

Comment

CONTRARY to what the present government believes, it will not be able to forcefully suppress the growing discontent in the country's townships forever. Nor can it afford to ignore the justified demands being made by workers and students. How long will it take the government to realise that detaining worker and progressive leaders is not a viable solution? Oppression may dampen the flames but it will not put out the fire. Workers will not give up their struggle for freedom from economic exploitation and social poverty.

And will big business continue to sit idly on the sidelines — hiding behind the weak excuse of 'we are not political'? They say they deplore the repressive actions of the government but it is clear that they have benefited from these oppressive policies. South Africa has become an industrial giant at the expense of the welfare of its workers. The townships were built to provide 'dormitories' for the millions of workers that big business desperately needed. But in order to keep the profits high, as little as possible was spent on providing workers with decent living conditions. And because only a basic education was needed to operate the machines in the factories, little money was spent on schools, technical colleges and universities for the country's blacks.

Conditions in the townships have often in the past become so intolerable that workers and students have taken to the streets to protest. But like at Sharpeville in 1960 and in Soweto in 1976, the government's only response is to use armed force to suppress all attempts to raise natural grievances. Once again in 1984, workers and their student children have demonstrated their discontent by staging a two-day stay-away. High unemployment, increased food costs, bus fare and rent hikes, inadequate housing, low wages, poor education, have all combined to rouse their anger. But once again it is met by the repressive fist of the government. The townships are virtually occupied by the police and the army — worker and progressive leaders are detained.

It is time that the government and big business began to consider real solutions to the problems they have created. Is it unfair for workers to demand to live in reasonable conditions? Is it unfair for workers to demand the right to work and receive a living wage? Is it unfair for workers' children to demand a decent education? FOSATU says, NO IT IS NOT UNFAIR. These are basic human rights. FOSATU will not surrender until these have been achieved.



Township residents barricade the streets to keep the hippos away

Army doesn't stay-away

FROM PAGE ONE

These were the same councillors who were voted in by less than 9 percent of the township residents as the rest boycotted the elections.

Towards the beginning of September workers stayed away from work.

Angry residents burnt councillors' shops and houses, beer halls and government offices in Sharpeville, Evaton and Sebokeng.

The only response that the government could come up with was armed force.

On October 23, the residents of Sebokeng woke up to face 7 000 gun barrels. The army had moved in.

Police went from door-to-door and arrested hundreds of people for petty

offences.

Carrying machine-guns, the army handed out pamphlets and stickers at road-blocks which said 'Trust me. I am your friend'.

Is it surprising that few township residents believed them?

Soon, the unrest spread to other townships in the Transvaal.

The police backed by the army increased its presence in the townships until a state of virtual civil war existed.

In KwaThema on October 22, workers stayed away from work and sent a telex to the Minister of Law and Order and the Minister of Education.

The telex demanded that the army and the police be

removed from the townships, the release of detainees, the stopping of harassment of students and that the students' demands be met.

As the situation worsened FOSATU set up a special sub-committee to monitor the developments in the townships.

When the stay-away was suggested, FOSATU had no hesitation in backing it — having been fully informed of the crisis that was rapidly developing in the townships.

The massive support for the stay-away clearly shows the extent of the very real frustration of FOSATU members — a frustration, to which the government's only response was to detain worker leaders.



Train platforms usually packed with workers — silent on the morning of the stay-away

Deadline for detainees release

FOSATU has set a December 1 deadline for the first stage of its campaign to win the release of the detained union leaders.

The federation has begun to mobilise worker members and will be taking up the detentions with employers at all levels.

However, if no response is forthcoming by the beginning of December, then FOSATU

will move on to the next stage of the campaign which will involve specific forms of international solidarity.

The campaign was planned at the recent meeting of FOSATU's National Executive held on November 18.

The federation believes that the detentions are part of a

crackdown on all forms of democratic organisation in South Africa.

It also believes that new forms of political protest are needed to combat the crackdown on the unions.

It is clear that FOSATU's members are prepared to take further action if necessary.

'Detentions a direct attack on trade unions'

The special FOSATU Central Committee meeting wishes to state clearly why FOSATU members participated in the stay-away. We believe that this is necessary because there has been too much focus on reports of violence and too little on the issues involved.

Our reasons for supporting the stay-away were:

- * We wanted a clear announcement removing the age limit in the schools.
- * We wanted democratically constituted Student Representative Councils in the schools.
- * We wanted the army removed from the townships and a stop to police harassment of residents.
- * We wanted a suspension of rent and bus fare increases.

These factors directly affected our members as workers and parents and we took the action because of this.

We therefore totally condemn the detention of FOSATU office bearers and officials who carried out FOSATU instructions. We call for the immediate release of Chris Dlamini, Moses Mayekiso, Bangilizwe Solo, Jethro Dlalisa and for the release of all persons detained under Security Legislation.

FOSATU is not prepared to stand by and watch its leadership being detained.

Detailed and far ranging decisions were taken by the special Central Committee to protect FOSATU and to ensure the release of those detained. These will be reported back to all regions and affiliates for their approval and implementation.

FOSATU sees this as a direct attack on unions and will be contacting other unions to support it in its actions.

The proposal made by the Transvaal Region for a 'Black Christmas' will be referred back to all regions and affiliates of FOSATU for consideration as a national campaign.

The Central Committee committed itself to the full support of CWIU and the Sasol workers.

(Statement released after a special Central Committee Meeting held in the Transvaal on November 10)