

Ref.:

THE BLACK WORKERS' PROJECT: A PROPOSAL

"When industrial workers were oppressed by miserable conditions of work, by long hours, and by starvation wages, they formed UNIONS to demand a decent stake for workers. It was the determination of ordinary workers to join together in a union movement which got them the improvements they wanted.

When ordinary men stop letting decisions be made by the rich and the powerful, when ordinary men decide that we will stand up and be counted, then this country will be a better place to live".

-- JOIN MANIFESTO.

This is a universal understanding for workers to negotiate in a united voice for those conditions they regard as essential to their survival. Yet black workers in S.A. have been by various legislative enactments and sheer practice been dissuaded from establishing and belonging to trade unions.

The complexity of the race situation in S.A., however, does require that this sector of great importance to South Africa's economy should claim adequate representation. It was in appreciation of this fact that the SASO GSC at Hammanskraal passed the following resolution:-

".....to mandate the Permanent Organiser to look into the effectiveness of establishing a BLACK WORKERS' COUNCIL whose aims and objects shall be:

- a. to act as a co-ordinating body to serve the needs and aspirations of the black workers;
- b. to unite and bring about solidarity of black workers;
- c. to conscientise them about their role and obligation toward black development;
- d. to run clinics for leadership, in-service training and imbue them with pride and self-confidence as people and about their potential as workers.

Subsequent to this SPROCAS Black Community Programmes undertook to co-sponsor the project.

WHY A WORKERS' COUNCIL:

It is not a statutory offence for black workers to organise themselves into unions. Coloureds and Indians are adequately covered in that they can have registered trade unions. They can negotiate through the channels prescribed by law. (Though thousands of them are unorganised)

There is a long history of efficient trade unionism among Africans, from Clemens Kadalie's ICU to the S.A. C.T.U. and FOFATUSA of yester-decade. Yet there is an opinion in government circles that 'the interests of African workers are adequately protected by state-created machinery.' It is their belief also that the African is not yet ripe for trade unionism as represented by the Minister of Labour, Mr. Marais Viljoen's statement that:

"We definitely are not going to allow our sound labour and race relations so painstakingly nurtured by this Government, to be disturbed by elements which apparently have no respect for our way of life."

White rule in S.A. has been characterised by curbs on the African workers' self expression. A range of specific labour legislations ushered in the Nationalist regime in 1948 among whom was the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953 in which the definition of employee was redefined to exclude Africans. Striking became illegal and incurred stiff penalties.

What forms of negotiation are there for African workers? In a Special Report on Trade Unions (RDM 18/8/72) Robert Kraft of TUCSA submits:

"If there is an Industrial Council Agreement in the industry many workers who are not trade union members can have their conditions of employment proscribed by that agreement. Also, most Industrial Council agreements are extended by the Minister of Labour to cover the African workers, especially in regard to the wages laid down in the agreements."

Unions and workers can, of course, still make Common Law contracts with employers outside the Industrial Council set-up.

Another important body in industrial relations in South Africa is the Wage Board. This is a body of appointed Government officials, which prescribes wages and conditions of employment after hearing evidence from interested parties. The Minister of Labour then publishes a Wage Determination which becomes binding on all employers and employees in the industry in an area. Wage determinations usually prescribe minimum conditions for workers who are not organised into trade unions. A wage determination operates until it is revoked. The Wage Board has been criticised of late for allowing certain wage determinations to run for many years before being updated.

Basis:

The Bantu Labour (settlement of disputes) Act is theoretically the basis for African worker representation at Industrial Council hearings and at the Wage Board. This Act is, however, not operating as it was intended. The provision for works committees of elected African workers in any establishment with more than 20 African employees has not been successful."

Benjamin Pogrud of the R.D.M. (Trade Unions - Special Report 18/8/72) to account for the slump in the effectiveness of trade unions after 1944 notes:

"The unions were not officially registered so the leaders could use little but persuasion in negotiations with employers. With members having long waits for little results, interest could not be sustained.

Regular subscriptions by way of stop orders were infrequent so that unions had scanty resources for officials' salaries and for office expenses. What little there was was open to theft by poorly paid officials. Lack of training added its share of inefficiency and mis-management.

The migratory labour system meant that workers came and went, resulting in fluctuating and disappearing memberships. Meeting venues were hard to obtain, and problems of organisation were added to by the need for workers to travel long distances to get home, the existence of curfew hours and the incessant attentions of the police.

Many of these problems still exist today. But they can be overcome."

It is our conviction that these structures can be overcome. The motivation to take part in a union which caters for the "bread and butter" issues and champions the welfare of the workers as a "whole man" would interest a worker and motivate him to take charge of his own affairs.

We have indicated that there is an urgent need for the establishment of a Council of Black Workers. Implicit in this idea is the desire to look after the "whole man". The black worker must be developed as such. All factors of his existence, the 'singleman's' barracks (hostel), housing, transportation, education, wages etc. all go into the making of a true worker. Any programme envisaged must meet all these factors of a man's development.

Statistics reveal that there has been a steady rise to the present 80% of the contribution of African workers as a work force. Yet 80% of Africans in the private sector earn less than R70 per month; about $\frac{1}{3}$ of these earn less than R10 a week. The great bulk of African workers are living below the Poverty Datum Line which in many instances is hardly sufficient.

There is a view that if greater wages are paid to Africans -- this would increase their economic viability and consumer potential. The most cardinal reason for organising black workers on our part is sheer anger and revulsion at the hordes of God's people who are taken for granted and 'pushed around' by whites. There is a sheer necessity for blacks to organise themselves to make their demands loudly heard and full appreciated. To develop a sense of awareness and human dignity.

WHY BLACK?

At the time when TUCSA has renewed its interest in the organisation of black workers after "white fears and misplaced self-interest won" back in 1969 when African unions were evicted from TUCSA. The debate at this year's TUCSA Congress where it was resolved

"to obtain from their members an unambiguous and clear mandate to press the Government to permit the organising of African workers into registered trade unions in their respective industries and occupations for which they cater." proved that there was a raging desire from white unions to take over representation of all workers.

This move by TUCSA, supported by Chief Duthalezi is rejected by Blacks. Drake Koka makes the point that "the unrecognised African Workers cannot validly exist like black pimples on the white union's face." He goes on to say: "Africans are competent enough to speak for themselves, make their decisions and negotiate on their own behalf whether they are being legally recognised or not."

Robert Williams quotes the following poem.

"Can the white man speak for me?
can he feel my pain when his laws
tear wife and child from my side
and I am forced to work a thousand miles away

does he know my anguish
as I walk his streets at night
my hand fearfully clasping my pass?

is he with me in the loneliness
of my bed in the bachelor barracks
with my longing driving me to mount my brother?

will he soothe my despair
as I am driven insane
by scraps of paper permitting me to live?

Can the white man speak for me?

in substantiating Aime Cesaire's view that "we cannot delegate anyone to think for us; to do our searching, to make our discoveries; that we cannot henceforth accept that anyone at all, be he our best friend, answer for us."

It is the oppressed workers themselves who must wrest the initiative. The bastard relationship between black and white unions cannot be allowed anymore.

The interest of TUCSA in black unions is very curious. The best motivation is simply to control black workers. This experience is being reported by Coloureds in mixed unions: "..... Coloured resentment over appointments on racial lines not infrequently leading to white control or at least severely disproportionate White representation on the executive committee."

Trade unionist Norman Davids comments "We see this as White superiority." Blacks are no longer interested in white tutelage.

Another reason for this sudden interest is that TUCSA was worried at the erosion of the bargaining power of White (Coloured and Indian) workers in Industry and commerce. A very influential view, however, is that unorganised African unions are amenable to exploitation by the bosses and this might induce unfair competition."

White workers have heavy protection against competition with blacks. Certain sectors of employment are reserved for whites. While the black worker is tottering on the base of the economic ladder, white workers are enjoying the highest standard of living. Dr. Dudley Kessel cites as reason for this situation:

"The fact that the large majority of White workers occupy skilled or semi-skilled positions in the economy. Thus the average earnings of Whites appearing in our table (unlike the figures for other countries) are not pulled down by the inclusion of the lower earnings of unskilled workers (mostly Blacks in South Africa).

Furthermore, the restrictions on the entry of Blacks into skilled or semi-skilled jobs must also have helped push White wage rates and earnings higher than they otherwise might have been.

Also, in our view, the statistics, if anything, underestimate how relatively well off White workers in South Africa are because they do not take full account of their benefits stemming from the existence of an industrial colour bar and a ready supply of cheap Black labour.

White workers have a stake in the system and they cannot be trusted to shoulder the aspirations of the workers they, themselves, help to oppress.

WHO ARE BLACK WORKERS?

Those people who are discriminated against socially, politically and economically by law and tradition because they are not white and have as their sole source of income the selling of their labour for financial gain. We, therefore, include in our definition Coloured, Indian and African labourers who are not professional but that the political situation in S.A. cultivates 'common ground' and a common awareness about their situation.

There is seeming discrimination among black workers themselves since Indians and Coloureds receive preferential treatment and can bargain for their rights. Hence there is an urgent need to build up solidarity between black workers. The priority, however, is to build up and organise the African labour force.

THE PROGRAMME:

There is disarray in the Black trade union situation. There are some unregistered African trade unions mainly around the Reef which are under the aegis of the white unions. This does affect their effectiveness and true relevance and tend to become 'kaffir-boatie' of their white overlords.

There are in some establishments workers' committees which operate under the Department of Labour and represent the interests of workers to the management which appoints its 'boss boys'. This has tended to militate against the free expression of workers.

The Black Workers' Council will be something much wider in scope than a trade union. Organisation, of course, will stem from formation of craft unions. However seeing that most Africans are not craftsmen or skilled labourers they can be organised according to the type of work they do.

Collective Bargaining:

It is a prerogative of workers to bargain collectively for the improvement of their situation, of wages, hours, benefits and to protest against ill-treatment and prejudice. The collective voice of workers is their most potent weapon. They can thus bargain and demand a hearing from the management. In numbers they can bargain from a position of strength and make representations to the Wage Board and the Industrial Councils. Employment of this power would put an end to arbitrary exploitation and harassment of black workers. Their trump card is their essentiality to the production process and hence the GNP of white S.A. Only such an event will they earn respect as people from the management and the other white workers.

IN - SERVICE TRAINING:

Many workers never had the opportunity to become craftsmen or skilled technicians because no opportunities have ever been afforded them. Even despite use being made of them because of their experience, they enjoy no grading from unskilled to semi-skilled to skilled workers. Thus despite the fact that they are used as such, sometimes they are not recompensed for their labour because they are not certificated. The challenge of the Minister of Transport to white unions in this regard is worth noting;

"For instance you find very few Black men becoming skilled journeymen and I want to ask this question:

I want to ask this question: Even if the government had to adopt a neutral attitude, is there one craft in S.A. that would be prepared to throw the doors open to the Black man?

"Is there one craft union that would be prepared to allow the Black man to become an apprentice so that he could become a skilled journeyman?"

"Would engineering, metal workers and iron and steel workers' unions be prepared to do this?"

"Oh no, they would allow the black man to become a semi-skilled assistant, but would certainly not permit him to become a skilled journeyman."

"I want to challenge the mining industry. If the Mines and Works Act were amended to remove the colour bar, would they issue blasting certificates to Blacks?"

(Daily News 24/8/72)

It shall be the task of the Black Workers' Council to organise clinics for 'in-service' training of workers. This can be done in consultation with the management which has everything to gain from the improved skills of their workers - then production will improve and workers can claim pay rises.

Motivation:

This is an aspect lacking most in present-day labour relations. It has been noted that this is due to the fact that Africans are "aware that advancement is limited. They know that time spent on the job, and the experience gained, do not lead to significant pay increases."

"The feeling that they can be fired at will and the insecurity of urban tenure are also factors. Chief Gatsha Duthelizi's comment in this regard is worth noting:

"Productivity will rise automatically if African people are better paid, better educated, better trained for the job and if they feel that they are relied upon. They must be involved in the whole job situation. They must know that they have a fair share in all this."

(Natal Mercury 24/8/72.)

Chief Duthelizi is operating within a Dantustans system that perpetuates the misery of the black worker. re: Prof V.D. Morwe's proposals at TUCSA on Pretoria-created Dantustan operated worker unions.

This is the task of a Black Workers' Council to be a watch - dog against evil employment practices.

LITERACY CONTINUED (HOME) EDUCATION:

Education for blacks in S.A. is voluntary and very expensive. In the past decades there was abundant resistance to formal education because of the divisive practices of missionaries and a determination to maintain customs and ritual which education frowned upon. Hence the illiteracy rate is high in the working class sector and some even left school too early for their overall development and independence. Poverty at home has hurled such people into the labour market. They are not able to negotiate with advantage because of their limited horizons. Yet they have been able to learn the basic art of work to the satisfaction of employers.

The Black Workers' Council must establish programmes "to serve the people" In consultation with voluntary student groups it can declare war on illiteracy. This will help the crippling effects on both the individuals and the community. Employers who provide compound (hostel) accommodation for migratory labourers must be induced to cooperate in the literacy programmes by providing classrooms etc.

A need urgently felt is that of adult education. Many of those who had to leave school early are spending their time continuing their education at home after working hours. They are preparing to acquire school certificates which will put them in good stead for promotion. Arrangements can be again made with volunteer students to assist with tuition and arrange vacation classes. Improvement in learning will imbue them with self-confidence and ambition.

Conscientisation Programme:

Seminars on Leadership training will be run. To be discussed there are workers' problems and an approach to these for maximum results. These will also be geared at making workers appreciate their social and community obligations.

Literature will be disseminated which increases their awareness of their rights, responsibilities, etc. Happenings and activities of workers in other areas will be brought to their attention. The Council will publish a workers' mouthpiece and organ and plan workers' programmes.

Recreation, Facilities and Culture:

One of the factors which kill black workers is the absence of facilities and amenities for relaxation and creative occupation of the workers. This is particularly evident in those areas where there are concentrations of migrant workers. The complete absence of family life is killing.

The complete absence of family life is killing. Recreational programmes will then be arranged to employ the workers creatively their leisure time. Representations can be made about their problems about housing, transportation etc; which all affect the productivity of the black worker.

Counselling:

Provision will also be made to establish a counselling service for the many problems workers are confronted with. We have in this regard essential services like legal counselling about their legal status, rights (if any) and advice on the multitudinous irritating confrontations blacks have with the law. Also counselling on workers' problems and rights, health education and prevention, medicine and finances, budgetting etc;

Benefits:

These can be worked out in consultation with the management, the Industrial Councils and other agencies to provide benefits for workers. These would include the statutory ones of unemployment, workman's compensation, sick fund and others like cooperative discounts, travel discounts etc.

The initial stages of this project, however, will consist in grass-roots organisation of African workers into farming committees, unions etc. Both SASO and SPROCAS 2 Black Community Programmes have made available two field officers who shall undertake the organisation of black workers throughout the country. To assist them in this they shall organise regional seminars to motivate workers TOWARDS A BLACK WORKERS' COUNCIL. It is hoped that after six months they will be able to call all black workers to a national congress where the said Council will be inaugurated. It is estimated that the Black Workers' Council will be established by June next year.

BUDGET PROPOSAL

BLACK WORKERS' PROJECT

<u>Salaries:</u> 2 Field Officers @ R120,00 per month	R2400,00
<u>Travelling:</u> Acquisition of vehicle	1800,00
Maintenance (for 10 months)	1000,00
<u>Seminars:</u> Reef	
Natal	The grant will only
Dordor	entail catering and
P.E. -- Uitenhage	accommodation @
Western Cape	R200 per seminar
	1000,00
<u>National Congress</u> - (subsidies - these will include	
travel grants - to motivate workers	
to attend.)	1000,00
	<u>R7200,00</u>

BLACK WORKERS' COUNCIL (5 year programme)

<u>Administration:</u>	<u>1 year</u>	<u>5 years</u>
Director @ R300,00 per month	2400	12000
Research Assistant @ R150,00 per month	1800	9000
Regional Secretaries: 5 regions	7200	36000
Typists - (6) @ R100 each	7200	36000
Rents +- R75 per office	5400	27000
Office Equipment, desks, machines etc.		5000
<u>Transport:</u> 1 car (acquired above)		
Depreciation @ R600 per year		3000
Organisers' visits		3000
Maintenance of car @ R100 p.m.		6000
<u>Projects:</u> Seminars, clinics etc.		2000
Recreation, Cultural Facilities		1000
<u>Stationery:</u> @ R600, per year		3000
<u>Publications:</u>		<u>2000</u>
		<u>R145000</u>

INCOME:

It is intended that income from members' subscription fees will offset part of this budget. Also the publications produced will be sold and they will pay their own costs. Wherever possible an attempt will be made to get members to raise the necessary funds. Problems envisaged here relate to the non-co-operation from the management and we will rely almost entirely on voluntary subscriptions by members.

All contributions and enquiries must be addressed to:

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