

## **POLITICS OR ECONOMICS.**

Again and again a web of slander and confusion threatens to cloud the issues in the historic bus boycott taking place in Johannesburg. As yet still too many of us think of the boycott as a long walk over a penny. The press and the Liberals have not been slow to try and disguise and distort the boycott. Like machines they pour out facts, figures and quotations to try and prove that the economic burden on the people is too great for them to bear, and hence the boycott. But if there is one thing we do not need to be proved to us it is precisely this !

We have said before, and we say it again that the bus boycott is a political demonstration not an economic one. It stopped being an economic issue the same day that it started! Perhaps it is necessary for us to point to some concrete examples to demonstrate this fact.

Hundred of the workers in Alexandra Township daily use taxis to get to and from town. No taxi will charge them four pence for the trip. The costs of the boycott to them in terms of money must run into pounds rather than a saving of pence. Similarly for those boycotters who walk a matter of four miles and then get the Municipal buses at a fare of 9d. Similarly too, those thousands of people in other places on the reef who have come out on sympathy boycotts, or in Port Elizabeth or now in East London – WHERE THERE ARE NO FARE INCREASES! But perhaps the most telling example is that of the thousands who walk to work and back every day. As one man said to a press reporter:

"I have worn out my shoes after three weeks of walking. I have saved 3/2d. in fares, but I will continue to walk for another six months or more."

This man will have to pay 12/6d to repair his shoes. He like the thousands of others have lost much more than they have saved. They have braved the burning sun and the thunder showers; their bodies are sick with tiredness. But they continue to walk day after day.

All these things must make us ask over and over; "Why the boycott?" The answer lies not in the realm of economics, but in that of politics. Because the bus boycotts all over the country are symptomatic of the increasing militancy of the people. It is a protest against oppression. That is why the Schoemans are determined not to negotiate with the boycott leaders, but resort to using the black legs of the Advisory Boards. Negotiation with the boycott leaders means recognising the strength of the people; it means recognising the boycott leaders as men and meeting them as man to man! That is they are falling over each other to prove its economic nature, and they have succeeded to some extent as indicated by the press statement of the African National Congress.

The bus boycott is an historic event. It marks the opening of a new epoch for us, for the oppressed are using, and in the process learning, the potency and strength of the boycott weapon as a method of struggle as well as a means of unifying them. The lessons and the fast growing traditions of this boycott must be imprinted in the minds and hearts of all of us.

That is why, too it is essential for us to establish the true facts and to see the true perspective. A failure to do so would be the greatest tragedy of our times.

The same people who are putting forward the argument that the boycott is an economic one, have also formulated the demands of the boycotters by saying that either the fares must be reduced or the wages of the workers raised. In this way by a simple economic expedient they hope to smash the boycott. But to us it is not an alternative demand. The demand of the people of Alexandra and of all South Africa is for the lowering of fares and a raising of wages. It is not one or the other but BOTH. Because the one is meaningless without the other. In fact to put the demands as alternatives is to sow the seeds of disunity amongst the people. It leaves wide open the way for the industrialists (and the government) to raise the wages of one section of the people only and so induce them to scab on the rest. It invites them to bribe off the people and to use them as boycott breakers.

Further, increases in wages (even if made universal) are meaningless in the framework of the present industrial laws. They can be made today and withdrawn tomorrow. To protect and maintain the gains that the oppressed will make in this struggle it is essential that they have the right to form organisations to defend their gains. If wage increases are granted then the workers must have the right to form free and democratic trade unions to protect those increases. Not the dummy, hamstrung type of organisations that the laws allow them, but trade unions in the fullest sense' of the word. Only then can the valiant struggle of the people on the Rand bear its true fruits: the just reward for their magnificent sacrifices.

The eyes of all the oppressed in the land are focussed on Johannesburg. From it must come the clarion call: "We fight not only for a penny, but for the rights of all the working class to a just wage for their labours and for the right to form our own trade unions to protect and guard us, We fight for the abolition of the colour bar in industry and the revision of the industrial and labour laws of South Africa.

“We fight for a democratic South Africa.”

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