

Samson Ndou

I greet you in the name of the struggle for national liberation and social justice.

I am speaking as a trade unionist and worker. I am speaking in the place of Thozimile Gwet-ha - the trade union leader. He is unable to be here today as the South African and Ciskei Security Police are making it difficult for him. Fellow unionists were detained on Wednesday.

Shooting, banning and imprisonment carry on while the government tries to make us believe that the government is really changing. We as workers know that nothing is changing and we cannot remain aloof from an attempt that shows that the people should defend themselves. Workers are part of society, part of the community, therefore, changing the society is a responsibility of workers because we have that power. As workers we have faced problems in the factory, low wages, unhealthy and dangerous working conditions, lack of

representation. This is the reality of our working day and we know trade unions are fighting to change this. But, when the factory gates close we go back to our communities, our townships where we also experience problems. With our poor wages we have to face high rents, unrealistic electricity bills, expensive transport, we live in overcrowded houses because there are not enough houses for us.

In our schools, our children do not have proper facilities and are given a racist education, are taught in a way that hides the real proud history of our people. Students in schools are fighting to change these. Organisations have very difficult tasks facing them and different problems to fight but they are fighting a whole system which is responsible for each and every problem that we face. Although trade unionists and workers struggle is the major struggle as it is a fight between workers and bosses, we cannot hope to change the syst-

em as a whole unless we unite all the organisations working in different areas.

Exploitation and low wages in the factories cannot exist without influx control, pass laws, group areas, and the education system. Our people are oppressed wherever they are. We must fight to change that exploitation and oppression.

The word change is a word used by the ministers of parliament and liberal bosses. We know that these changes are not based on the will of the people because we do not have rights and because wherever changes are spoken about by those who divide us, those changes are not in the interest of the workers but in the interest of the bosses.

These Koornhof and Constitutional Proposals are not the first acts of the repressive regime, they are simply the ongoing process of domination and exploitation of one class over another.

This is the history of our country. This is why we fight for freedom. The current state of parliament cannot be seen in isolation from this ongoing process of domination and exploitation of the majority of our people. The government and the bosses have tried all the means

at their disposal to obstruct the organisation of workers. In 1974 a frightened Nationalist regime responding to the waves of strikes which spread through Natal and the Witwatersrand amended the Industrial Conciliation Act in an attempt to offer workers work committees in place of trade unions. Workers however, refused to have anything to do with these toothless bodies and continued to organise themselves. Within months, twenty new independent black trade unions had been formed. In 1976 our children took the lead and shook the country with 18 months of continuous acting against apartheid domination saying that they would rather die fig-

hting for freedom than live passively as slaves.

They stood unflickingly in the face of police, guns, batons, dogs and teargas - this has been a point of no return and left a memory in the minds of freedom loving people which could never be erased. With the suffering of their children in mind, workers threw themselves into the tasks of organising to smash this brutal system. A terrified Nationalist government, working hand in hand with the bosses, appointed the Wiehahn Commission to look into new ways of controlling the organisations of the working class. When it replied the committee made a lot of noise about the registration of trade unions. Some liberal and fascist circles hailed this as a breakthrough. After some sixty years of refusing to officially recognise the existence of black trade unions, the government agreed to recognise them. Those of us who had been hardened in years of struggle saw these proposals for what they were - an attempt to impose new and stricter control on the working class. Workers stood firm, they were not fooled. Since when were the government and the bosses seen to agree with our organisations? How could they expect us to trust them when every day they force us to work for long hours for little pay under dangerous conditions when we have to travel long distances by trains and by busses from the ghettos and come to their tiny cities to cater to their needs.

Through our united refusals to accept these so-called new dispensations we will be able to counter a parliamentary side-show which has convinced no-one. Fanie Botha has already sent bosses to deal with "undisciplined" trade unions. Despite this challenge we were able to maintain our independence and our democracy and to grow as organisations of the working class. We face severe challenges from the bosses taking advantage

of the economic recession. Hundreds and thousands of workers have been fired or retrenched, in an attempt to break trade union organisations. The threat of retrenchment is used to intimidate those lucky enough to have jobs into not joining trade unions. Anyone determined enough to demand higher wages or better working conditions is immediately threatened with dismissal. The government meanwhile has taken a back seat and is leaving it up to the bosses to break the unions.

In unity however, there is strength. To counter this threat, the unions have been trying to form a federation to make a combined attack on the bosses. Such a setup will be the most powerful alliances of trade un-

ions to emerge since the South African Congress of Trade Unions was forced underground by way of state oppression in the early 60s. I would like to use this platform today to call on all democratic trade unions to unite and work together in defence of the interests of the working class. But, the struggle of the working class will have to go beyond the factory gates. Women, students and workers must come together to build this political movement and in doing so, must work together as progressives and as democrats and agree to bury organisational and ideological differences in the interest of a broader movement. Forward to the United Democratic Front, forward to the workers' struggle, forward to the people's democracy.

**AN INJURY TO ONE
IS AN INJURY TO ALL
A DISMISSAL TO ONE
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