

that as migrants they should not have full trade union rights in the industrial areas.

These problems can only be overcome by the acceptance that migrant workers are South Africans and not Foreigners, and therefore, they should have the rights of, freedom of movement, and freedom to organise within their homeland South Africa.

THE PORT ELIZABETH BUSDRIVERS AND THEIR OVERTIME BAN

Workers must always support other workers in times of struggle. This is the most basic principle of workers' unity. Even when, as is the case of the busman's ban on overtime, workers are suffering as well as the boss, the workers must nevertheless show their support for their brother-workers who are fighting for better conditions. Without your support, the busdrivers cannot win! And when the time comes for you to make your demands, you will need their support!

CRITICISE

But workers must also never be slow to criticize other workers who have acted foolishly, or incorrectly. There can be no learning if there is no criticism! Thus workers must examine very carefully the overtime ban by the busdrivers.

It is clear that the busmen have followed the example of the dockworkers and busdrivers in Cape Town - both of them won small victories by holding over-time bans. In both cases, wages were increased- but not by very much. In both cases, none of the leaders of the workers were sacked, and in neither case was there any intimidation, because of the great unity among the workers.

On this score, the busdrivers of Port Elizabeth have acted very wisely. By merely refusing to work overtime, they have acted within their legal rights. That is, they have not broken any laws, and thus have given the boss no excuse to fire them, nor the police an excuse to break them up. They have forced the boss to make the next move.

THE FAULT IN OVERTIME

They have also, by their action highlighted an important fault in the system of overtime- if the boss can afford to pay them more for overtime, why can he not afford to pay them the same during normal hours of work? Why is it that decent men must work overtime in order to earn a living? Surely the basic wage (without overtime) should be enough to ensure a decent living for every worker?

In these respects the workers have done wisely. They have also taken advantage of the fact that the boss cannot replace trained busdrivers easily: In the case of unskilled labourers, for example, the boss might simply sack the lot of them and employ new labourers.

TWO FAULTS

But there are two faults which must be criticized. First, just as it is the duty of every worker to support the busdrivers, so it is the duty of the busdrivers to make sure that they do not act in isolation. By not seeking the assistance of other workers, the busdrivers have endangered their task. By not explaining to other workers the reason for their overtime ban, the busdrivers have risked angering those other workers. And by not undertaking to discuss the affair with other factories, they have acted selfishly, assuming that once they have won a victory in the bus company, all their problems are over! Second, the African drivers made no attempt to get the support of the Coloured busdrivers. Imagine how powerful the busdrivers would be if they all joined together, regardless of race! It is not too late for the busdrivers to explain their actions to their Coloured fellowdrivers.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED.

The lessons from the busdrivers' overtime ban are thus threefold:

1. No demand by the workers can meet with victory unless it has the support of workers in other factories.
2. Workers who are making demands must explain this to other workers, and use the opportunity to educate backward workers about their struggle. In this way, more workers can be drawn into the unity of the workers.
3. Workers in one factory cannot seek their own selfish demands- only when all workers act together in unity can the demands of the workers be won.

THE INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION ACT: PART 11

In the last article (in last month's Basebetsi) we looked at how the Industrial Conciliation Act lays down methods whereby interaction between the bosses and workers can be regulated in many matters. This Act, we said, protects some of the workers but does not look at the interests of all the workers. It prevents Black workers from standing together with all workers, in the same worker organisations. In this article, let us look at why the Government felt it necessary to pass this law. We must also try and understand why so many workers supported the dividing up of the trade union movement.

DIVISIONS AMONG THE WORKING CLASS

The first thing we must understand is that South Africa's working class has never been united. Most White workers have always feared that the Black workers would accept lower wages for the same job than they would have, and that this would lead to the bosses sacking the Whites and replacing them with Blacks. The Whites feared that they would be sacked because the Boss's profits would be higher this way because he would have to spend less money on wages. The White workers felt that the Black workers did not need so much money because many also earned some money from their plots of land in the Reserves. The White workers did not ask themselves why it was that Black workers had to come to the cities to work. No, the white workers with their traditional racial prejudice, organised themselves against workers of other races and in particular Africans. They did not organise with the Black workers to prevent Bosses employing the Blacks at lower wages in place of Whites. Instead they talked about two kinds of work: "white men's work" and "kaffir's work". They succeeded through the mines and Works Act in 1911 in getting jobs limited to Whites only on the Mines. In time, the 'Colour Bar' as it was known - spread to railways, industry and commerce. It was established firmly through the first Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 which excluded Africans who carried passes from participating in collective bargaining at the Industrial Councils. (I wrote about the Industrial Councils in the last Basebetsi.)

To summarise, then, White workers found that it was more rewarding to create working conditions based on their status as Whites rather than to stand together with all workers, regardless of colour. Whilst in one sense they were like the Black workers (that is to say, they depended on their jobs for their living - and were exploited by the Bosses who primarily tried to make better profits), they preferred to trade on their white skins to maintain their jobs. The laws, such as the Industrial Conciliation Act were used to prop up a system of racial discrimination. In other words, black workers were not allowed to do certain jobs because they were black. And the white workers' organisations supported this. They became 'privileged' workers.

It is important that we understand this clearly because it will help us to understand better why Black and White workers did not organise together. Instead white workers formed themselves into their own trade unions, sometimes with Indian and Coloured workers, and African workers formed their own organisations: (the ICU, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions etcetera.)

TWO STRUGGLES

So two struggles went on during the 1920's and 1930's. Two separate groups of workers fought for better wages and working conditions, and a greater share in the profits of the Bosses. Sometimes there was co-operation but this was fairly infrequent. Even in those unions where the leadership tried very hard to organise non-racial unions because pass-carrying Africans were not allowed to be members of registered unions. The white workers did not scrap their privileges of being members of registered unions.

THE NATIONALIST PARTY AND THE

'BLANKEWERKESBESKERMINGSBOND'

Now the whole thing was complicated by something else. The people we know as the Nationalists (i.e. the people who govern South Africa at the moment) became suspicious of the fact that Afrikaans workers were forgetting the fact that they were

Afrikaners. They were seeing themselves as workers first. They were forgetting their culture and political differences with the English. These Nationalists formed the 'Blankewersbeskermingsbond', a trade union for all white Afrikaner workers. It will take many more words to explain why some of the Afrikaner workers wanted to be separated from English workers but I shall explain it like this:

Most of the English workers were fairly skilled. They were not as threatened by undercutting by Black workers. They did not mind Indian and Coloured workers standing with them. The Afrikaner worker, on the other hand, had been forced off the land after the Boer War. Poor and unskilled, and uneducated, they flooded the cities. They had a great deal of difficulty in coping, and in finding jobs. They felt very threatened by the competition of Black workers. They believed that the White man could only survive if the Black man was "kept in his place", if he was kept as a servant of the White man. Their traditional race prejudice was reinforced by their poverty in the cities. Many of the Afrikaner workers, however, forgot their earlier race hatred in the trade unions. Others, on the other hand, made their trade unions for Afrikaner workers only. (This is where the Blankewersbeskermingsbond was important.)

The present Nationalist Party then said that the most important thing was for all Afrikaners to stand together, regardless of whether they were workers or not. They claimed that they must ensure the continued existence of the White man. They were hostile to free, non-racial trade unionism because it meant that the Afrikaner workers would have divided loyalties between the doctrines of racial supremacy and those which said that all workers should stand together (which was what the mixed trade unions said, even though many of them did not even try to organise the African workers to stand with them.)

Now, that gives us some of the background to the Industrial Conciliation Act.

These are the points you must remember:

1. job reservation has been in existence for over sixty years;
2. black workers and white workers generally organised separately, separated by racial, cultural and political considerations, although there were some mixed unions of White, Coloured and Indian workers.
3. In the 1930's the growth of Afrikaner nationalism led to the growth of a separate trade union movement for Afrikaners which was associated with other Afrikaner movements amongst school children, women, businessmen and politicians. These movements were cultural, economic, and political and all aimed at the rise of the Afrikaner people as a group.

DISSOLUTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE AND LABOUR COUNCILS

When the Nationalist Party came into power in 1948 - 26 years ago - they immediately started trying to put into effect ideas about trade unionism. In effect, the Industrial Council Act of 1956 made job reservation much stricter and tried to segregate the mixed trade unions; it tried to stop the growth of non-racial trade unions; it tried to bring workers under the Nationalist Party. It DID not want independent trade unions. They did not care if what they were doing slowed economic production. The main thing was that the White man should be boss.

What exactly happened?

First of all, in 1948, some white-only unions broke away from the SAT&LC (the South African Trades and Labour Council) which was open to all unions including African unions and formed the Co-ordinating Council of South African Trade Unions. They said that the White workers' viewpoint was not being represented.

Then in 1950 the SAFTU (the South African Federation of Trade Unions) was formed. This was a trade union federation which did not permit the affiliation of "mixed" trade unions. It also broke away from the SAT&LC.

S.A. TRADE UNION CONGRESS

Then the SAT&LC dissolved itself and formed the S.A. Trade Union Congress (now known as TUCSA) which whilst it was largely composed of mixed trade unions (i.e. Indian, Coloured and Whites) did not permit the affiliation of the African unions. In other words, in the face of the great pressure placed upon them by the new Afrikaner and 'whites only' trade union federations, the more liberal and non-racial trade union federation gave in and had 'segregated' membership.

In the meantime, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions dissolved itself and formed SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions.) This was a truly non-racial federation; it stood for the unity of all workers; it was concerned about the economic, social, and political exploitation of all workers.

The point here is that the old SAT&LC, whilst it preached unity for all workers, never really tackled the most important questions of the day. It tried to maintain the unity of workers, ignoring the thing that eventually split the trade union movement from top to bottom; the fact that workers must see themselves as workers first and not as Afrikaners or whites or nationalists.

A workers movement must sort out what it is fighting for!

.....

Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.