

WHAT IS TUCSA?

You will have read elsewhere in ABASEBENZI that the Trade Union Council of South Africa has announced its intention to organise African workers into "parallel" unions. What does this decision mean? It is important for workers to realise what all this means, because it is something which is going to affect them.

Before we go any further we must understand what is meant by "parallel" unions. At present, coloured and white workers (skilled workers) are organised into registered trade unions, on an industry basis. That means that all skilled workers in a given industry e.g. garment workers, organise to form an industrial union. These registered trade unions are recognised by the law. Some comprise only white workers; others comprise coloured and white workers. African labourers may not belong to these unions. What TUCSA wants to do is to organise the African labourer in each industry along the lines of the registered unions, and that these registered unions will 'mother' the African unions while they grow. Now this decision sounds fine; Unionisation of all workers is something we all strive for. But we must look very carefully at why TUCSA has taken this decision, so that we can make up our minds as to whether this is really in the interests of black workers or not.

WHAT IS TUCSA?

TUCSA is the Trade Union Council of South Africa. It is made up of a number of white and mixed unions, who all join together to present a common front. All unions that at present can belong to TUCSA are those which can be registered by law. We know that although African unions are not registered by law, they are nevertheless legal. Registration means that employers are forced to negotiate with these unions. TUCSA represents skilled workers.

WHEN WAS TUCSA FORMED?

TUCSA was formed in October of 1954, when 61 unions decided to join together to represent the views of white and mixed unions. TUCSA was formed at a time when the government was thinking of legislation to split up unions which had both coloured and white membership. The unions of TUCSA were opposed to this, and when they decided to join up, they decided to include only registered unions, i.e. all African unions were excluded. Some trade unionists disagreed with this decision to exclude africans, and in 1955, formed another co-ordinating trade union body called SACTU.

WHAT DOES TUCSA AIM TO DO?

TUCSA's aim is to protect the workers that belong to it. Now we know that most of the workers in TUCSA are skilled workers, so TUCSA aim must be to protect the position of these skilled workers. This means that TUCSA must resist any measures taken which might undermine the position of privilege of these workers, and the standard of living to which they are accustomed.

WHAT PROBLEMS DOES TUCSA FACE IN CARRYING OUT THESE AIMS?

Obviously TUCSA faces many different kinds of problems, but we are only interested in those that affect black workers. Here, we can look at two definite problems for TUCSA arising from the fact that African trade unions are not encouraged.

. African unions are not recognised, and so have no legal voice in negotiation with employers. TUCSA has felt in the past, and still feels, that without channels of communication with management, african workers would become discontented, and that this discontent might erupt into industrial action. Without "responsible leaders", African unions that felt frustrated might be exploited by 'subversive' elements. What TUCSA means is that these unions may see a political role for themselves.

2. TUCSA fears that the increasing number of Africans coming into industry will undermine its ability to protect its workers. Employers already have learned the art of splitting up skilled jobs into a whole number of unskilled jobs, and employing Africans to do these at much lower rates of pay. The skilled workers don't want this kind of competition from unskilled workers. So TUCSA would like to organise these unskilled workers into trade unions which it can control. African trade unions could resist the tendencies of employers to undermine the position of the skilled workers.

SHORT HISTORY OF TUCSA'S ATTITUDE TO AFRICAN UNIONS

We know that when TUCSA started, african unions could not be members. But because of the problems outlined above, TUCSA in 1962 decided to change this decision. In 1963, five African unions joined TUCSA. Because they disagreed with this decision to include african unions, a number of unions withdrew from TUCSA.

TUCSA's decision to include african unions was very unpopular with the government, which began applying pressure to the leadership. In 1967 it was decided to debate the question again. There were threats by other unions to withdraw unless TUCSA changed its decision once again and excluded african unions. In an attempt to prevent a split developing in TUCSA, a number of the african unions decided to withdraw from TUCSA. OTHER african unions decided to refuse to withdraw. No decision was taken at this congress, but was held over to the congress of the following year, 1968. Here, the majority of unions voted to include African unions. As a result of this, a number of very large unions left TUCSA in protest.

At the 1969 congress of TUCSA; the decision to include african worker was changed, and this time it was decided that only registered unions could join, i.e. african unions were forced to leave. As a result of this, many of the large unions that left in protest against inclusion of african workers, rejoined the organisation.

TUCSA's position now on the question of african unions is that they may not join the organisation, but that it is TUCSA's aim to organise as many African unions as possible on industrial lines. What does this decision in fact mean? Does it mean what Tom Murray, general secretary of the Boiler Makers Union, takes it to mean, ie. that they must 'organise african workers into trade unions, under white leadership and control', or does it mean that there is a genuine attempt to organise black workers because it is the best thing for them.'

We have shown that TUCSA has certain concerns to protect the privileged position of the skilled workers in its ranks, and in order to do this it is necessary to prevent african workers being used to do the same jobs at lower rates of pay. This can only be done by organising african workers to resist these tendencies. So it is in the interest of TUCSA to organise black workers.

They are not being organised solely because it is in the interests of african unskilled workers. Because of this, we must be wary of any offers made by TUCSA. We must recognise them for what they are, and learn in what ways we may work to build a strong workers movement. Some suggestions of what TUCSA should do are made elsewhere.

We can summarise all this by making two points about TUCSA's attempts to organise unskilled african workers.

1. that it wants these unions to organise to resist the attempts by employers to substitute unskilled for skilled labour
2. that it wants these unions to restrict themselves only to the questions of wages, working conditions etc, and not to become involved in any political questions. In other words, TUCSA realises that unions for unskilled workers are necessary, but wants to control them so that they do not undermine the position of skilled workers in any other ways.

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Electrical Workers.

In May this year, the South African Electrical Workers Association (an independent union) announced its plans to organise skilled black electrical workers. This would apply only to black electricians in the Transvaal area, and only to those who hold the necessary qualifications, ie: the same as the white electricians hold. The Unions intends approaching the registrar to request that he considers this case on its merits.

ADVICE BUREAU NEWS.

152 workers from Nautilus, an engineering firm, expressed their interest in joining the Advice Bureau. As soon as it opens, these new workers will be fully incorporated. At the moment, they are preparing and organising a works committee for their firm.

At Murray and Stewart, workers are calling for a works committee because they find their present machinery for negotiations, inadequate. They are being advised on how to set up their committee, and should have one fully registered by the end of the month.