

Yes we CAN feed all those starving children

It just needs some REAL changes

IN THE last few decades, a number of myths about population size or what is otherwise referred to as the population explosion, have developed and become generally accepted:

- Third World countries are poor because they have high birth rates.
- A reduction in the population growth rate is the answer to Third World development.
- Third World people have big families because they don't know better.
- There will soon be more people in the world than can be fed.
- Since the Third World holds the largest population, it is the Third World population that is using up the largest proportion of the world's resources.

How are these myths used in South Africa?

To quote the HSRC "Without a reduction in the present rate of growth in population numbers, we have little, if any, hope of success in directing the material living conditions of the population along the right channels."

This view blames the poverty of the average South African on the size of its families. Looking at South Africa's history we find the real causes. Economic processes set in motion with colonialism removed people's rights to the land on which they lived and worked to produce food for their own livelihoods — it systematically excluded African producers from the markets on which they were dependent for selling their products — it forced men off their land because they were needed to labour in the mines, and later in other industries.

This undermined the ability of these people to continue their food production, while they provided the labour that produced the gold on which our country's wealth rests — wealth which went to the colonial-



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ists and not to the workers themselves.

A history of incredible industrial growth and prosperity for those who took control, and of steadily increasing suffering in terms of health, family life, and general social welfare for the majority. This is the process of poverty.

In 1972, Black mothers in rural South Africa had an average of 6.5 children. White mothers in the O.F.S. had an average of 6.2 children. Of the 6.5 Black children just over half survived. Of the 6.2 white children, 6 survived.

It is not the number of children in a community that determines its infant mortality rate. Rather, it is the position of the community in that society that determines this.

Some are protected by our country's politico-economic structure, and those without political or economic rights are also deprived of the right to health, and in this case, of the right to life.

For the average middle class South African family today, it is common to consider the costs of rearing a child before deciding how many to have. These costs include everything from nappies to dentists to holidays to university. And there are no necessary returns.

The grown child, an expensive product, then leaves and goes off to start the process again. But for many people in South Africa, this logic does not hold. For them, another child means only another mouth to feed in terms of costs, and this is really a marginal difference in relation to the expected returns.

As soon as that child can walk, she or he will contribute to the family, be it in assisting in the housework, or in herding cows.

In an urban setting, the child may sell newspapers or do odd jobs to bring back some income to the family. By taking over housework, children allow their parents to leave the house in search of paid work, the more adults able to find jobs, the more chance of eating.

But even more importantly, we live in a country where pensions, sick pay, and social security benefits in general are hard if not impossible to come by. In this situation, old people rely totally on their children to support them in their old age. Thus it is a rational choice for the black working class to have many children. Only when our social and economic structures are different will this change.

Social research on this subject shows that when people's standard



'Of 6.5 children just over half survived.'

THE RECENT announcement by Colgate Palmolive and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union that they had agreed to a settlement of the dispute for Union recognition represents a major victory for the workers' struggle in South Africa.

After a 16 month battle, management has been forced to concede the principle of in-plant negotiations over wages and working conditions. It has dropped its demand that the Union enter the Industrial Council, an idea central not only to its own strategy for restricting workers' rights, but also to the programme of organised capital and the state.

The Colgate dispute represented a test case: the centrepiece of the new state/management industrial relations strategy had been directly challenged and overturned.

As one worker representative insisted at a FOSATU shop stewards council in the midst of the dispute, "If Colgate workers win, we all win. If they lose, we all lose".

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union, backed by FOSATU, developed a two-pronged strategy against the Colgate management. Firstly, a Conciliation Board was appointed which allowed for the

Colgate workers win recognition after legal strike action

calling of a legal strike 30 days after negotiations had become deadlocked. Secondly, and immediately after deadlock had been reached, a boycott of Colgate products was called by FOSATU. Management was now faced with a near certain strike and a growing consumer boycott.

In addition, FOSATU used its links with the international trade union movement to apply secondary pressure on Colgate overseas. At the time of Colgate's capitulation to its workers, efforts were underway in Britain, United States and Spain to bring pressure to bear on Colgate in those countries.

But, the main struggle was in South Africa itself. Here the 30 day "cooling off" period insisted upon

by the law was used to build up solidarity both inside and outside the factory. Lunchtime meetings were held by Colgate workers in the factory canteen in open breach of factory rules, where songs and slogans were devised. Meetings with other FOSATU unions were arranged, a strike levy was proposed, and a strike ballot was held at which only four of the eligible workers voted "no".

At the same time, the boycott of Colgate products got underway and began to bite in the two weeks before the planned strike. Pamphlets and stickers were circulated and plastered over many commercial and industrial areas. Colgate workers addressed meetings during Republic Day "celebrations" and

on June 16th. Nurses', taxi drivers', shopkeepers' and civic associations were approached to pledge their support. Many did: shopkeepers in some areas began removing Colgate products from their shelves, and workers advised Colgate salesmen to stay away from their area until a settlement had been reached.

Most effective of all, were the activities of other FOSATU affiliates. Shop Steward councils met in FOSATU 'locals' all over South Africa to affirm their solidarity with the Colgate workers struggle. Workers in the 6000 strong Volkswagen factory at Uitenhage, in the 2000 strong Salcast factory in Benoni, in the 1500 strong Alusaf factory in Richards Bay, and in many other plants, stuck Colgate boycott

stickers to their overalls as they reported to work. Trucks and buses driven by Transport and General Workers Union members were covered with pamphlets and stickers.

Management objected, but the workers would not budge, and particularly in the East Rand, employers became increasingly apprehensive of a general sympathy strike.

Colgate is alleged to have responded by giving out free samples of products in the township and embarking on a massive advertising campaign. This had limited effect: workers redoubled their efforts; supermarkets were "stickered"; schoolchildren gave out pamphlets and are reported to have stoned a Colgate vehicle distributing free samples in Duduza township on the East Rand.

In this context of mounting militancy, and with the prospect of a massive escalation of internal and overseas pressure should the strike take place, Colgate management backed down. Managements' unity on the issue of Industrial Councils had been temporarily broken, and a bridgehead for the further extension of workers rights had been won.