

CAPE TOWN

NOTICE TO ALL WORKERS:

All the members of Western Province Workers Advice Bureau are invited to the Annual General Meeting to be held on 26.10.75, Sunday, at the B.E.S.L. Hall, Klipfontein Road, Athlone at 2 pm.

AGENDA:

1. Minutes of the last AGM
2. Executive Report
3. Reports from Workers Committees.
4. Financial Report
5. Election of Office Bearers
6. Constitutional Amendments.
7. Resolutions from Workers Committees.

TUCSA AND THE UNSKILLED WORKER.

We read in the newspapers of the 23rd September that a delegation of trade-union organisers of unskilled workers in Durban had been refused permission to participate in the TUCSA Conference. **

We read also that participating in the Conference were trade-union organisers of unskilled workers from the Transvaal and elsewhere.

This is a strange situation! Why did TUCSA admit some representatives of unskilled workers, and expel others!

The newspapers said that the delegation from Durban had been expelled for technical reasons. TUCSA had originally invited delegates from each of the unskilled unions in Durban, but these unions have formed their own umbrella organisation, called the Trade-Union Advisory and Co-

Ordination Council (TUACC). TUACC accepted TUCSA's invitation on behalf of all the unskilled unions belonging to it.

When the delegation arrived in Cape Town, they were told by the TUCSA officials that they could not be present in the name of TUACC. Each union had to be present in its own name. And before these union representatives would be admitted, they would have to get proof from their unions in Durban that they were in fact the true representatives. Urgent telegrams were sent back to the union offices in Durban, asking for confirmation. Telegrams came back, informing the TUCSA conference that each union organiser

from Durban was a true representative of the union. But TUCSA refused to admit them. The TUCSA officials did not debate the question of their admittance in the presence of all other delegates to the conference. The matter was hushed up as far as possible, and the organisers from Durban were told to leave.

We cannot accept that TUCSA acted in good faith. If TUCSA really wanted the Durban delegation at the conference, they would have been prepared to overlook a technical complication and

**Footnote: TUCSA stands for the Trade Union Council of South Africa. Skilled workers are able to organise themselves into legally recognised trade-unions. Some of these trade-unions have come together to form an umbrella organisation called TUCSA, to which they all belong.

admit the delegates. So why were they, the Durban delegates, told to pack their bags, while other delegates of unskilled unions from the Transvaal and elsewhere were allowed to remain? We believe that TUCSA did not want the Durban delegation to participate because they would have exposed TUCSA's two-faced attitude towards the organisation of unskilled workers. We can only understand TUCSA's attitude towards the organisation of unskilled workers once we understand the attitude of skilled to unskilled workers in S.A.

Skilled workers in S.A. have entered into an alliance with the employers. This two-sided bargain means that:

1. The skilled workers (some of which have full political rights; others have only the right to recognized industrial organisation) agree to support the employers in keeping unskilled wages down. Low wages are maintained by depriving unskilled workers of political and social rights, and more particularly, the right to organise into legally recognised unions. Organisation of unskilled workers on a wide scale would assist them greatly in fighting for higher wages. To prevent this, the employers prevent organisation.
2. The fact that unskilled wages are so low means that profits are high. Some of these profits are given to the skilled workers in return for their support. So skilled workers are well-

paid compared to unskilled workers.

This pact with the employers has by no means made the position of the skilled workers a secure one. The position of skilled workers is rather like that of a man who is trying to look in two directions at the same time: In one direction, he is looking at the employers against whom he is constantly struggling for higher wages etc. In the other direction, he is looking at the mass of unskilled workers, who threaten to undermine his position of privilege.

How do the unskilled workers threaten the skilled workers?

More and more unskilled workers are being drawn into industry, as the factories grow in size and number. The number of available skilled workers has not grown fast enough to meet the needs of these growing factories. So what the employers have done, and are doing, is to train "unskilled" workers to do skilled jobs. But the employers continue to pay these workers unskilled wages. So they are having the job done much more cheaply than if they had employed skilled workers. The skilled workers are scared that this is going to happen more and more, and that their jobs and high wages are going to fall away. As this process has gone on, so the attitude of skilled workers to the organisation of unskilled workers has changed. Whereas in earlier days, they supported the employers in preventing unskilled workers from organising, they now want to assist the unskilled workers to or-

ganise themselves. But why? How does this now help them?

The skilled workers believe that if the unskilled workers could be organised in a certain way, the unskilled workers would put an end to employers employing "unskilled" workers to do skilled jobs at unskilled wages. The "unskilled" would use their organisation to demand the rate for the job. So the employers would be prevented from cutting skilled rates, and the privileged position of skilled workers would be protected.

But the skilled workers - and particularly their representatives in TUCSA - are very fussy about the kind of organisation for unskilled workers they will support. We stated earlier that skilled workers benefitted from a bargain made with the employers, to keep unskilled wages low. The skilled workers don't want unskilled worker organisation that start demanding very high wages. This would "rock the boat". Employers would only be prepared to pay more to unskilled workers if they could cut skilled wages. Skilled workers don't want any organisation of unskilled workers that will disrupt or destroy the cosy arrangement they have with employers. What this all boils down to, then, is that skilled workers want the organisation of unskilled workers on one hand, but don't want it on the other! What TUCSA has done is to support and encourage organisation of unskilled workers into unions which the skilled workers can control. TUCSA has assisted, and allowed into its

fold, unskilled unions who are prepared to go along with TUCSA - who are prepared to ask for enough to prevent skilled workers from being threatened by employers, but certainly never enough to rock the boat.

This explains why some unskilled workers nestle under the wings of TUCSA, while others are flung out into the cold. The Durban delegation represents unions which TUCSA cannot control. These unions would have brought out into the open at the TUCSA conference, the hypocritical attitude of skilled workers to un-

skilled. That is, a support for the organisation of unskilled only where and when it suits TUCSA, and not because it is a good thing in itself!

Unskilled workers must learn an important lesson from this. The skilled workers stand between them and the employers. They must not allow the skilled workers, or any group of skilled workers, to turn their eyes in the wrong direction. The unskilled workers' struggle for better conditions is waged against the employers; they must not allow skilled workers to prevent them from seeing their way clearly. And they must realise another important thing. And that is that the skilled workers are not the permanent enemies of the unskilled workers. For a time, the skilled workers have joined hands with the employers, but this cannot last, and in time to come, the skilled workers will realise the importance of organising all workers to stand together, unified and strong. This will happen in the future - unskilled workers must be sure in the meantime that their steps are

not confused by the skilled workers trying to use them to protect their own skilled position.

BUS-BOYCOTT.

The workers of Madadeni and Osizweni township near Newcastle (Natal) have refused to accept a rise in bus-fares. The bus-company wanted to raise fares to 30c from 25c. Two years ago fares were 8c. Instead of accepting this, the workers in the townships have decided to boycott the buses.

It is not surprising that workers get angry when they see prices rising all around them. Meanwhile, their wages remain low. They cannot afford to pay for higher bus-fares-anyway it is not their fault that they have to travel so far to get to work.

There are 40,000 to 50,000 workers who decided to boycott the buses in Madadeni. They are not the first workers in this country to express their anger at rising bus-prices and bad conditions. In 1943 and 1957 there were huge bus-boycotts by workers in Alexandria township near Johannesburg. In 1957 the workers refused to use the buses for three months, even though there was much intimidation by the authorities! In the end, the bus company had to lower the fares.

At the end of last year there was another boycott in the town of East London. Some fares were raised by 40c a week. The workers could not afford these prices and refused to travel on the buses. Some buses were stoned. Even though one man was shot by the police and many arrested, the workers stood united. Once again they were victorious - Mr. Sebe of the Ciskei Government was forced to buy the bus company. Sebe tried to make the workers pay the

increased fares, but they refused. The fares were brought down to the old level.

The workers of Madadeni and Osizweni have learnt the lessons of the past. Firstly, they organized very carefully. Fares were to be raised on a Monday - the workers spent the whole weekend planning to make sure that everyone knew of the boycott. When the boycott began on September 29, many workers also refused to go to work. Companies like Bester Homes, Defy Industries, Veka Clothing and Iscor were short of up to 90% of their workers. That day, all of the 160 buses travelling to Newcastle from the township were empty. A few workers tried to use the buses but their fellow workers stopped them. They knew that the workers must be 100% united. The bus-company tried to use an old trick that management uses. They offered to leave things for two weeks and hold discussions in the meanwhile. But the workers were not fooled - they knew that in two weeks the company would have tried to breed disunity, and would raise the fares again after much clever talk. Besides, the workers now said that even the old prices were too high! They were also angered when the Mayor of Madadeni, Dr. Mdalose, called for police protection. On Tuesday over 1000 workers marched through Newcastle waving sticks. The police could do nothing about it. The workers destroyed the bus-coupon office, the beer-hall and many bus-shelters. A few were arrested, but the boycott continued. On Wednesday night, workers tried to burn down buildings belonging to the Bantu Investment

Corporation, which runs the bus-company. They also took two people hostage, including the Iscor compound-manager. Police had to set the hostages free.

On Friday, the boycott was still 100% strong. At a meeting on Sunday October 3, workers rejected offers made by the bus-company and the B.I.C. They called for negotiations with a new bus-company - they were tired of the tricks of the old one. They decided to boycott the B.I.C. bosses indefinitely.

They also complained of how police were taking the side of the bus-company. In an effort to break the boycott, the police were stopping cars and taxis at roadblocks. They would then say the cars were not roadworthy, or had too many passengers. The workers were not intimidated.

At the time of writing, there is still a total boycott. Workers get up at 4a.m. to walk the 15 km. from Madadeni or 25 km. from Isizweni to work. How have they achieved this?

They planned the boycott carefully. They were prepared on the Monday when the fares were raised. This ensured total unity. Hardly anyone used the buses. The workers were so well organised and united that the police could do nothing to stop the boycott continuing. The unity of the workers of Madadeni and Osizweni townships near Newcastle had set a shining example to the workers of South Africa.