

17
21

Wreckers

at



Work

**A WARNING
TO THE
BLACK and WHITE WORKERS**

With Compliments
From **H. M. BASNER.**

By **H. M. BASNER**
74, FOX STREET
JOHANNESBURG

"YOU hide your practical impotence behind revolutionary phrase-mongering."

This is what Jean Jaurès, the great leader of the French Socialists, said forty years ago, to a noisy group who disturbed his party's work of organising and educating the working class.

It needs saying again, here in South Africa, to another noisy group who have appeared recently on the scene; play-boys who have grown tired of playing, idlers tired of idling, dilettantes tired of their books and artistic pretensions. Bored and frustrated, they find a new escape; a more amusing and exciting sport: to lead the working class in its historic task of overthrowing the capitalist system and of achieving the socialist state.

It is not an unusual phenomenon, rather a constant irritation in the socialist movement—these weak heads for whom Marxism is too potent a beverage, and who, being only used to the stuff that is served at bohemian parties, mistake their aggression for social protest, and their nervous excitement for revolutionary fervour. They think in slogans and see barricades around every corner. They imagine that adventures and mock heroics can take the place of the hard and patient toil required to educate and organise the masses in a socialist direction. They are firmly convinced that abuse can move mountains, and mistaking mud for dynamite, throw it in all directions.

Such groups are always a nuisance and sometimes a danger, but only to the working class, never to the capitalist system. They can be a danger because they may lead workers into adventures and premature action; they are always a nuisance because their foolish slogans and bad behaviour discredit the socialist movement.

Especially here, in our country, dangerously explosive with racial antagonism, and complicated by varying classes and strata of exploiters, politics is not a game for weak heads or unstable personalities. This new group, the Workers International League, is composed of both, if it is to be judged by its first public activity, the African Milling Workers' strike, and by the first issue of its newspaper, Socialist Action.

The African Milling Workers' strike was led by officials and advisers belonging to the International League. It is the only strike of importance, in recent years, in which African workers were nearly defeated. When the strike had lasted a few days and a number of workers had been arrested, the members of this ultra-revolutionary group took such fright that they

advised the union to surrender, and were prevented, with difficulty, from begging the officials of the Labour Department for a settlement, on any terms. The situation was only saved by the refusal of the rank-and-file to listen to this advice, and by the intervention of the non-European Trade Unions and the Campaign for Right and Justice who negotiated a settlement with the employers.

These are the individuals who discuss a general strike as if it were a Sunday picnic, and who want to assume leadership of the African trade unions. The trade union movement cannot afford to tolerate them in its ranks, let alone trust them with leadership.

The first issue of this group's paper—Socialist Action—is four pages of lies, malice, and revolutionary phrase-mongering. It contains malicious attacks on all left parties in South Africa and not one word of criticism of the Nationalist Party, Ossewabrandwag or the followers of Pirow. It lies about Alexandra Bus Dispute settlement and about the strike in the Brakpan Location. "Down with the War Lords, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin" is one of the slogans of these profound political thinkers. Another, "For the Workers' Socialist Soviet Republic of Africa" is a perfect example of revolutionary phrase-mongering, considering the stage of economic and political development of the African continent.

Neither the Workers International League nor its paper would be worth mentioning, except for certain factors in our society and political situation.

The non-Europeans are cruelly exploited, oppressed and uneducated. Their resentment is rapidly mounting, and they are looking for leadership in their struggle against the intolerable social and economic conditions imposed upon them. They are also looking for organisational forms for this inevitable struggle. But their present national and industrial organisations are too rudimentary and their leadership too weak to satisfy the needs of the situation. This leaves the gate open for every political adventurer, every revolutionary phrase-monger, every irresponsible group to enter and gain influence in non-European organisations and communities. In such troubled waters even the individuals of the Workers International League may prove to be fishermen, and their paper some sort of a bait. They are not important themselves, but important as a warning of what will happen unless African trade unions are organised and responsibly led by militants ready to do battle against intolerable conditions of the urban workers, and unless the European trade union movement comes to their assistance.

to gain recognition, rights of collective bargaining, a better standard of living and proper education to acquire a consciousness of socialism.

In the larger field of national liberation and democratic rights, such adventurers may lead the non-European masses into costly and fruitless adventures, unless responsible leaders of the African and other non-European sections take energetic steps to unite and organise into strong national organisations, and unless the European labour movement alters its present attitude of indifference and hostility to the demand for democratic rights in the land of their birth. Only an organised mass movement of non-Europeans, militantly led and supported in its demands by a united Labour front, can bring about a change from the present system of unbridled exploitation and degradation of the whole non-European and so large section of the European population.

The Workers International League will probably disintegrate soon. This type of organisation is notorious for the rapidity with which its members find ideological and personal differences on which to split. But after it may come others, perhaps even more irresponsible and loudmouthed. Such groups will continue to appear until the African leaders do their duty and give a militant leadership to the struggles of the African people. They will continue to appear until white socialists do their duty and unite on a correct programme of aid to the non-Europeans in their demands for democratic rights, for education, for agrarian reform, and for abolition of the colour-bar in industry, and the migratory cheap-labour policy of the Chamber of Mines.

We have a long way to travel and a great deal to do before we can achieve socialism in South Africa. We must organise trade unions and national organisations among non-Europeans based on a militant policy of mass action and mass resistance to all forms of national oppression, and linking that with the constant education of the white workers to an understanding that their true interests lie in helping to raise not to oppress non-Europeans. When this form of activity has borne fruits socialism will become practical politics in our country. All parties which work for the unity of white and black workers serve the cause of socialism. All parties which, like the Workers International League, confuse the black masses and frighten off the white workers, serve the capitalist system because they enable the capitalist to divide and exploit both sections of working class.

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.