

Organise or Starve

An extract From A Radio Freedom Interview With Comrade ELI WEINBERG

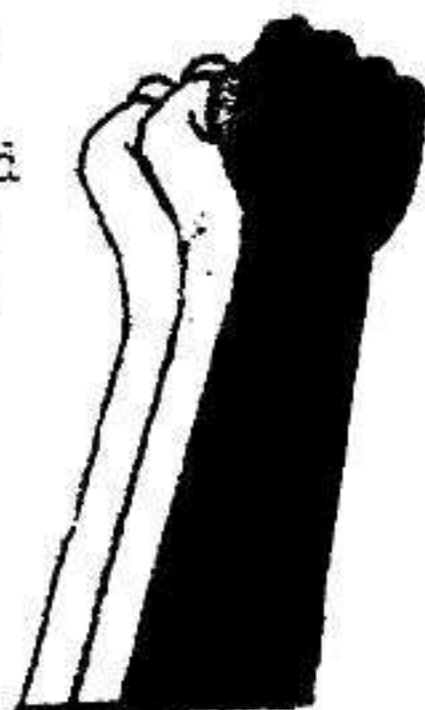
Question: Well, the racists are saying that these strikes are caused mainly by rising expectations of the African workers because of what Botha has been saying by way of reforms, etc. Is that so?

Com. Eli Weinberg: Well, what expectations can the African workers have? You know, they struck at very considerable sacrifice and cost in the early 70s. The strikes of 1972, 1973 and 1974 also on a very immense scale, brought them some benefits. They got some increases in wages. But in the seven years since then, these gains of the workers have been eroded by the increased cost of living. Today the real wages of the workers are between 15% to 20% lower than they were in 1973 and that is the expectation the African workers can have from the regime in South Africa. The expectation of lower and lower wages, of greater and greater exploitation.

ORGANISE

It is obvious to the workers that if they want to maintain even their meagre standard of living of today they cannot do it unless they organise. And that is the lesson which the South African Congress of Trade Unions has been teaching the workers of South Africa ever since its foundation. We had just published a history of SACTU, 25 years of history. It is entitled "Organise or Starve", and that was the slogan of SACTU when SACTU came out with the Pound (£1) a day campaign way back a quarter of a century ago. Organise or starve; if you don't organise you will not achieve anything. And the workers are taking up this lesson today, they are building their unions, they are increasingly becoming active in demanding higher wages and better conditions.

Question: In what sort of practical way should they organise





Combined with the \$1 a Day Campaign was
the Anti-Pass Campaign.

so that they can achieve their aims?

Cde. Eli Weinberg: Well, they must build independent democratic trade unions over which they have rank and file control and they must exercise their demands, exercise their influence through the democratic organisation of their trade union. Of course, they must also understand this is basic in real trade unionism as we have seen with wages since in the last seven or eight years. You cannot maintain your gains ... under the existing conditions of power, where the employers have full political power and the workers have no political power; they will be losing all the time and therefore part of the struggle of the workers, part of building their unions is to contribute to the struggle for political power.

ACTION

Question: The racist regime has been meeting the actions of the workers mainly by sacking them or putting them to the bantustans or detaining trade union leaders, in the case of FOSATU banning its capability to collect funds both locally and abroad. How should the Trade Unions react to this type of strong-arm tactics of the racist regime.

Cde. Eli Weinberg: Our whole history has shown that the repression exercised by the racist regime will not stop the growth of the Trade Union movement. The bannings, the detentions, the arrests we've had them on an increasing scale since the sixties. After the banning of the African National Congress, the whole

executive of SACTU was banned and restricted. Every official, every organiser was banned and restricted during the late 60s and early 70s they imprisoned many of our people ... they tortured them, they killed some of our leaders but the movement is going on, the movement is growing. They are sacking workers and putting them on buses and sending them back to the bantustans. What are they doing? They are exporting the revolution to the bantustans, because these workers are going to go back into the bantustans with militant spirit which they have and they will teach those workers who are coming from the bantustans back into the urban areas to work. The South African Congress of Trade Unions has declared 1980 The Year of the Workers. We took that decision at the end of 1979. And what has happened in 1980? 1980 has been the Year of the Workers, the workers have taken up this idea of the Year of the Workers. I am not saying that we had directly influenced it but SACTU is conscious of the wishes and the will of the workers and it has been proved and the workers have exercised that will during this year 1980, in the massive strikes all over the place. So repressions will not stop the working class movement.

HIGHLIGHTS

Question: Speaking about SACTU what would you say now that it is 25 years old. What would you say are the highlights of its past years?

Cde Eli Weinberg: I think that the best story to tell about SACTU is this new history that we have just published, "Organise or Starve", which is not only a history of SACTU. It is a history of the efforts of sacrifices, of the endeavour of tens of thousands of workers who have given their lives, their energies, their blood in order to build the trade union movement. SACTU has a magnificent record of achievement. It not only built trade unions and organised the workers in mass campaigns, it conducted the famous Pound a day campaign. Even in recent years SACTU issued out demands three years ago to the employers for higher wages and better conditions and for the whole series of demands affecting the lives of the people. We are serving new demands on the employers right now this year. New demands for increased wages, improved conditions and so on. We are initiating new organising drives to build the trade unions of the unorganised workers. To bring the unorganised workers into the trade union movement.

We are working for building up the organisations of unemployed workers who are without protection whatsoever, the black unemployed workers of whom according to the very conservative



estimates of the capitalist press there are over 2-million already and the number is growing. Those workers have to be organised in order to protect their interests and that is one of the tasks which SACTU has set itself in the near future and we are hoping to achieve that by mass mobilisation of the workers, by getting the workers themselves to take the initiative as they have been doing in building the organisations and in advancing their demands. You know when we speak of SACTU, we can't speak of the organisation in isolation from the people, the Basotho have a very good proverb, they say: "MORENA KE MORENA KA BATHO", that is, "no chief without people", that is "no SACTU without people". SACTU can only be an organisation if it has the support of the people and that is what we are aiming at, building up mass activity, activating the people and intensifying their activities in their own interests.

REGIME

Question: Well, coming to the regime itself, it seems to be having some kind of problems among themselves, I mean the racists, especially in the Nationalist Party. There have been significant factions, one led by the Prime Minister, Piet Botha, and apparently supported by the racist army. And the other led by Andries Treurnicht, that is the leader of the Nationalists in the Transvaal. And the other is the vanquished, led by Johannes Vorster, Mulder and the rest, NGK itself. It also has a serious crisis of conscience as shown by members defecting, some leading members of NGK defecting, and generally some internal problems, spiritual problems so to say. And even the racist army suffering from defections, desertions and even mutinies. And the Broederbond had stood up and criticised the racist Prime Minister through its leader, Boshoff. Now given all this situation within the racists themselves, can you say that they are able to bring changes to South Africa that can meet the situation as they claim they are able?

Cde. Eli Weinberg: The question of whether these cabinet changes are significant or not, depends on how one looks at it. They are not significant from any point of view of change. They are significant from the point of view that they indicate a degree of panic amongst the ruling circle. You know in the last six-seven months, Botha has advanced six different consti-

tutional proposals. It advances one thing discards it, it advances another thing discards it, because the people are rejecting these alternatives. These cabinet changes are of no significance as far as the ruling circle in South Africa is concerned, they know very well that their system is doomed, that apartheid will fall, that it will come to an end. What they are trying to do is to delay and to maintain the system of white supremacy, of white domination as long as possible, for the purposes of the exploitation of the majority of the people, the black working class, the black working people. That is the main purpose. Now we must look at it from the point of view of what is the real answer. Are these cabinet changes going to produce any changes or what is it that is going to produce real changes?

CABINET

As far as the cabinet ministers are concerned, the big capitalists in South Africa, the wealthy people, their solution when apartheid falls is already prepared a long time ago. They have put away money, sorted away money in Swiss Banks, they have bought land in Latin America, they can go away. But the Afrikaner white working class has no place to go. For them South Africa is the only place, their language is not spoken in any other part of the world, they have no ties with any other part of the world, they have no financial resources to run away, to leave the country. So they are faced with one alternative, apartheid, or what we offer them. It offers them and their children, their future, what does it offer them? It offers them insecurity, continuous pressures, rifts, frictions, fighting.

What do we in the African National Congress offer them? We offer them democracy, peace, security, peaceful living together with all the people in South Africa. Equal opportunities for all the peoples of South Africa. And, they will have to make up their mind to choose. Between apartheid which means continuous insecurity for them and the Freedom Charter which offers them free and democratic South Africa. That is the decisive and the significant question that is posed for the white working people of South Africa. For the capitalist they can find their own solution, they will run away. But the workers can't run away, they have to stay there and they will have to make up their mind to make their peace with the liberation movement. This is not just something that we offer them out of goodwill or anything like that. It's the only historical solu-



tion which history gives them. This has happened in other parts of the world, it has happened in Mozambique, it has happened in Angola, it has happened in Zimbabwe and that is eventually the answer for the white people in South Africa too, that sooner or later we would be having a Muzorewa in South Africa?

Cde. Eli Weinberg: I think that the Muzorewas are finished. You know the Muzorewas don't represent the mass of the people. You can see what happened in Zimbabwe where the people voted for those who conducted the armed struggle and against the Muzorewas - the traitors, the sell-outs, the neo-colonialist servants. People like Muzorewa represent the dream of the aspiring capitalists who would like to maintain the exploitation of the masses of the blacks and take part in that exploitation, and get a share of it. But the majority of the black middle classes have no stake in apartheid. It is true that the present system is offering them advancement. They are suggesting that in the bantustans they will have scope for developing, for building up capitalism and so on, but the middle classes do know very well that the moment they walk out of their bedrooms or out of their shops, when they walk out into the streets it doesn't matter whether they are capitalists or whether they are professionals or what they are, the nearest white policeman will stop them and ask for their pass. They are black and that is why the Muzorewas have got no chance. The black middle class have got no hope of competing against the multinational co-operations these days. You know some black businessmen opened supermarkets in Soweto or somewhere. It took them three years of planning, of fighting in getting licences, in getting the ground and so on and when they had gone as far as building the supermarket a group of white capitalists opened a hyper-market on the other side of the fence; and they can't compete against that.

In terms of the Freedom Charter we will open up facilities for all races on an equal basis. But under monopoly capitalism those facilities do not exist...

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!