

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,

held by Africans and Indians to protest against apartheid laws. The Black people of South Africa hoped to make the Government and Whites of South Africa listen to them. The Black people of South Africa are still to be heard.

Recently in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban thousands of workers from many factories have come out on strike. Most firms in Durban struck for higher wages.

- a) At Hypack Products 300 Indians and Africans went on strike after a dispute over attendance bonus.
- b) 700 workers at Blaikie & Johnstone struck for a R5,00 per week increase.
- c) 70 workers at Medwood Furniture Removers struck for higher pay and were ordered off the premises of the factory. They returned the following day.
- d) About 350 workers at the three branches of the O.K. Bazaars chain in Durban went on strike. The 250 workers from two Congella depots get R65 a month irrespective of length of service. They requested a R55 a month increase which was refused. The 100 workers from the main West Street shop returned to work with a promise of R7,00 per month increase.
- e) More than 400 workers at the Wire Industries Steel Products & Engineering Co. struck because the workers said they had been promised a minimum 7c per hour more and they were then told they would get only 5c an hour increase. Mr Mgobase, Kwa-Zulu's Urban Representative addressed the workers - urging them to return to work, so he could negotiate with their employers.

At all these firms workers earning very little money urgently needing more, struck together for higher wages. At one factory, however, all the workers united to speak for a few of their brothers.

At Paper Sacks(SA) Ltd. 315 workers went on strike to protest against pay increases given on merit and not across the board. Twelve workers received no increase, although the rest received from 50c to R8,50 increase per week. Management agreed to give nine of the twelve workers increases, and the workers then returned to work.

From this it can be seen that the workers' problems do not arise out of the worker's wish to fatten his pay packet. Neither do they arise out of any social impertinence within the industrial sphere. They arise out of the workers' alienation against/from his work situation. The worker needs certain rights in the factory. The strike by workers at two Frame Group factories at Jacobs can serve as illustration of this inherent alienation.

- a) Immediate reaction of the bosses
- b) Solidarity expressed by workers
- c) Negotiation and terms
- d) The results and queries as regards mediation.

THE RECENT SPREAD OF STRIKES

The recent wave of labour unrest in Durban and the Johannesburg Area has spread to the Cape, where 2,000 workers from 3 factories went on strike for more pay on the 24.7.74. 150 workers at the Abkine Steel Corporation in Germiston, refused to work, and demanded a 20c per hour increase.

The Rand Refinery, also in Germiston, ended its strike of 200 workers, when pay was increased to 56c per shift. Workers are now receiving free accommodation, but pay 10c per meal. The salary is now at about a minimum of R20.40 taking home pay. It was R15.80. The general manager put the strikes down to "general unrest" in Germiston at the time. This explanation of "general unrest" does not say why there is this unrest. Some of the factors, we believe, are ~~low~~ wages, lack of effective communication between Black workers and management, lack of consultation and the migrant labour system to mention a few. What is most obvious is the gap between white management and black workers.

The large scale strikes in East London show that these factors of friction are not being dealt with effectively by the industrialists approach to labour problems. Managers were frequently heard saying that there was "organised intimidation behind the strikes". This may be the case, but a far more effective and long reaching approach would be to hold talks at an institutional level, that is, for the workers to be operating through the disciplined efforts of a trade union which represents them honestly. If disruptions and problems are dealt with by one, standing body recognised by the workers, the possibility of trouble makers in the form of violent antagonists would be settled.

Attitudes such as those of the manager of the Kaffrarian Reinforcing Company in East London who fired all the 90 striking workers, and said, "if you have no employees you have no strikes", shows the lack of effort on behalf of certain industrialists to deal decently and effectively with societies problems.

This attitude did nothing to serve the problems of the workers. Within a week the number of workers out on strike in East London had risen to 4,500, putting 11 factories out of order. This illustrates the need for a Black representative institution. The unity of the Black worker has taken shape, but as yet has no structure through which they can effectively bargain with the management.

At the present strikes in East London, the Chief Minister of the Ciskei, Mr. L. Sebe called a meeting of industrial leaders, police and two United Party M.P.'s. It is good to see the active and effective role played by the Black leaders in the labour disputes, but at this level it is limited.

Mr. Sebe managed to persuade 200 workers of the Border Passenger Transport Limited to return to work. This shows that agreements can be reached, but not by imposing "Discipline Committees" upon the workers. They must be allowed to choose their representatives. At the Cyril Lord factory in East London, the 1000 striking workers elected 6 representatives to discuss with management, the problems.

The approach of the Frase Group of Consolidated Textiles, which fired over a thousand workers is not the solution. Their genuine grievances must be dealt with humanely; women earning R6.00 per week with 3 years experience are not grumbling about nothing (Figures quoted from Rand Daily Mail 2.8.74).

So strikes continue to spread because nothing is done to set up effective institutional bodies which will be representative of the workers - the Black workers need Trade Unions.

REVIEW OF RECENT STRIKES

<u>Gerriston:</u>	Alking Steel Corporation	180 workers
	Gerriston Fresh Meat Supply	67 "
	Road Refinery	200 "
	National Chemical Products	600 "
	Human Control Board	Not known
	Gerriston Coal Company	140 workers
	General Erection Company	400 "
	Road Scrap Iron and Metal Comp.	220 "
<u>East London Area:</u>		
	Car Distributors Assembly	1500 workers
	Kaffrarian Reinforcing Company	90 "
	Wey Waste Paper Company	25 "
	Dunlop Factory	350 "
	Kenbow Furniture Factory	159 "
	Consolidated Textile Mills	1000 "
	Cementile Products	Not known (all)
	Cyril Lord	1000 workers
	Regent Beckwater	300 "
	Everite Factory	275 "
	Border Passenger Transport	200 "
	Distillers Corporation	250 "
	Marine Knitting Mills	130 "
	Langeberg Co-op	900 "
	Model Dairy	200 "
<u>Durden Area:</u>		
	Flocon Products	75 workers
	Hypeak Products	150 "
	Blakie Johnstone	700 "
	Redwood Furniture	70 "

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EDITORIAL

Your involvement in a trade union may be because of a personal problem. But the moment you have joined the trade union which is stimulus to collective bargaining, you are looking into any problem as problem for the mass of our workers' lot. A problem that has perhaps been fought against since the early stages of industrialisation in this country.

Therefore it is worth realizing from the onset that all our workers' problems will only be successfully confronted when we are able to organise ourselves into a solid bloc. This is the only way our demands can be made felt.

Now is the time to initiate for ourselves what we believe would be the normal situation. Let us not wait for tomorrow. All the workers' needs must be fought for now; because our workers' rights are being violated now. We must create a union movement now.

In as much as we need our pay increased and other attached benefits, we must not lose sight of the fact that in this country only a CHANGE in industrial legislation will change our situation.

AROUND THE UNIONS

METAL UNION

The Metal & Allied Workers' Union is at present conducting shop steward courses on Tuesday and Thursday every week and as a result of these courses the organisers find that from the factories where there are these shop stewards there are very few workers who come to the Union's offices with complaints because most of them are dealt with by their shop stewards in the factories.

On the 30th August 1974 the Union Secretary received an invitation from Non-Ferrous Metal Works' Management to come and have some discussions so as to clarify some points on the Union's representation of the workers.

On the 6th September 1974, the Secretary, together with one of the Organisers of the Union, went to N.F.M.W. where they had discussions with the Director, Mr Lazarus and his Associate. After the Director had perused the matter that had been written to him previously asking Management to recognize the Union, he seemed to be interested in the Union's benefits, enquired about the system used for collecting Union subscriptions and also how the firm would be expected to work if it were to recognise the Union. He also pointed out that they had a Works Committee but that most of its members were also the Union's shop stewards as they had pointed out at a previous meeting that they wanted the Works Committee to be replaced by a Shop Steward Committee also stating he was not against this move.

After a long discussion he pointed out that N.F.M.W. would like to be the pioneer in the Metals Industry in Natal to recognise the Black Trade Unions but also that he was anticipating hardships with SEPSA and other employers' groups. He requested the Secretary to furnish him with information and names of the factories where they have signed agreements with the other Unregistered Unions.

The Union Secretary has also had talks with the Defy Industries management who also, after a long discussion, said that although they had a channel for communication, being the Liaison Committee which has not been accepted by the Pinetown plant, they will be prepared for the time being to have unofficial negotiations with the Union on matters concerning workers in their Company so as to avoid unnecessary strikes.

TEXTILE UNION

The dynamic National Union of Textile Workers and its Indian counterpart, the Textile Workers' Union of South Africa, jointly signed an agreement on the 18th July 1974 with the management of Smith & Nephew, a British owned textile company.

This event marks an historic milestone in the struggle of the African worker for trade union rights. The entire black working class movement has been opposed by the State and big business. All actions and arguments used by these two forces to oppose the worker amount, in short, to nothing but threats and an ability to create confusion among the workers, i.e. stating that Black unions are not recognised as having the right to legislate on wages and working conditions and also that black workers are not able to run their own unions.

Between the Unions and Smith & Nephew undermined, in the entire actions and arguments of the State and

The agreement between one massive blow, the bosses.

in some detail the contents of the Smith & Nephew agreement means that the African Union and the equal rights in the factory. Both are recognised leaders are workers' leaders elected in the factory shop stewards and represent the workers in the

Let us now examine the agreement. The Indian Union have and the factory led by the workers, at the factory.

Management will meet and discuss wages anytime after this year.

The unions and management the 15th of August

laid down in writing that workers' wages will rise a year as the cost of living rises. Say, for cost of living rises by 15% the wages would automatically 15%. On top of this the agreement also lays down a standard of living increase of 2 1/2% per year. So there are increases plus any increase obtainable if the cost of living goes up in August every year.

The agreement sets out automatically each year. For instance, if the cost of living increases by 10% automatically an automatic standard of living increase. There are two automatic increases. The Indian Union can negotiate with the management.

It clearly lays down a production bonus and how it is calculated, holiday allowance and shift allowance, holiday bonus, sick leave, overtime rates, public holidays.

The agreement also covers - a service award, annual leave, sick leave, etc.

In all, the agreement lays down the procedure for the grievance procedure. In this agreement it is stated that if anyone is dismissed, he can take it up with the management, together with the shop steward. If nothing is resolved the union secretary or shop steward can be called in and if this problem continues, then the management can call in an independent person to sit on the grievance committee. So you can see that in case of dismissal for any reason other than drunkenness - theft - fighting - or sleeping on the job, the case can be thoroughly examined before anyone is dismissed.

Most important of all is the grievance procedure. In the event of dismissal, he can take it up with the management, together with the shop steward. If nothing is resolved the union secretary or shop steward can be called in and if this problem continues, then the management can call in an independent person to sit on the grievance committee. So you can see that in case of dismissal for any reason other than drunkenness - theft - fighting - or sleeping on the job, the case can be thoroughly examined before anyone is dismissed.

Another thing is, that if a worker is warned by the foreman and the worker is of the opinion that the warning is not called for, he can then say so. Each worker must be given two verbal warnings and then a written warning, and if the worker does not make the same mistake the written warning must be destroyed after three months.

We have examined this historic agreement in some detail so that workers can see what, and how, a Union can really be the only way to protect the interest of the workers.

If you want more details then contact any of the Unions in Gale Street.

CHEMICAL UNION

Since C.W.I.U. has employed two fulltime organisers, Mr Omar Badsha and Mr Patrick Tabets, very little time has been lost in expanding and strengthening the union especially at A.E. & C.I.

"Isisebense" learned that inevitably bosses at A.E. & C.I. had reacted to the Union by going around and "persuading" the workers not to join the C.W.I.U.

This action seems to have had the opposite effect on the workers. On Saturday the 12th August 1974 over 200 workers met at Bolton Hall and after a very lively session resolved to get every worker at A.E. & C.I. to join the Union. The Secretary, Mr Badsha, was instructed by the workers to write to the Chairman of A.E. & C.I., Mr Harry Oppenheimer, and get the company to recognise the Union.

The events at A.E. & C.I. all point to the fact that a long and bitter struggle lies ahead, but workers are resolved to stand firm and obtain full recognition for their Union.

The Secretary called on the workers at S.A.T.P., the sister company to A.E. & C.I. to join the Union. A mass meeting of workers at S.A.T.P. is to be called in the future.

BENEFIT FUND

A group of 102 workers were issued with summons following alleged strike action taken a few months back.

An Admission of Guilt - R40,00.

Some have agreed to pay a deduction of R5,00 per week. The rest have taken the matter up with a lawyer and a collection is being made to meet legal costs.

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SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR HISTORY

While the Indians were working in the sugar plantations, what was happening to the Africans? We mentioned in Part I how white farmers in Natal were unable to find enough Africans to work for them, and so brought Indians to this country to work for them.

Yet today, there are millions of Black workers in the towns, giving their labour to the mine and factory owners. Why did they leave their land? How did this happen?

The 19th century was a time of the making and breaking of nations. In Natal, the Zulu nation had to defend their country against white colonialists who were searching for more land. At first the Zulus won battles because they were brave fighters, but they could not defeat the gun which the white man carried. Eventually the Zulus lost nearly half their land to the whites.

In many cases, small tribes broke up and the people were scattered. Much of the land that remained was unsuitable for agriculture. One man reported that the land was fit only for the owl and the eagle, the baboon and the jackal, because it was so rocky. Many had no choice but to work for the new white farmers or to rent a small piece of land from them. They were called squatters.

These squatters became quite successful after a few years and sold their crops for good prices. In 1877 a magistrate said: "Taking man for man and acre for acre, the native produces more than the European." Many white farmers complained that Africans were lazy because they would not work for the low wages that the whites offered. As long as Africans could work on a small piece of land they could remain independent. They had their own source of wealth, even if it was small.

But in the meantime, diamonds were found in Kimberley and this was to change the whole system of wealth in South Africa. It is important to look at what happened in Kimberley, because this was the start of many unfair labour customs and laws that we still find in South Africa today. It was also the making of the Black working class, a people who sell their labour in return for wages.

People of all races came from all over the country to Kimberley to find diamonds and riches. In the early years, Black workers were able to improve their wages because they were free to sell their labour for the best price. In two years a diamond digger's wages rose from R1 a week with food to R3 a week with food. This was in 1871, when money was worth more.

But these conditions did not last. Next week we will write about how things changed.

WORKERS OF PIETERMARITZBURG

It is very unfortunate to see workers coming into the Union Offices only when they have trouble with their employers. It is far more advisable for you to join the union as from now. It will be difficult for the Union to assist you if you join it only when you are faced with problems, despite the fact that you heard about its existence a long time ago. We know that there are clever fools among the workers who always lead the workers astray. You find that workers in Johannesburg and in Durban, as well, earn more than us here in Pietermaritzburg. That is true, it is because of their unity, honesty and courage. They aren't people with two faces and boss puppets among them.

Solution:

There is only one solution, workers, that all of us here in Pietermaritzburg should be united. Our bosses will respect us and will also respect our rights if we are united. Remember that unity is our strength. We Pietermaritzburg workers will succeed if we show unity. Don't deceive yourself by the fact that you are earning more than others at your firm. Don't deceive yourself because of your boss who calls you "a good boy" because you will soon regret. Your children will suffer because they will have not got these privileges that you have.

Workers, today we are working for the whole nation. You, who think for yourself only will regret because you don't know what your future will be.

Which people can join the Union?

It is all those people who call themselves 'workers' irrespective of the job you are performing (qualified or unqualified). Those who are highly educated as well as those who are clever may also join the union. Even those who claim to know better than the others, those who say the union has nothing to do with them.

GENERAL FACTORY WORKERS' BENEFIT SOCIETY AND METAL AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION, FLETCHERMANITZBURG

The Union in Fletchermanitzburg has been growing steadily as usual. This week many of the Black workers at the University of Metal joined the Benefit Society because they too know that their strength lies in uniting with other Black workers. There has been trouble with their bosses, and because they are afraid of being fired if they complain too much, they have joined the Benefit Society so that it can represent them and help them.

At Barwood, the Management wants the workers to have a Works Committee, even though they had one before and it didn't work. At a big meeting, the workers said they wanted the Union to represent them, and decided to sign Union members to the Works Committee. The police and S.A. were at the meeting and threatened to charge the Union Officials for holding an illegal meeting. But they took legal advice and have not yet been charged.

A few months ago the Union's red Cortina car was stolen, and recovered burnt. So now the Union has no transport, and as a result was sometimes not able to get to the factories as often as they wanted to. Workers must be patient and understand that the Union Officials can only do their best until they can get another car at the end of August.

Many workers have been coming into the Union Offices, to pay their dues, for advice on legal problems to find out about Workmen's Compensation and, of course, to join the Union and Benefit Society.

A new Union, the Furniture and Timber Workers Union has just been formed. Workers in factories where furniture or any wood products are produced, should come into the Offices to join this new union.