

A RECOGNISE BLACK TRADE UNIONS - CHIEF GATSHA TELLS THE BOSSES

Chief Gatsha Buthelesi addressed Natal employers on the 25th July 1974. He urged employers to "allow our people to have the rights of industrial workers, which are enjoyed throughout the civilised world. This they can only have if industry recognises Black Trade Unions."

"APPALLING CONDITIONS":

He said that the living and working conditions of South African Blacks was very similar to the conditions of workers in England one hundred years ago. He read them a description of "ill health, early death, maiming and stunting of children, the break-up of the family, prostitution, drunkenness and crime. But without political rights, the workers had no way of changing their lot."

This, Chief Gatsha said, was the exact description of the appalling conditions under which Black workers operate in South Africa. He went on to say, that it was "the political emasculation of the Kulu People since 1879, that is responsible to a large extent for the appalling conditions under which they have to work today."

"INFLATION":

Chief Buthelesi, furthermore, advised employers to look at what inflation was doing to the wages that had recently been increased. He told employers that the Poverty Datum Line, the minimum wages needed to survive on, was now R110 per month. Unions and employers should be aiming for more than that amount, i.e. securing a decent living. "The Current Effective Minimum Level (E.M.L.) is R166 a month and this should be an immediate target to aim for, if we do not want disaster to overtake us."

TRADE UNIONS

In the light of "appalling living and working conditions"; of inflation that is knocking the bottom out of workers' wages, without political rights where they work; at the very least Black Trade Unions could defend workers' rights and negotiate with management for better living and working conditions. There is no law to stop management doing this.

WARNING":

Buthelesi warned employers that there was not much time left. They were, he said "Masters of their own Fate." Their "responsibility is as great as those men who control our destinies in Pretoria." Employers should therefore not hide behind the government's skirt and say that since the government did not recognise Unions, they could not. Unions were not illegal and management should recognise the Unions of the workers. This was the substance of Buthelesi's advice to employers.

RECENT STRIKES

Why do workers strike? Wage disputes and demands for higher pay are not always the reasons. Strikes often happen when the workers' and their families' stomachs are full. In 1922 white miners struck because they did not wish African miners to do jobs previously reserved for white men. There was a General Strike in June 1950,

held by Africans and Indians to protest against apartheid laws. The Black people of South Africa hoped to make the Government and Whites of South Africa listen to them. The Black people of South Africa are still to be heard.

Recently in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban thousands of workers from many factories have come out on strike. Most firms in Durban struck for higher wages.

- a) At Hypack Products 300 Indians and Africans went on strike after a dispute over attendance bonus.
- b) 700 workers at Blaikie & Johnstone struck for a R5,00 per week increase.
- c) 70 workers at Medwood Furniture Removers struck for higher pay and were ordered off the premises of the factory. They returned the following day.
- d) About 350 workers at the three branches of the O.K. Bazaars chain in Durban went on strike. The 250 workers from two Congella depots get R65 a month irrespective of length of service. They requested a R55 a month increase which was refused. The 100 workers from the main West Street shop returned to work with a promise of R7,00 per month increase.
- e) More than 400 workers at the Wire Industries Steel Products & Engineering Co. struck because the workers said they had been promised a minimum 7c per hour more and they were then told they would get only 5c an hour increase. Mr Mgobase, Kwa-Zulu's Urban Representative addressed the workers - urging them to return to work, so he could negotiate with their employers.

At all these firms workers earning very little money urgently needing more, struck together for higher wages. At one factory, however, all the workers united to speak for a few of their brothers.

At Paper Sacks(SA) Ltd. 315 workers went on strike to protest against pay increases given on merit and not across the board. Twelve workers received no increase, although the rest received from 50c to R8,50 increase per week. Management agreed to give nine of the twelve workers increases, and the workers then returned to work.

From this it can be seen that the workers' problems do not arise out of the worker's wish to fatten his pay packet. Neither do they arise out of any social impertinence within the industrial sphere. They arise out of the workers' alienation against/from his work situation. The worker needs certain rights in the factory. The strike by workers at two Frame Group factories at Jacobs can serve as illustration of this inherent alienation.

- a) Immediate reaction of the bosses
- b) Solidarity expressed by workers
- c) Negotiation and terms
- d) The results and queries as regards mediation.

THE RECENT SPREAD OF STRIKES

The recent wave of labour unrest in Durban and the Johannesburg Area has spread to the Cape, where 2,000 workers from 3 factories went on strike for more pay on the 24.7.74. 150 workers at the Atkins Steel Corporation in Germiston, refused to work, and demanded a 20c per hour increase.

The Rand Refinery, also in Germiston, ended its strike of 200 workers, when pay was increased to 56c per shift. Workers are now receiving free accommodation, but pay 10c per meal. The salary is now at about a minimum of R20.40 taking home pay. It was R15.80. The general manager put the strikes down to "general unrest" in Germiston at the time. This explanation of "general unrest" does not say why there is this unrest. Some of the factors, we believe, are ~~low~~ wages, lack of effective communication between Black workers and management, lack of consultation and the migrant labour system to mention a few. What is most obvious is the gap between white management and black workers.

The large scale strikes in East London show that these factors of friction are not being dealt with effectively by the industrialists approach to labour problems. Managers were frequently heard saying that there was "organised intimidation behind the strikes". This may be the case, but a far more effective and long reaching approach would be to hold talks at an institutional level, that is, for the workers to be operating through the disciplined efforts of a trade union which represents them honestly. If disruptions and problems are dealt with by one, standing body recognised by the workers, the possibility of trouble makers in the form of violent antagonists would be settled.

Attitudes such as those of the manager of the Kaffrarian Reinforcing Company in East London who fired all the 90 striking workers, and said, "if you have no employees you have no strikes", shows the lack of effort on behalf of certain industrialists to deal decently and effectively with societies problems.

This attitude did nothing to serve the problems of the workers. Within a week the number of workers out on strike in East London had risen to 4,500, putting 11 factories out of order. This illustrates the need for a Black representative institution. The unity of the Black worker has taken shape, but as yet has no structure through which they can effectively bargain with the management.

At the present strikes in East London, the Chief Minister of the Ciskei, Mr. L. Sebe called a meeting of industrial leaders, police and two United Party M.P.'s. It is good to see the active and effective role played by the Black leaders in the labour disputes, but at this level it is limited.

Mr. Sebe managed to persuade 200 workers of the Border Passenger Transport Limited to return to work. This shows that agreements can be reached, but not by imposing "Inquiry Committees" upon the workers. They must be allowed to choose their representatives. At the Cyril Lord factory in East London, the 1000 striking workers elected 6 representatives to discuss with management, the problems.

The approach of the Frase Group of Consolidated Textiles, which fired over a thousand workers is not the solution. Their genuine grievances must be dealt with humanely; women earning R6.00 per week with 3 years experience are not grumbling about nothing (Figures quoted from Rand Daily Mail 2.8.74).

So strikes continue to spread because nothing is done to set up effective institutional bodies which will be representative of the workers - the Black workers need Trade Unions.

REVIEW OF RECENT STRIKES

<u>Gerriston:</u>	Alking Steel Corporation	180 workers
	Gerriston Fresh Meat Supply	67 "
	Road Refinery	200 "
	National Chemical Products	600 "
	Human Control Board	Not known
	Gerriston Coal Company	140 workers
	General Erection Company	400 "
	Road Scrap Iron and Metal Comp.	220 "
<u>East London Area:</u>		
	Car Distributors Assembly	1500 workers
	Kaffrarian Reinforcing Company	90 "
	Wey Waste Paper Company	25 "
	Dunlop Factory	350 "
	Kenbow Furniture Factory	159 "
	Consolidated Textile Mills	1000 "
	Cementile Products	Not known (all)
	Cyril Lord	1000 workers
	Regent Beckwater	300 "
	Everite Factory	275 "
	Border Passenger Transport	200 "
	Distillers Corporation	250 "
	Marine Knitting Mills	130 "
	Langeberg Co-op	900 "
	Model Dairy	200 "
<u>Durban Area:</u>		
	Flocon Products	75 workers
	Bypack Products	150 "
	Blakie Johnstone	700 "
	Redwood Furniture	70 "