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● THE CASE FOR  
THE RECOGNITION  
OF AFRICAN - -  
TRADE UNIONS



THEY FIGHT

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*for*

Trade Union  
RIGHTS!

PRICE OF PAMPHLET

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# THEY FIGHT for Trade Union RIGHTS!

“Lucas Fajazi, an African soldier in the South African army, is the first African ever to win the Distinguished Conduct Medal. He saved the lives of many wounded men.”—(Inkululeko, 9/1/43.)

“Fourteen African soldiers have won the Military Medal.”—(Umteteli wa Bantu, 13/3/43.)

“Privates Jack Mohlala, Moses Maluka and Jantjie Mothapo, Native Military Corps, received the award (of the Military Medal) for meritorious action in which they showed great courage and determination.”—(Umteteli wa Bantu, 27/3/43.)

**T**HESE are a few examples. Dozens of such cases of devotion and courage have been reported in the newspapers. These brave men are volunteers; more than 70,000 of them have joined the South African army. They have taken part in many battles, many have been killed, many more have been taken prisoner or returned crippled.

Many tens of thousands of African soldiers are helping to win an Allied victory, as labourers, lorry-drivers, stretcher-bearers.

On the home front the African people are also making their contribution for victory. 750,000 are working on the farms, producing food and raw materials. 400,000 work in gold and coal mines. Over 200,000 are making bombs and shells, armoured cars and other weapons in South African factories.

Our means of waging war are made and carried, built and repaired by these African workers.

What recognition do they receive? What is the reward for their contribution for victory?

The African soldier receives 2/3 per day (less than half the pay of a European soldier). African workers in the factories receive very little more, on the farms and mines they receive less. The African people groan under many oppressive laws. Some of these laws were introduced into Parliament by men who have since been exposed as friends of Fascism, but the laws remain.

The African worker is compelled to carry a Pass. After many promises that the Pass Laws would be relaxed, over 10,000 people were arrested during April on the Reef and in Pretoria for offences against these laws. The African people have no freedom of movement, they are not free to live where they wish and they may not trade freely.

One of the worst barriers against them is exclusion from wage-regulating machinery specially provided for all other workers.

## **THE INDUSTRIAL COLOUR BAR**

African trade unions may not be registered by the Department of Labour. The Industrial Conciliation Act declares that no African worker may use the means which it provides for the formation of Industrial Councils and Conciliation Boards. All "Pass-bearing Natives" are excluded by this law. It means that African trade unions cannot use the methods to win improvements for their members which are commonly used by trade unions of European, Coloured and Indian workers.

**EVEN TRADE UNIONS WHICH INCLUDE ONLY A SMALL MINORITY OF AFRICAN WORKERS ARE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN THIS WAY—THEY CANNOT OBTAIN REGISTRATION.**

Here is an extract from a letter sent by the Industrial Registrar to a trade union, less than 10 per cent. of whose members are Africans:

"... the Union cannot be registered until it has been reconstituted into a trade union as defined in the Industrial Conciliation Act by excluding Natives from its membership. In other words, while the Natives remain members of the Union registration cannot be granted and should Natives be admitted to membership at any time after registration, the Union will be deregistered."

This letter was written in 1942, while Africans were fighting the Axis in Libya. It was written a year after the publication of the Atlantic Charter.

Officials of the Department of Labour and some employers are prepared to negotiate with the officials of unregistered trade unions. Other employers refuse to negotiate with such trade unions. They say: "We will recognise you when the Department of Labour recognises you." African trade unions are in this way prevented from using the machinery which was created to avoid strikes. They are left with no other means of obtaining redress for their grievances except the strike weapon.

## LABOUR MOVEMENT SPLIT

Not only does the Colour Bar deprive the African worker of the opportunity of using legally established machinery for obtaining better wages, but it is also an effective means of dividing the working class. Hence the inclusion of the Colour Bar in the first Industrial Conciliation Act soon after the 1922 strike.

But the real interests of all workers lie in unity. Disunity means weakness. It means low wages and insecurity. The right of Africans to organise into trade unions and the recognition of such unions without any restriction is a vital matter, not only for Africans, but for every worker.

Speaking of European trade unions formed in South Africa forty years ago, veteran trade unionist W. H. Andrews says: "These early unions were looked on with hostility by the employers and had to fight for their existence." Recognition for their trade unions was won by the European workers only after great sacrifices and hard struggles. To-day the African workers are meeting with the same hostility from the employers. It is in the interest of the European workers to assist the Africans in winning the fight which they themselves fought and won.

The existence of a strongly established trade union movement of European workers, numbering well over 200,000 members, has lightened the task of the African workers fighting for recognition. The Trades and Labour Council and the Cape Federation of Labour Unions, representing the organised European workers as well as many Coloured, Indian and African trade unions, have repeatedly demanded recognition for African trade unions at their national conferences.

Employers who can obtain low-paid African workers to do the same jobs will always be eager to displace European workers with African workers. In every industry the use of new methods of working is tending to displace the skilled worker, the craftsman, and to replace him with semi-skilled or unskilled workers. In the building industry the use of composition blocks in place of bricks is already a threat which sharply faces the skilled workers. Similar threats are also appearing in other trades.

**THE ONLY PROTECTION FOR THE AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN WORKER ALIKE IS THE ORGANISATION INTO TRADE UNIONS OF ALL WORKERS, AND CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ALL ORGANISED WORKERS IN RESISTING THESE THREATS.**

## **NEGOTIATION—OR STRIKES?**

The Government has often talked of recognising African trade unions. It first said that it was considering the matter in April, 1939. In July, 1942, Mr. Madeley, the Minister of Labour, said that the Government had at last decided to recognise African trade unions. The Smit Commission also recommended recognition later in 1942. But it was still delayed.

Last January General Smuts was asked by a deputation of churchmen when it was intended to recognise African trade unions. He replied:

**“This is a question we are busy with. It has been delayed but we are considering in what way this can be done. Things are inconvenient just now.**

**There is a wave of unrest in this country. One thing is that Communist influence is at work in our land on a fairly large scale. Many people are impressed with the danger of putting something in the hands of Africans which will be abused by other people.”**

The African workers are not allowed to use the machinery to avoid strikes which is available to other workers. They are compelled by harsh laws and restrictions to use strikes as a means of winning improvements. Now General Smuts says that discrimination is to continue because strikes have taken place!

During December, 1942, and January, 1943, many strikes occurred on the Reef, and after the Marabastad Riot, at which 15 Africans and a European soldier were killed, War Measure No. 145 was introduced outlawing strikes.

These strikes apparently influenced the Prime Minister in making the statement that Communist influence was responsible for a wave of unrest.

The Commission of Enquiry into the Marabastad Riot reported as follows:

**“The Commission finds that the disorder was unorganised and unpremeditated, without ringleaders or any precise object, and was apparently not instigated by any outside agitator. . . . The outbreak of lawlessness was due to general dissatisfaction among the Native employees. . . .”**—(Cape Times, 10/5/43.)

**LOW WAGES AND THE REFUSAL TO ALLOW AFRICAN WORKERS TO USE TRADE UNION MACHINERY MUST INEVITABLY END IN "DISORDER AND LAWLESSNESS".**

**CRIME AND ILL-HEALTH**

No employer is eager to pay higher wages. The employers realise that the recognition of African trade unions might have the effect of forcing them to increase wages. The Chamber of Mines and the farmers are for this reason opposed to the recognition of African trade unions. Both these groups are afraid that if the industrial and commercial workers get higher wages their own ill-paid employees will demand improvements.

**LOW WAGES MAY SUIT THE POCKETS OF THE EMPLOYERS, BUT THEY DO NOT SUIT THE WELFARE OF SOUTH AFRICA.**

Low wages and poverty are the causes of ill-health and crime. Tens of thousands of urban African workers do not earn sufficient to support their families. Even the earnings of their wives, who are also compelled to go to work leaving their children at home uncared for, are not enough. Some are driven to theft to supplement their wages. Others suffer slow starvation.

The Rev. W. Eveleigh, President of the Methodist Church, said two years ago:

**"South Africa is far from being a Christian country. We have a European population of about 2,000,000 people protected by tariffs and subsidies and colour bars. . . . And there is a non-European population of some 8,000,000 people, and a vast number of them are underfed, badly clothed, uneducated. . . ."**—(Cape Times, 12/8/41.)

The greatest single step to get rid of poverty, ill-health and crime would be an increase in the wages of African workers. The employers possess every facility to organise, make propaganda and make representations to the Government. Unless the right to organise freely is given to the African workers, low wages, poverty, ill-health and crime must continue to exist in South Africa.

**AFRICANS WANT TRADE UNIONS**

In spite of the many difficulties facing them, African trade unions have advanced. More than 80 such unions, with a total membership of 150,000, already exist. These unions have made representations on behalf of their members, facing insolence

from employers and provocation from the police. They have secured increased wages and better working conditions, and have collected large sums in back pay for their members. Trade unionism has taken root among the African workers and a general eagerness to be organised exists among them.

Also the European workers are demanding for the African workers the right to organise freely and full trade union recognition.

The Communist Party puts forward as measures which will strengthen the morale of the workers and thereby the whole war effort, the following demands. Until they are carried out African workers will be prevented from taking a full part in the war and we will continue fighting a total war with only a fraction of our resources.

- (1) The repeal, by Emergency Regulation, of the clause in the Industrial Conciliation Act which excludes a "Pass-bearing Native" from all the regulations of the Act.
- (2) Immediate full administrative recognition of African trade unions by the Department of Labour.
- (3) At the next session of Parliament, the repeal of the Pass Laws, the Master and Servants Law and the Native Labour Regulation Act.

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