

DANGERS THREATEN COLOURED UNIONS

Recently there has been much talk in the newspaper about Coloured trade unions. The Minister of Labour even said that he might deregister some unions because so few workers support them! In this article ABASEBENZI looks at the reasons for this lack of interest amongst some Coloured workers, and also warns African workers that the same dangers threaten their organisations.

There are two reasons why some unskilled Coloured workers do not like their unions:

- * Some coloured unions are weak and do not press the demands of workers
- * The union sometimes do not represent the interests of workers.

Why are the unions weak? Bosses do not like it when ALL the workers are united and speak with one voice through their union. So they decided to divide the workers so that they speak with many different voices! One way of doing this is by preventing coloured and African workers from joining together in a registered union by making certain laws. Now the union can only speak for the coloured worker, and it cannot press the workers' demands too strongly, because the bosses can replace coloured by African workers.

But bosses do not only divide the workers racially. As we have seen many coloured workers do not belong to unions. This is so because workers have also been divided on the basis of skill. Let us see how this was done.

Although there are less skilled than unskilled coloured workers, the skilled workers normally start a union. The bosses now offered the skilled workers higher wages, but kept unskilled wages down. This was very clever, because the skilled workers would now use the union to protect their privileged position by keeping unskilled workers out of unions. Of course unskilled workers were also unwilling to join a union that only tried to protect the skilled worker! This then leads to the disgraceful situation that some coloured unions do not even represent enough workers to be registered!

We have seen that there are two main reasons for the weakness of some unions: they are divided racially and on the basis of skills. Of course African workers committees also face both these dangers, and every worker must be constantly on the lookout for efforts by the bosses to divide the workers.

But there is also another reason why workers dislike some Coloured unions. One sometimes finds that the leaders of the union (the secretary and executive) are more interested in receiving big salaries and driving large cars than in acting in the workers' interest. This tends to happen in many large worker organisations. Workers must always be vigilant so that their leaders will not begin to think that they can use the workers' money for their own purposes! Leaders must live like workers, not like bosses.

To summarise: for workers to be united it is necessary that they must always be vigilant against all efforts by the bosses and others to divide the workers. Workers must also ensure that their leaders really represent them.

WORKERS ADVICE COLUMN - YOUR PAY SLIP

Many arguments arise about whether workers have been paid properly or not. If there is any argument about back pay the only evidence that the worker was underpaid is the payslip. Because of this all workers should keep every one of their payslips.

It is important to know what the different amounts on any payslip are. The three most important amounts are: