

# THE STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

## PART I

South Africa's basic social fabric is the economic system of Capitalism – the private ownership of the means of production and livelihood. Intricately woven into this system is the social structure of racial discrimination and inequality.

For nearly three and a half centuries since the arrival of the Dutch settlers on the shores of the Cape of Good Hope, the White South Africans have assiduously been building a peculiarly South African social and economic regime—"The South African Way of Life" --- the hall mark of which is absolute political domination and unlimited social privileges for the White race.

Through sheer violence, stealth and an incredible battery of discriminatory legislation, the Black man has been reduced to the position of a pariah and outcast in the land of his birth; utterly divested of any rights which mankind has painstakingly nurtured in its long, evolutionary and historical march.

In the division of the spoils that followed the conquest of the Black man, the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, elevated all the social layers of the White population group - including the working class - to the status of share-holders in the lucrative loot and indemnities. The Whites, as a group, are the beneficiaries and partners, albeit of different standing, in the South African enterprise of White supremacy. They are what I choose to call a "people-class", to borrow a descriptive phrase from Abraham Leon.

We shall take a close look at the ingenious devices that have been employed to achieve the White man's purpose and apotheosis of his existence in South Africa. We shall examine the social pyramid at the pinnacle of which are precariously perched the descendants of the settlers from mercantile and industrial Europe, and at whose broad base are to be found the indigenous inhabitants and the rest of the oppressed of South Africa - with the sole purpose of promoting its demolition and the construction of a just and humane social order on its ruins, outside the pale of Capitalism.

## II

At the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, a rapprochement was reached by the adversaries, the central feature of which was the joint development and consolidation of Capitalism in South Africa under the aegis of British Imperialism, which supplied the capital, the necessary entrepreneurial skills and technological expertise for the joint venture. There was to be a relentless exploitation of the country's extensive mineral and other resources, and the labour of the Blacks.

The first task confronting the Herrenvolk was the creation of suitable political structures, corresponding to the new economic dispensation, and tailored to suit the pursuit of profit. It was natural that they had recourse to the time-tested British Parliamentary System - the efficient and flexible tool of the rule of capital - which the English bourgeoisie had perfected over centuries. And so it was that the Draft Constitution of the Union of South Africa, later known as the South Africa Act of 1910, was drawn up at the 1909 National Convention, solely comprising the representatives of the Boers and Britons.

The Act of Union excluded the Blacks from the democratic process; denied them the franchise, for the specific purpose of facilitating their economic exploitation. The bourgeois-liberal representatives of British Imperialism in South Africa shed crocodile tears, decrying the naked violation of the democratic principle.

## III

In 1913, the first major legislation by the Union of South Africa's Parliament, the Land Act of 1913, was passed. It was a Machiavellian measure, designed to flush the Africans out of their shrunken land enclaves, the Reserves, and send them helter-skelter to the mines and the other sectors of the economy to minister to the insatiable needs of the White man and to dance attendance on him. Its immediate aim, however, was to turn the African squatters on the White-owned farms into wage-labourers, either on the farms or in the mines. It expressly set aside 13% of South Africa's total land area for African occupation under communal tenure, whilst the remaining 87% of land was to be for White ownership on individual landholding.

A delegation of the South African Native Congress (now the African National Congress or A.N.C.) led by Sol Plaatje, went to England to explain to the British Government of the day the untold suffering and heavy toll the Land Act was exacting on the Africans. As was inevitable, their plea for mercy fell on deaf ears.

Towards the decade of the twenties, nascent working class stirrings were manifesting themselves among the African workers. In 1919 they emerged into the open with the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (or I.C.U.) by African and Coloured dock workers in Cape Town.

The I.C.U. was a polyglot organisation, at once a general trade union and a political organisation. And yet, such as it was, the I.C.U. fired the imagination of the Blacks and provided some organisational frame and expression for their militancy. This militancy increasingly became a source of deep concern to the Herrenvolk. However, the immaturity of the I.C.U., its lack of experience of organised labour activities and the absence of a tradition of independent workers' struggle in South Africa led to its decline and final extinction - but not before it had taught the ruling class a sharp lesson through a series of disconcerting industrial actions.

#### IV

In 1922, the sheet-anchor of South Africa's pass system and influx control, the Urban Areas Act, became law. It laid down stringent conditions under which an African could legally be considered a permanent urban dweller. Its pernicious purpose is borne out by the fact that out of more than 6 million economically active Africans, only 1.5 million are registered or legal permanent urban dwellers.

The Act has succeeded, in large measure, in delaying the growth of an appreciable, settled African urban population, and a class-conscious working class.

It subjected all corners to the towns to rigorous influx control and placed those workers who had not qualified for permanent residence at the mercy of the rapacious employers. Operating alongside entrenched segregation practices, reinforced by the brazenly profit-motivated migrant labour system and the odious practice or policy of housing the majority of the African workers in isolated, soul-destroying barracks, compounds and single men's and women's hostels, often along tribal or regional lines, it militated in its cumulative effect against any desire on the part of large sections of its victims to be assimilated into the urban environment. It chronically depressed the wages of the Blacks, particularly those of the Africans. By regulating and manipulating the flow and mobility of African labour, it assured the ruling class an unlimited supply of Black cheap labour not only where, but also as and when, required. It converted the Africans into fair game, objects of police brutality, sadism and amusement or derision.

#### V

In the early 'twenties a trickle of African mine workers were admitted to jobs previously done only by White miners, who constitute the bed-rock of the exclusive, reactionary Afrikaner or Boer nationalism in South Africa. The White miners went berserk and revolted against the employers and the state. General Smuts, who was Minister for Justice, ruthlessly quelled the revolt. The result of his action was that, in 1924, the South African Party was defeated at the polls by a coalition of the Afrikaner and Labour parties, which immediately introduced the so-called "civilized labour policy" as a basis for South African labour and industrial relations. This measure afforded the White workers formal protection against competition for jobs with Black workers, especially in the mines.

The 1922 White miners' strike and what followed in its wake are events of tremendous significance for South Africa. They demonstrated beyond doubt the existence of a direct nexus between the Black man's lack of political rights and his status of social inferiority. The White worker (or White man) has recourse to, and can exercise, his vote to protect his interests and, thus, wield some influence over state legislation. This is not the case in respect to the Black worker (or man). He has no influence whatsoever over the running of the machinery of the state.

This brings us to the crucial theoretical question of practical significance: the question of the political struggle of the Black man in South Africa, be he a worker or not. The struggle for liberation is inseparable from, and is dialectically connected with the struggle of the working class, as a class, in South Africa; and an advance in the struggle for democratic rights will be an advance in the struggle against exploitation, and will help the worker to conduct his struggle for his rights and interests, as a worker, under more favourable conditions and improved prospects for its success.

The Black worker is part and parcel of the oppressed and cannot conduct his struggle in isolation from them. Alone and isolated, his struggle is ineffectual. In fact, no single section or group of the oppressed can conduct a successful struggle for itself and by itself alone.

This is the lesson which the concrete situation in South Africa compels us to draw. This is the central characteristic of the terrain of the battle for liberation in South Africa, in its present phase. Only in the split-level, thinking of charlatans and dilettantes, only in their slanted view, is there a hiatus between the two aspects of a single process.

It is not enough to pay lip-service to the critical distinction between living, revolutionary theory and atrophied dogma. It is necessary to make the requisite adjustments in theory and in practice in accordance with the demands of the real and concrete situation, and the exigencies of the class-struggle. One wants to remind the theorists of the theoretical revolution that it was Marx himself who advanced the proposition that the slaves shall be free for their liberation before they can become free.

Democracy is part of the stock of weapons in the arsenal of the class-struggle and the proletariat will use or discard it in the light of the actual circumstances with which it is confronted at a given place and time. A struggle for freedom is not a detached attempt to conform to, or confirm, theory. A struggle for freedom is a matter of life and death for those who are actually engaged in it. The course it follows is right or wrong in accordance with whether or not it corresponds to reality. Theory is a tool for analysing at all times the concrete situation and helping draw the necessary lessons from it, in order to propel the struggle forward. Theory is not itself an object of analysis. That would be to turn theory into metaphysics. There is no room for sorcery in an actual revolution.

#### VI

The political events of 1936 are a watershed in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. In that year the Afrikaner Party government of General Hertzog enacted the Native Trust and Land Act. The purpose of this legislation was to consummate the process of creating a vast and permanent army of Black cheap labour set in motion by the 1913 Land Act. It created a trust for acquiring additional land to fulfil the land quota previously decided upon for the Africans by the Whites-only parliament in 1913.

As a concomitant to the Native Trust and Land Act, Hertzog's government also enacted the Native Representation Act of 1936. Together, the two Acts were seen by the Herrenvolk as the last nail to be driven into the coffin of what they called "the native problem". The Acts were to solve the problem for them once and for all!

In the former British colony of the Cape, which existed prior to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, there was a common voters' roll for all the inhabitants of the colony. The Blacks therefore could vote, could be members of the colony's legislature and, theoretically, of the government itself. After the formation of the Union of South Africa this position altered. Although the common voters' roll remained intact, the rights of the Blacks to membership of parliament was annulled by the Constitution of the Union of South Africa.

The 1936 Native Representation Act removed the Africans of the Cape Province from the common voters' roll and placed them on a separate one. (Incidentally, the same fate befell the Coloured voters in the Cape Province in 1957 with the passing of the Senate Act by the Nationalist Party government.) Then the Act provided for election by the Africans in the Cape Province of four White persons as their representative in the House of Assembly. It extended this peculiar policy of African representation in the political institutions of the country by a few Whites by also providing for election by ALL the Africans, on a communal or regional basis, of four White senators to represent the Africans in the Senate.

The Act went further and created a Native Representative Council (N.R.C) as a "parliament" for the Africans. The N.R.C. was a gigantic device for directing the attention and concern of the Africans away from demanding their inalienable right to representation in the country's political institutions.

The two Acts generated a storm of protest among the Africans throughout South Africa. For the first time in the history of the country, the Africans reacted in unison to what they correctly regarded as a concerted, systematic attack on their rights by the Whites. This is significant. It evidences political growth and maturity on the part of wide sections of the African population. It is proof of the readiness on the part of the Africans to engage in militant political struggle. They put paid to the idea and policy of deputations and petitions. They drew the battle lines clearly and distinctly. An independent political struggle had become not only possible but a fact to be seen by all those who had eyes to see it.

In the wake of the massive protest, a national political body, the All African Convention (A.A.C.), was created to serve as the mouthpiece of the African people and instrument of political struggle against oppression. The A.A.C. rejected in their entirety the Hertzog Acts; adopted a policy of non-collaboration with the oppressor in all his designs against the interests of the oppressed and, accordingly, advocated a boycott of all elections in terms of the Native Representation Act or any other similar legislation. It clearly articulated the demands of the African people in a programme of political demands - the Ten Point Programme - which incorporated the two cardinal demands of the oppressed, namely, the demand for the franchise or universal suffrage and the demand for land.

Let it be understood that the conception and drawing-up of the Ten Point Programme was not an arbitrary act or fortuitous circumstance, but a deliberate act of intervention in the actual course of events, in the heat and conduct of the struggle. It was not brought about by a fascination with the conceptual beauty or perfection of ideas, but by the application of theory to an actual and evolving sociological phenomenon

The A.A.C. leadership's analysis of the concrete situation in South Africa revealed that the present disabilities suffered by the Blacks stemmed from:

- a) lack of political rights;
- b) land hunger or landlessness.

These conclusions were denounced by the theoreticians of the theoretical revolution as "bourgeois demands".

We wish simply to make the point that to the oppressed and toiling masses in South Africa, these demands constitute the terrain they must traverse, the river they must cross, in order to come to grips with the real enemy beyond. And to them their revolution is not a single and finite act but a continuous and uninterrupted process. We are in full agreement with them on this.

(In the continuation of this article, we shall focus our attention on the industrial relations and the trade union movement in South Africa. We shall also look in depth at the major political and theoretical issues raised in this article.)

## **Part II**

Up to the middle of the 19th century, South Africa was predominantly an agricultural country with distinct feudal features in its social relations.

In 1652 the Dutch East India Company landed settlers in the Cape to grow food to provision the Company's ships on their way to and from the East. In the vicinity of Cape Town the settlers encountered the Nama and the Khoi; deprived them of their land and cattle and pegged them to subservience and servitude, and when local labour dried up, slaves were imported from Mozambique, the West Coast of Africa and Malaysia. Thus, from the very beginning the Dutch settlers saw themselves as gentlemen farmers rather than toiling peasants.

The Cape became a British colony in 1806 and in 1834 the Cape Government decreed that the slaves be freed. As a consequence, the Dutch settlers emigrated North in search of land and labour. They conquered and displaced the African inhabitants of the interior; employed the now landless peasants as labourers, whose entire families had to work for the farmer, or pay for the right to live on, and off a portion of the landlord's land with labour in his fields at defined periods of the year. In Natal the indigenous people resisted subjugation and the British imported indentured labourers from India to work on the sugar plantations.

A pattern of economic relations deeply rooted in the myth, reinforced by Biblical piety, of a God-given social order where the Black man shall serve and the White man command was thus evolved.

The Transvaal Indigency Commission of 1908 made the following observation: "The whole South African-born White population up to nearly the middle of the nineteenth century had grown to maturity in the belief that the normal and proper relationship of White to Coloured was the relationship of master to slave or serf. They regarded it as the natural province of the White man to supervise the Native and direct his energies, and the duty of the Native to perform for the White man the rough manual labour which was required for cultivating his land and tending his stock. Despite the abolition of slavery, this tradition has remained and has continued to govern relations between White and Coloured races to this day."

The discovery of diamonds and gold in 1867 and 1886, respectively, set South Africa firmly on the road to industrialisation. Governments enacted laws to force the Africans to work in the mines and on the farms through measures such as poll tax, as imposed in the Transvaal in 1905; and labour taxes, such as enforced under the Glen Grey Act in the Cape in 1894. Simultaneously, the first recent pass systems were introduced to enable the authorities to expel the 'idle' or the 'unemployed' from the new urban areas as 'vagabonds' and 'undesirables', such as in the Transvaal in 1895. On the farms squatter's laws were imposed in an attempt to redistribute labour by limiting the number of squatters per farm. Despite these stringent measures, the farmers continued to clamour for more and more labour because of the accelerating rate of urbanisation and increased demand for food.

The Native Commission of 1903-1905 calculated a shortfall of some 400,000 farm workers; and yet pronounced, 'any recommendation as to higher wages is quite out of place'. It then recommended, apparently illogically, a programme of education to raise the level of African material 'needs', and a series of coercive measures to force them to become wage-earners; as also a ban on further purchases of land by Africans, except in 'certain areas to be defined by legislative enactment.' It then advocated more energetic enforcement of the existing laws against squatting and 'vagrancy' and the imposition of rents on Africans living on Crown Lands.

The 1913 Land Act was to be the coup de grace. It incorporated most of the Commission's proposals: it froze the proportion of land available for African use and made it illegal for an African to buy or rent land from a White. The growing tendency for Africans to buy their own farms and compete with White producers on the expanding urban markets was halted; as well as the wide-spread practice of farming-on-the-half, by which an African tenant farmed part of the landlord's farm and paid him a proportion of his crops in rent.

As was intended, thousands upon thousands of Africans were rendered landless and had to find work as labourers, or move to one or the other of the already overcrowded Reserves, where many were finding it increasingly difficult to eke out a living from the barren land.

Thus, the African was deprived of land rights in all but a tiny part of the country and his future fate as a wage-earner was sealed. Human beings were systematically reduced into mere units of labour by a barbaric and deformed capitalism, born of the perverse social conditions of South Africa. The whole African population found itself in the grip of the octopus of the machinery of the herrenvolk state.

The remarks of the Stallard Commission of 1921 are in place here:

'The Native should be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the White man's creation, when he is willing to minister to the needs of the White man and should depart there from when he ceases to minister.'

The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923, as amended in 1930, banned African men and women from entering any urban area without a pass; and the Native Service Contract Act of 1932 further bound farm workers to the land by providing for three-year service contracts and institutionalising flogging by employers. In 1947 a correspondent to the RAND DAILY MAIL put the matter thus:

'If we want the Natives to be law-abiding, let us speak to them in the language that they understand: the language of the sjambok, administered frequently and with vigour'.

## II

Racial discrimination in employment in South Africa originated in the 19th century in the early days of gold and diamond mining. It was to the economic advantage of the mine owners to replace the White miners by lower-paid Africans who, hemmed in by vicious laws and subjected to an iron discipline, appeared to be less militant than the Whites, who constantly clamoured for more pay, shorter hours and other improvements.

The Transvaal Republic under the patriarch, Paul Kruger, head of the Afrikaner tribe in the Transvaal, took up the cudgels on behalf of the White miners against the employers. The Transvaal Volksraad passed a law in 1893 prohibiting Africans, Indians and Coloureds from performing blasting operations. In 1896 and 1897 further laws were passed reserving work done by banksmen, onsetters and winding engine drivers for Whites only. When the British annexed the Transvaal in 1902, these laws were retained; after the formation of the Union of South Africa, they were incorporated in the Mines and Works Act No. 12 of 1911. The Act empowered the Governor-General to make regulations for the issue of certificates of competency in skilled occupations in mining and engineering. The Blacks, that is, the Africans, the Coloureds and the Indians, were not eligible for such certificates.

The Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 ruined many White farmers and threw up a class of landless, illiterate, unskilled Whites who flocked to the towns in search of work. Their presence in the mines sharpened the dispute over job 'advancement' for Africans and this was the root cause of the stormy and bloody battles fought between mining capital and their government - the South African Party Government - and the White miners.

The mine owners wielded great power through their wide-ranging economic interests, and were able to influence the general wage structure of the country in their favour. Big strikes of White workers took place in the mines, railways and in industry during the years 1907, 1911, 1913, and 1914. Soldiers went into action against the strikers and, in 1914, several of them were fired upon and killed in the streets of Johannesburg. The strike ended with the arrest of the leaders and the surreptitious deportation of nine of them to England.

Trade unions had meanwhile been formed among White workers. The first were craft unions, started by British immigrants in the latter part of the 19th century. The unions were modelled on the British pattern and some of them, like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, even remained part of the British organisation. The 1913 strike in the gold mines was over the question of the status of the White miners' unions, for at that time the recognition of trade unions and the right of collective bargaining were not generally accepted in South Africa.

Further strikes, of first African and then White mine workers, occurred between 1920 and 1922 over the question of the employment of Africans in semi-skilled jobs at lower rates of pay than the Whites received for similar work. The 1922 White miners' strike ended in open revolt; martial law was declared and the revolt ruthlessly suppressed. Many White miners lost their jobs; most had their wages cut, and their trade unions suffered a temporary setback. In 1923 the regulations provided for under the Mines and Works Act of 1911 were declared ultra vires by the courts and scrapped. Then the battle shifted to another ground and the White mine workers became the 'victors' over the powerful Chamber of Mines, on this occasion.

In 1924 the Labour and Nationalist Parties defeated the ruling South African Party - the Party of the mine owners - led by General Smuts, in the general elections held in that year. The new Nationalist-Labour pact Government restored the colour bar in the mines, which had been upset by the 1923 court decision; as well as introduced the 'civilised labour' policy as the basis for industrial relations in South Africa. Employers were urged to employ 'civilised' labour in preference to 'uncivilised' labour. The relevant instruction defined 'uncivilised labour' as 'the labour rendered by persons whose aim is restricted to the bare requirements of the necessities of life as understood among barbarous and undeveloped people'.

The Mines and Works Act of 1911 represented the country's only statutory colour bar, or work reservation, until 1951 when the purified Nationalist Party Government added a second in the building industry, the Bantu Building Workers' Act No. 27 of 1951. The Act created a new kind of building artisan, a 'Bantu' building worker; and prohibited Africans from doing skilled building work in 'White' areas and restricted their employment to African townships and reserves. Provision was made in the law for the training of Africans as 'Bantu' building workers. Their training was fixed at a fraction of that for White apprentices and the teaching limited to bare essentials. Their wages are determined by the Minister of Labour and not by negotiation with employers, and the best they can hope for is about one-third the earnings of White artisans.

The first African trade union, the Industrial Workers of Africa, was established in 1917. Then the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (I.C.U.), which included Coloured workers, was formed in 1918. By 1920 the former had paled into insignificance. The I.C.U. catered for a variety of interests and some of its members were not workers in any industry. It was more a mass movement than a trade union. It is said to have had a membership of 50,000 in 1925. The Industrial Legislation Commission of Inquiry (the Botha Commission) of 1948-1951 estimated the membership of the I.C.U. at 200,000 in 1928. It was a militant organisation and consequently attracted to its ranks large numbers of Blacks. The ruling class saw it as a threat to their interests; engineered its decline and final extinction. It was then superseded by new unions, formed for African workers engaged in specific occupations.

### III

In the wake of the strikes of the early 'twenties, it became clear that machinery for the regulation of industrial relations and the settlement of labour disputes was necessary. Consequently, the Industrial Conciliation Act was passed in 1924, providing for the registration and regulation of trade unions and employers' organisations; the establishment of joint industrial councils, and the appointment of conciliation boards or arbitrators. -

The South African Parliament, in enacting the Industrial Conciliation law, characteristically ignored the fact that 12½% of the total African population had become entirely dependent on wages. They were, in the eyes of the legislators, mere units of labour, and the operative term 'employee' was defined in the Industrial Conciliation Act in such a way as to exclude persons whose contracts of service were regulated by any Native pass laws, and also workers recruited by labour agents or holders of employers' recruiting licences.

In the Cape and Orange Free State there were no pass laws and regulations which regulated contracts of service, and there were large numbers of Africans who fell within the definition of 'employee' and could legally join registered trade unions, thus participating on a basis of equality with workers of other racial groups in the industrial conciliation machinery. A number of registered unions in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg admitted such African membership, and some trade unions with mainly or almost entirely African members were registered.

The 1924 Act was amended by the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 36 of 1937 in which the definition of employee excluded also those persons whose contracts of service were regulated by the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923. But this extended definition of employee still did not exclude all Africans. Those who were exempted from the pass laws and the registration of service contracts could still participate in industrial conciliation machinery, as also could Africans in Port Elizabeth, where the urban service contract system had not yet been introduced. African women workers in factories had to be regarded as employees as they were not subject to the pass and other laws under which male Africans were excluded. But the vast bulk of African workers were not 'employees' for the purposes of the Industrial Conciliation Act and could not thus take part in the

functioning of registered trade unions or collective bargaining within the statutory machinery.

The Wage Act No. 27 of 1925, re-enacted with amendments as Act No. 44 of 1937 and Act No. 5 of 1957, provided for determination by the Wage Board of minimum wages and conditions of employment in industries in which the workers were not covered by industrial council agreements. But agriculture and domestic service were excluded from its scope.

Because the vast majority of Africans were excluded from the operation of the Industrial Conciliation Act, their wages were not laid down in industrial council agreements. As the skills of African workers developed, certain employers took advantage of this fact in replacing statutory 'employees' by Africans at lower rates of pay. Thus, when the Act was amended in 1937, the Minister of Labour was empowered to extend the terms of an industrial agreement to include Africans, if he considered that the object of the agreement would otherwise be defeated - although the African workers concerned had taken no part in the negotiation of the agreement. The result has been that there are more Africans than members of other racial groups combined who are now subject to industrial conciliation agreements they are not a party to.

#### IV

The African trade unions formed after the demise of the I.C.U. in the early thirties expanded rapidly, particularly from 1939 on. In 1945 a co-ordinating body - the Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions - was formed and it gradually extended its activities to other provinces besides the Transvaal. After 1945 a period of decline of these trade unions set in. Because the unions were not registered they had no official status, and this placed their representatives at a great disadvantage when negotiating with employers. The members tended to lose interest when they could not see results. There was a very high membership turnover - members frequently moved from one industry to another. But the most significant cause of the decline was the difficulties experienced in finding suitable meeting places, and the obstacles placed by the pass law system in the way of those wishing to attend meetings. Also, it was often impossible for the unions to arrange with employers for the collection of subscriptions by means of stop-orders as the unions had no official standing, and members fell into arrears with their payments.

By 1950, when the numbers of unions had diminished considerably, there were 32 African unions completely independent of the unions of other races, 13 of which had broken away after the 1937 legislation which excluded further numbers of Africans from the statutory definition of employee; and three unions had been formed under the supervision of registered trade unions. Besides these there was the Association of Non-European Staff of the S.A. Railways and Harbours, which had 8 branches. The total paid up membership of these bodies was 34,551. There were also twelve registered trade unions which continued to accept African members and about 3,700 Africans belonged to these. At the end of 1948 White and Coloured (including Indians) membership figures were 269, 379 and 70,427, respectively.

It is interesting to note that before the accession of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948, African trade unions were, in practice, consulted by some registered trade unions, employers and arbitrators appointed under War Measure 145 of 1942, which dealt with settlement of industrial disputes involving Africans; and representatives of African unions were often permitted to appear before industrial councils or the Wage Board

A change of government took place at this stage and the incoming Nationalist Party Government appointed the Industrial Legislation Commission of Inquiry in 1948. The Commission recommended that African trade unions be recognised; that they be controlled by the Department of Labour, in consultation with the Native Affairs Department, through the medium of 'Native Trade Union Officers'. Recognition would be in two stages: first, 'certification' during a probationary period and, if then considered suitable, full recognition which would carry with it authority to participate in collective bargaining with employers through a special conciliation board.

The Commission had been set up to inquire into four labour laws mainly affecting White workers and their unions; and to make recommendations regarding wage fixing, the settlement of disputes, the control of trade unions and their affairs - including race separation - and 'protection of all races' in wage regulating legislation. It was also directed to report on African trade unions and recommend suitable machinery for settling disputes between African workers and the employers.

On the question of protection of the workers of all races - that is racial quotas in employment, job reservation etc. - the Commission was unable to make a recommendation, explaining that this was a matter which should be entrusted to an expert scientific body.

#### V

In 1945 the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond (BWBB), or White Workers Protection Society, was founded under the aegis of the Nationalist Party and its 'think' tank, the Broederbond. Its membership was restricted to White Protestants its objects, 'founded on the Christian-National traditions of the people of South Africa', were to combat the 'evils' affecting White workers on the Witwatersrand. Its constitution stated that the BWBB's aims were the reservation of occupations on a racial basis; no undesirable contact between White and Non-White workers in their employment; and the prohibition of racially mixed unions. Its main pillars of support within the labour movement were the Mine Workers Union, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers and the Leather Workers Union. In June, 1941, an 'Afrikaner Front' was announced in a 'Declaration on behalf of the People's Organisations' proclaiming the common objective of 'a free, independent, republican, Christian-National state, based on the word of God, eschewing all foreign models... with the strongest emphasis upon the effective disciplining of the people'. One of the signatories of the Declaration was the Ossewabrandwag (OB) or Ox Wagon Sentinel.

The OB was a militant, National-Socialist movement which sought the establishment of an authoritarian state, with citizenship restricted to 'assimilable White elements', the abolition of private enterprise and the breaking of the British

connection. Ex-Prime Minister J.B. Vorster was one of its main leaders. He was detained by the Smuts Government during the Second World War for his activities against South Africa's involvement in the War and his strong pro-Nazi proclivity. Vorster said of the OB's aims:

"We stand for Christian Nationalism, which is an ally of National Socialism. You can call it the anti-democratic principle dictatorship if you wish. In Italy it is called Fascism, in Germany National Socialism, and in South Africa Christian Nationalism."

The Nationalist Party's declaration of intent in regard to labour matters was enunciated by B.J. Schoeman, who later became Minister of Labour in the Nationalist Party Cabinet in 1948, on March 19, 1942. He said that wage fixing should be entirely in the hands of the state; that self-government in industry and collective bargaining must be abolished; that racial quotas should be fixed for all skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. Elaborating on the Nationalist Party plan, he added:

"... the principal function of trade unions will disappear ... These organisations will not so much be entrusted with the function of obtaining better wages and better working conditions ... they will be mainly entrusted with the task of regulating domestic matters, as between the employers and the employees. And for the rest, of looking after the spiritual welfare of the workers."

Again,

... there must be changes in the foreign British system, which does not conform to the character and traditions of the Afrikaner. . . . the present (labour) system must be destroyed and a new one created ...'

## VI

The restrictions affecting African workers in industrial and labour matters did not apply to the rest of the Blacks - the Coloureds and Indians. At least not fully or in their entirety. The Botha Commission of 1948-1951 stated that of the 199 unions registered in 1949, 63 were 'mixed' or multi-racial; 76 were registered on the basis of multi-racial membership, but in fact 54 of them were composed of White membership only, and the remaining 22 of Non-White members only. There were 38 unions registered for Whites only, 14 for Non-Whites only, and 8 that furnished no clear indication of their composition.

As at December 31, 1948, there was a total of 339,824 employees in registered unions and of these 70,427, or about 21%, were Blacks, i.e. Coloured and Indian workers. The majority of the mixed unions were domiciled in the coastal towns, especially in the Cape, where Blacks outnumbered Whites in 70% of the industries and in many of the unions.

On the question of the control of trade unions and their affairs, the Botha Commission reported that the evidence presented to it was overwhelmingly against the introduction of legislation compelling the segregation of the various races into separate unions on the grounds that: there should be no interference with the principle of the right of association; the workers in each industry should have the right to decide whether they wanted mixed or separate trade unions; the interests of workers were indivisible and separation would weaken workers vis-à-vis the employers in that if separate unions were created in an industry, one union might attempt to undermine the position of the other.

The evidence against mixed unions was that: it is idle to deny that there are differences in education and standards of living, or that racial prejudice exists; mixed unions did not provide adequate protection for the economic interests of minority groups in that the group forming the majority negotiated the wages paid to all; and where Blacks were in the majority in any particular industry they might, because of their lower standard of living, be willing at a time of economic depression to accept lower wages for all workers in that industry in order to avoid unemployment; that unless a closed-shop provision applied, White workers were often unwilling to join mixed trade unions.

Despite the recommendations of the Botha Commission for conditional recognition of African trade unions, the Nationalist Party Government decided that African trade unions should not be recognised. And there were, at this period, at least 52 African trade unions in existence. Accordingly, the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act No.48 of 1953 was enacted. The Act is entirely in keeping with the White master-Black servant herrenvolk thinking and is a ludicrous attempt to conceal the racist denial of rights behind the façade of a separate but adequate alternative. In place of collective bargaining, it substitutes autocratic power in the hands of state officials, who are installed as spokesmen for African workers and who are the government's substitutes for trade unions and workers representatives.

The Act prohibits the registered trade unions from having African members and provides separate procedures for the settlement of disputes between employers and African workers other than those employed in farming, domestic service, gold and coal mining and governmental or educational service. It denies status and recognition to African unions and prohibits strikes under severe penalties - a fine of up to £500 or three years imprisonment or both fine and imprisonment - and empowers the Governor-General to apply the provisions of the legislation to the mining industry should this be considered desirable.

The separate industrial conciliation machinery provided for under the Act consists of regional Native Labour Committees comprising three African members and a White chairman, 'the Native Labour Officer' for the region - all appointed by the Minister of Labour. The stipulated duties of these Labour Committees are to maintain contact with employers and employees, to receive representations, and to act as mediators in settling disputes.

Section 7 of the Act provides that in establishments employing not less than 20 Africans, Works Committees of three to five members may be elected, one member to be responsible for maintaining contact with the regional Committee.

There is also a Central Native Labour Board, consisting of White members appointed by the Minister of Labour and to this Board are referred disputes which cannot be settled by the Regional Committees. If the Board's mediation is unsuccessful, it must report to the Minister, stating whether or not it considers that the disputes should be referred to the Wage Board. Members of the central Board and regional Native Labour Officers are entitled to attend sittings of industrial councils or

conciliation boards when agreements affecting occupations in which Africans are employed are under consideration. They may participate in the deliberations but have no vote.

South Africa's White herrrenvolk Government and its Department of Labour are appallingly insensitive to the needs and interests of the African workers - indeed, of all the Blacks. The responsibility of the Department of Labour is mainly confined to imposing on Africans the legal sanctions of wage agreements made between white workers and employers and to barring their way to certain jobs and keeping them out of registered trade unions. It makes it its appointed task the relegation of Africans to starvation wages, as well as nullifying their attempts at improving their miserable conditions through the use of the *only* weapon at their disposal - the strike weapon. When Africans do go on strike, the armed bands of the state intervene at once: armed police rush to the scene and detectives of the Special Branch accompany Labour Board officials who arrive to undertake 'investigations'.

It must be pointed out that one of the declared purposes of the Native Labour Board and the Committees is to settle disputes in the interests of the African workers. Let us scrutinise their record.

The Report of the Department of Labour for the calendar year 1957 states that during that year 130 African labour disputes involving some 15,997 employees were settled without the workers resorting to strike action. On being questioned in Parliament, the Minister of Justice said on January 24, 1958 and January 30, 1959, that 113 strikes in which 6,158 African workers took part had occurred during 1957. In 13 cases the strikes had been settled by granting increased wages and in 20 cases the strikers had been prosecuted for striking illegally. He did not explain how the remaining strikes had been settled. Altogether, he said, 539 Africans had been charged and 274 convicted during 1957 for participating in illegal strikes. He added, later, that 588 were charged and 453 convicted during 1958. He then added that during 1958 two labour disputes had been settled by the Central Native Labour board, 34 by Regional Committees, and 92 by the Native Labour Officers; while four disputes had been referred to the Wage Board.

The absurdity of South Africa's discriminatory labour and other racial laws is illustrated by an incident which occurred in August, 1957, when Black workers employed by a meat canning factory near Cape Town demanded higher wages. The Food and Canning Workers' Union failed to reach agreement with the employer and a deadlock was declared. The coloured workers came out on a strike - which was legal. The 32 Africans who joined them were arrested.

One other strike that occurred in 1957 and through which 9,242 shifts were lost was of some 1,300 African workers in the flour-milling industry in Johannesburg. The men demanded that their weekly wage be increased from £2.18.3 to £4.8.3. The employers maintained that so large a claim was impossible to consider and offered an increase of 6/9d per week. The Native Commissioner met the strikers and urged them to accept the offer, promising that if they did so he would see to it that negotiations for further increases were set in motion, and warning them of police action if they did not accept.

Early in 1957 African workers employed at the Port Elizabeth docks refused to work overtime or at week-ends unless they were granted higher wages. Some of them, employed by private stevedoring companies, received 11/6d per day worked; but as there was not always a full week's work available their daily pay, averaged out over a period, was about 6/6d. Others who were casual workers employed by the Railways Administration were paid inclusive amounts of 9/7d per day worked if they were married, and 7/3d if they were single.

The stevedores demanded 25/- a day. The Divisional Inspector of Labour, together with the Native Commissioner and a member of the Local Native labour Committee, met the men and said that their demand was unreasonable, but promised an investigation if they returned to full working hours. The stevedores refused this offer. The government decided to break the go-slow strike, which, the Minister of Labour said, had been engineered by agitators. The strikers were put off work. Convicts were used for four days to do the work, and were then replaced by Africans brought into Port Elizabeth from the Transkei. Meanwhile, the stevedoring companies, which require Government permission to operate in the dock area, offered their employees an increase in pay of 3/- a day. On hearing of this, the Government strongly advised the companies not to pay more than an extra 1/- a day. After vehement protests by South African and overseas trade unions, the scab labour from the Transkei was withdrawn and the dock workers returned to their jobs; the Minister of Labour promising a Wage Board investigation. A new wage determination covering all the major ports was published in February, 1959. The minimum wages payable to daily paid stevedoring hands at Port Elizabeth docks was raised to 15/- per day.

The February, 1959 Wage Determination for stevedores led to a strike of more than 1,000 workers at the Durban harbour, as soon as it was published. The men were aggrieved because their pay had been increased by only 1/3d per day, whilst the indunas ('boss boys' or supervisors) had been granted an increase of 4/- per day. All the strikers were dismissed and ordered to leave the premises of the stevedoring companies. However, they decided to meet in a compound of one of these companies. Then the police arrived to order them to leave. The meeting was broken up by means of a baton charge and about 80 men were arrested. Sixty eight of these pleaded guilty to trespassing in the compound and were each sentenced to a fine of £5 or 25 days imprisonment.

The majority of the strikers were re-engaged by the companies; the employers deciding to abolish the system of daily-paid labour and replacing it with wages paid on a weekly basis. The workers did not like this arrangement. They preferred to be paid on a daily basis, as they could earn more if work was available all week. They consequently refused to do overtime and congestion in the harbour resulted. The entire labour force was dismissed and new workers recruited from Zululand to take their places.

In February, 1958, 3,700 employees of the Amato textile factory in Benoni near Johannesburg demanded an increase in pay, pointing out that their average wages of about £3 per week had not been raised since 1951. After negotiations with the employer had broken down, the men were all discharged and told to return later for their pay. When they did so, they found



the police present in strength. A baton charge was ordered; some twenty Africans were subsequently admitted to hospital and about thirty others received treatment for injuries. There were no prosecutions in this case, but it was announced that those workers whose conduct was deemed to have been satisfactory would be re-engaged through the labour bureau. About 300 men who were considered to be 'agitators' were not taken back. The large majority of these were unable to find other work and were required to leave the town.

In January, 1959, the entire African staff of a canning factory in Johannesburg, consisting of 289 workers, came out on a strike following a dispute in regard to overtime. They were all arrested and taken into custody, no facilities being afforded the women employees to make arrangements for the care of their families. The magistrate later found the accused not guilty. Overtime formed no part of their contract, he said. The Crown had not satisfied him whether the accused had, in fact, created the dispute, or whether, in view of the circumstances, the employers were to blame. In spite of their acquittal, the workers suffered severely in that for some five weeks, while the proceedings were in progress, they received no pay.

A second object of the Native Labour Board is to attend sittings of industrial councils, conciliation boards or the Wage Board when agreements affecting jobs in which Africans are employed are being considered, in order to watch the interests of the Africans. According to the Report of the Department of Labour for the calendar year 1957 (mentioned above), during 1957 members of the Native Labour Board succeeded in 'obtaining marked improvements in the wages and other conditions of employment of some 42,000 Native workers'. The Nationalist Government claimed in 1968 that the Bantu Labour Board had succeeded in getting wage increases for Africans to the extent of R47 million in the previous nine years. As we hope to have shown, the Labour Board's record refutes this claim.

Obviously the matter cannot be left at this, for each time the African workers demand higher wages and better conditions of work and life, the Government and its Department of Labour do everything in their power to frustrate their efforts. The full weight of the might of the State is brought to bear on the workers. In South Africa there can be no normal, meaningful improvement in the conditions of work and life of the Blacks. The scales are heavily weighted against such a development. It is the declared policy of successive South African governments to 'keep the Native in his place', which simply means holding him in servitude and condemning him to poverty in order that the super-profits may continue to flow and privileges for the White race maintained. The language used by the various parties which have been in power may be naked or camouflaged, but the essence of the matter remains unchanged. Measures have been taken to tighten control over the movement of Africans; to direct their labour; to ensure their subservience; to establish the non-existence of their status in the country's economy; and to subordinate them to the barbaric authority of the government-appointed, mercenary tribal chiefs. The Nationalist Party has been pursuing this policy with a religious zeal that defies understanding. On May 21, 1959, the Minister of Labour, Marais Viljoen, put the position succinctly:

'To plead that you must pay the Natives who are employees a "civilised wage" means only one thing in this country - White wages.

'To want to pay Natives White wages fails in the first place to take account of their productivity, in the second place it does not take their living standard into account.'

The Honourable Minister's remarks spell out the provision in the Wage Act No. 27 of 1925, re-enacted with amendments as Act 44 of 1937 and Act 5 of 1957. Section 8 (4) of this Act provides that 'the Board (meaning the Wage Board) shall not differentiate or discriminate on the basis of race or colour'. But Section 5(b) of the Act stipulates that in making its reports to the Minister, the Board must show 'the class or classes of employees to whom it would be equitable. . . that remuneration should be paid at such rates as will enable them to support themselves in accordance with civilised standards of life'. Put in ordinary language, this means that Whites must be paid more than Blacks; that a White needs a higher wage than a Black because he lives on a 'civilised standard' and the Black does not. The Board does make recommendations on wage determinations to the Minister on the basis of the race of the workers concerned. This is noticeable from the wage rates they recommend for jobs done by Africans, usually one-third of the lowest White wage.

The Labour Settlement of Disputes Act provides for the setting up of Works Committees in establishments employing not less than 20 Africans. There were only seven of these committees by February, 1957 and eight by April, 1959. The system of Works Committees provided for under Section 7 of the Act has been represented by the Government and its hirelings as a model of democracy and workers' representation. This is a blatant lie. First the system deliberately limits the combination of African workers to the factory level in order to prevent any concerted action on their part on the level of the industry; second, the Works Committees are usually constituted by 'boss boys' or other employers' favourites; thirdly the employers usually regard the committees as conduit pipes for transmitting their wishes or instructions to the general body of the workers and not workers organs for advancing their interests. The basic fallacy of the herrenvolk's claims regarding these committees as well as the absurdity of the committee system itself is borne out by the fact that as at 10 February 1971 - almost two decades after they had been set up - only 28 of them were in existence throughout South Africa.

After the massive industrial unrest of the African workers in the early seventies, the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act was re-enacted with amendments as the Bantu Labour Relations Act No. 70 of 1973. The new Act provides for the extension and active encouragement of the committee system in order to improve the efficacy of this instrument of control of the African workers which had proved pitifully inadequate during the strikes by African workers that reached their peak early in 1973. It has been reported that by August 1974 1.319 new committees had been formed, constituted either by workers' representatives alone or with joint worker-employer membership. The employers naturally prefer the latter arrangement because it offers them the opportunity to monitor developments among the workers and to intimidate and control them through these committees.

In the new Act the Government also makes a pretence of acceptance in principle of the right of African workers to go on strike. But in practice this acceptance or recognition of the right to strike is nullified by the elaborate process and procedures through which the workers must go before they can actually down their tools - the dispute has to be referred to a works committee or to a Bantu Labour Officer; 30 days have to elapse after notice of a dispute has been given; no dispute can be declared if there is a wage agreement that is less than 1 year old, or if the wage rate is under consideration by the Wage Board.

As in the old act, the provisions of the new act do not apply to agricultural workers, domestic workers, workers employed by local authorities, workers employed in 'essential' services; as also workers in the gold and coal mining industries that is to say, the great bulk of the African workers, the very ones at the bottom of the pile.

As always, the herrenvolk want to eat their cake and have it. The Government wants to be seen to be extending its hand, but makes sure that the hand is empty.

Even the so-called statutory bargaining powers conferred on the works committees in terms of amendments introduced in 1977 into the Bantu Labour Relations Act No 70 of 1973 are so much eye-wash, as the agreements - such as they are - arrived at between workers and employers are not required to be registered with the Department of Labour.

The Wiehahn Commission reports that there are at present 2,928 works and liaison committees, each with 8 co-ordinating committees; representing 764,000 African employees. The Commission then showers encomiums on the committee system and recommends its continuation.

The point is: there are 7 million African workers in South Africa today, who carry the economy of the country on their broad and bent shoulders, with no workers' rights at all because they have no rights of citizenship. This is the crux of the matter. Tinkering with trinkets on the part of the herrenvolk Government does not change this fact.

In the continuation of this article we shall complete our survey of industrial relations in South Africa. This will include an examination of the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission Report. We shall then discuss the existing trade unions and their positions and outline what we consider to be the role of the workers and their organisations in the struggle for freedom and the tasks of the liberation movement.

### PART III

For nearly a decade now South Africa has been plagued by continued Black unrest and a mounting political crisis. In the face of the relentless, militant struggles of broad layers of the oppressed - the workers, the peasants, the youth and significant layers of the urban petty bourgeoisie - South Africa's traditional fascist mechanisms of domination and control have proved inadequate. Today, the primary pre-occupation of the ruling class is *how* to retain political power in its hands.

Thirtytwo years ago, the Nationalist Party came to power on a platform of rigid racial discrimination, strict segregation of races and 'separate development', which posited that the Africans did not belong in South Africa but in some 'Homelands' somewhere in the back-of-beyond where, by some magic formula, they were to 'develop along their own lines'. To the industrialists' arguments that 'the Native must be trained in his work in industry and to become an efficient industrial worker he must become a permanent industrial worker', the ideologues of the Nationalist Party replied that such a course 'moet uiteindelik lei tot totale integrasie en gevolglike gelystelling' - must eventually lead to total integration and resultant equality. And that was sacrilege.

The abiding predicament of South Africa's ruling class has been expressed in unambiguous language by Dr. Gerrit Viljoen, a former chairman of the Afrikaner Broederbond and Minister of National (White) Education in P.W. Botha's Government:

'The core of South Africa's problem', he explained to the diehard White supremacists, 'is that the answers to problems of the past are not full answers to problems of the present. Let us be honest with each other: things have not worked out as we wanted. We have to adapt policy and reform it in accordance with the existing reality of our situation'.

Here Gerrit Viljoen is painstakingly pointing out to the traditionalist Afrikaner and the jingoist English-speaking South Africans the compelling necessity for the ruling class to substitute subtle and more efficient mechanisms of control and domination of the Blacks for the crude, primitive methods they had hitherto applied.

### II

Unstinting White support for the policies of South Africa's racist regime hinges on the ability of the White Government to dispense material privileges. But White prosperity is not possible without economic growth and stability. The Government, therefore, naturally has its gaze fixed on the prospects for the economy to expand. However, uninterrupted economic growth and prosperity are contingent upon a continuous inflow of foreign investment capital and technology, and the availability of a pacified, loyal labour force.

South Africa's economy is built and maintained on the labour of the Blacks who constitute 84% of the country's total labour force. Moreover, by the year 2000 only 7% of the country's labour force will be White. The post-Sharpeville rapid expansion of the economy due to heavy injections of foreign capital and technology and the recent phenomenal incomes derived from the sales of gold and strategic minerals like platinum, coupled with the failure of the Government to attract the requisite amount of labour from abroad, have led to a chronic shortage of skilled labour. To crown all this, the demands of the country's defence have further aggravated the situation. The period of compulsory military service has been doubled to two years and White young men who should be entering the labour market are being diverted to the armed forces. At present, the country is said to be short of at least 65,000 professional and technical workers, and the country's manpower resources are continuing to be stretched. Under these circumstances, the continued unrest among the Black workers and the revolt of the youth are a source of

deep worry to the industrial magnates and their government.

The spiralling inflation spawned by the chronic crisis bedevilling the economies of Europe and the United States to which South Africa's economy is indissolubly bound, holds out no discernible hope for the containment of the waves of unrest of the Black workers who, for well over a decade now, have been gradually moving into the skilled jobs that have traditionally been done by the White workers, including some jobs in South Africa's strategic industries. There arises, therefore, the need to make urgent adjustments to the labour practices of the country. But the White workers, South Africa's labour aristocracy, who have a vested interest in the maintenance of the colour bar in industry are girding themselves to fight with might and main any measures that seem to erode their privileged status. At the same time, the Black workers are fast learning how to use their potent bargaining weapon, their labour power, and are effectively employing it against the idol of the ruling class - profit.

The problems which beset Western European capitalism from the end of the 19th through the 20th century are only now being experienced in South Africa to an appreciable degree. South Africa has a highly developed and sensitive economic structure. Her economy is so advanced that she exports capital to other countries, including the imperialist capitalist countries of the West. But her social relations are backward and primitive. This contradiction makes any upsurge of the Black workers take on a feverish and explosive character; and as the Black workers become progressively class-conscious, as they learn to think socially under the sting of the appalling conditions of economic and cultural deprivation they are made to endure, South Africa's racial social edifice, together with the principle of bourgeois property, will be shaken to its very foundation.

Classical capitalism was able to weather the stormy labour upheavals of the 19th century because they occurred in the era of its rise, when the young and growing economies of the West could accommodate the demands of the working class for improved material and cultural conditions of life.

But in the present era of capitalist decline with its recurrent economic crises, continued meaningful improvements in the social condition of the proletariat are not possible. Today capitalism can continue to maintain itself only at the expense of the proletariat and by lowering the standard of living of the working class. There is no other way out for the owners of the means of production.

One of imperialist capitalism's time-tested devices for controlling the working class is the creation of a labour aristocracy and labour bureaucracy, who act as agents of the bourgeoisie and its capitalist state among the broad mass of the workers. The aristocracy bases itself on the mass of the workers, the labour bureaucracy stands on the shoulders of the labour aristocracy, and the capitalist state occupies the pinnacle of the pyramid. The main task of the labour bureaucracy is to annex the working class to the capitalist state to which it then becomes an appendage. It is to this efficacious device that the South African herrenvolk are now turning. This is the quintessence of Wiehahn's recommendation - to render the Black working class impotent by fastening it to the chariot of South Africa's fascist capitalist state. This is what the ruling Nationalist Party meant when, during the 1979 Parliamentary by-elections, it declared in its manifesto:

“27 Black trade unions exist already and have a membership of some 70,000. They will now be effectively brought under the discipline and control of the law, and this will include a ban on political activities, a control over their membership, access to their financial statements and balance sheets, and control over their overseas funding...”

The above objective of the ruling class has already been achieved in relation to South Africa's White working class through the agency of its trade union bureaucracy. Now, it is the turn of the Black workers. But in order for Wiehahn's plan to succeed, it is imperative to incorporate a section of the Black workers into the White labour aristocracy in order effectively to control the Black working class as a whole. The mass of the Black workers, that is, the more oppressed layers, will derive no benefits from 'the new dispensation'. They will remain where they are. That is why the Nationalist Party was able to say in the same 1979 by-elections:

'The positions of the White worker, among others, will be protected more efficiently, (since) statutory job reservation protected only one out of every 200 White workers'.

The requirements of South Africa's economy and the preservation of the political hegemony of the ruling class demand that her industrial relations system be brought into line with the principles and practices prevailing in the central capitalist countries of the West. In this process, the recalcitrant sections of the White working class are going to be beaten into shape, for the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie take precedence over narrow, tribal sentiments and petty complaints. If South Africa is to survive as a capitalist caste society, she must first die as a primitive feudal relic. From now onwards, her fascist police and army must constitute the second, not the first, line of defence of the domination of the bourgeoisie. This is the message of the Wiehahn. Of course, they will be called out if and when the grip of the bourgeoisie on the state apparatus begins to falter. Everything depends on whether or not Wiehahn's strategy is able to deliver the goods. But we doubt it. The terrible conditions of life of the toiling masses in our country negate such a perspective. Harry Oppenheimer is one of the most perceptive of South Africa's bourgeoisie. He has this to say:

'I don't fool myself. We are going to face a great deal of difficulty as an employer. But I would rather face those difficulties than others that would arise if you had no authentic spokesmen for Black workers'.

Between Harry Oppenheimer and Nic Wiehahn there is no disagreement. They both grasp the essence of the matter.

### III

Since the purpose of Wiehahn is not the liquidation of the White labour aristocracy but its re-inforcement and consolidation as a support to the bourgeois fascist state, requisite steps have been taken to protect the essential interests of the White workers. In the words of Wiehahn, '... the bargaining process in industrial councils... will have to contain safeguards and guarantees against a particular interest group dictating the process of decision-making at the expense of other groups'.

South Africa's industrial council system is the centrepiece of the collective bargaining process. Hitherto only the White trade unions and representative employers' organisations sat on industrial councils. The industrial council is a joint management-union body that decides on jobs, wages, benefits, and working conditions. It is also the principal organ for the settlement of labour disputes in a particular industry and region. It decides who shall be employed and in what category of

work they shall be employed in an industry and at what rate of wages. Here the White workers have complete freedom to make collective agreements that lay down officially sanctioned rules designed to block the advancement of Black workers in all sections of secondary industry.

Now, the Black trade unions will, if granted official recognition, have the formal right to sit on industrial councils and take part in collective bargaining and dispute settlement proceedings - provided they are admitted to the councils by unanimous decisions of the White member unions. Wiehahn further provides that the White unions will have the right of veto in, among other things, 'the administration and implementation of agreements'. What this means, practically, is that any attempt to effect the advancement of Black workers and to remove the existing bars to it will be subject to the approval of the White workers - *they* will decide if such advancement or removal of bars shall take place.

The point must be emphasised that what Wiehahn has done has simply been to *regularise* what has already been taking place in the labour market in South Africa - the entry of Black workers into job categories traditionally the preserve of the White worker, with the permission of the White worker, and in return for enhanced status and material benefits. The Black workers have been doing these skilled jobs at lower rates of pay than those enjoyed by the White workers, without a drop in the level of productivity. Far from being prejudicial to the interests of the White worker, this 'arrangement' has, in fact, been beneficial to him both materially and psychologically. It also suited the employer who, by squeezing the life out of the Black worker, brought down production costs and maximised profits. The Black worker carried both him and the White worker. This is the point of the White-worker slogan: 'Equal pay for work of equal value'. This is how matters stood when Wiehahn came into the scene. And this is how the Black workers understood them.

What is going to emerge from this welter of circumstances is that a trickle of Black workers will filter through the web of racial restrictions and move into the income categories of the White labour aristocracy. In the Industrial Conciliation Act Amendment Bill pending in Parliament, Fanie Botha calls for the elimination of all discrimination by race or sex in wage agreements. In everything else this trickle of Black workers will remain where they have always been - in location ghettos, under the iron heel of the pass laws, devoid of political rights, and without security of tenure of even their jobs for the simple reason that in periods of economic recession - which are inevitable - they will be the first to get the boot. As for the great bulk of the Black workers, the hoi polloi, they will continue to provide the scaffold on which the labour aristocracy stands, for the objective conditions leave no room for improvements in their lot. In the light of the above, the question that immediately arises is: what is the way out for the Black workers?

It must at once be said that there is no blueprint on how the oppressed, toiling masses can attain their liberation from the shackles of capitalism - the system that exploits, impoverishes and degrades them. But the road to liberation lies *only* in revolutionary struggle. There is no other road. The basic task consists in laying the foundation for a better economic system; for a just, rational and decent use of the resources and productive capacity of our country in the interest of *all* its people. One of the pre-conditions to attaining this goal is the 'complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state'. The trade unions of the oppressed must be, have got to be, the combative organs of the broad, exploited masses and not pliable instruments in the hands of the labour aristocracy and bureaucracy, for that is the capitalist recipe for the emasculation of the working class and its condemnation to eternal servitude, ignorance, poverty and animal existence. The workers are the engineers of our material and cultural heritage and their destruction will be the destruction of humanity itself.

We wish to point out that there has been no lack of militancy on the part of the Black workers in South Africa. Their combativity has been demonstrated by them in sufficient measure. Throughout the period beginning in October, 1979 to early 1981, the Black workers have been locked in a bitter struggle against the combined forces of the Government bureaucracy, the reactionary White trade unions and the employers - a formidable front indeed.

The main issues have been the refusal by the Government to recognise non-racial unions, the exclusion of migrant workers from trade union membership, the official ban on political activity and a battery of restrictive measures. Under these conditions, the Black trade unions - with the exception of the timid, collaborationist parallel unions led and controlled by the bureaucracy of the White Trade Union Council of South Africa - correctly refused to apply for official registration. The battle lines were drawn and the herrenvolk united front sought to liquidate the Black trade unions. They tried to freeze out the unions that had refused to register by denying them access to factories, detaining and banning their officials and forcing the rank-and-file workers into the bosom of the obsequious parallel unions. It was a costly exercise for the herrenvolk front, more so that it failed. The Black workers responded to the attacks by going on strike in a wide range of industries throughout the country. In a period of 13 months they mounted 219 strikes and the walkouts represented a loss of 175,000 man-hours and cost South African industry 1 billion dollars in lost production.

Let us take some individual examples of the damage done by the strikes to the interests of the capitalists: during the period November, 1979 to January, 1980 the Black workers' strike at Ford's Port Elizabeth plant cost the company 15.5 million dollars in lost production, whilst Volkswagen's 3,500 workers' 3-week strike at the company's plant in Uitenhage set back the company's production by 4,000 vehicles worth 15 million pounds.

In the clash between the state and the unregistered Black unions, matters came to a head in Johannesburg in July last year when 10,000 municipal workers consisting mainly of the down-trodden street cleaners and garbage collectors went on strike. They were demanding a weekly pay rise of nearly 100%. The City Council refused to deal with their union, the Black Municipality Workers' Union. Meetings called by the strikers' union were broken up by the police; the strikers, who were mainly migrant workers, were fired and expelled from Johannesburg, and bus and train loads of new workers were brought in from the rural areas. Joseph Mavi, the strikers' leader, was charged under the 'Sabotage Act'.

The will to resist and the militancy of the Black workers have foiled the combined onslaught of the herrenvolk to bring them to heel and have driven a wedge into their front. Fanie Botha has been urging the employers not to deal with unregistered unions, but more and more of them are ignoring his advice and even openly coming out against it. Fanie Botha has been forced to beat a temporary retreat and the employers have learnt their lesson. The Federated Chamber of Industries has felt compelled to declare:

'It is pointless to force the unions into a system imposed from the top. We must reach an accommodation with them at the grassroots. Out of that an official system which all can endorse should emerge'.

We doubt very much if there can be evolved a system in South Africa which *all* can endorse.

The Black workers have won a partial victory, but the road ahead is long and hard. The fascist capitalist state is regrouping its forces in order to mount fresh assaults on the Black working class. Only their combativity will avert a catastrophe. In the struggles ahead, they will have to use their only weapon against the herrenvolk onslaughts, the weapon of the strike.

In the Bill before Parliament, Fanie Botha advocates the lifting of the bars on mixed and migrant worker trade union membership and is calling for the elimination of race and sex discrimination in wage agreements. At the same time, the Bill gives the Government arbitrary powers to close down unions, and to repatriate migrant workers who have taken part in an 'illegal' strike. He also proposes to monitor all contributions to union funds, as well threatens to impose additional disabilities on the unions, such as barring them from giving industrial relations training to their members and organisers. Most sinister, the prohibition on political activity is hanging over the heads of the working masses like the sword of Damocles.

In the days that lie ahead, the Black workers will be able to avert painful disappointments and humiliating defeats *only* if they combine their struggle for the right of freedom of assembly, the right to work and improvements in their economic condition and life with the main-stream political struggle of *all* the oppressed for democratic rights and equality. It is the main-stream political struggle which, guided by a class-conscious and principled leadership, will lead inexorably to the socialist reconstruction of South Africa, provided the basic principle of revolutionary politics and strategy - the combination of the struggle for reforms with the struggle for the socialist revolution - is observed *in action*.

(In the next article, we shall conclude the discussion on the above topic.)

## Part IV

The discovery of gold and diamonds in the latter half of the 19th century opened up vast prospects for industrialisation in South Africa. Roads and railway lines were built, ancillary industries to mining were started up, and there was a rapid growth of the urban population. There also arose an increased demand for food production and for raw materials for processing in the embryonic industries. Not only were there extensive mineral resources for exploitation but also enormous reservoirs of potential Black labour, for the dispossession of the indigenous population of their means of livelihood - the land - had been accomplished. It was a happy conjuncture of events and circumstances. There were tremendous possibilities for the speedy development of capitalism. But the obstacles to it were equally colossal.

Commodity production and exchange requires the bringing together and centralised control of resources, and a homogeneous home market. Economic centralisation and the welding together of vast regions is characteristic of the development of capitalism and provides the best conditions for its fullest and speediest growth. But South Africa had been carved up into four distinct territories: the British colonies of the Cape and Natal and the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. This was a serious drawback to the economic development of the region as a whole. In essence, the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was an agent of history to correct this abnormal situation and to clear the decks for the development of capitalism in South Africa and for the emergence of political institutions suitable to it. It was a fight to the death between the patriarchal Boer republics, in which feudal, pre-capitalist features predominated in the economic system, and the "enlightened" British imperialism - the pioneer of capitalist culture. Its direct consequence was the formation in 1910 of a uniform, national State - the Union of South Africa - with a democratic constitution and parliament.

The formal process of democratisation stopped halfway. Only the White South Africans were accorded full democratic rights and citizenship under the constitution. They alone have a voice in determining the structure of the state or in running it. The Black South Africans AS A WHOLE are disfranchised. This fact occupies a central place in the South African revolution and must always be borne in mind.

In South Africa the Blacks are subjected to rule by proclamation; are subordinated to the barbaric authority of government-appointed tribal chiefs; are administered by insensitive, racist "Native" Commissioners; have to pay all manner of special taxes: poll tax, hut tax, stock and grazing tax et cetera, ad nauseam. They slave from dawn to dusk and get a pittance for wages; they live in hovels like animals and are liable to flogging like serfs; have no freedom of movement; no right to work, to a trade or profession. They are entirely at the mercy of the chiefs, the "Native" Commissioners, the location superintendents and the police. In many cases they starve to death. They have no way of having their grievances redressed. They can't work for whom they please, where they please, nor live or trade where they want to live or trade. They have no freedom of association and assembly, and come under a spate of discriminatory laws they have had no part in their making, but which govern their entire lives from the cradle to the grave. They are denied the most elementary democratic rights - first and foremost, POLITICAL LIBERTY.

## II

In a pamphlet addressed to the rural poor in Russia in 1903, Lenin explained in a direct, popular vein what political liberty meant:

*"Political liberty means the freedom of the people to arrange their public, state affairs. Political liberty means the right of the people to elect their representatives (deputies) to a State Duma (parliament). All laws should be discussed and passed, all taxes should be fixed only by such a State Duma elected by the people themselves. Political liberty means the right of the people themselves to choose all their officials, arrange all kinds of meetings for the discussion of all state affairs, and publish whatever papers and books they please, without having to ask for permission,"*

He continued,

*"Political liberty will not at once deliver the working people from poverty, BUT IT WILL GIVE THE WORKERS A WEAPON WITH WHICH TO FIGHT POVERTY". There is no other means and there can be no other means of fighting poverty except the UNITY OF THE WORKERS THEMSELVES. But millions of people cannot unite unless there is POLITICAL LIBERTY."*

Lenin placed the demand for political liberty at the very top of the democratic demands of the workers and the peasants in Russia because WITHOUT it the battle for socialism could not be joined and the toiling masses could not free themselves from oppression and poverty.

It is indisputable that the concentration of the ownership of land and of the means of production - the factories, the machines etc., that is, everything man uses to produce wealth in the present social order - in the hands of a few rich people is the source of the poverty of the vast masses of the people. It is also beyond dispute that the only way to put an end to the misery and suffering of the majority of mankind is to change the existing social order by abolishing private property in land and in the means of production and turning it over to the whole working people.

But matters are not simple: Nothing is arranged like the notes on a piano. And the question stands: How, CONCRETELY, do the poor free themselves from the shackles of capitalism and raise themselves to a better life? More precisely, how are the toiling masses to be won to a socialist perspective? Clearly, it is not enough to say that life is hard and to call for revolt. Every tub-thumper can do that. It is equally futile to proceed from abstract formulas. The given situation is the only starting point. It is imperative to proceed from the living experience of the toilers; their on-going struggles, their present democratic consciousness and aspirations and, by a process of approximation, bring them to socialist consciousness. Any other road can only lead to a proliferation of elitist sects fervently engaged in the serious task of preaching the gospel of the "pure" social revolution in isolation from the mass struggle.

It is the task of the revolutionary leadership to LEAD the class struggle of the toiling masses IN ALL ITS STAGES, leading up to and including the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its socialist expropriation. The FORMS of organisation suitable to each stage of the revolutionary process will suggest themselves in the course of the development of the class struggle, and will be determined by the level of the class-consciousness of the struggling masses.

In October 1917, joining battle with Karl Radek in this vexed question of the relation between the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist revolution, Lenin went to great pains to set the record straight. For this reason, we shall quote him at length:

*"...it appears", he said, "that in the name of the socialist revolution, he scornfully rejects a consistently revolutionary programme in the sphere of democracy. He is wrong to do so. The proletariat cannot be victorious except through democracy, that is, by giving full effect to democracy and by linking with each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in the most resolute terms. It is absurd to contrapose the socialist revolution to a single problem of democracy, in this case, the national question. We must combine the revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary programme and tactics on all democratic demands: a republic, a militia, the popular election of officials, equal rights for women, the self-determination of nations etc. While capitalism exists, the demands can only be accomplished as an exception, and even then in an incomplete and distorted form. Basing ourselves on the democracy already achieved, and exposing its incompleteness under capitalism, we demand the overthrow of capitalism, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, as a necessary basis both for the abolition of the poverty of the masses and for the complete all-round institution of all democratic reforms. Some of these reforms will be started before the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, others in the course of that overthrow, and still others after it. The social revolution is not a single battle, but a period covering a series of battles over all sorts of problems of economic and democratic reform which are consummated only by the expropriation of the bourgeoisie," (COLLECTED WORKS, VOL.21, page 408.)*

### III

The development of capitalism has been uneven. In the central capitalist countries it preceded that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries by centuries. In the latter not only was it belated but also deformed. The distinctive characteristic of backward countries is the co-existence of advanced capitalist forms of production and technique with primitive economic forms, and the rooting of capitalist relations into relations of feudal and even pre-feudal barbarism. The result has been peculiar, polyglot social formations which are a special feature of all colonial countries where imperialism has with one hand implanted capitalist relations, while supporting and even re-creating with the other all forms of slavery and serfdom.

By their very essence, colonial and semi-colonial countries are backward countries, but have varying degrees of backwardness. This distinguishes them from one another. All these countries are economically dependent on imperialism; some of them are direct colonies of one or the other of the imperialist countries; whilst the political dependence of the others on imperialism is concealed by the fiction of State independence. In none of them has the democratic revolution been carried through to any real extent; in all of them agrarian reforms have yet to be instituted.

### IV

South Africa is a country of stark contrast reflecting its own particular uneven development. It is a highly developed industrial state with features of a past feudal era. In her agrarian relations her backwardness finds its most organic and cruel expression.

It is in the rural areas that are to be found the majority of South Africa's Black population. There they live in abject poverty

and well-nigh absolute deprivation.

1. The total number of Blacks living in the White rural areas is about 5 million, of which 4 million are Africans, i.e. about 20% of the total African population. This rural Black population is made up of regular farm labourers and labour tenants and squatters, who work for the White farmers at definite periods of the year in return for grazing rights for their cattle and use of the land for growing crops. The last two categories are either being converted into regular labourers or forcibly removed from the farms to be dumped in the barren Bantustans or "Homelands" in accordance with the Government policy of reducing African labour to indentured labour.

Two million of these people are labourers and domestic servants in the farmers' households. 1.8 million of them are African. The rest are Coloured and Indian. The African farm labourers' average earnings (in cash and kind) are R18 (£9) per month. The yearly income is R217 (£108). The earnings of the Coloured and Indian labourers do not amount to much more than this. No minimum wage determination machinery and no wage agreements cover the farm labourers' pay. They are not entitled to any sick leave payments, unemployment benefits or compensation for injury at work. It is illegal for them to go on strike and practically impossible independently to organise a trade union.

These men and women (and quite often children) work 12 hours a day, seven days a week; they live in shacks with no furniture but sacks to sleep on and are clothed in rags. There is no water or toilet facilities; no proper lighting. They are either fined or flogged by the farmer for any breach of "discipline" and are tied to the land in very much the same way as the medieval serf, for if they tried to escape they have very little or no chance of obtaining permission to enter an urban area, and are subject to a jail sentence if they break a contract by running away. For these men and their families there is no escape from their condition of slavery.

2. About ten million of South Africa's total African population of 20 million live in the "Native Reserves", now officially referred to as the "Homelands". These are barren, unproductive tribal areas scattered all over South Africa and all together amounting to nearly 13% of the country's total land area. These ten million people cannot support themselves on the land allocated for them. In order to provide for their families and to pay the numerous special taxes levied on them, a great many of them have to find work as migrant contract workers on the South African White farms and mines and in the construction and heavy industries and the transport services. They are usually the lowest paid of all South African workers.

Their conditions of life in the reserves are appalling beyond description. It is in these parts of South Africa that poverty, ignorance and diseases take their heaviest toll of human lives. It is here that are to be found the highest infant mortality rates and the lowest levels of education and culture. And besides sheer hardships, the peasants in these areas have to endure the whip-lashes of the autocratic government-appointed, tribal chiefs and bureaucratized White government officials. They have to pay all kinds of taxes designed to flush them out of the reserves to find work in the White-owned economy.

It has to be clearly understood that the so-called "Homelands" are essentially reservoirs of Black cheap labour for South Africa's industry and agriculture. Their inhabitants are in reality capitalism's classical reserve army of the unemployed so necessary for depressing the wages of the workers and maximising profits. But in the central capitalist countries the reserve army lives in the dilapidated tenements and slums of the urban areas, and are urbanised and in the main proletarianised. In South Africa the ruling class have taken stringent measures to prevent its urbanisation and proletarianisation in order to forestall the stresses and strains this would have brought to bear on capitalism as a system of exploitation. And so long as this reserve army exists, so long will the problems of poverty and deprivation besetting the Black workers resident in the urban areas remain unsolved. The democratic demand of the ten million Africans living in the reserves and the White rural areas for land is indissolubly linked with the democratic demand of the Black workers living in the urban areas for economic and social advancement. The agrarian problem occupies a central place in the struggle of all the oppressed for democratic rights and equality. This implies a combined development of the national struggle for liberation together with the struggle for socialist reconstruction.

## V

There are 9 to 10 million Blacks permanently resident in the urban areas of South Africa. Around 6 million of these are African, of whom 2½ million are male and female industrial workers. The rest are Coloured and Indian South Africans, the majority of whom are workers. They are all victims of racial segregation, job and wage discrimination and constant harassment and intimidation by the police and the government bureaucracy. Like the rest of the Blacks in South Africa, they have no democratic rights, no way of promoting their interests or satisfying their aspirations. A great many of them live in dire poverty and squalor.

It is from this section of the South African Black population that will arise an independent, revolutionary leadership of the struggle of ALL the oppressed against racial oppression and for democratic rights and equality. It is this leadership that is destined to lead the struggle of ALL the toiling masses for the liquidation of capitalist exploitation and for socialism.

We have already pointed out that South Africa has a very highly developed capitalist economy that is inextricably linked with the economies of the imperialist capitalist countries, whilst at the same time her social relations are primitive and backward. We have also indicated that in the present era of capitalist decay the demands of the working class for improvements in their conditions of work and life cannot be met to any real extent. These considerations invest the South African revolution with a special combined character. Although its immediate aim is the cleansing of social relations of the remnants of feudalism and backwardness in general and the democratisation of South Africa's society, in the conditions of South Africa the struggle of the oppressed Blacks for democratic rights and full citizenship is combined with the socialist

struggle against world imperialism. It is at once national-democratic in form and proletarian-socialist in content and perspective. For South Africa's truncated bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot be consummated or completed within the framework of capitalism and under imperialist domination. Therefore, only the working class supported by the peasantry can lead the fight for freedom and conduct it through to its socialist conclusion.

The democratic and socialist revolution in South Africa are not divided into separate historical periods or stages, but interact on and interweave with each other, so that socialism is an organic outgrowth of democracy. As Lenin taught the working class:

*"Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will NEVER live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.*

*"The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which ALL the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But OBJECTIVELY, the mass movement was breaking the back of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.*

*"The socialist revolution in Europe CANNOT be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it - without such participation. MASS struggle is IMPOSSIBLE, without it NO revolution is possible - and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But OBJECTIVELY they will attack capital, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for different reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately 'purge' itself of petty-bourgeois slag".*

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