

## EDITORIAL

What are workers to make of the confusion that surrounds the boycott in East London ? With statements flying left, right and centre, we have heard from all the parties - except the boycotters! What is the workers' attitude towards the boycott ?

The first thing to be made clear is that the fare increases result from the wage increases that the bus drivers got after their successful strike in July and August. And who is to begrudge the drivers these increases ? They went on strike for reasonable wages, and all workers will support them in struggling for what is their due.

But clearly it is not the bus company that is paying for the increased wages, but the workers of East London, in the form of higher fares!

The bus drivers are entitled to ask the workers of East London to pay bus fares to cover their wages. But the bus company increased the fares in order to keep its profits high!

In other words, the company should pay for higher wages out of its profits - the East London workers should not have to pay for these wages out of their own small wages!

And that is why the boycott is so important. The workers are, in effect, telling their bosses and the Government that they all want increased wages to cover the new fares. If one group of workers gets better wages, this must not be done at the expense of other workers. What has happened is that the workers of East London have joined the busdrivers in a general campaign for higher wages.

The second general point is that the leader of the bus drivers is displaying a very selfish attitude. It is perhaps significant that he is chairman of a liaison committee - the kind of committee that is very easy for the boss to control. This man has attacked the boycott because it threatens the jobs of the busdrivers. He fears they will be put out of work if the boycott continues. But does he not realize that it was the wage increases won by the busdrivers that caused the fares to go up - and thus caused the boycott ? Instead of asking the workers of Mdantsane to pay for his higher wage, he should support the workers in the boycott, and do what he can to help them get higher wages to cover the new fares.

We can only hope that the busdrivers do not share the selfish attitude of the chairman of the liaison committee.

The third lesson is that the township councillors do not enjoy the confidence of the workers. This is shown by the rejection of their pleas to end the boycott. Workers in East London have indicated that they will trust only their own leaders - and it will not be too soon if workers in other cities follow their example.

The fourth lesson is that the workers' struggle is more important than any tribal differences! Radebe and Fingo in Mdantsane have forgotten their differences and come together as one "tribe" - or tribe of workers!

And the final lesson ; a lesson for all workers - is that united action by workers from every different kind of job is called for. The stage is passing when workers in one factory can struggle alone for higher wages - because those increases may well raise the cost-of-living of other workers (as in the case of the bus fares).

Workers should not be discouraged from demands for higher wages on the grounds that it will hurt other workers - but they must be discouraged from making demands without consulting other workers and enlisting their support.

The call to workers is this - no more isolated demands! Instead, workers from every factory must join in making a single demand of all the bosses. In that way, the bosses are made to pay for increased wages, not the other workers.

## Wages and Profits

Whenever the workers demand an increase in their wages, managements' first answer is that if wages are increased, their costs will be increased and so prices will have to be raised - in other words they tell their workers that an increase will not improve their living standards because they - the workers - will have to pay a higher price for the goods that they buy.

The worker earns wages which are paid to them by management, management earns profits which they get from selling the goods produced in their factories - if management pays his worker a wage of R1,00 and if he sells the good produced for R5,00, he has made a profit of R4,00. He now says that if he pays his worker R1,50 he will have to sell the good for R5,50 so that he still makes R4,00 profit - but it is not possible for him to raise wages without increasing the price, even if his profits are slightly smaller.

Almost every day workers find they have to pay more for the goods they need. Only a few days ago bus fares went up, shortly after the rise in rail fares. And as if this was not enough, bread has gone up from 13c to 16c.

So on the one hand, the workers are finding they can buy less with their money - and on the other hand, when workers ask for higher wages, the boss tells them that they cannot get them because of inflation.

Why does this inflation come about ?

Workers in many parts of the country have won better wages by organising themselves and the bosses have raised many wages to prevent unrest from disturbing the factories. The bosses' costs have risen in other ways too - many of the goods he uses are now more expensive.

If the boss finds his costs (like wages) going up, he will be earning a smaller profit (profit is what the boss keeps when he has paid wages and other costs). The boss will therefore attempt to keep his profit high by increasing his prices.

To put it more simply, the workers may be given a higher wage. This will reduce the boss's profit, so the prices will be increased. But it is the workers who have to pay his higher price! Thus, even with their higher wage, they are no better off than before.

In attempting to keep his profits high, the boss will make the workers in general pay for the wage increases of his own workers.

This only serves to show that inflation is used by bosses to keep profits high - and to ensure that workers can buy no more for their wages than before!

If the workers are to achieve a higher standard of living, they will have to ensure that higher wages come out of profits, not out of the workers' wages.

### Note for Cape Town's Workers

Bus fares in Cape Town have just gone up to cover the increased wages for bus drivers. The busdrivers recently had a ban on overtime to force the bus company to raise their wages.

Thus the events of East London are repeating themselves in Cape Town! But it is sad to see that the committee that says it is representing the bus-passengers has done nothing more than "appeal" for the fares to come down again. The Border Passenger Transport Co. is owned by the same people who own the buses in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Both these cities have experienced overtime ban and increased fares.

SOURCES: The World, Daily Dispatch, Rand Daily Mail.