

of 1941-2 show an infantryman (½ d), a nurse (1 d), an airman (1½ d), a sailor (2 d), a member of the Women's Auxiliary services (4d), electric welding (6 d), the Tank Corps (1/-) and a signaller (1/3), but no place is found for the Cape Corps, the Native Labour Corps or Indian medical and other personnel.



Some compensation for the shortage of humans is found in the generous representation of animals—A 1954 issue shows the warthog (½ d), wildebeest (1 d), leopard (1½ d), zebra (2 d), rhinoceros (3 d), elephant (4 d), hippopotamus (4 d), lion (6d), kudu (1/-), springbok (1/3), gemsbok (1/6), nyala (2/6), giraffe (5/-) and sable antelope (10/-). It makes one think of the faintly ironic ceremony where Mr Piet Grobler, while Minister of Native Affairs, was given an honorary doctorate for his services in preserving South African fauna.

The religious issues are somewhat one-sided. They comprise Calvin (1963), the symbol of the N.G. Kerk (1965) the Groote Kerk pulpit, Cape Town (1965), Luther (1967) and the church door at Wittenberg (1967.) Even if we



exclude the rugby player (1964) and Dr. Verwoerd, with a halo round him (1968), it is clear that the Roman Catholic, Anglican and agnostic citizens of the Republic find little to comfort them in their country's philately.

It will come as a surprise to many to discover that South-West Africa has been somewhat more liberal than the Republic. In addition to featuring Bushman rock painting, it gives us in its 1954 issue three stamps depicting Ovambo women and one depicting a Herero woman. The 3c stamp of 1965 gives us a picture of an African mail runner of the 1890's. This is the only African male to appear on the stamps of South-West Africa, and all the five Africans are in tribal dress. It would be a matter of interest to see a representation of Fort Hare University College on our stamps and perhaps a whole series might form a 1974 issue depicting the executive heads of the Bantustans. The 4c black and carmine depicting Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and the 5c brown-black and apple-green showing Chief Kaiser Matanzima would assuredly be valuable collectors' items. □

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER SEVEN MILLION WORKERS ?

by Dave Hemson

The Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) conference held between 13 and 17 August 1973 did very little about the 7 million unorganised workers in the South African economy. TUCSA has a long way to go from being an organisation representing unionised White, Coloured and Indian workers, to becoming the organising centre for unorganised workers in South Africa.

The real tension at the TUCSA conference was between Coloured and White-governed trade union interests, which could develop racial tension over job territory, blinding workers to the urgent problem of a path of liberation for black workers.

There were 28 resolutions passed at the Conference. Of

these, 10 originated from the garment unions and 8 from the distributive unions, showing a low degree of formulation of policy at the union level considering that there are 49 unions in TUCSA. Some of the most important resolutions concerned the following topics:

- 1) Unionisation of African workers,
- 2) Lack of confidence in the Minister of Labour,
- 3) A national minimum wage of R130 a month,
- 4) Elimination of racially mixed trade unions,
- 5) Abolition of African poll tax,
- 6) Elimination of discrimination against female workers,
- 7) The organisation of plantation workers,
- 8) The textile industry.

From the start of the Conference, however, it became apparent that the most important resolution was not the unionisation of African workers, but the threat to racially mixed trade unions from exclusively Coloured unions. One after the other delegates rose to demand that this issue be considered first. The racially mixed craft unions in the metal industry were particularly incensed by the resolution and demanded that it should be removed from the agenda paper altogether. The resolution was duly brought forward on the agenda paper for immediate consideration.

The whole issue was shabbily treated from the start. The Chairman, Steve Scheepers from the Leather Workers, did not allow the proposer A. Poole of the Engineering Union to speak for the resolution. The amendment to the resolution would have to be taken first, he ruled. This confused the proposer who then thought the procedure was grossly unfair since he would not have the right to speak for his resolution. The confusion which followed was not remedied by the Chair.

Eventually A. Poole took the rostrum. He read his prepared speech with difficulty since he realised it should have been made against the amendment and yet he had no time to rewrite it. The resolution was finally voted down by a vast majority.

The full importance of the issue did not rise to the surface:

- 1) Coloured workers in white-governed unions are chafing at the bit and wanting to take a more vital role in decision-making;
- 2) Coloured unions are being endangered by mixed unions which are in an evangelical mood in the metal industry.

It was said that the mixed unions wanted to wipe out the Engineering Union, which was originally fathered by the S.A. Boilermakers Union, one of the most powerful mixed unions. The metal industry is a rat race of competitive unions having the same job territory, and each union is out to win.

The whole position is complicated and is frustrating for leading Coloured workers because the present Industrial Conciliation Act lays down that all executives of mixed unions must be white even where 90 per cent of the members are Coloured or Indian. The mixed unions do, however, always have the advantage of established relationships with management, better benefits, complaint arbitration, and are tough enough to give competitive White and Coloured unions a rough time.

The whole issue was an ominous foretaste of yet another division in the ranks of labour in South Africa. It was also an indication of the articulation of the particular needs of the 'marginal' people in South Africa: Coloureds and Indians. Many Coloured and Indian workers and leaders see themselves as 'non-white', not 'black'. These unions can make TUCSA a platform for defining their particular niche in the racial hierarchy. All racial unions (both white and coloured) become in terms of their membership highly particularised special interest groups. Indicative of this trend were three other resolutions:

- 1) demanding the elimination of the tax on rice, the staple diet of 'our people';
- 2) demanding old age homes for Coloured and Asian people;
- 3) demanding integration in first-class railway compartments.

While these resolutions have legitimacy in a society in which all interests are channelled racially, it was uncomfortably obvious that the potential division is between 'brown' and 'black'. Some delegates complained at having to sit among workers in overalls at airport restaurants. A key indication of the expression of 'brown' interests will be found in the evidence to be submitted by Coloured trade unionists to the Commission of Enquiry into the Coloured Community.

The Coloured vs Mixed Union issue obscured the issue which theoretically everybody acknowledged as the most important issue: trade unions for African workers. This resolution was one step ahead of previous resolutions which piously called upon the Minister of Labour to allow Africans to become members of registered trade unions.

As was pointed out by Harriet Bolton at that time: 'Would there have been a trade union movement at all, of any colour, if the people in the old days had said to the Government: 'Make it legal and then we will do it? The workers in those days formed themselves into unions first, and then fought for their rights.'

The resolution at this conference called upon registered trade unions to set up parallel African trade unions, which could eventually be recognised by the Government.

The whole debate on African trade unions, divided by the inevitable tea break, took 12 minutes. Harriet Bolton who proposed the resolution said that TUCSA which represented 200 000 workers had to think about the other 7 million unorganised workers. The trade union movement should not wait for government permission to organise all workers in South Africa. She asked delegates not to pay lip service to an ideal but to get down to the job of effective organisation.

She explained some of her reservations about parallel unions. Existing trade unions were far too often small splinters of what they could be, dividing broad sectors of industry into fiddlingly small negotiating units. In the food industry, for example, there were sweet, biscuit, bread, canning and milk unions, none of any significance. What was needed was broadly-based effective mass unions for Africans, to make up in numbers what they lacked in legal recognition.

The debate came to a swift end because of the rule which restricts the number of speakers for a resolution. The potential conflict over various policies towards unorganised workers never surfaced. Some registered trade unions do view existing African trade unions with considerable disfavour since these unions do not fit into a comfortable parallel-union drawer. Registered trade unions in the metal industry, again, are irritated by the existing Engineering

Workers Union in Johannesburg and the Metal and Allied Workers Union in Natal.

The unionisation of African workers, originally placed high on the agenda paper, was moved down so that the Coloured vs Mixed Union issue could be dealt with first. That done, conference whipped through the other resolutions, even including the potentially contentious textile resolution.

The crucial issue of equal pay for women workers was treated with the same despatch as the unionisation of African workers. All manner of jokes were made on inevitable subjects, possibly to diffuse the real tension between male and female workers on this issue. More jokes per minute were totted up on this issue than any other, and the purpose of the resolution was blunted.

Overshadowing the conference from the first day was the desperate plight of the textile workers at Consolidated Textile Mills, Jacobs, the headquarters of the Frame Group. The Consultative Committee of the Garment and Textile Unions had voted thousands of rand in relief for weavers who had struck for higher wages on the Wednesday preceding the conference. These weavers had all been fired, the company claimed, because they had struck for higher wages. They demanded R21 a week basic wage. A tense situation developed outside the mill when the weavers were locked out on the Thursday morning. Eventually 75 workers were dismissed by the company, and these workers needed immediate relief.

The Textile Workers' Industrial Union, and in particular the Natal Branch was simply not in a strong enough position to provide financial support to these workers. The Union, through the Secretary of the Natal Branch, Harriet Bolton, appealed to other unions to give financial and moral support.

The lack of enthusiasm from the Chair for the issue was immediately evident. After discussion, which became quite heated, it was agreed that the resolution on the agenda paper on the textile industry be rewritten to encompass the new developments.

It is no secret that the resolution which expressed disgust

1) at the 'inhumanely low wage rates' particularly in the cotton section of the industry,

2) at the 'unjustifiable dismissals' of 10 members of the works committee and the Vice-Chairman of the Natal Branch of the Union,

which warned of the threat to industrial peace that could result from the recent attitude and actions of the management of the Frame Group, and which endorsed the strategy of the Textile Union and pledged financial support, had a stormy passage behind the scenes before being adopted unanimously by the Conference.

It was this opposition which created suspicion when eventually TUCSA and the Textile Union met the Frame Group and issued a press statement that the Textile Union and the Frame Group had agreed to settle their differences.

Nevertheless the textile resolution was important as it mustered excellent support from other delegates and brought some of the fighting spirit back into TUCSA which has been so lacking in the past few years.

The 19th Conference of TUCSA avoided some of the most important pressing aspects of labour policy in South Africa:

- 1) The attitude which trade unions should take toward foreign capital in South Africa.
- 2) The necessity of absorbing the vast pool of Black unemployed.
- 3) The imposition of works committees and new methods of wage determination through the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Amendment Act.
- 4) The setting up of Bantu Labour Boards to control the mobility of Black workers.
- 5) The urgent necessity of a National Health Scheme for all workers.
- 6) The attitude which trade unions should take toward White immigration.
- 7) Effective policies for training and upgrading Black workers in industry.
- 8) A national plan for the organisation of African workers in major industrial sectors.

On the other hand policy was set for a national minimum wage (R130 a month); elementary educational benefits; the elimination of job reservation; the containment of inflation; and the extension of benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

It is up to the trade unions participating in TUCSA to see that these policies are carried further than a letter to the appropriate government department.□

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