

workers' class organs. In the words of one informed observer:

They (African worker) reject Works' Committees on the grounds that they are formed by employers ...they are actually controlled by employers in that it is the employer who introduces these committees, especially at the times of labour unrest, and the workers suddenly wonder why the management approaches them on these questions. As one worker put it: "Is it feasible for a man with whom you are quarrelling to give you a gun in order that you might shoot him?"

The response of the workers was clear-cut. Several working-class organisations were formed to co-ordinate the class battles that lay ahead. The organisations that emerged from the 1973 Mass Strike were the following: the Transport and Allied Workers' Union, the Laundry and Dry-cleaning Workers' Union, the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union, and the Chemical and Allied Workers' Union.

The significance of these historical developments meant a resounding victory for the proletariat in that phase of the class war; and new weapons of combat had been acquired through bitter and tenacious struggles, the lessons of which had to be carefully digested.

Lessons of the 1973 Mass Strike

1. One of the major lessons of the 1973 Mass Strike is that the real education of the masses comes through struggle itself in the field of battle. The concrete experience discloses to the proletariat the magnitude of its class-power, widens its horizons, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, and forges its will and unity.

Class consciousness and solidarity was elevated to highest levels during the Mass Strike at the factories and marches and demonstrations in the streets, that is, in the battle-ground itself. The defeat of the 7,000 Hammarisdale workers who staged their action at a bus depot, far away from the industrial area, underlines the point we made above. This experience casts a serious doubt about the wisdom of staging "stay-at-home" demonstrations so fervently revered by the social reformists. The mass "stay-at-home" in the Transvaal in November 1984 was hailed by the bourgeois liberal press as a huge success. One distinctive feature of the November demonstrative action was that, out of the 7 demands put forward, only 2 were of immediate economic importance to the workers who nonetheless enthusiastically supported the call to stay away from work.

The point to be made here is that the 1973 Mass Strike was a major success because of the manner in which economic strikes were interwoven with political strikes. The broad masses of the exploited and oppressed could not have been drawn into the revolutionary mass movement had they not been given daily examples of how the wage-workers in various industries were forcing the white capitalists to grant immediate, direct improvements in the conditions of labour. In other words, the real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially the revolution-

ary struggle as the crop of social reformists would make us believe. The history of the working-class elsewhere has clearly demonstrated since the inception of the class that the mass strike is not an isolated act, but a whole period of the class struggle. Therefore, if this period is symmetrical with a period of revolution, it becomes quite clear that the mass strike cannot be called at will or decided at random at some board-room meeting. The mass strike, on the contrary is an historical phenomenon which at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability.

2. One other lesson from the 1973 Mass Strike is that while strike action at the factories and marches in the streets in the heart of capitalist enclaves are more effective than the glorified "stay aways" of the liberals and social reformists, since class consciousness and class solidarity is enhanced by the battle-field concrete experience, political consciousness, on the other hand, grows from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this education is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of interrelations between all classes.

For that reason, while strikes may be a "school of war", a school in which workers learn to make war on their class enemies for the liberation of the whole people from the yoke of oppression and from the vice of capital, a "school of war" is however not war itself. As Lenin taught us, by strikes alone the proletariat cannot achieve a considerable improvement or even its liberation. In other words, the mass strike is one of the ways in which the proletariat struggles for its liberation, but they are not the only way. If the workers do not turn their attention to other means of conducting the struggle, this may slow down their class combativity.

It therefore becomes not only necessary but crucial to build a revolutionary proletarian party that will lead the revolution. Only then will the proletariat become a VANGUARD fighter for democracy and socialism that is, an integral part of the revolution.

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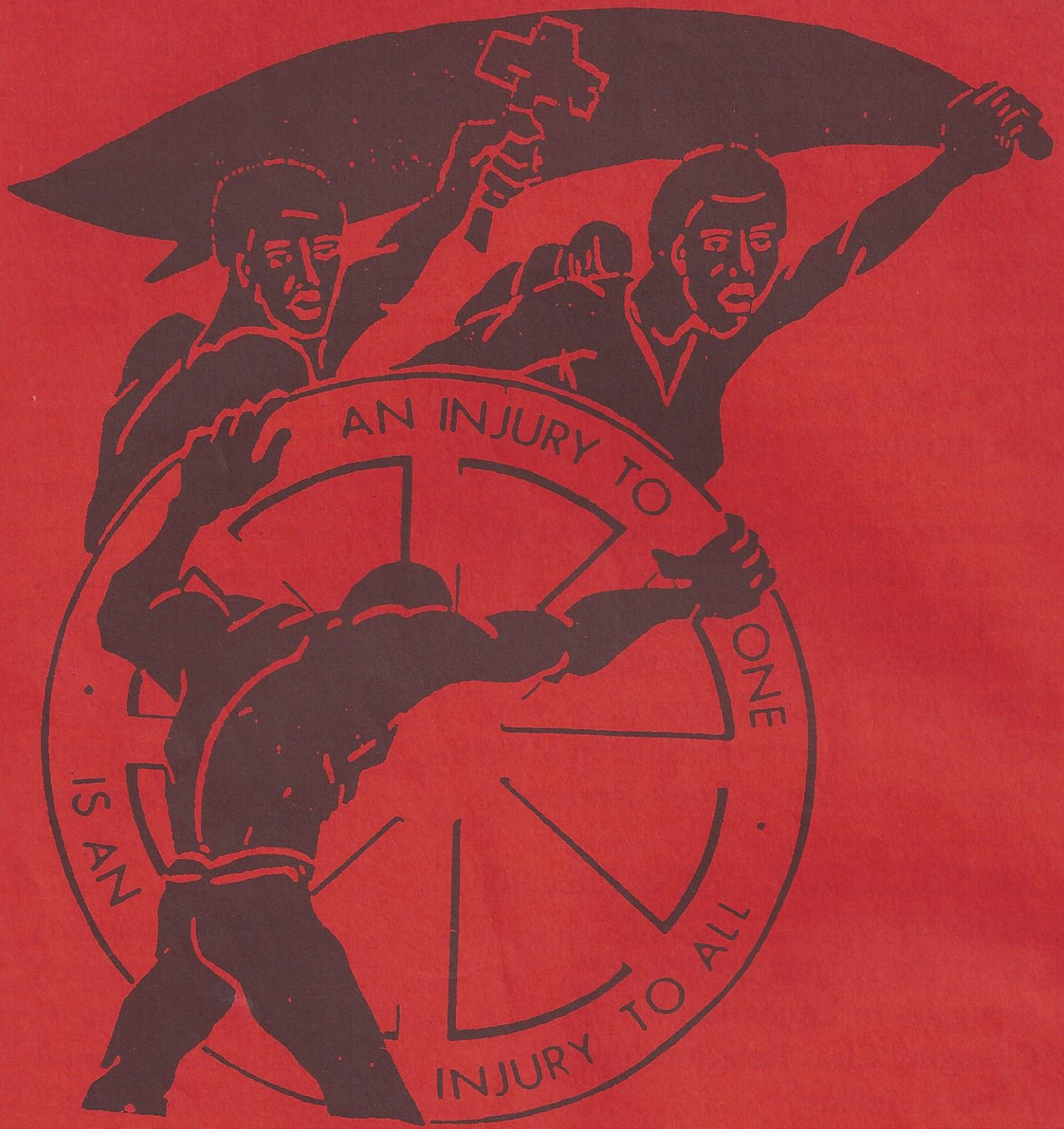
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