

He said that the living and working conditions of South African Blacks was very similar to the conditions of workers in England one hundred years ago. He read them a description of "ill health, early death, maiming and stunting of children, the break-up of the family, prostitution, drunkenness and crime. But without political rights, the workers had no way of changing their lot."

This, Chief Gatsha said, was the exact description of the appalling conditions under which Black workers operate in South Africa. He went on to say, that it was "the political emasculation of the Kulu People since 1879, that is responsible to a large extent for the appalling conditions under which they have to work today."

"INFLATION":

Chief Buthelesi, furthermore, advised employers to look at what inflation was doing to the wages that had recently been increased. He told employers that the Poverty Datum Line, the minimum wages needed to survive on, was now R110 per month. Unions and employers should be aiming for more than that amount, i.e. securing a decent living. "The Current Effective Minimum Level (E.M.L.) is R166 a month and this should be an immediate target to aim for, if we do not want disaster to overtake us."

TRADE UNIONS

In the light of "appalling living and working conditions"; of inflation that is knocking the bottom out of workers' wages, without political rights where they work; at the very least Black Trade Unions could defend workers' rights and negotiate with management for better living and working conditions. There is no law to stop management doing this.

WARNING":

Buthelesi warned employers that there was not much time left. They were, he said "Masters of their own Fate." Their "responsibility is as great as those men who control our destinies in Pretoria." Employers should therefore not hide behind the government's skirt and say that since the government did not recognise Unions, they could not. Unions were not illegal and management should recognise the Unions of the workers. This was the substance of Buthelesi's advice to employers.

RECENT STRIKES

Why do workers strike? Wage disputes and demands for higher pay are not always the reasons. Strikes often happen when the workers' and their families' stomachs are full. In 1922 white miners struck because they did not wish African miners to do jobs previously reserved for white men. There was a General Strike in June 1950,