

# BUILDERS OF THE NATION

8

## SACTU AND WORKERS UNDER APARTHEID

The election victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 was followed by an almost immediate attack on black and militant trade unions. The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 resulted in the banning of the Communist Party as well as 53 trade union leaders.

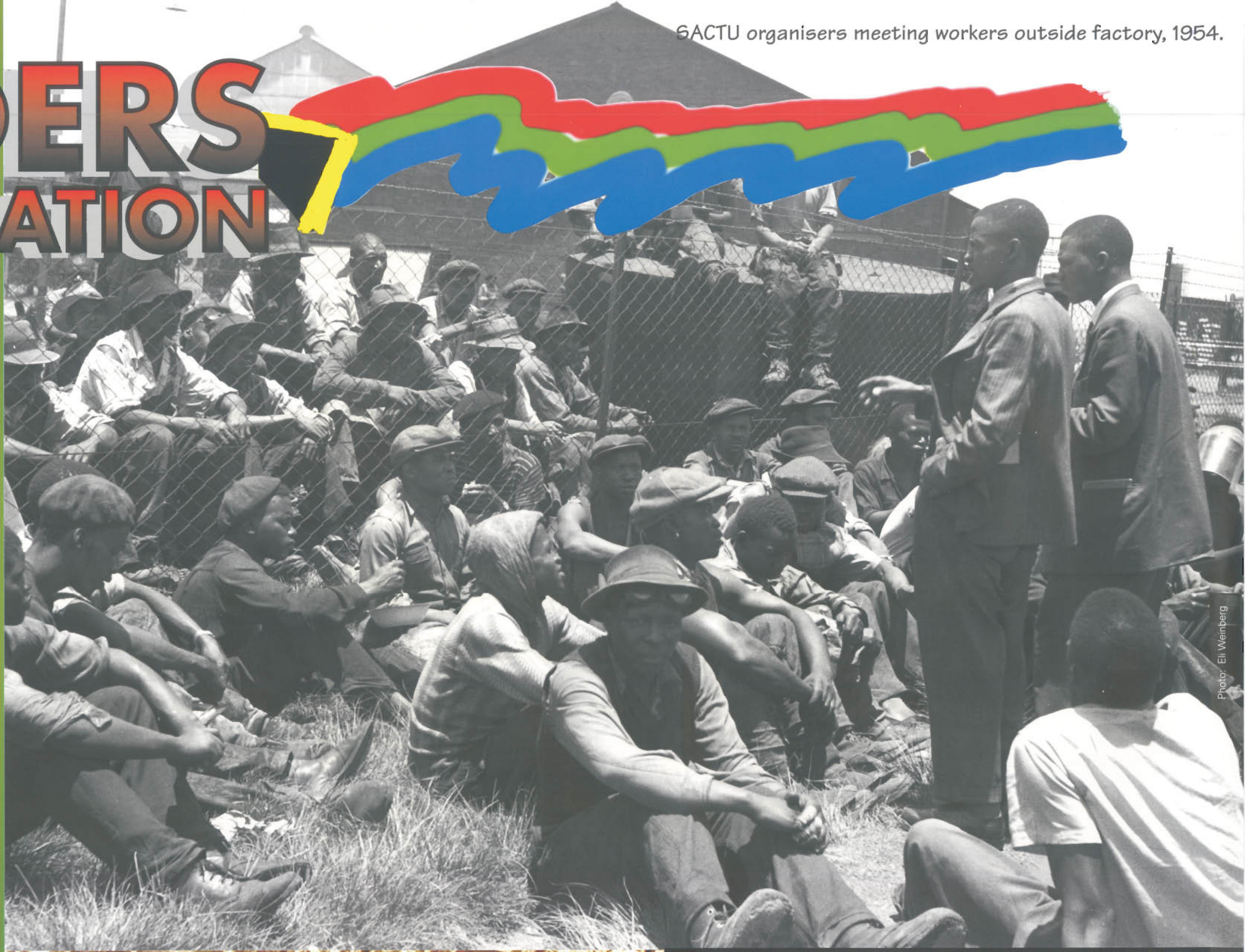
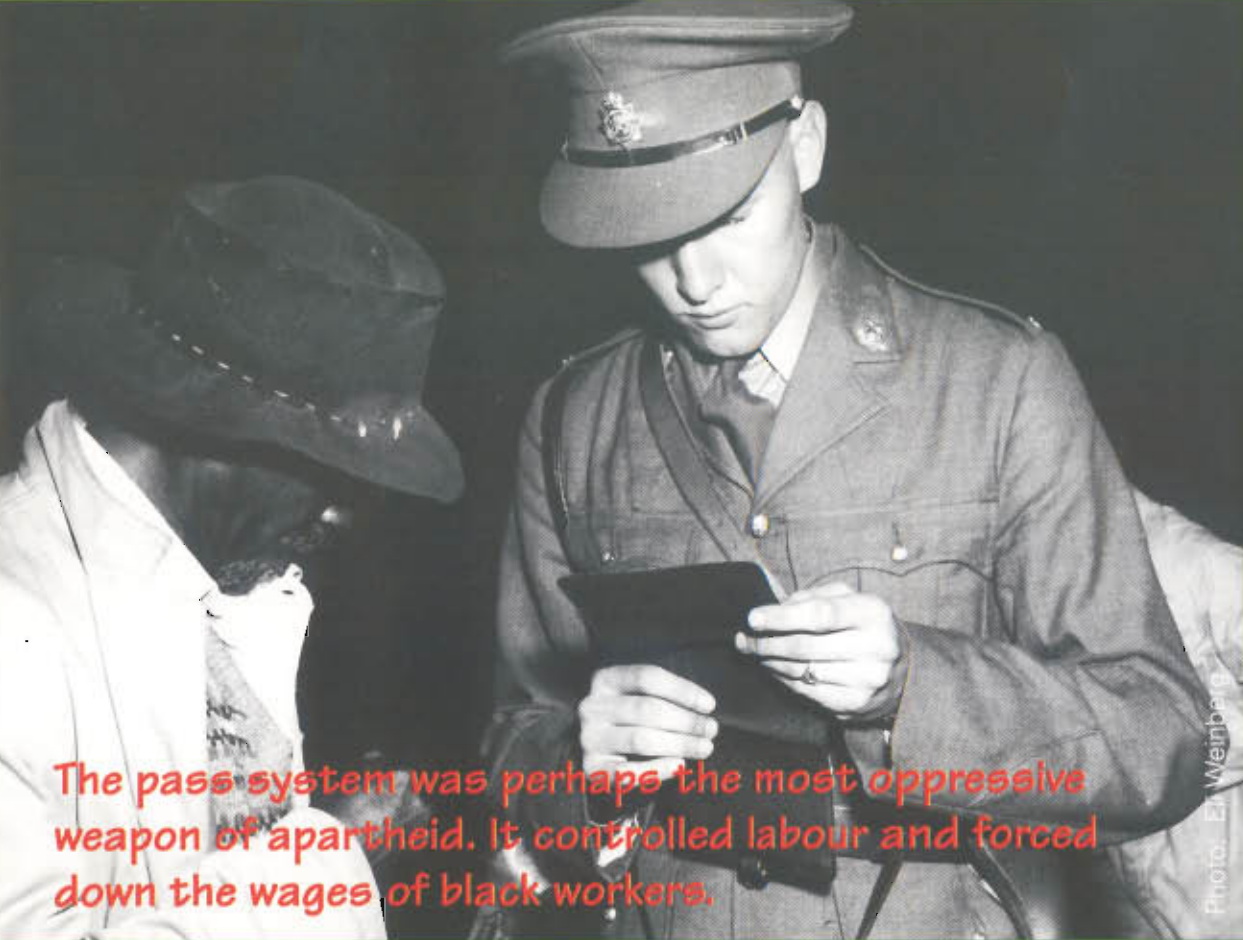


Photo: Eli Weisberg



The pass system was perhaps the most oppressive weapon of apartheid. It controlled labour and forced down the wages of black workers.



Photo: Eli Weisberg



The Pound-a-Day campaign, 1957.

Workers are approached by volunteers to elect delegates for the Congress of the People, 1955.



Under the apartheid policy, the pass laws were tightened, further jobs were reserved for whites only, and blacks had to move into racially segregated townships. If they were caught without passes in the cities, they were sent to work as convicts on the white-owned farms.

In these harsh conditions, a non-racial union federation was born. This was SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions) which formed an alliance with the democratic movement under the leadership of the African National Congress. The Alliance also included the SA Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress and the small white Congress of Democrats. SACTU's campaigns were directed at bosses but also at the apartheid government.

It took an active part in the formulation of the Freedom Charter in 1955.

It launched the potato boycott in protest against brutal treatment of convict labourers working on commercial farms.

The "Pound a Day" campaign successfully mobilised thousands of workers even though it did not increase workers' wages.