

W H A T N O W, W O R K E R S ?

Much has happened in Cape Town since the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau was formed, exactly two years. In those two years, over forty factories have organized and joined the Advice Bureau, bringing more than 4000 workers together to fight for their advancement.

And the Advice Bureau has achieved much for its members. Its organizers have provided invaluable advice to the fledgling factory committees. training courses have ensured that the leaders of the workers understand the nature of their tasks; and countless workers from every kind of job, with every kind of complaint, have found the Advice Bureau ready and willing to assist them.

Now, two years after their first hesitant steps, the Advice Bureau and the workers of the Cape are ready to move forward yet again. Up till now, the factory committees have been concerning themselves only with matters in their own factory. Their work has been to raise wages for the workers in their factory, to improve conditions and do away with abuses.

But it has become increasingly clear that the workers' problems are not merely with the single boss in their own factory, but with all the bosses together ! Just as the bosses act together in all important matters, it has now become necessary for the workers to act together in all larger matters.

But it is not only that workers are realizing that improvements can only be obtained by organizing in unity with workers from other factories; workers are also beginning to realize that not all their problems begin and end in their factory !

Take the matter of busfares - this is clearly a matter which neither begins nor ends in the factory ! And while workers will certainly want to press for higher wages to cover the higher fares, you should know that no amount of persuading will make it possible for your boss to reduce the bus fares ! No, this is one of the many matters that workers as a group must confront.

Bus fares is just one of the many matters that workers in a single factory are powerless to change - but that workers as a group can battle against and win victory !

So far, in Cape Town, there is no body which effectively brings the representatives of the factories together. This step cannot be any longer postponed ! While the bosses devise new ways to divide the workers, the factories in Cape Town are still acting in isolation - as if the other factories did not exist ! What sort of organization is best suited to bring the factory committees together in unity ? This is a matter on which there must be much discussion. But certain rules can be laid down from the beginning.

The first is that such an organization must be directly responsible to the workers in the factories. That is, each factory should elect delegates which carry the workers instructions to the meetings, and which report back to the workers afterwards.

Secondly, the organization must be controlled by the workers and no-one else. This means that the trainers and the "intellectuals" must be kept firmly in advisory positions; that the organizers must be prevented from exerting undue influence; that those who seek their own advancement and power should be kept out; and that the timid and weak should be replaced by the progressive leaders who faithfully follow the wishes of the workers !

The third is that such an organization of the workers should be clear about its task. Its task is not to make things easier for the boss by keeping the workers in check; nor to build "good relations" with the boss while the workers starve. Its single task is to pursue the interests of the workers without hesitation and without delay - wherever that path might lead.

The formation of such a general union of workers - breaking through every barrier between factories, between industries and between races - is the next great step forward for the workers of Cape Town. Soon the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau is to call a conference of factory committees to discuss this matter.

MAKE SURE your factory has elected a factory committee !

MAKE SURE your factory is sending its factory committee to the conference.

GET IN TOUCH with the organizers for further details and help.

9 Benbow Building,  
Beverly Street,  
Athlone.

THE CALL TO THE WORKERS OF CAPE TOWN - FACTORY COMMITTEES PLUS A GENERAL WORKERS' COUNCIL !!



## A MOVEMENT OF UNSKILLED WORKERS

Over the past two years, the Africans workers of Cape Town have learnt that if they are to better their positions they have to be organised and made united demands of their employers. They have learnt that one worker standing alone is powerless, whereas the united workers have power from which to make their demands.

But if this is the case, why is it that all workers do not stand together? In particular, why is there racial separation amongst the workers?

This question is a very complex one - and one which cannot be covered completely in one article. But in order to begin to understand it, we must understand firstly which of the workers have common interests, and secondly, the motives of those who have brought about these racial divisions.

The one single factor which distinguishes workers from others in the society is that the only thing they have from which to make their living is their labour. They do not own the land or the sources of raw materials or the factories. In order to satisfy their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, they must sell their labour to those who own the land or the factories (the capitalists). This factor is common to all workers, be they white, african, coloured or indian.

In selling their labour, they will be trying to get the maximum payment for this labour in the form of wages; while the capitalist will be trying to make the maximum possible profits from their labour, and hence will be trying to pay them the least possible wages.

We see, therefore, that the interests of all workers are basically the same - to get the maximum return on their labour. We also know that these interests are best served by all the workers writing in their demands to the capitalists - it is, therefore, also immediately obvious that it is in the interests of the capitalists to destroy that unity.

All this seems very obvious. Why, then, have the workers become divided? The answer to this lies in two connected factors:-

- i) the divisions between skilled and unskilled workers
- and ii) the exploitation of racial prejudice and fear by those who wish to divide the workers.

We said above that the interests of workers are all basically the same - to get the maximum return on their labour. But, in reality, the interests of the workers are only completely the same if they are all prepared to advance together. If some workers are prepared to advance their interests at the expense of other workers, this obviously divides the workers' united struggle and they begin to fight amongst themselves.

This is the fundamental cause of the first factor mentioned above - the divisions between skilled and unskilled workers. Skilled workers have some form of education and training which allows them to do more

complicated jobs. Because of this, they are more valuable to the capitalist than unskilled workers who have no special training and who are easily replaced. Therefore the skilled worker, if he wants to advance his interests independently of the unskilled worker, will make use of his better bargaining position.

We can also see that this better bargaining position of the skilled worker will only be maintained if the skills remain confined to a few people. Hence the skilled worker also wants to protect himself from the unskilled worker who he sees as a potential threat to his better position.

We therefore see that the interests of the skilled and unskilled workers are not exactly the same, even though both are workers. While the unskilled worker is struggling with his employer, the skilled worker who is also struggling with his employer (because he is a worker), is at the same time looking over his shoulder to see that he is not being threatened by the unskilled worker (because he is skilled).

And all the time, the employer realises that it is in his own interests to have the workers divided, and so encourages the divisions.

In order to illustrate how this all works in practice, let us assume that Mr. Smith is a skilled worker, while Mr Jones is an unskilled worker. As workers, suppose that Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones make united demands on their employer.

But the employer knows that Mr. Smith is more valuable to him than Mr. Jones - he will therefore be more prepared to meet the demands of Mr. Smith than Mr. Jones who can easily be replaced. So he tells Mr. Smith that he is prepared to meet his demands, but that Mr. Jones will have to be happy with his present position. Is Mr. Smith going to say: "No, I won't accept this"? or is he going to advance himself without much concern for Mr. Jones? In most cases, he will do the latter. And we see that the more he does this, the more he becomes allied with the employer rather than with his fellow unskilled worker, Mr. Jones, and the more he comes to feel threatened by Mr. Jones. He feels threatened because, firstly, Mr Jones may be trained to do skilled work as well and, secondly, Mr. Jones has a lot of potential power as an unskilled worker if he unites with all other unskilled workers - Mr. Smith knows that Mr. Jones and his fellow unskilled workers would probably put a stop to his privileged position if they had the power to do so.

We can see how he has responded to this threat by looking at the role which trade unions have played in South Africa. These unions initially consisted only of skilled workers - their role was to advance the position of the skilled workers in the struggle against employers and to protect their position from being threatened by the unskilled worker.

So what do we see from all the above?

The most striking thing is that the racial question (which so many people say is at the root of the divisions amongst workers) is not a fundamental cause of the divisions at all. It does not matter



whether the employer, skilled worker or unskilled worker are white, black or coloured - the fundamental divisions are based on their interests as employers, skilled or unskilled workers, NOT on their race.

The racial question has entered the problem in South Africa largely as a result of the political history of the country where the capitalists and skilled workers were initially the whites who held political power and who used this political power to advance their interests at the expense of the unskilled (black) workers. It is impossible to go into the historical process in this article - another whole article is necessary. But it is enough to realise that the racial divisions are not fundamental divisions and that interests of all unskilled workers are basically the same, that the interests of all skilled workers are basically the same, and that the interests of all capitalists are basically the same.

Once this is understood, the direction which must be taken by the movement of unskilled African workers is quite clear. It must not remain a movement of African workers, but must become a movement of unskilled workers, while at the same time not forgetting those skilled workers who wish to be united with the unskilled workers.

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T H E S T A R I S S H I N I N G !

- By a Port Elizabeth worker -

We did rejoice and appreciate when we heard of the achievements obtained by the united workers in various areas. We are happy because any successful movement of the workers in any district or city is also our success.

Any branch of a business whether it is in Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London or Umtata will also emulate its other branch when it comes to increasing the wages of the workers.

Remember the words of the old sage "when someone goes down another one goes up" So therefore whosoever sacrifices for his rights is most honoured. Even if he loses his life for a just cause, his efforts will long live and his name will be held in reverence by future generations.

It is fitting that first effort should be made by the workers of Natal last year (that is Kwazulu) Meat is palatable if you flavour it with spices.

Though the employers pretended not to take notice of events, particularly the wealthy owners of the Frame Group Company, the militant workers managed to get something. Even if the increase was very little, it was an achievement nevertheless.

What I really want to say is that the workers of Port Elizabeth should be very grateful. Now the helper has come to build the unity of all workers.

Am I telling a lie .... IT HAS ARRIVED agree with me. (In other words a challenge is presented to any man who wants to get something for his family.)

H O W ? ?

By him joining other workers, however little the number, and build workers' unity, to demand and protect the rights of workers. They must meet quite often I emphasize quite often "They meet at a place where they will be taught how to fight for their rights without being victimised or threatened!"

"The Voice of the newspaper Abasebenzi has been heard by many workers, calling them with a loud voice to unite. Please agree with me!"

This newspaper you must look for it by all means. It is your life-blood. Because of its leadership and its efforts you will be born again- With high wages you will be able to feed your babies on milk rather than on sweetened water. Because you can't afford milk. Through lack of milk a baby can die of malnutrition.

We all agree with this.



Workers, from October to November last year (1974) the stevedores of Cape Town organised a very effective ban on overtime work that you may not have heard of. It would not be surprising if news of the ban on overtime never reached you because the press kept very quiet about it. The first time they wrote about it was when the ban on overtime was already two weeks old. There are also many important things that the white press never told you about. We shall now tell you what these are.

What caused the ban on overtime?

The ban on overtime work was really started by the managers of a shipping agent. They insisted that the stevedores should work overtime until 9 o'clock and not knock off at 7.30 p.m. (half past seven) as the stevedores were doing. Why did the management insist on this? They were paying overtime rates until 9 o'clock and therefore believed they had the right to make stevedores work until then. By making the stevedores work until 9 o'clock the managers can increase their profits. The stevedores would not earn cent more, but the profits of the capitalists would increase as a result of the work done by stevedores.

Why had the stevedores been working overtime until then? They worked overtime because they were earning so little money from their full day's work that they had to put in extra work to be able to provide for them and their families. The demand by management that they must work longer overtime hours made the stevedores angry. They said that overtime work was already killing them. There were also old people amongst them who were not able to do more overtime work. They said that the employers were exploiting them because they had to rely on overtime work to make enough money.

For these reasons the stevedores demanded higher wages. They insisted that the wages should be high enough so that they, the stevedores, would not have to do any overtime work at all. At that time the basic wage of stevedores varied between R17 to R19 per week. Long service workers earned from R22 to R25 per week basic. With overtime work the lower paid stevedores took home up to R25 per week and the long service workers took home about R35 per week.

Management offered the stevedores an increase of twenty per cent. This amounts to R3,40 to R5 per week. But they also insisted that the stevedores should still work overtime. The stevedores replied that the increase was too small and that they wanted an end put to overtime work. Management refused these demands. As a result 2000 (two thousand) stevedores decided to ban all work on overtime until management decided to give in to their demands. An important point to note is that all the stevedores took part in the ban on overtime. The Coloured and the African stevedores stood together against management and as a result they were much stronger than they would have been if, say, only the African stevedores banned overtime work.

How was the ban on overtime organised?

For the whole month 2000 Coloured and African stevedores banned all overtime work. How did the stevedores manage to organise a complete ban on overtime work for the month without one worker breaking the ban? From our conversations with some stevedores the first thing

to emerge was that they all felt strongly about their grievances. They all agreed that their wages were too low and that they did not want to have to work overtime. But things did not stop at their grievances. They met at lunchtimes to express their grievances and they elected a committee to lead and organise them. The committee had fourteen members and included both Coloured and African stevedores. We do not know who these fourteen committee members are because the stevedores we spoke to would not tell us their names. In this way the stevedores protected their leaders from victimisation on the part of the management and the police. Therefore the committee members could also carry on with their work on behalf of the stevedores.

#### How was the ban on overtime settled?

The ban on overtime work by the stevedores lasted for a whole month. Why did it come to an end? The white press reported that the stevedores wanted the money from overtime work because they needed it for Christmas presents! But the white press knew little about the ban on overtime and even less about the stevedores!

The ban on overtime work by the stevedores caused a congestion of ships at the Cape Town harbour. There were many ships, up to twenty, waiting to be unloaded. What is more, the shipping agents had said they were going to charge money if they had to wait before their ships got offloaded. It was therefore important to the management and the government that a settlement should be reached. It was the government who made the first move. Instructions came from Pretoria that the shift hours of the South African Railway and Harbours at the docks must be changed in order to do away with overtime work. They suggested two shifts per day: the first shift from six in the morning until five in the afternoon and the second shift from two in the afternoon to ten o'clock at night. Now the stevedores can only work when the railway workers are also there and the stevedores have therefore to work the same shift hours as the railway workers. This suggestion from Pretoria therefore meant that overtime work for the stevedores was being abolished. The bosses in the stevedore companies had no option but to agree to the new shift times without overtime work.

The final outcome of the ban on overtime work by the stevedores was therefore the abolition of overtime work for the stevedores. In addition to that they also accepted the twenty per cent increase in wages that was offered to them by management. This means that their wages are still low, but their work hours have improved immensely. This indicates the strength of workers when they stand together.