

READING FOR LIBERATION: LAUNCH OF THE WORKERS LIBRARY

'Knowledge is power'

In her opening address at the launch of The Workers Library in the Wits Flower Hall, on Saturday 22nd October 1988, popular historian Luli Callinicos cited the dictum: 'Knowledge is power' and added, 'knowledge is power for workers in the struggle against racial capitalism in South Africa.' The re-application of this classical adage is indeed very apt for present day South Africa and the central role of workers and their organisations in the struggle for social, economic and political transformation.

The particular form of economic exploitation and racial oppression found in South Africa affects workers most severely. In this regard workers are not only systematically exploited but an educational system designed to perpetuate oppression is made available to workers and their children. This education, variously known as Bantu Education and Education and Training, is not only tailored to keep workers and their children in a state of ignorance but is also made available at such minimal and inadequate levels that it disqualifies itself as education altogether.

Workers and their off-spring have, however, come to see through this. Students have, for more than a decade, challenged and rejected Apartheid education and in the place of this put forward the need for a People's Education. Simultaneously, the acceleration of the workers movement has not only witnessed the phenomenal growth of worker organisations but also a related understanding of the vital role education and information plays in the effective struggle for liberation. The launch of The Workers Library must, therefore, be seen against this background.

'The struggle for justice and democracy is inextricably linked to the struggle for information and knowledge.'

In this context, the launch of The Workers Library was not merely the opening of just another information and literary resource centre. It signals the growing awareness among the various sections of the oppressed and fighting people of

South Africa that the struggle for justice and democracy is inextricably linked to the struggle for information and knowledge. In terms of the unfolding national democratic struggle and the pivotal role of the class struggle in the overall process, it means that as workers engage in their day to day struggles to transform their conditions of employment, they are also engaged in a struggle for fundamental political and social change. In order to pursue this effectively, the lessons drawn from practical struggle require a related educational process which will raise the consciousness of every single worker and that of the class as a whole, to such a level that workers are able to fight for their economic, political and social interests with insight and resolve.

Thus, while the opening of a Workers Library enhances the access workers will have to progressive literature released by local and international publishers, it also marks a turning point in the struggle for knowledge and information. From the wide range of cultural activities presented at this occasion, it was also evident that workers are resolved to break out of the stultifying tedium which manual production imposes in order to define the value of culture as an irre-

ducible need which is of equal importance to material and political needs.

'A day of music, poetry and fiction readings, drama performances and films'

The launch offered a day of music, poetry and fiction readings, drama performances and films by progressive cultural workers from all over the country. If one has to single out an event from a vast programme it would be the energetic and illuminating performance of *Bambatha's Children* by the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative, which chronicles the Sarmcol struggle from its historical

roots in 1906 to the present. On the basis of this and many other cultural displays it is apt to reiterate:

Power to the workers!



Luli Callinicos addresses the launch of the Workers' Library. (photo by Cedric Nunn.)

*SAWCO (The Sarmcol Workers' Co-operative) perform *Bambatha's Children* at the launch of the Workers' Library. (photo by Cedric Nunn)*



OUR LAND

In Which **Our Culture** is:

