

COMMENT.

1. CLARIFICATION: TRADE UNIONS AND KWAZULU POLITICS.

The IIE is an educational institute which does not take up party political positions. We invited Chief Buthelezi to become Chancellor of the IIE because we believe that he is the outstanding national leader of the Zulu people, of the African people, and of all South Africa's peoples. But as an organisation we do not wish to become involved in KwaZulu politics. Nevertheless, we feel that the Labour Bulletin should at least comment on and attempt to clarify the present confused situation with regard to the trade unions and KwaZulu politics.

There are three quite distinct issues involved:

1) The policy differences between Chief Buthelezi and one of his Ministers, Mr Dladla. There clearly is a sharp policy difference between the two. Unfortunately, what the nature of the difference is, is not at all clear. Journalists would really be performing a service if they would set out clearly what these policy differences are, instead of merely hinting obliquely at them. Unfortunately, the newspapers seem to be more interested in the dramatic headlines provided by personality clashes than in a sober analysis of policy differences. However, as far as we can gather, the differences between the two leaders have little to do with trade unions or with the immediate problems of workers. As far as we can gather, these differences are concerned with problems such as the nature of the relationship between african entrepreneurs and the Bantu Investment Corporation, and with the issue of land tenure and rural development. These are issues on which the trade unions have no opinions as yet. In regard to Mr Dladla's interventions on behalf of the workers, the trade unions have always understood Mr Dladla to be acting as the agent of Chief Buthelezi, as has been stated by both men, and as was confirmed by the recent joint statement of the KwaZulu cabinet and the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) which we print below.

2) The suggestion that some people intended to start a Labour Party in opposition to Chief Buthelezi, and that Mr Dladla is to lead this party. We do not know if anybody is planning to start such a party, but we have seen no evidence that they are. We do not know if Mr Dladla is planning to become involved in such a party, but so far we have seen no evidence that he is. Also, we can only agree that such an eventuality would be a tragedy for South Africa, and could do nothing other than to weaken the positions of both men in their struggle for African rights, and therefore also in their struggle for the rights of the workers.

3) The third issue is the allegation that the open trade unions in Natal, or people associated with them, are involved in a campaign against Chief Buthelezi. Here we can state unequivocally that no workers' organisation associated with TUACC has ever adopted such a strategy. Trade unionists, like other people, although

usually to a lesser extent than other people, also have their spare time, and of course we cannot guarantee that no trade unionist in Natal is privately involved in such political manoeuvres. But we have seen no evidence that any are. And even if any are so involved, it would be irresponsible to suggest that this means that they are acting as representatives of the trade unions in such involvement.

It is sad, then, that journalists should write lengthy articles, bereft of any evidence other than references to 'sources', making very serious allegations about trade union involvement. It is doubly sad to see a man of the status and background of Laurence Gandar writing what can only be characterised as a smear article; an article in which he suggests, but never proves, that there are radical (white) elements around the trade unions who see Mr. Dladla as a 'black power strongman', and that Tucsa is justifiably 'unhappy about some aspects of what is going on here'. Here Gandar is conflating a number of totally different issues to produce 'evidence' for a plot in a manner which would put a cabinet minister to shame. The accusation about 'Black Power' is particularly bizarre. There is a workers' organisation in Durban which is in some sense associated with 'Black Power', or, to be more precise, with 'black consciousness.' This is the Black Allied Workers' Union. But BAWU at present has nothing to do with the TUACC unions because these unions co-operate with Tucsa unions and with whites. So to suggest that the TUACC unions are in some way associated with a Black Power move shows a fair degree of ignorance.

Of course we cannot discount the possibility that there is some organised campaign against Chief Buthelezi involving the trade unions. If these journalists really do have evidence, then it is about time that they revealed it. The trade unions have no desire to be manipulated by politicians. But if they are relying for their evidence on rumours, then they should ask themselves two questions. The first question is: what possible reason would the unions have for being opposed to Chief Buthelezi? He has fully supported the unions, and the unions know that Chief Buthelezi is their most important source of moral support, and their greatest protection against government intervention. Even if it were thought that Mr. Dladla would be even more firm in his support of the trade unions, it is obvious that the hope of making that marginal gain cannot be worth the risk of attacking a leader who has the wide support not only amongst workers but also amongst all other sections of the Zulu community. Any union official who used his position to canvass against Chief Buthelezi would be certain to cause a split in his/her union. The unions have an interest in preserving the unity of the Zulu people and the power and influence of Chief Buthelezi.

The second question is: if the unions have no interest in the weakening of Chief Buthelezi, and in the rift between the Kwazulu cabinet and the unions, who does have an interest. Who has an interest in

starting and circulating rumours which could be the source of such a rift? The whole story of Shaka's Spear should surely provide an answer to that question.

## 2. DEATHS ON THE GOLD MINES.

In the last nine months 48 african miners have been violently killed. Nineteen died as result of pay disputes, and the other 29 died in 'faction fights'. These figures are horrifying. In any normal country such events would have lead to the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the nature of an industry which produces such violence. But South Africa is not an ordinary country; nor is Gold Mining an ordinary industry. So it is left to the public to try to make sense of this phenomenon by piecing together what bits of information there are.

The most significant bit of information is that miners are paid far less than industrial workers, while mining houses are making enormous profits. The most serious disturbance was at Western Deep, where 12 miners were killed. Western Deep is owned by the progressive Anglo-American company. Recent figures show that Anglo in one year had an african wage bill of R40 million - and distributed dividends of R235 million. African wages could have been compensated for by decreased company taxation.

Harmony mine, where 4 miners were killed, had, in the year 1972-73 an african wage bill of R7.7 million. Its working profit for the year was R50 million. Figures of this order could be duplicated in any number of the other mines. The vast profits are mainly the result of the rocketing price of gold. But, as Wilson shows in his book 'Labour in the South African Gold Mines', dividends were about twice as high as the total african wage bill throughout most of the 1960s. And the gold price has been high for some time now.

Many of the shareholders live outside Southern Africa and cash remitted to them is lost to the South African economy. If cash was distributed in wages rather than in dividends it would boost demand for a whole range of South African manufactured goods and foodstuffs throughout those areas in Southern Africa from which the miners come.

But wages are not the whole problem. The mining houses are, with varying amounts of enthusiasm, beginning to raise wages. Indeed, in all four mines in which deaths resulted from wage disputes, these were associated with previous wage rises. In all cases companies concerned explained that misunderstandings had arisen, and these misunderstandings had lead to ill-feeling and violence. But how can misunderstandings of this nature arise in such closely managed and disciplined institutions as mining compounds? A clue to the obvious conclusion is given by the

fact reported by a spokesman from one mine, that the first thing which the miners did was to burn down the cottages of the indunas, 'the first symbol of authority that they came across'. There is no trust, no communication, no negotiation between management and workers. Everything, even wage increases, comes from the top.

A mining compound is what the social psychologist Erving Goffman has called a 'total institution', in which large numbers of people are permanently together, subject in all their activities to a plan drawn up and imposed upon them without their participation. In such a total institution the kinds of tensions between inmates, which in the compounds break out into faction fights, are endemic. The faction fights and the rifts in connection with pay increases are almost certainly both the result of the pattern of tension, antagonism and distrust which is typical of any total institution.

Just as the diagnosis is obvious, so is the remedy. There will only be relative peace on the mines when the workers themselves have a measure of control over their lives. This can only be achieved through a workers organisation which can consult the workers and negotiate for them; which will be trusted when it gives them information; and which can take over the running of the compounds and the facilities available to the workers. No individuals who are not responsible to and chosen by the workers will be able to mediate between workers and management- hence the fate of the indunas' houses. No facilities made available to the workers will serve to decrease tensions unless the workers have some real control over them. Consultation is not enough. There must also be real participation, which involves some devolution of power from management to workers.

The major argument which has been repeatedly advanced over the last 70 years against a trade union for african miners is that such an organisation is not practicable for migrant workers. This argument can be proved false both in theory and from the practice. Although virtually all the miners are in fact migrants who come to work on one year or 18 month contracts, most also return frequently to the mines. Wilson suggests that the total service of an african miner is somewhat less than half the 14 year average of the white miner. But even 6 or 7 years is an appreciable period of time. In any intake of miners there will always be older and more experienced men who also have the leadership potential to become workers' representatives within the trade union.

This is born out by the success with which the African Mine Workers' Union was able to organise between 1941 and 1946, in spite of the fact that it was refused access to the compounds and that the Mines refused to recognise it in any way. During its whole existence it only received one reply from the Chamber of Mines, a printed 'the matter is receiving attention' card which, it later turned out, had been sent in error by a junior clerk.

By 1946 the union was sufficiently well organised to have a conference of over 2000 delegates, and to organise a strike of 74, 000 miners, which was only broken by extremely harsh repression by the combined action of the United Party government and the Chamber of Mines.

The Chamber claimed: "A trade union organisation would be outside the comprehension of all but a few educated Natives of the urban type; it would not only be useless, but detrimental to the ordinary mine Native in his present stage of development." This kind of ignorant racialism perhaps shows only that the many Africans who joined the AMWU had a rather broader comprehension of workers problems than that possessed by the half-educated spokesmen of the Chamber of Mines.

Today, 30 years later, one must hope that the policy makers of the mining houses are better educated. It is even widely believed that one of the largest of these organisations has close links with a political party which favours greater democracy and a devolution of power in South Africa. If this is the case then they do not need to wait for a change of government; they can begin straight away by agreeing to recognise an African Miners' Union. In such a key industry an effective workers' organisation, negotiating conditions of work, and democratically controlling the workers' living quarters and facilities, would be an important training ground for black leadership, and a shining example of the possibilities of progressive policies.

But if the mining houses do not act in this way, and continue to claim that they cannot understand this violence, then the government must appoint an open Commission of Inquiry. According to a press report, the Minister of Police, Mr. Kruger, "said he was concerned about the situation. The mines were near residential areas and the trouble could spread." (Sunday Times, June 16th.) The implication of this statement seems to be the following; "We do not care how many people die on the mines because of conditions there. That is no business of the State, but only of the mines themselves; but of course if the trouble affects (white) residential areas, then it is a different matter." But the miners are not the property of the mines, that they can treat as they will. They are South African citizens, and the government has a responsibility for their lives, and for their deaths. The government cannot wait for such trouble to spread. It must investigate the underlying causes of the deaths which have occurred, and then it must take the one necessary step which can solve the problem; it must legally recognise african trade unions.

THE STATEMENT MADE BY T.U.A.C.C. AND THE KWAZULU CABINET.

The meeting between the KwaZulu Cabinet and the representatives of the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council came about because the latter were concerned about the press reports, and the mention of african workers in the alleged disputes within the KwaZulu Government. They were also concerned about the document or letter that caused the dispute, and about the authors who claimed to be speaking on behalf of workers.

The Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council representatives wish to object strongly to Mr. Ndlangamandla's claims (that is, the supposed writer of the document) that he represents the interests of workers. The views he expressed were his personal views which are not representative of the workers' views. We object to his overt attempts to set one member of the KwaZulu Government against the others.

We further want to make clear that when the Executive Counciller for Community Affairs, Mr. Dladla, interceded in all disputes involving african workers, he did so at the request of workers and the Trade Unions concerned, and with the knowledge of the KwaZulu Government.

We also discussed and clarified the point about Mr. Ngobese's role in any future disputes. We understood that Mr. Ngobese would, from now onwards, liaise more with workers and trade unions, and report to the KwaZulu Cabinet through Mr. Dladla, under whose department these matters fall.