

## INDUSTRY IN POORER COUNTRIES

Before the 1950s, multinationals were mainly interested in getting raw materials (like cotton or sugar) from poorer countries. But since the 1950s, many multinational companies have built factories in the poorer countries.

In South Africa businessmen build factories next to the Bantustans where they can pay very low wages. In the same way, multinationals try to increase their profits by going to the poorer countries. Here labour is cheap, and often foreign businessmen do not have to pay any taxes on their profits.

Sometimes a company will shut down a factory in Europe and move it to another country where labour is cheaper and easier to control. These are known as 'runaway companies'.



*Multinationals in less industrialised countries often employ women at very low wages*



The way multinationals have grown and spread to the poorer countries has created new problems for workers everywhere. It has brought workers in different countries into competition with each other for jobs. Workers have organised in two important ways to deal with these problems:

- through international trade secretariats
- through shop floor internationalism

Here we will look at examples of each of these.

#### TRADE SECRETARIATS AND MULTINATIONALS

Part 1 talked about the trade secretariats, or ITSS, which bring together unions in the same industry from all over the world.

The ITSS work hard on the problems caused by multinational companies. Since the 1960s many ITSS have set up WORLD CORPORATION COUNCILS. Each corporation council represents workers in one multinational company.

For example there is a world corporation council which represents all organised workers in the Ford company in different parts of the world. It tries to negotiate with Ford on problems affecting all Ford workers in different countries.

Workers have also worked through their trade secretariats to get workers in other countries to support their struggles. Here is an example of how a trade secretariat helped workers in different countries to support food workers in Guatemala.



### COCA-COLA BOYCOTT

Guatemala is a country in Central America. The multinational company, Coca-Cola, owned a big bottling factory there. The manager of the factory said he would never talk to any trade union.

But workers formed a union. In 1975 workers demanded that the company recognise their union. The manager sacked many workers and tried to intimidate others.



*Workers at the Coca Cola factory in Guatemala*

Many union members received death threats. Some of the union officials were even murdered. One was attacked, beaten with an iron bar and his throat was slit. Another union leader was found dead - his tongue was cut out, and his toes and fingernails broken. When workers protested they were attacked by police with machine guns and teargas.



The workers fought back. They organised a boycott of Coca-Cola in Guatemala. Workers also asked for support from their international trade secretariat.

Coca-Cola is a multinational company with factories around the world. The ITS for food workers, the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF), organised international support from workers in other countries.

- unions in the food and drink industry all over the world sent protests to Coca-Cola. They held solidarity meetings and sent messages of support to the Guatemalan workers
- workers at Coca-Cola bottling factories in different countries stopped production and organised a boycott of Coca-Cola drinks



*These posters call for a boycott of Coca Cola*

In the end this forced Coca-Cola to talk to the workers in Guatemala. They promised to recognise the union, give back jobs to the fired workers, and give money to the families of trade unionists who were murdered.

This story shows that workers in different countries can act together to force a big and powerful multinational company to listen to them.



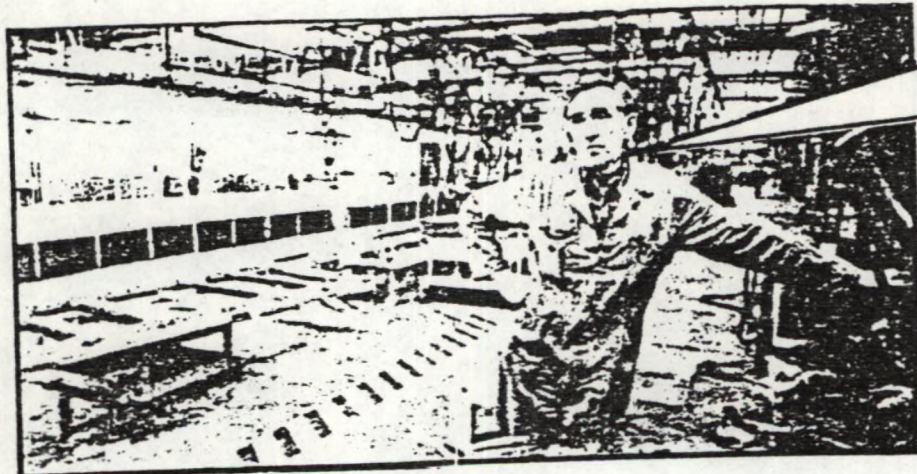
### SHOP FLOOR INTERNATIONALISM

Workers have sometimes found that international trade union organisations have not helped them with all the problems caused by multinationals:

- their unions are linked to different organisations which will not work together
- often it takes a long time to work through the big international organisations.

In some factories belonging to multinational companies in Europe, workers have organised their own links. They have met with shop stewards and ordinary workers from factories in other countries. This is called shop floor internationalism.

Here we look at one example of shop floor internationalism in the Ford Motor company. Jan Cartier, a shop steward in the Ford factory in Amsterdam, Holland, tells the story:



*The Ford factory in Amsterdam*



### THE FORD WORKERS' GROUP

In 1980 the Ford management decided to close our factory in Amsterdam. The workers decided to fight against the closing of our factory.

To do this we needed information about the company and we needed support from Ford workers in other countries.

At first we tried to work through the international trade union organisations. But some Ford unions are linked to the ICFTU, others are linked to the WCL, and some are linked to the WFTU. These organisations would not co-operate to bring all Ford workers together.

So we in Ford Amsterdam tried another way to organise international links. We started the Ford Workers' Group. This was made up of shop stewards, union officials and ordinary workers from Ford factories in different countries in Europe. Through this group we exchanged visits. We helped workers on strike elsewhere, and exchanged information.

In the end we did not manage to stop Ford from closing our factory. But we could confront them with the lies they were telling us. We learnt about workers elsewhere. It was very important for us workers to know that in other countries, there are workers fighting for the same things as we do.



## PART THREE

# SOUTH AFRICA

### EARLY CONTACT

International contact between unions in South Africa and elsewhere has a long history. Many skilled workers came from Europe to work in South Africa. They formed the first unions. For a long time their unions had close links with the British trade union federation, the TUC.

In 1927, one of the first big unions of black workers, the ICU, joined the world confederation at that time, the IFTU.



*This picture, in the ICU newspaper, supported contact between workers of different countries*

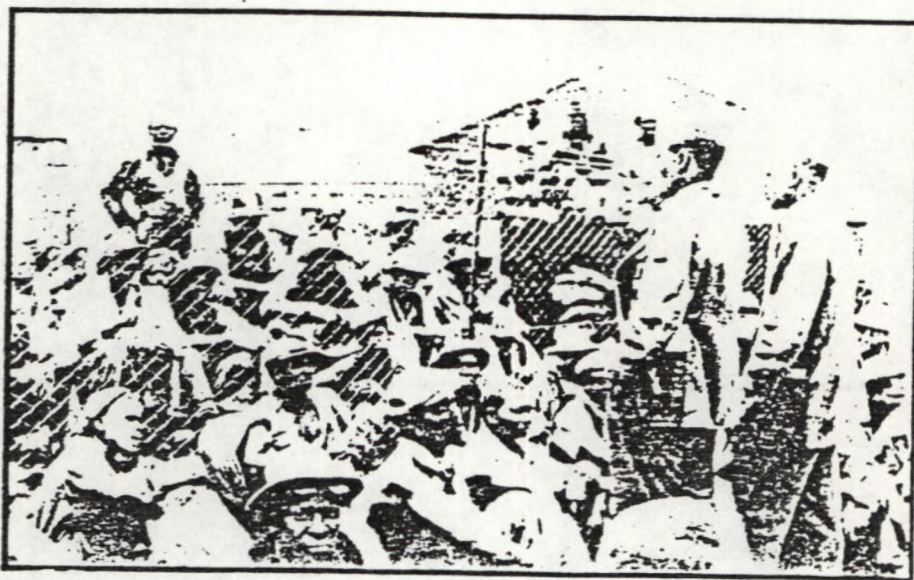
In the 1920s and 1930s there were also socialists who organised black workers. They worked closely with the communist international labour organisation, the Red International, which was mentioned earlier.



## SACTU AND THE ICFTU

In the 1950s, after the Cold War began, international trade union organisations wanted to win influence over unions in South Africa, like they did elsewhere. Here is one example of how they tried to do this.

In 1955 the trade union federation, SACTU, was formed. It opposed the racist laws of the National Party government. It worked closely with the ANC in its campaigns for political rights for blacks.



*SACTU organisers speaking to workers*

SACTU was a member of the WFTU. It also worked with the ICFTU. SACTU needed all the support it could get because it suffered harsh repression from the government.



In 1958 two representatives of the ICFTU visited South Africa. They were worried that SACTU was too radical. They said that the ICFTU would support SACTU if it did two things: it must stop supporting the ANC, and it must break from the WFTU. SACTU refused to do these things.

The ICFTU tried to set up another federation of black trade unions - FOFATUSA - to oppose SACTU. FOFATUSA worked closely with other conservative unions in South Africa. But this federation did not last long, because it did not have the support of the majority of black workers.

## INTERNATIONAL LINKS TODAY

### CONFEDERATIONS

Since the 1970s the ICFTU has learnt to respect the independent unions in South Africa. It now supports the new, non-racial unions and speaks with a much louder voice against apartheid. At the end of 1976 the South African government banned many trade unionists. The ICFTU called for unions around the world to support a week of protest action against this banning.

In 1984, only one federation, CUSA (Council of Unions of South Africa) belonged to the ICFTU. But since the 1970s, many unions have received money and other support from the ICFTU. This has helped to build up many unions. But it has also raised some questions for workers:



## WORKERS ARE ASKING THESE QUESTIONS IN THEIR UNIONS



Is it good for our union to be dependent on an outside organisation for money? Isn't it better if the union members pay to run our own organisation?

If our union accepts funding from an outside organisation, will this organisation be able to influence our union's policy?

Can we control our union officials if these officials are not paid with the workers' money?

How can workers make sure that we know what money is coming from outside, and how it is being spent?



### TRADE SECRETARIATS

Since the 1970s the ITSS have become more important to unions in South Africa. Many new unions have joined trade secretariats.

Many unions have asked the ITSS for help and support in their struggles with multinational companies. The ITSS have supported unions in their struggles for union recognition from management.

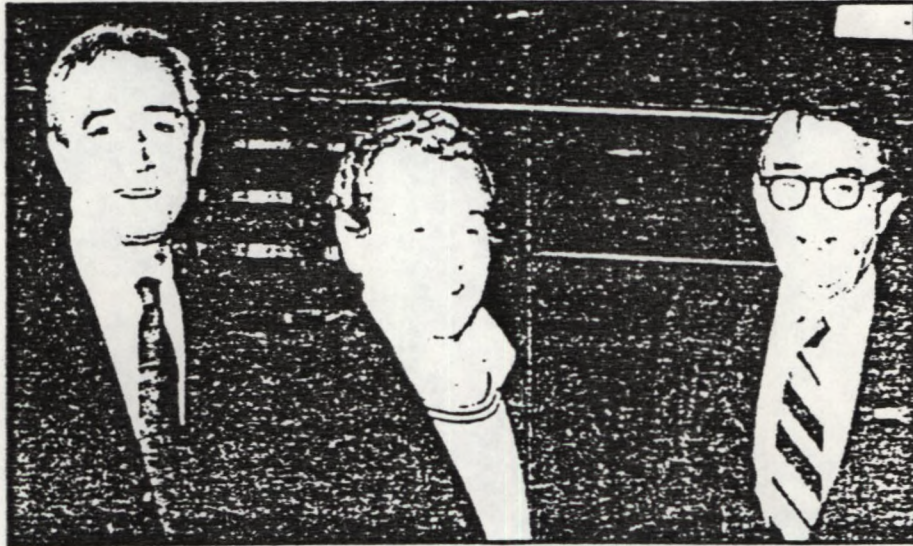
For example in 1980, Cape Town dockworkers were struggling for recognition of their union, the General Workers' Union. The International Transport Workers' Federation gave them support. In 1983 the International Metalworkers' Federation helped NAAWU (National Automobile and Allied Workers Union) to win recognition at the Alfa Romeo factory in Johannesburg.

### THE AFL-CIO

Since the 1970s the AFL-CIO began to get involved in unions in South Africa. Its office in Africa, the African-American Labour Centre (AALC), has sent a number of South African trade unionists on visits to America. It has started a newsletter for South African trade unions.

In 1982 an AALC delegation visited South Africa and promised a "Programme of Action to Assist Black Unions in South Africa". The delegation offered lots of money to the new non-racial unions. But most unions did not accept money from the AALC.





*The AFL-CIO delegation in 1982: (from left to right)  
Patrick O'Farrel, Chick Chaikin, Irving Brown*

#### WORKER TO WORKER LINKS

In the last few years, many trade unionists from other countries have exchanged visits with South African trade unionists.

In 1980 a British Leyland shop steward, Bob Ashworth, visited factories in South Africa. After this visit he said:

As a worker I could understand their day-to-day problems even though they were South African workers. We could discuss things together. It showed me that workers' problems are the same everywhere, and that the workers' struggle is one and the same around the world.



## PART FOUR

# PROBLEMS

This book has shown how workers have often given support to fellow workers in other countries. But the history of international trade union organisations shows that there were often problems with the way they worked around the world.

- First, some trade union federations worked very closely with their governments in their international programmes. The international trade union movement was divided by the political struggles of the Cold War. The ICFTU and the WFTU competed against each other for power and influence over unions in different countries. This divided and weakened some union movements, for example, in France and Nigeria.

- Second, some trade union organisations, like the AFL-CIO, worked closely with big multinational companies and received large amounts of money from them. It helped companies to operate in the poorer countries. In some cases, for example Chile, it even helped a government which repressed workers' organisations.

~~Why has this happened? These organisations are supposed to help workers everywhere. Why have they not managed to do this?~~

We do not have all the answers to these questions. But here are some things which might help to answer some of these questions.



## UNIONS AND DEMOCRACY

The way in which some trade unions work is bureaucratic. In these unions the leaders and paid officials have a lot of power. Ordinary workers do not have a lot of control. There is not a lot of democracy in these unions.

Often there are the same problems in the international trade union organisations. Here too, there is a big distance between the paid officials and the ordinary worker members in each country. Workers often do not know what their leaders are doing in other countries. So they cannot control what their leaders are doing.



*Democratic unions: workers have a strong voice*

Many unionists who work for the international trade union organisations really want to help workers in different countries. But sometimes they find it difficult to criticise the organisation they work for, or to change what it is doing.



## STRONGER AND WEAKER UNIONS

Trade union federations in Europe and North America have a long history of organisation. They often pay the most money into the international trade union organisations. They are stronger than trade unions in the less industrialised countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In the poorer countries there are fewer workers and the number of workers in unions is small. Many poor people are peasants who still farm the land. They are difficult to organise.

Because of these things, many unions in the poorer countries are weak. This means that they have little power in the international organisations. So the labour movements in the industrialised countries can more easily influence and control them.



*Strong unions: workers in Europe demand a shorter working week*

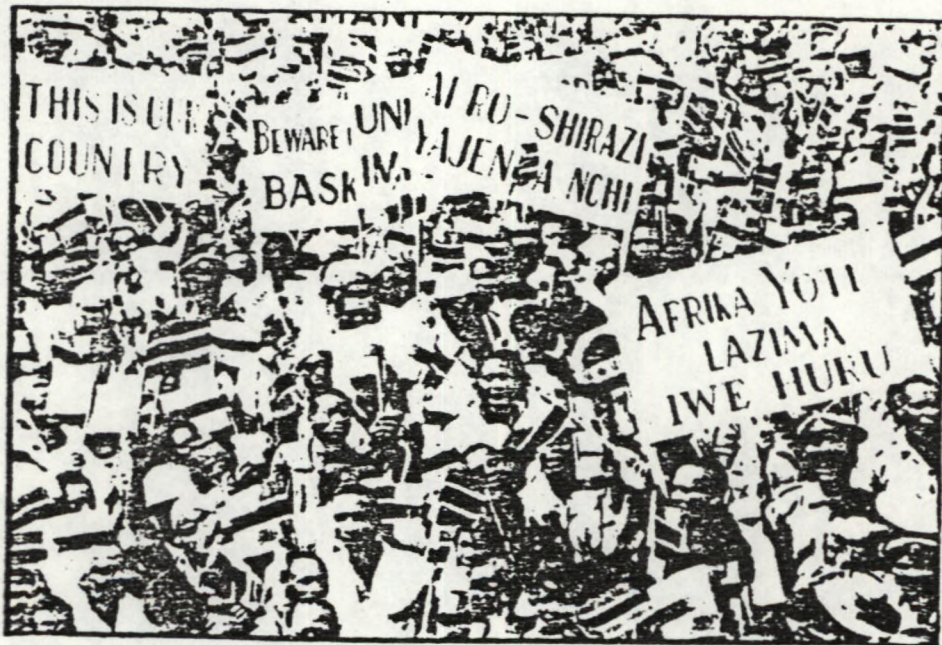


## WORKERS AND NATIONALISM

It is difficult to get workers from different countries to work together. Sometimes workers are not interested in building international solidarity.

Workers often know very little about the problems of their fellow workers in other parts of the world.

Also each union is organised in a particular country. Unions become part of the national feeling of the people of that country. So, many workers are interested in improving the conditions of workers in their own country. This nationalism sometimes makes it difficult to build unity between workers from different countries.



*Nationalism: Workers in Tanzania celebrate independence*



**Collection Number: AK2117**

**DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

**©2012**

***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 the collection records 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 is part of a private collection deposited with Historical Papers at The University of the Witwatersrand.