

- I wouldn't say they actually said they were pushing some refugees, but it was just a feeling of all of us that whenever you mentioned the fact that you wanted to meet a particular person, they would question you and find out who these people are, what they wanted and they'd be protective about the whole thing. There was Lester Tractman and Maida Springer. She seemed to know, more or less, the people we could possibly meet.

- There wasn't much political input in the course. If they wanted to influence us politically, it was a question of preparing us for a later stage. Now that we'd come we were closer to them. Even now, when they write to my union, they write through me and never really address themselves to the organisation. It seems maybe I'm being singled out as their right-hand man. It's a problem to some extent, because each time I speak to the union I've got to say 'I've got this information', as though it's an individual thing.

- After the course we stayed out in Washington and used to come into the AALC offices almost daily in the morning. I would, for example, be taken into the office of the president and have some discussion of general problems. Thereafter we'd meet as a group and just discuss generally what we think is the future of this country. They'd have the AALC officials there, like O'Farrell who'd come in occasionally and also Lane Kirkland, the AFL-CIO president. They'd want to know what we thought of South Africa and what the future would be.

What came out of those discussions, very definitely, was that they didn't want to have anything to do with the current political organisations, specifically the A.N.C. The PAC they regarded as more or less dead. A labour movement is most probably what they think should bring about liberation, independently of any other organisation. They didn't talk about the homelands or Gatsha.

- Personally I think these people want to have a hold in this country, but they want to do it through the workers, as though they are helping the workers. I don't see any help there. At the United Nations when they vote, they know apartheid affects the workers, yet they either vote with the S.A. government or abstain from voting in order to weaken the opposition.

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ulterior motives and strings attached, then it is an obstacle.

Because the AALC is motivated by US foreign policy interests, it is not interested in the ordinary workers. Instead it aims to cultivate sections of the leadership. One Scandinavian trade unionist has described their methods: "The Americans are travelling around offering money independently to trade union leaders..... It is obvious that the AFL-CIO doesn't consider trade union assistance from the point of view of giving a hand to the common worker but as part of the US foreign policy. They don't give a damn about the common workers' situation, as you can easily see from their training programmes. They are always geared to trade union leadership training. But if you never train the rank and file members how will they defend their rights, especially against dishonest leadership which is often their worst problem? And how do you get sound trade unions if you continuously economically maintain the upper strata of the unions - and maintain them very well by pouring in 'education' money but don't care about rank and file members, if there are any?" (28)

Others have commented on the effects this has on hindering unity. Leadership may have a vested interest in maintaining, say, the SA Tin & Construction Workers Union. The interests of the workers could require unity with others in the metal and construction industries.

Busch has written scathingly of African unionists "whose major activity has been attending international courses, seminars and congresses." According to him, "external influences have been the most corrupting". (29) This is a further criticism that can be made of the proposed AALC programme, that it is essentially foreign; foreign in style, in personell, in its aims, and in its content. This foreign influence is particularly inappropriate for educational courses. Education is crucial for the workers' movement, but it has to spring from the day-to-day needs of that movement. It has to be rooted in the concrete conditions in the factory, the township and the country. And the content and approach should be suitable and essentially indigenous. The most indigenous the AALC programmes will be, are that their courses will be government approved! One difference of approach that is likely to emerge, for example, would be the equation of the struggle against apartheid with the US black civil rights movement. But South Africans are likely to feel happier comparing their struggle with the many international movements of nations and social liberation.

But the major criticism which can be made is that the proposed project will not be controlled by South African workers and unions. It is likely to be

staffed primarily by Americans, perhaps also with a few individuals like Nana Mahomo. Furthermore the project will be accountable to the all-American AALC Board of Directors, to the AFL-CIO Dept. of International Affairs (headed by Irving Brown), to the US government (the sponsors), and unofficially to the CIA.

Conclusion

As we stated at the beginning of this article, the AFL-CIO visit is surrounded by question marks. But that is a charitable assessment. Their motives are suspicious and their record internationally has been disruptive. They represent foreign assistance to South African unions in its worst form.

Trade union internationalism leaves a lot to be desired, as any reading of the history will show. However, many workers' movements are beginning to realise that there is an alternative to pouring in money (even when done well-meaningly). Real solidarity, many unionists argue, is between workers around the globe, rather than between the heads of the international departments of the different national federations. The strength of British or US workers is not their national federations' bank balance but their ability to act in their own factories in support of Third World workers. United solidarity actions between workers sharing similar interests (say in the same industry or company) is worth more than millions being pumped into the trade union movement from abroad.

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Footnotes

- 1 See Where were you brother?, by D. Thomson & R. Larson for details.
- 2 GK Busch, Political Currents in the International Trade Union Movement Vol.1 (Economist Intelligence Unit), p.20
- 3 "The USA seems destined by Providence to plague us with all kinds of evils in the name of liberty", wrote Simon Bolivar, leader of the 19th century struggle for Cuban independence.
- 4 Busch, Vol 1, p.62
- 5 Horowitz, p.403
- 6 T. Braden, 'I'm glad the CIA is immoral', Saturday Evening Post, 20 May 1967.
- 7 Busch, Vol 1, p.56
- 8 27 October 1974
- 9 Busch, Vol 1, p.67
- 11 Thomson & Larson, p.26
Thomson & Larson, p.60-62. See also Waterman's article in SALB Vol 5, No.8.

- 12 See Windhoek Advertiser, 6 November 1981 & 11 November 1981.
- 13 See B. Cohen, 'The CIA & African Trade Unions' & Scheeter, Ansara & Kolodney, 'The CIA as an equal opportunity employer', both in Dirty Work, Vol 1, (Africa). The most wide-ranging account of AFL-CIO activities is Thomson & Larson. But see also Davies in SALB Vol 1 No.9 (on Zimbabwe); Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru (on Kenya); F. Hirsch & R. Fletcher, The CIA & the Labour Movement, as well as the film 'Missing' (on Chile).
- 14 Quoted in Thomson & Larson, p.82..
- 15 In the mid 60s a top-level study for the US government by George Cabot, had this to say about 'Labour and the Developing Countries': "We are involved in a total war. It cannot be won easily or cheaply. This book is a plea to governments, management and labour to perceive more precisely that they have the importance of organisations of workers in the developing world to the fulfillment of US foreign policy and the objectives of the free world.... In fact our foreign policy cannot be successful unless it specifically includes and gives high priority to the activities of worker organisations in these vast areas (of Asia, Africa and Latin America)", quoted in Thomson & Larson, p.69.
- 16 US Dept. of Labour. Profile on Trade Unions, 1980.
- 17 See Monthly Review, June 1970 for two views on the 'International Solidarity of Workers', by A. Emmanuel and C. Bettelheim. See also B. Nissen's insightful paper "US workers and the US Labor Movement" in Monthly Review May 1981
- 18 Busch, Vol 11, p.49.
- 19 See Seidman, 'US Labour unions in South Africa'
- 20 Larson & Thomson p.54
- 21 Funk has denied the allegation. See Cohen in Dirty Work, p.76.
- 22 Cohen in Dirty Work, p.75
- 23 Programme reprinted in Industrial Relations Journal of S.A. Vol.1 No.2 (1981).
- 24 South Africa Newsletter, Vol 1, No.1, February 1982.
- 25 Sunday Tribune 12 September 1982; Star 20 October 1981.
- 26 Sunday Tribune 12 September 1982; also Sunday Tribune 19 September 1982 for Brown's replying article, 'I'm here to help the workers'.
- 27 South Africa Labour News, Vol 1, No.3, July 1982.
- 28 Thomson & Larson, p.58.
- 29 Busch, Vol. 11, p.50.

DOCUMENTS

The following press statement and policy document were released by the Council of Unions of South Africa after a National Conference held at the end of July 1982.

Press Statement

At the National Conference of CUSA held over July 31 - August 1 1982, Mr. A. Mosenthal (President, S.A. Chemical Workers Union) was elected President and Mr. L. Kwelemthini (President Food Beverage Workers Union) was elected Vice President. The position of General Secretary held by Mr. P. Camay was reconfirmed.

Three new affiliates were accepted as members:

Hotel Liquor and Allied Workers Union
Textile Workers Union (Tvl)
S.A. Black Municipal Workers Union.

The Council now has ten affiliates. The conference also agreed to establish two new unions:

The Security Workers Union and
The National Union of Mineworkers.

A number of resolutions were also passed and covered such matters as: Black leadership, union membership, management, collective bargaining, party politics, influx control, education, technical training, overtime, Ingwavuma, KwaNdebele and the "homelands", the right to strike, union

involvement in community, realistic wages, pension funds, workmens compensation and unemployment insurance benefits, worker unity, women workers, retrenchment and unemployment, worker control, occupational health and safety, unfair labour practices and detentions.

POLICY DOCUMENT ON SOME ISSUES

Black Leadership

CUSA operates in a country which is racist, undemocratic and which exploits the larger Black (people of African, Indian and so-called "Coloured" origin) community. Racially disadvantaged people need re-education and training so that they can take their rightful place in their community.

CUSA believes therefore that we need to develop a leadership which serves the community. We believe in developing the awareness and consciousness of the Black community which has been denied its rightful leadership role in South Africa.

Union Membership

CUSA believes that all workers in South Africa irrespective of sector or industry in which they are employed should be represented by unions of their choice.

State interference

That state interference in prescribing membership by class of workers, race or sex or any other discriminating measure is condemned and will be vigorously opposed at all times.

Registration

CUSA believes that the present registration procedure imposed on independent Black trade unions is an attempt to control them. The CUSA unions opted for registration under protest in the post-Wiehahn legislative changes as an indication of their bona fides to assist in the creation of sound industrial relations in the country.

CUSA endorses the stand of member unions which have decided not to register. The Council would like to see, and has made representations to that effect, to the Director-General of the Department of Manpower Utilisation that the registration process be removed from the present labour legislation. In

its place a simple certification procedure be instituted which would entail the applicant union to deposit a copy of its constitution to the registrar upon which a certificate would be issued to the union. The effect of this would be to give the union legal competence to act for and on behalf of its members.

Competing Unions

Whilst the Council of Unions would prefer seeing industry wide trade unions finally emerging, we recognise that in the present developmental stage, worker aspirations need to be expressed through their freedom to choose or create associations to protect and enhance their interests. It is only when sufficient trust and credibility is established between unions that common purpose will allow unions to adopt common stances or merge. The Council would also wish to develop a dispute procedure acceptable to non-affiliated unions and other federations which may be used when issues need to be resolved between competing unions.

Management

CUSA believes in a free and just society, and accepts the truism that labour cannot exist without management. The Council therefore is willing to meet and discuss issues of common interest with employer organisations or individual employers.

CUSA believes that employers should not interfere in trade union activity

Collective Bargaining

CUSA believes in the internationally accepted right of workers bargaining collectively with management. The right to withhold labour to ensure a balance of power is of paramount importance and will be defended by CUSA at all times. The Council recognises the deprivation suffered by its members, through centuries of oppression. We will redress this wrong in the economic sector by bargaining for living wages and other conditions of employment emphasising issues such as security of employment, health and safety etc. The right to representation in issues involving workers will be the cardinal features of agreements arrived at by the unions represented in the Council.

The State

CUSA recognises that the present government is unrepresentative of the people of South Africa. Legislation aimed at protecting the white minority will

be opposed in every form available to us. Where such legislation infringes worker rights, the duty of the Council will be quite clearly to its membership. If despite representation and protest, the State continues to infringe worker freedom we will not hesitate to act in the interests of our members. It is also regrettable that the State does not act decisively in these matters. As long as this hesitancy and indecision manifests itself in State policy, industrial strife will occur.

Party Politics

The Council has inherited a historical situation where the Black labour movement has been excluded from political affairs. Decisions are made by the minority unrepresentative government in the political, economic and social fields to entrench their power. An unwillingness exists to share meaningful political power in the country. Black workers have been subjected to various pieces of ideological and punitive legislation. It would be naive and simplistic to think that the Council agreed to this. We disagree! We do not believe that solutions found in a separatist political forum can effectively and satisfactorily reflect the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of workers in South Africa. CUSA will not tolerate State direction and coercion into unacceptable situations. CUSA will meet the challenge presented to it.

CUSA believe that the role of the State is a facilitating role in industrial relations. The State should not play a role which is directing and promoting the view of one section of the worker community against the interests of other sections of the community. Whilst we accept that regional development is a priority in South Africa, we reject the practice of dividing the country into so-called homelands. State action against worker organisations will not be tolerated. Our resolve to fight to the bitter end for worker rights and freedom is a mantle cast on us by the repressive legislation which is applied currently in South Africa.

Influx Control

CUSA will make every endeavour to eradicate this inhuman legislation. The free movement of labour is a cardinal factor in determining the infrastructure of a healthy economy. State interference through influx control legislation, the Group Areas Act and other legislation is abhorrent to the Council.

Education

CUSA believes that a unitary system of education should apply to an undivided South Africa. CUSA further believes that racially segregated schooling is to the disadvantage of all the people and advocates the desegregation of all schooling and other educational facilities at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Technical Training

CUSA believes that in the near future our country will be governed by Black people. Artificial criteria placed on technical training either by the State, or white unionists or reactionary management will be opposed wherever it is encountered. Again, we emphasise that we believe in desegregated facilities and equality in selection opportunity. Separate apartheid institutions are an anathema to us.

International Trade Union Secretaries and Federations and National Centres in the Free World

CUSA believes in international unionism and will maintain contact with organisations and seek assistance from them wherever it requires such assistance. But, we will develop our own solutions to South Africa's problems. Manipulation of affairs in South Africa by these agencies will not be tolerated, nor will we be dictated to adopt postures and positions which do not have the support of our membership.

Workers' Voice

Below we publish parts of WORKERS' VOICE of June 1982, the newspaper of MACWUSA, GWUSA.

The Workers Organise

Since the late seventies, there has been large scale worker activity in the Eastern Cape. This has culminated in the formation of the two unregistered Trade Unions, namely The Motor Assemblers and Component Workers' Union of South Africa and the General Workers' Union of South Africa, (MACWUSA and GWUSA respectively).

The history of the two unions has been covered in the Press, in certain research works by either groups or individuals and elsewhere. We will therefore not bother getting into that at this moment.

A few months after the establishment of our unions, harassment by the authorities of both the leadership and membership became the order of the day. Five of our leaders were detained for periods up to nine months, for crimes best known to the authorities. A number of GWUSA members (GPO and SA Bottling) have appeared on and off in court for what the security police refer to as intimidation.

The five detained were: Dumile Makanda (Chairperson of MACWUSA), Siphon Pityana (GWUSA organiser), Mxolisi Didiza (MACWUSA organiser), Max

Madlingozi (Branch- Chairperson, General Motors) and Zamile Mjuza (G.M. official).

Four of these people were banned two weeks after their release. They are: Dumile Makanda, Siphon Pityana, Max Madlingozi and Zamile Mjuza.

The aim of these detentions and bannings is to crush the unions, but as can be noted this has not been the case, for membership numbers have increased substantially over recent months. "A union is not its leadership but the workers themselves".

Affiliation

The two unions are not affiliated to any labour organisation but work very closely with other progressive trade unions. The unions with which our unions have established contact and a working relationship are these:

South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), General Workers Union (GWU), African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU), General and Allied Workers Union (GAWUSA), and the Black Municipal Workers Union (BMWU).

All these unions including ours are some of those that attended the historic Unions Conference in Cape Town, where Industrial Councils and union registration were rejected.

Though most unions differ in certain principles like non-racialism; it is strongly felt that they should come together and form one formidable force that cannot be easily crushed by our strong enemy.

Expansion

Workers outside Port Elizabeth have shown and expressed interest in MACWUSA/GWUSA, with the result that a branch was established in Pretoria and organising is also in progress in Uitenhage. Primarily, organising workers solely in the Eastern Cape had been our major objective, but the Pretoria workers that approached us could not be turned away,

This reason being that the workers' struggle is not regional but national and also that the Pretoria area is well industrialised and unorganised, i.e. the workers there mostly are not unionised.

The problems encountered by Messrs Kobese, Mali and others of our Uitenhage branch cannot be undermined. These gentlemen lost their jobs because they openly identified themselves with our unions and publicly voiced their support. This was brought to the attention of their respective

managements, allegedly by officials of a trade union of which they were still members at the time. Harassment, surveillance and constant interrogation followed and in the end they were fired.

This has not at all diminished the spirits of these committed comrades, for they are working even harder. For the sake of unity the actions of those union officials met with no retaliation from our side, for we believe in accepting these sell-outs as our brothers first before judging them and later re-educating them.

Recognition

MACWUSA has submitted letters with recognition terms to some companies and has negotiated with others. In most of these companies our shop stewards are allowed to operate, that is, to represent workers who are fired or who have grievances etc.

GWUSA on the other hand, has also met with the same experiences. In a number of companies the two unions have stumbling blocks in the form of verkrampt management. In these companies union members have been victimised, threatened with dismissal or retrenchment. At Associated Glassworks, all members of GWUSA were in fact retrenched. At James North, a union affiliated to TUCSA, which hereinafter shall be referred to as Lucy Mvubelo's union, was brought in and encouraged by management to recruit GWUSA members. Those workers who refused to join Lucy's union were immediately dismissed.

Liaison Committees

The two unions reject completely the use of liaison committees as channels of communication.

Let us look at what Mr. Fred Ferreira of Ford has said about liaison committees: "We do not believe that any liaison committee has any real bargaining power. After all, the employee representatives are still employees of the company and subject to company disciplinary codes."

Now let us look at remarks made by Dirk Pieterse, Labour Relations Manager at Ford: that Works and Liaison Committees are "useless channels" and "completely ineffective". He went on to say that "One has to recognise the reality of things like victimisation, and in that situation a trade union, acting as a third party, is the best means of representation".

Is it then, surprising that we as workers reject bodies so referred to by management themselves? In our two unions, only a worker's committee is acceptable as a channel of communication.

What is a Workers' Committee

A workers' committee is a committee of workers elected by the workers themselves. It must comprise a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Shop Stewards, the number of which depends on the size of the factory or the number of members in each firm.

Industrial Councils

This is one other body which our unions reject totally, because Industrial Councils:

- serve only to institutionalise and contain conflict, since management is effectively able to veto any proposals put forward by workers.
- management and workers are numerically equally represented on the council, yet a two thirds majority is needed to pass any proposal.
- a representative of the Department of Manpower Utilisation may be present at council sittings.

The following document is the full text of the letter sent to the National Manpower Commission Investigating Farm Labour by the Orange Vaal General Workers Union on Sept. 6 1982.

You have written to us asking our opinion on the position of farm and domestic workers. We farm workers cannot go into every aspect you have raised. Our problems are so great, our needs so far from being satisfied that we would have to establish our own commission of enquiry if we were to begin to do justice to all the specific problems we have.

In a spirit of honest and mutual co-operation we will generally outline what for us is the very minimum we expect if we and our children are ever to have a decent working life.

- In accordance with the fundamental principles of the free enterprise system, we expect that we be allowed the legally enforced right to sell our labour wherever we find the best price for it - whether it be on the farms or in industry anywhere in our country. We want freedom of movement - not "farm worker" stamped in our pass book, not pass book at all.
- We expect that all farm and domestic workers be protected by a legally enforced decent minimum wage. Everyone knows that farm and domestic workers are the worst paid workers in the country whether we are

skilled or not. We want a minimum wage at least equal to that of our fellow workers in industry - a wage that will meet our needs as we know them.

- We expect that the length of our working day and week, as well as over-time rates comply with the requirements of the Factories Act. At the moment there is no control over the hours we are made to work.
- We expect that adequate health and safety measures are legally laid down for farm and domestic workers, with the right to decent compensation in the event of an accident. In addition paid sick leave should be enforced as well as maternity leave for women workers.
- We expect to be housed decently with enough room, air, light and protection from the elements for ourselves and our families. We want electricity, hot water and adequate sanitation in our house. If we are paid decent wages we will be able to afford to pay for those services at market related rates.
- We expect a decent education for our children, legally enforced at least to age 16 or Standard 8, with schools not too far away from farms.
- We expect the right to form trade unions to negotiate on our behalf for better living and working conditions and naturally we expect that we be allowed the democratic right to strike in support of our demands if need be.
- We expect that where we are on farms we be granted the right to cultivate for our own use a small portion of land as well as being able to keep our own goats and whatever on the land as well. This is how things were in the past, and this is how we would like things to be in the future.
- Lastly we expect decent social security in all aspects of our working lives - pensions, unemployment benefits, housing and job security and so on - so that we have some guarantee that we will not just be thrown away like rubbish when we are no longer of any use to our employers. This unfortunately is what has been our lot for so long.

Commissioner, in good faith we say that we need these things if we are to live reasonably decent lives and we urge you to do all in your power to put right the great wrongs that have been done to us for so many, many years. Of course, what you cannot put right, we ourselves will have to put right - otherwise who is going to do it.

INTERVIEWS

Jeremy Baskin interviews Johnson Mpukumpa, National Chairman of the General Workers' Union. (GWU)

Can you tell me something about the membership, principles and policies of the GWU?

We have about ten to fifteen thousand members nationally. The policy of the GWU is a non-racial policy. We do have difficulties organising African and Coloured workers, although there's good organisation consisting of all workers amongst the stevedores. In other industries we are having a harder time. But the doors are open for every worker who wants to join us.

It is also the policy of the union that the workers should play a role towards controlling their trade unions along democratic lines. The workers must decide the policy which will be followed and must take the decisions. We've got committees at the shop floor level, and they represent the workers on our union controlling committee. Those representatives get a mandate from their various 'generals' and bring it to the controlling committee.

Also, as a progressive trade union, we feel we must be involved in community activities. To have a good relationship and work together with the communities, will also help us to have more strength. The reason I say so is that the community is the workers and workers are also the community. I see no difference. It would be a strange thing if I say I'm opposed to community

associations, whilst I'm a worker from the community. The job of the trade union in the factory is to look after the members in the factory but the members in the factory are from the community. We should therefore have a good relationship with the community associations, since we are workers from the community.

Finally the policy of the GWU is to organise all industries, but since unity is coming we have industries which will be transferred to other unions, such as FOSATU affiliates.

Does this mean the GWU is going to change into an industrial union or a dockworkers union?

No. The GWU will organise generally but there will be industries which will be organised and transferred to progressive unions which fall under this federation. One of the important items at our annual national conference was the unity of the workers. We felt that a federation of the workers should be encouraged and supported.

What are the main obstacles before unity can be built?

There are minor differences which became a stumbling block to unity or federation, because some of the progressive unions are opposed to forming a federation with some of the registered progressive unions. But that is a minor thing which can be overcome in future. I think they'll see reason and come forward to this federation because it's beneficial to them and to the workers.

It's been said the GWU has turned about in their attitude to FOSATU, for example on the registration issue. Is this not a change in the direction of GWU?

Yes, there is a change and also we are going to meet them from time to time. Our differences were not so great. We believe that FOSATU has become a more democratic organisation and we believe that they are more willing to take criticism, so we have started to build good relations and ties.

Our differences over Industrial Councils were not so important. In meeting together FOSATU also brought us some good advice, especially on this question of Industrial Councils.

Mr. Thandani, GWU's East London branch secretary was recently detained by the Ciskei police. What is GWU's conflict with the homelands?

We are having difficulty in the homelands because they are opposed to the workers being unionised. We are facing a lot of struggles and harassment. We face the problem of being recognised by the homeland leaders as members of the union. That is one of the main problems of the workers in this country. How can our 'leaders' oppose our liberation in South Africa? They should be happy to see their workers joining the trade unions and being properly paid. I think their fear is their position.

How do you see the future for the workers in this country?

The workers are joining the unions at a great pace. This is the talk of the town, that the workers demand to be organised. I think the workers have even got a chance of changing the South African society.

Jul 23

Craig Charney interviews Arthur Grobbelaar, General Secretary of the Trade Union Council of South Africa. (TUCSA)

How can trade unions in your view best advance the interests of the workers?

Firstly, they've fundamentally got to determine what their membership wants them to do. But having said that, I think it's the responsibility of the leadership of trade unions to clearly indicate to their membership what is possible of achievement. Secondly, they've got to show their membership, and they've got to convince their membership, that some objectives are desirable, whereas others might not be; that in fact the objective the membership might want to pursue is against their own best interests.

My analysis of the strikes that have been taking place show that invariably the workers have lost out, that they have achieved very little in practical terms through engaging in strike action. Now, I think that a lot of the blame must lie on the leadership of the unions involved, in that if they didn't encourage strike action on the part of their workers, they didn't do sufficient to dissuade them from taking those steps. I think that's what responsibility of leadership is all about.

When is the last time that a TUCSA - affiliated union went on strike?

Oh, we have them every now and again. Let's be quite honest about it: one can't rigidly control this sort of thing. We also get a certain percentage of, shall we say, illegal strike actions. We also get a certain percentage of strike actions when we don't believe every other avenue has been explored to resolve the problems amicably.

So when TUCSA have struck, generally it would not have been because of instigation by the leaders, but rather because the workers themselves have gone ahead?

It's rather been a question of spontaneous action on the part of the workers, where the situation got out of hand. I think in the majority of those instances, responsible leadership has ensured that the strike was of short duration.

On this particular point, let me say this: I personally believe that one of the worst times to mount a strike or to engage in strike action is when the economy is in a downturn. When you've got a high level of unemployment, it's stupid to mount strikes, and to engage in strike action in such circumstances.

Another topic of concern in the trade union movement has been that of separate or "parallel" unions for workers of different race groups. Do you think that a case can still be made for having separate unions, as opposed to non-racial ones?

Yes, I do think a case can be made, if we believe in the concept of freedom of association, and that is an internationally accepted concept. I see absolutely nothing wrong with the decision by a particular group of workers to want to retain either their ethnic or their group autonomy.

I think one has got to recognise that it's not only a question of colour that might come into the picture. I think you've got the very sharp divisions that exist between different categories of labour. I think we're childish if we don't recognise that there are always prejudices: not only colour prejudices, but also occupational prejudices, class prejudices, group prejudices of various sorts. I can well understand - that's a classic example - that the accountant in the bank does not want to associate with the bank cleaner. And one can quote thousands of different examples of that, and it's not a question of colour. In instances like that, it's a question of group and / or

occupational prejudice.

But by all means then, let unions that are established on some sort of a separate or parallel basis go their own ways, do their own thing, meet the aspirations of the membership that they represent. But somewhere along the line, let them look for the common ground in their own common interests, and see what areas they can co-operate in. And I think we should get down to the fact of saying, let's look for what is common to us, let's look for the areas of common concern, instead of perpetually looking for what divides them.

Some unions insist that they must represent the workers in a process of "class struggle" against their employers. Do you think the notion of class struggle is a myth?

I sincerely hope that we never get to the stage where too many people believe in that sort of philosophy. I think one of the major problems which is still facing the industrial relations climate in the United Kingdom has been this concept of continuing to fight the class struggle, where the overall philosophy is one of "them" and "us", instead of labour getting down - and I think the employers are equally guilty in this concept of getting down to saying, that we've got to find a formula for co-existence.

You see the answer as partnership, then?

Well, correct, that's the logical follow-on. And then you develop a much sounder basis of struggle, something along the line of the German system, a policy of co-determination, which is in direct contradiction to the other philosophy of "them" and "us". But then I don't have to remind you how successful the German economy has been since the war took place, and that to my way of thinking proves that you're much better off following a policy of co-determination, as distinct from that of espousing the dying remnants of class struggle.

Now I'd like to ask about TUCSA and its relationship to some of the emerging trade union groups. FOSATU, for instance, has been growing very rapidly. According to its annual report, it doubled its membership in the past year. Are you fearful that you are losing the race for black unionisation?

Not in the least. I think on this question of trade union growth, I can say

that it is an established fact that TUCSA can also show a considerable improvement in its membership figures. But I'm going to say this bluntly: our membership figures are genuine, in that they are dues-paying members. They are not book members. They are paying per capita affiliation fees to the organisation. So they are what I call true trade union members. Because I believe that's the only yardstick by which you can actually calculate union membership; that is on the basis of people paying subscriptions or dues to the union concerned.

Tell me, looking at the more militant unions, such as FOSATU, FCWU, GWU, do you regard their philosophy and influence as a constructive one on the South African labour scene?

Let me put it this way: to date their progress has been singularly unspectacular. I am back to my point of measuring what has been achieved. And I think the true yardstick of measurement is that of looking at the benefits which have accrued to the membership. And I can't see any signs of any successful achievements. One or two instances, reasonable achievement, but weighed against the sacrifices that the membership had to make, I think a lot more could have been achieved with less spectacular action.

The burden of your comments would seem to be that these unions have not done enough to justify their existence?

I would tend to incline towards that view, but I think this is something for the membership to determine. But one thing I'm quite convinced about is that the membership will finally determine the issue. I don't think that the membership of those unions, whether it be black, white, pink, yellow or any other colour, is going to be prepared to continue to make sacrifices for spectacular non-results. I think a stage will soon be reached where a lot of these unions' membership are going to reject a lot of the present leadership.

What are your views on the Freedom Charter?

I think the Freedom Charter is something like the curate's egg: it has its good parts, and it's certainly got its bad parts as well.

Which is which?

Well, I think that's rather difficult. It depends where you sit. It's rather difficult to say. There might be individual clauses in the Freedom Charter that I could personally subscribe to. I think a lot of South Africans could personally subscribe to certain clauses. But then, by the same token, we'd be in opposition to some of the others.

Now I'd like to talk about TUCSA's relationship with the South African government. In general how satisfied are you with the new labour dispensation which has followed the Wiehahn Commission's reports?

I think in general and broad terms, TUCSA supports the new dispensation. It supports the amendments which have been made to legislation following on the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations, basically because much of what TUCSA stood for over all the years is now becoming a reality. And although there are certain developments taking place which were not particularly partial to, I think we also completely accept that some of the instability which we're presently experiencing was to be expected.

In any change situation, you get this degree of instability, because change certainly doesn't mean that it equals stability. But I would personally, and I think a lot of my colleagues agree with me here, press the view that what's happening is not too serious. I think the fact that we've got a few bush fires mustn't be interpreted as meaning that the whole country is aflame. I think what is taking place is relatively mild. I don't believe that we're in the process of radical upheaval; far from it. I think the incidents that are taking place are merely manifestations of an adaption to a new dispensation. They're merely the teething problems of the new dispensation.

Are there further changes which you think are necessary to labour law?

At this point in time, I would probably incline to the view that we have probably done enough for the moment. I think the system must be given a chance to stabilise. I think, in the light of our experiences in the course of the next year, it will then determine whether any further major modifications are needed. But I emphasise there once again, the new system is to a large extent flexible. I believe it can accommodate some of the minor adaptations and modifications that are needed.

It sounds like the fundamental problems of principle have largely been ironed out, and TUCSA's remaining differences are largely ones of detail.

I think I must agree with that. I think the fundamental problems of principle have been resolved to a large degree; I think our problems now are basically those of practice.

Why was there no outspoken public protest from TUCSA following the detention of a TUCSA trade unionist, Alan Fine, or another who had recently left the service of TUCSA, Montgomery Narsoo?

I think in the first instance, it is not correct to say that TUCSA did not object to the detention of a number of people, not only trade unionists, when they were detained. TUCSA did object, strongly. It's been our policy over all the years to support the concept of no detentions without trial. We've continued to support that policy. A study of what we have done in this regard even in the course of the last six months would show that this still remains an issue of contention between TUCSA and the government.

And I want to emphasise that it is problematical whether in fact Mr. Fine was even an official of one of the unions affiliated to TUCSA at the time of his detention.

What do you mean?

According to information which I received only yesterday, it would seem that that is not the case. And I quote from a letter received from the Secretary of the union concerned: "Alan Fine had resigned from the National Union of Distributive Workers, effective on the 30th September, 1981. He was detained a few days before the date, and was still therefore an official at the date of his detention by a matter of a few days."

But I want to emphasise again, we protested at the detention of a number of people when they were detained. And we protest on the basis of protesting against an administrative practice, as distinct from taking up the cudgels for individuals.

TUCSA chose not to participate in the half-hour work-stoppage after the death in detention of Neil Aggett. Why was that, if you felt strongly about the issue?

Fundamentally here because we knew absolutely nothing about the person concerned.

Yet you said that you don't take up the cudgels in regard to individuals.

But I think the half-hour work stoppage related to the death of a certain person. TUCSA protested strongly, and made its concern known very definitely about what it felt regarding the detention of people and the death in detention of people. Once again, I pointed out that we disliked and we were extremely concerned about the death of any detainee whilst in detention. But we would not engage in a particular action in respect of a particular person. I think furthermore, to take into account, is that we do not believe that any successful campaign for a work stoppage could be mounted.

Yet more than 80 000 workers did stop work for half an hour.

I think that is a debatable point. We're well aware of some of the tricks that management got up to, such as advancing the lunch hour, such as giving some sort of ex gratia leave for a half hour, etc.

Do you think that there are fashions in labour reporting, and that reporting on the more militant unions has become more fashionable?

Well, I would tend to think, though it might be felt by some of the labour reporters that they are actually furthering the cause of the militant or reporting on the actions of militant trade unions, in actual fact they are doing them a disservice. I think there're helping to create a monster, not only in the public mind - although the facts seem to belie the fact. I think this type of emotional, highly subjective reporting is creating in the public's mind that trade unionism is a nasty word, that trade unions in the main are irresponsibly-minded, seeking to destroy the existing situation and systems, anti-progress, anti-economic policy, anti the status quo.

Now there's nothing wrong with knocking at the status quo if one can provide a suitable alternative. But the picture being painted is that the militant organisations seem to want some sort of completely radical, socialistic system, as distinct from that which presently applies.

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- Constructive criticism of unions or federations in the independent labour movement is welcome. However, articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.
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