

THE WORKERS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

Trade Unions cannot look after the interests of their members without at the same time favouring policies which will solve the general problem of unemployment. In South Africa this problem is associated with the economic underdevelopment of the rural 'homelands', from where many workers come as migrants to the industrial areas. Everybody knows that migrant labour is a Bad Thing. But it is not enough merely to condemn the effects which it has on the lives of the migrants. It is necessary also to understand its role in the economy, and its relation to the problem of employment and rural development. What are the economic and social forces underlying the system of migrant labour? To what extent is the South African economy organised around the migrant labour system? What is the nature of the economic and social relations between the rural homeland areas and the industrial core? What strategies are available to homeland leaders in order to improve the employment situation in the homelands? It is vital for trade unionists to attempt to answer these questions. Any policy which increases employment in the homelands improves the bargaining position of the urban workers.

In this issue we print four articles which deal with various aspects of the problem. Francis Wilson shows to what extent migrancy has become a world-wide phenomenon. But he also shows how differently the problems which arise from it are dealt with outside South Africa. This is born out by the 'Migrant Workers' Charter' drawn up by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which we reprint. John Rex offers an interpretation of migrant labour in South Africa which differs on many points from that suggested by Wilson. A pseudonymous economist at present working in Lesotho gives a more specific account of the problems of underdevelopment and migrancy as they affect Lesotho. Alec Erwin suggests some strategies which might be adopted by the peripheral homeland areas to achieve a better bargaining position. None of these articles pretends to offer the last word on a subject which is under-researched and still, in spite of the confidence with which people offer solutions, little understood. But there is one thing which all four articles illustrate with great clarity. It is the extent to which the problems of the rural peasants and the urban workers have a common root, and can only be solved by close co-operation between the two groups.

---

LESSONS THAT REFUSE TO BE LEARNT.

Strikes by african workers are continuing throughout South Africa. Elsewhere in this number we describe seven strikes which have occurred in Durban in the last month. There have also been more

than a dozen strikes on the Witwatersrand, and a wave of strikes in East London.

There are three very clear lessons to be learnt from the seven strikes in Durban;

1. In most cases the strikes were associated with a previous pay rise. In several cases the rises had been preceded by rumours to the effect that there would be large increases. In none of the cases were the workers actually consulted about the rises. They were simply presented with the management's decision. The lesson is that such unilateral decision-making is use-less. Unless workers are involved in consultation and negotiation over wage increases, the vicious circle of rumour, disappointment and strike cannot be broken.

2. In all those cases where there existed a works committee or a liaison committee it played no constructive role. In one case, the alleged victimisation of a liaison committee spokesman was the main cause of the strike. These committees are not functioning properly. Indeed, they cannot function properly since they are virtually dependent on management goodwill, and do not have the confidence of the workers.

3. In a number of cases the workers felt it necessary to call in or consult an outside body, such as the Kwazulu government or the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund. It is evident that the workers feel that they need support from outside the factory, and that they have more confidence in the Kwazulu government or the Benefit Fund than they do in either management or liaison committees. Workers need a spokesman who is outside the control of management. They need a spokesman who has the resources needed for meaningful wage negotiations with employers. They need a spokesman who is responsible to them and whom they can instruct and in whom they will have full confidence. These three criteria can only be fully satisfied by a trade union.

Chief Buthelezi has once more repeated his call for full trade union rights for african workers, saying, "The economy cannot stand battering from strikes every other day of the week. We realise that this does not do anyone any good". Management can only bring some order into the present chaotic situation by recognising trade unions. This is the lesson of the present strikes. It is also the lesson of the bloody history of white worker organisations before the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924. And it is the lesson of every other advanced industrial society. Some people seem to be slow learners.

---