

# "AN INJURY TO ONE..."

## THOUGHTS ON TASKS FACING THE TRADE UNION ORGANISATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

— *ARNOLD SELBY*

South African colonial labour policy is based on the migrant labour system. Its intention is:

- a. To squeeze the last possible gram of surplus value from the labour of Africans;
- b. To ban a permanent, settled and stable African working class;
- c. To keep the African toilers in a permanent state of dispossession and enslavement;
- d. To prevent African unionisation; and
- e. Prevent African workers from being united with workers of other races.

All laws aimed at the control and movement of African labour are based on the migrant labour system. It is out of question to think that Africans can win a measure of social justice within the migrant labour system or through struggle at the point of production outside the framework of the broad fight for national and social liberation. The task of strengthening the non-racial revolutionary trade union movement is one of the main tasks facing the struggle for national and social liberation in South Africa.

By their very nature African unions cannot survive and be effective without being political. From the very day of its birth an African union comes into conflict with the migrant labour system and thus into a direct confrontation with the violence of the aggressor apartheid state.

It is the migrant labour system which forces Africans into a position where they have to form unregistered unions apart from their fellow workers of other races. So the demands of the African workers are not simply worker's demands but are also demands put forward by Africans for national rights as well as worker's rights. So at the point of production they carry out both a class and a national battle.

However, the demands of the African workers are not, and have never been, demands for separatism. These demands are in effect demands for all workers to have full and equal trade union and political rights. The basic content of these demands is for workers' unity as is reflected in the slogan of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) - "AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL".

### SACTU'S TASKS

The independent and class character of revolutionary trade unions in the South African liberation struggle is expressed in the preamble of SACTU's constitution:

"The future of the people of South Africa is in the hands of the workers. Only the working class in

alliance with other progressive-minded sections of the community can build a happy life for all South Africans free from unemployment, insecurity, poverty, racial hatred and oppression, a life of vast opportunities for all the working people".

From the very day of its founding, March 1955, SACTU became a component of the national and social struggle, headed by the African National Congress. In the liberation front SACTU as the mass social organisation of the workers is committed to all aspects of the liberation struggle without reservation.

This means that at the point of production SACTU is also committed to strengthen and support Umkhonto we Sizwe in promoting the armed struggle for the seizure of power by the people and for the complete destruction of the colonialist aggressor state.

At the point of production revolutionary trade unions do not only hold anti-apartheid and anti-imperialist basic attitudes but at the same time take an anti-capitalist position. The ideological and practical preparations are acquired for promoting the struggle both on day to day issues and on long-term aims.

*It must be borne in mind that at the point of production not every worker is a member of the national movements. But every worker can be recruited to, drawn into or come under the influence and direction of the trade union force. It is at the point of production that the revolutionary*

trade unions have the task of mobilising the working people. It is through practical activity that SACTU at the place of work strengthens the links of the national movements with the working class. Trade union organisation, therefore, is the very life-blood of the most advanced strata of the population which has everything to gain in bringing about the victory of the national democratic revolution and taking it through the transition stage to socialism.

In the booklet "ANC Speaks" a SACTU representative writes:

"SACTU will play its part in uniting the working people for this struggle. The many SACTU cadres now in jail and the many others found in the forces of MK are proof that our members are not lagging behind in the liberation struggle."

Here too, under the guidance of and in close co-ordination with the ANC, the task of SACTU is the choice and recruiting of suitable cadres for Umkhonto we Sizwe from the point of production, taking into consideration the industrial situation and leadership requirements at the different concerns. It is at the place of work that SACTU also recruits activists for the national movements.

It is at the place of work that the toilers can be linked to this struggle in a number of ways:

- The carrying out of agitational and organisational work; explaining the fight for the winning of workers' social and political rights as set



- out in the Freedom Charter;
- Lightning strikes for immediate demands;
  - Strikes for political demands, in support of the armed fight and in co-ordination with armed actions;
  - Passing on information to the ANC about the manufacture of arms and other military equipment or any other information useful to the liberation struggle;
  - Sabotage of military and economic infrastructures which can be used against the people's liberation struggle;
  - Organisation of the unemployed along the lines of mass unemployed unions in urban and rural areas with particular emphasis among the unemployed deported to the Bantustans and
  - All activists at the point of production and among the unemployed must be carried out in close co-ordination with and under the direction of the ANC.

In carrying out the above tasks it must be borne in mind that the workers are constantly confronted by the military and militarised police of the colonialist-racist state. A long history of strikes drowned in blood testifies to this.

### PROBLEMS

Generally speaking the above tasks are carried out in conditions of underground struggle. John Gaetsewe, General-Secretary of SACTU, emphasises this in an article published by

the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, June 1977: "...in the long term meaningful advances can only be made on an underground basis".

All known SACTU activists have been put out of action by bannings, banishments, exile, detention, imprisonment and murder. Thus at the point of production the activists have to carry out their work in such a way that they do not expose themselves. Conditions have to be created whereby workers at the point of production can prevent the activists from being put out of action and when casualties do arise to ensure continuity of leadership.

The migrant labour system makes trade union organisation very difficult. It is the cause of a continuous high labour turnover, a rootless army of unemployed and a large mass of land starved worker-peasants.

The migrant labour system places emphasis on dirt-cheap labour than on skills. In individual large enterprises workers are fired and hired daily by the score. During his working life an African goes through a number of enterprises and periods of unemployment. He acquires a knowledge of a vastly differing occupations. The case of an African being employed at one concern, say for 5 years, is exceptional.

At one enterprise an African may be a trade union member. After being thrown out there he may find that there is no trade union organisation at the next firm where he works. So he falls away until such time that he lands in another enterprise where

there is a trade union functioning.

A further difficulty is that unemployed workers after a certain period are deported to the countryside. Ever larger numbers are now being deported to the Bantustans. Overnight urban workers are turned into direct migrant-labourers, placed in peasant environment without land and no opportunities of employment there. He is faced with contract labour, when it is available, or starvation.

These difficulties account for the present low level of trade union organisation. In the "African Communist" No. 78 1979, L.E. points out that less than 2% of the African working class is organised and comments that this is one of the major weaknesses in the South African national and social liberation struggle.

### WHEREVER THERE ARE WORKERS THERE MUST BE SACTU

#### URBAN AREAS:

In the enterprises SACTU' activists

must not only be good revolutionaries but at the same time outstanding workers. Even though employers under the migrant labour system look more to a low wage sheet, than to efficiency, they are nevertheless reluctant to sack outstanding workers. Being a good worker gives a SACTU activist a chance of a longer working life in an enterprise.

Organising and mobilising at the point of production also means the training of workers themselves to take over political and trade union leadership. So when a worker is fired at one place he will, as a matter of course, continue political and trade union activity at the next. Get every worker into SACTU, make every worker a leader - is a good organising slogan.

#### RURAL AREAS:

Agricultural workers on big farms and estates could be classified as:

(a) Migrant labourers;

# MK



# SOLDIER

## Mass Action and Armed Struggle

EXTRACTS FROM A DISCUSSION PAPER PRESENTED BY *LUMKILE MBHELE*

Our strategic goal is the armed seizure of power. The logical question which flows from this statement is, what do we mean by that. What do we envisage when we talk of

armed seizure of power?

When we talk of armed seizure of power we visualize a situation where we will wage a protracted revolutionary armed struggle till the overthrow