

INDEX

LABOUR	The Allied Publishing	
ACTION:	dispute.....page	1
	The Karoo Meat Exchange	
	Strike.....page	3
	Other.....page	4
CONSUMER BOYCOTTS:		
	an evaluation.....page	10
RENTS:	paying for	
	incorporation.....page	17
RURAL RESISTANCE:		
	The Batlokwa.....page	24
	The Matlala.....page	27
THE PRESS.....page		30
AUTOMATION:		
	control of worker	
	and machine.....page	34
THE NATURE OF POLITICAL TRIALS.....page		37
COURTS:	Terrorism trials.....page	40
	Internal Security Act	
	trials.....page	46
	Contraventions of	
	banning orders.....page	46
	Appeal proceedings...page	47
	Trials in 'independ-	
	ent' bantustans.....page	47
	General trials	
	of interest.....page	47
'JO THE COW' COMES HOME.....page		49
ALEXANDRA A brief history.....page		50
TOWNSHIP: 'Uplift' or		
	co-option?.....page	58

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EDITORIAL

WHAT sorts of issues are of direct concern
 to the working class in South Africa? This
 question has once more been raised in the
 columns of Work In Progress: directly in
 the article on rents, and implicitly in
 the material presented on consumer
 boycotts and the Alexandra township.

One approach argues that any issue
 which is not related to the 'point of
 production' is 'political', and therefore
 is of no concern to workers' organisations
 (trade unions). 'Point of production'
 refers to the factory, and 'point of
 production issues' appear to refer to
 the contractual relationship between
 workers and employers (wages, hours of
 work, bonuses, leave) and working
 conditions (clothing, safety, noise, etc).

According to this argument, 'political'
 concerns should remain outside of the
 ambit of trade unions; they should be
 taken up by political organisations which,
 in turn, should not involve themselves in
 point of production (factory) issues.

While the need for specifically
workers' organisations is acknowledged,
 and while the legal constraints on trade
 unionism within South Africa are there
 for all to see, the maintenance of the
 separation that exists between 'point
 of production' and 'community' or

The nature of WIP, which is to stimulate
 debate and present controversial views,
 ensures that the opinions expressed do
 not necessarily reflect the views of
 the editorial collective.

'politics' has a number of disturbing implications.

Firstly, the separation between work-place and community is one that arises out of capitalist production itself (see the article on Rents in this regard); but this separation is also maintained by the state as a mechanism of control. The effect is that while the townships may be ablaze, production in the factories continues; while workers boycott buses they still walk to the factories; while rent protests take place, the unions and management maintain wage agreements.

The second effect of this separation between work-place and community is that many issues are handed over to non-working class interests, which tend to mobilise the working class for ends that have precious little to do with workers. If this takes place, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as far as the 'point-of-productionists' are concerned: they decline involvement in non-factory floor issues, and then claim that such issues are led by the petty bourgeoisie for their own ends.

A third implication, in the South African context, is that the reality of colour discrimination (rather than colour as a factor in exploitation) is of necessity ignored as having nothing to do with the 'point of production'. This means that discrimination in the fields of education, health, housing, etc. are perceived to be of peripheral interest to workers' organisations.

A fourth implication is that members of the working class outside of the point of production (the unemployed) are placed in a position of conflict with employed workers. This weakens the position of workers in strikes and dismissal situations, as the unemployed end up competing with the employed for jobs.

The above points have particular relevance for the assessment of three important areas of conflict which the editors of WIP believe are developing. These relate to the questions of rents, transport, and black schooling. In each of these areas, activity is clearly increasing, and resistance to certain dynamics intensifying. While none of these are 'point-of-production' issues, they are of direct concern to the working class. The class basis of leadership and activity in these areas is of great importance: whether the demands made contain a working class or petty bourgeois content will crucially effect the outcome of struggle around these issues.

The editors of WIP request readers to contribute information, and their understanding of these important issues: Rents: rents and service charges have rocketed in many townships in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Not all increases are covered in the newspapers, and when they are reported on it is frequently inadequate. We need to know where increases have taken place, or are planned; who is in charge of rents,

how are increases being justified, how are townships financed; what resistance has there been to rent increases in the past; what are the current responses, etc. Transport: Bus fares have increased, or new increases are proposed right across South Africa. WIP has already drawn attention to some of these increases, and tried to analyse the events involved. However, we need much more information - especially on the communities involved (were they moved to their current area; where do the people work); who owns the bus companies; how many times and by how much have fares been increased in recent years, etc.

Schools: At present, 'coloured' pupils are protesting about the inferior quality of the education they are receiving, while many people believe that no real changes have occurred in the educational system for africans. Sporadic incidents of opposition to the system of education in the bantustans have also been reported on.

Political trials and Labour action:

In response to our last editorial, in which we expressed a desire to present more detailed information on these categories, we have received certain contributions which have been included in this issue. More information on specific trials and strikes is still needed, and readers are asked to contribute regularly in these areas.

-THE EDITORS.