

# WORKING

# CLASSES

white Afrikaners came to the towns to seek work. Many of these people worked for the government, on the railways, or in State-owned industries like Iscor. They owed their jobs to the government. These workers never had the strong bargaining position of the craft workers. Therefore they adopted the racist strategy of the MWU. The government's 'civilised labour' policy gave them jobs in preference to black workers. These racist unions — like Spoorbond on the railways and Yster en Staal in the steel industry — were not politically independent and relied on State favours. As a result they played only a small role in the TLC. They left the TLC when they fell under the control of the Nationalists.

## The Workers Charter 1944

- The right of all people to guaranteed full employment under decent conditions.
- The right of all people to live in well built houses, to have good food, sufficient clothing and adequate medical attention.
- The right of all people to leisure, with adequate recreational and cultural amenities.
- The right of all people to free primary, secondary, technical and university education.
- The right of all people to freedom of association, freedom of speech and assembly and movement, and freedom of worship.
- The right of all people to security from loss of income through old age, unemployment, and incapacity to work.

### The industrial unions

However, not all unskilled white workers belonged

to racist unions. We saw in part twelve that some of these workers joined more radical industrial unions, like the Garment Workers Union. These workers worked for bad employers who paid low wages. They had to organise a union of all the workers and struggle to improve their conditions. So for many years, unions like the GWU, the leatherworkers, distributive workers etc were militant and supported progressive policies. It was the registered industrial unions which formed the backbone of the TLC and held it to a non-racial line for 20 years.

By the late 1940's the unity of the TLC was breaking apart. In 1947 and 1948 the racist unions left the TLC to form the Coordinating Council. Bill Andrews said: 'the departure of the most reactionary white unions is no loss. Indeed an all-out attack against the trade union right is necessary to create an organisation of trade unions who really intend and are able to conduct the coming struggle against the nazification of South Africa.'

By 1950 most of the craft unions had also left the TLC. Many of their members were now supervisors. The craft unions became racist and demanded that African unions be expelled from the TLC. Also, in the late 1940's the craft unions became increasingly anti-communist. At this time the international trade union movement split, with the pro-Western ICFTU breaking away from the WFTU. So when the Nationalist government introduced the Sup-

pression of Communism Bill the craft unions refused to defend fellow trade unionists, like Solly Sachs. Independent African unions and the registered industrial unions were faced with direct State repression. By 1956 some 56 trade unionists were banned.

The registered unions were greatly weakened by bannings. But they also had internal weaknesses. Many of their white members were also becoming supervisors, making them lose their militancy. Also the leadership made too many compromises with the more backward white workers. Even the GWU had separate branches for black and white workers. Also the leaders were only militant over economic issues, like wages and working conditions. They did not campaign for full political rights for black members. In the face of political pressure from the State and internal divisions, most registered industrial unions lost their militancy. They compromised with the racist craft unions and formed TUCSA in 1954. Solly Sachs, the banned leader of the Garment Workers Union, wrote from exile: 'if the conservative elements are prepared to fight the Nationalists even if only on immediate trade union issues, one National Trade Union Centre should be established, but always remember that unity of numbers without an urge to fight is useless and might even be dangerous.'

However, non-racial trade unionism did not die with the TLC. It was carried on by SACTU during the 1950's, and has been reborn in the democratic trade unions of today.



## The secret of profit uncovered

**A**LTHOUGH the peasants and city workers had really won the revolutions that occurred throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they soon found out that the new democracy was not meant to include them. They had no vote.

The landlords realised that it would be in their interests to support the capitalists. This was not only because the peasants were rebelling, but it would also increase their own power if there were no kings or queens. So the landlords and the capitalists became the new rulers with the parliaments firmly in their hands. Now there were no obstacles to using the armies and navies to defeat the rulers of other lands. Control of world trade quickly fell into the hands of the European capitalists.

### Wage labour begins

But even this was not enough. The search for profit still continued. Capitalists began to ask themselves why couldn't they also control the production of some of the things that they traded? Couldn't they begin to make silk material?

But here another problem presented itself. If they were going to make lots of things then they needed factories and workers. Building factories was not such a problem, but where were they going to get the workers? True, there were some workers in the larger cities, but they were mostly skilled craftsmen, and in any case they were working for someone else. The capitalists needed new workers and lots of them.

The only place where there

were a lot of people was on the land. But these people had worked and lived on the land for centuries. Why would they move to work for someone else in a factory?

If things were going to be produced, then people would have to be moved off the land. Here the capitalists' control of the government became very important. By using force, the law, and trickery, people were moved off the land. This was not at all easy because people fought back.

But they lost the struggle. Slowly the land was taken away from them and it became the private property of the landlord capitalists.

Without land there is no food. Without food there is no life. The only way to get food then, was to buy it. But

the only way to get money was to work for somebody. The only people who had the money and factories to provide work were the capitalists. So people had no choice. The peasants, without any land, turned to the factories to become wage labourers. Work meant wages, wages meant money and money meant food, shelter and life itself.

### The secret of profit uncovered

But as the capitalists employed wage labourers so they unlocked the door to great new sources of profit. This lay in the human energy of people. Human beings have a great ability. With their hands and their minds and working together with others, they can produce more than they need to keep themselves alive. This is why we said peasants were able

to produce a surplus over and above their needs.

This surplus and this ability was not new. But the capitalists had captured it themselves. Workers had no choice but to work for the capitalist because the land and the factories had become the private property of the capitalists. In exchange for his work, the capitalists paid the worker a wage to keep that person alive. But in a day's work the worker could produce more than was needed to keep one individual alive. The surplus had been captured and was now owned by the capitalist. The surplus had become the profit of the capitalist.

Next issue: The capitalists realise that if they introduce wage labour in the lands they traded with (like Southern Africa) then they could make bigger profits.