

Black Allied Workers' Union

The law in South Africa does not prohibit Black workers from organizing themselves into trade unions. Although Black trade unions are not being recognized (legally) by the Government they are still allowed to exist. Thus the obligation lies with the Black workers to organize themselves so that they can obtain de facto recognition by virtue of their existence and strength.

BLACK WORKERS:

Conditions

Of all racial groups in South Africa, namely whites, coloureds and asiatics, the Black worker (African) is the most neglected. The South African labour system, in its present form, has placed the Black worker on the worst receiving end. He is receiving a raw deal from both the government and the employer. The country's industrial laws subject the Black worker to perpetual economic disabilities -- he is an object of discrimination in both commerce and industry, a recipient of below poverty-datum-line wages -- deprived of collective bargaining for wages and better working conditions, an exploited source of cheap unskilled labour, a mere voiceless tool of production.

Discrimination;

The South African labour tradition and racial attitudes that led to "job reservation" contained in the Industrial Conciliation Act, form the basis of discrimination and injustices against Black workers.

Because of the colour of his skin and racial origin the Black worker is being prevented from fair competition in job opportunities. Several lucrative jobs are placed by law, racial attitude and traditional colour-bar, beyond the reach of Black workers. This position is entrenched by the Job Reservation that excludes the Black worker from taking up certain jobs and positions -- these being reserved for workers of the white race, coloured or asiatics. Prejudice and racial discrimination practised in the work field, place the Black worker in a perpetual inferior job position. His chances of promotion are limited. Jobs and positions in the upper strata are reserved for whites. Tradition taboos a Black worker from being an overseer of white labour. This puts a ceiling to the natural process of vertical mobility of labour in the Black labour pool. Because of this unjust discrimination, the Black worker often finds himself dehumanised, uncreative, lethargical in the discharge of his duties and almost detached from his plant of work. He feels no stake in his job situation and his significance as a human being and worker is dwarfed and destroyed by racial attitudes and discrimination.

Underpayment:

Black workers are experiencing gross underpayment in nearly all categories of work. Of all racial groups, they are the worst paid. The disparity between Black and white wages is the most shocking factor in a country that is the richest in Southern Africa -- or Africa as a whole. As the country is becoming more economically viable, the wage gap between Black and white races is becoming wider. E. G. Ref. Monthly Cash -- Average Earnings by Racial Groups in 1970.

	<u>In Mining & Industry</u>	<u>Construction</u>	<u>Manufacturing</u>
Whites	R 368.8	R 325.3	R 307.2
Coloured	75.2	109.6	73.6
Asiatic	98.9	150.4	77.4
African	48.3	49.9	52.3

The Black worker is not being underpaid because he is a miner, clerk teacher, salesman, machinist or social worker. He is being grossly underpaid because he is Black. It is the colour of his skin and racial origin that determines his remuneration. N. B. It is this situation that determines the type, form and nature of a labour movement (trade union) that Black workers should embark on in this country. Because of various labour disabilities in various job categories, they should decide whether their Trade Union movement should be formed according to their job categories (trades) or it should take the form of an all-embracing union.

Differential rates of pay and conditions of work are based on racial consideration rather than skill (qualifications), merit and ability. Black workers do not and cannot determine their own wages or conditions of work. They cannot freely market or bargain their labour for the best highest price. They are forever "to place total reliance on the goodwill of the employers; on the efforts (if any) made by white trade unions and on the efforts of the white officials on the Bantu Labour (Wage) Board." -- H. Suzman "The Star" 12/4/72.

Lack of Trade Union Movement.

Since the banning of Black political parties and the gagging of some trade union leaders by banning orders, fear has gripped the Black -worker-field -- and they have psychologically "legislated" against themselves that "Blacks are banned from forming or joining trade unions."

Although there is no law in South Africa that prevents Black workers from organising and forming themselves into trade unions, Black trade unions have been legally and effectively emasculated. Black workers can neither bargain collectively nor negotiate legally for decent living wage and better conditions of work except through the Bantu Labour Officers. The Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act is a watch dog over this situation. The Bantu Labour Officers, who must be members of the white race, are the only recognised agents to represent Black employees at the Industrial Council and Wage Board meetings. Their duties are to prevent and settle disputes on behalf of Black workers. Further, this Act makes it a criminal offence for any Black employee to withhold or withdraw his labour or service. That is, strikes as a form of protest against any ill-treatment, exploitation and injustice, are legally prohibited. This deprivation of the right to strike has left the Black worker voiceless, powerless and prone to ruthless abuse by some unscrupulous employers. He is left at the mercy of white Bantu Labour Officials (who, in general, are inclined to protect white interests). The Black worker is rendered helpless, hopeless and just a mere tool of production in the commercially and industrially powerful rich country of his birth. He has no stake and voice in the economy of his country. He is a perpetual ward of the white racial group -- who are, basically, main employers. This places the Black worker in a position where he shall forever remain, rely, depend, and live on the mercy and charity of other racial groups.

Lack of Training:

"Because of a lack of education opportunities and inefficient planning most of the thousands of new African (Black) workers (are) virtually unemployable except at the very lowest menial levels." A. Grobbelaar (General Secretary, TUCSA)

There is utter negligence of the training of Black workers by both government and employers. Technical training for the Blacks is at its lowest level (if any). Black workers do "repetative" work where skill is required. For the protection and preservation of white workers' position and status in the job situation, several industrialists deny the Black worker a chance of rising from "unskilled" to semi-skilled occupations. Skilled work has become a monopoly of the white race. The cry is that Black workers are not trained -- yet neither the Government nor private sectors are prepared to open training avenues or give financial grants and other facilities for the training of Blacks in job techniques.

It is the lack of general workers' education and specialized occupational training that makes the Black workers uncreative, unproductive, and lazy in the discharge of duties -- and thus a liability instead of an asset to the country's economy.

NEED FOR CHANGE

The Black labour force is an essential factor in this country. It cannot be neglected. It cannot be overlooked. It is a force to reckon with. It is a pillar to the sound South African economy. It is the main source of wealth and comfort to white industrialists and commercial magnets. What would the Oppenheimers, the Ruperts, the Dave Marais and the Moolmans be without Black labour? Members of Government, industrialists, and individuals in key commercial fields have raised a cry for the urgent need for a change in the Black labour situation in this country.

On the need for training of Black workers, the first major call comes from the Trade Union Council of South Africa's (TUCSA) Vice President, Miss Anna Scheepers: "South Africa's economic advance would be blocked by a massive unskilled labour force unless the Government and industry moved soon to provide adequate industrial training facilities." This urgent and important call was supported by Mr Dave Marais, M. P., who further quoted Miss Scheepers as saying "Unskilled workers cannot be transformed overnight into skilled or semi-skilled workers. Industrial training centres will have to be established and service training in the private sector greatly expanded if we are to have a big enough skilled labour force to ensure a steady economic advance." Miss Scheepers goes further to say "the Government is faced with a clear choice -- either the restrictive labour laws would have to be bent or drastically amended and funds spent on training facilities or South Africa's growth rate would be seriously retarded."

Although Miss Shceepers is not looking at the need for a change as an essential factor for the economic benefit of the Black worker but at the economic advantage of the country, Black workers are, however, in agreement with her in the need for training Black skilled workers, the need for scraping off restrictive labour laws, the need to accept Black workers as equal economic partners in the Country. Black workers call on the Government and employers

to open their doors and grant facilities for the general education and specialised training of Blacks. "

It is at this point that the SALES AND ALLIED WORKERS ASSOCIATION, one of the newly founded Black trade unions, responds favourably and seriously to the call for the training of Black workers. The "Sales and Allied Workers' Union" believes that if ever there shall be a change in the labour situation and conditions in this country, that change shall be brought about by the Black worker responding, equally, to the call as expressed by Miss Anna Scheepers and those who are concerned with the advancement of the Blacks in the South African economic field.

In this field of education, the Sales and Allied Workers Association feels morally bound to take the lead in:

- a. First to organise members in the sales occupations and those in other categories into a Union;
- b. To draw education programmes for workers -- in general.
- c. To draw education programmes for workers in various respective crafts (categories).
- d. To organise Labour Seminars where workers could be given general education and be made aware of Industrial Laws that govern them -- also of their rights and benefits contained in these laws.
- e. To organise courses for specialised education -- having in mind the improving of individual workers technical skills.
- f. Where possible and practical, to establish training centres where Black youth could be taught trades.

In response to the call that "the time for decision is to be taken now" if the living standards and degree of production are to be maintained, the Sales and Allied Workers Association appeals to all interested industrial concerns, commercial business houses, foreign firms, institutions and individuals to assist in various ways and means to make the training of a Black worker a reality. While benefiting the Black worker as a person who has a definite role to play in the economy of the country, who has a living standard to maintain -- it shall profit the employer production-wise and the economy of the country as a whole. It shall also create a happy economic relationship among all racial groups in the country, and thus reassure us an economic boom, stability and peace.

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N. B. "We have shown that the production of non-white workers rises significantly even after a short period of training." (in the clothing industry) -- A. Scheepers.

Also supporting the cry for need of training Black workers is Mr Harry Oppenheimer: "The economic problems of South Africa would not be solved until the Black labour force was properly trained and used." The compliance with this call would enable the Black worker to sell his labour profitably to whoever he chooses. It would be an end to the so-called "cheap labour" that has made South Africa a "stink cat: in the labour markets of the world. The Sales and Allied Workers Association is calling upon Mr Oppenheimer to demonstrate this call by practically assisting in the running of Black workers

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education programmes.

Joining the ranks of the industrial change prophets and calling for firms to assist the Black worker and his community, is one of the Black leaders, Mr L. B. Mehlomakulu: "Throughout the world progressive industrialists give liberally to community development projects like setting up faculties at Universities. There is nothing paternalistic about this, it is an accepted tenet of civilization that the rich should subsidise the poor." Here Mr Mehlomakulu is calling for members of the white community, white trade unions and other institutions to assist in the Black community development projects -- amongst them, Black workers training schemes.

Africans can be trained to the highest position in industry without threatening white labour privileges. Instead it will contribute toward advanced industrial growth and more job opportunities will be created for all citizens in the country irrespective of the colour of the skin and racial origin. It would lead to the narrowing of the wage gap and making for a happy South Africa whose wealth is shared and enjoyed by all racial groups.

NEED FOR BLACK TRADE UNIONS:

While there is an urgent call for a change in the labour laws, labour attitudes, wages and working conditions, the need for Black trade union movement supercedes all other calls. Black trade union movement is an essential element to play a vital role in the bringing about of the desired change in the labour system of this country.

The statement made by Mr Marais Viljoen, the Minister of Labour, in Parliament that: "The Government will not grant skilled and semi-skilled African workers collective bargaining rights because this is not considered necessary in view of the protection enjoyed by the Bantu Workers under existing legislation" drew sharp public criticism and attack -- especially from Mrs Helen Suzman who vigourously pleaded for African participation in collective bargaining procedures, warning that the longer Africans (Blacks) were denied trade union experience, the more open they would be to extremism. She called on the Government to prepare for South Africa's third industrial revolution -- for a new industrial relation deal involving:

- a. Decent minimum wages
- b. A reduction in the ever widening gap between skilled (white) and unskilled (Black) wage rates
- c. The rate for the job on the basis of scientific job evaluation and not on the basis of skin colour. And, finally
- d. Trade union rights for Africans and all that that implies.

Black workers in South Africa endorse this feeling as expressed by Mrs Suzman. At the moment, the existing Black trade unions are quite minor and ineffective. They are quite small in numbers and not very much well organised. The majority of these trade unions are, in reality, not Black. e.g. The National Union of Clothing Workers, the African Tobacco Workers Union, African Leather Workers Union, African Trunk and Box Workers Union, National Union of South African Journalists, etc., are attached to white sister-unions. They have no decisions of their own. They are like appendixes to the white unions and therefore, cannot cater

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for Black workers' interest without first getting approval or blessings from their white patrons. Of the existing nine black trade unions, only the Engineering and Allied Workers and the Sales and Allied Workers Unions can be termed Black unions. They are completely administered by Blacks and have black support. Yet these two unions have very small membership and are, financially, very poor. They largely depend on the members monthly subscription.

Question: Why do we need Black trade unions when they cannot be legally recognised?

Legal recognition of Black trade Unions is not liable or likely to be given before de facto recognition. That is, before they can exist. It is essential that Black trade union movement should first exist and grow. De facto recognition is more important than de jure recognition.

Black trade unions could assist Black workers to know more about themselves and the significance of their role at work; to know more about their rights and benefits in the existing industrial laws and assist in how to obtain these; they could provide an essential and effective means of training workers, establishing work committees at various work places -- and becoming an effective mouthpiece for the thousands of the voiceless Black workers in the country.

How should the black workers be organized into Trade Unions?

It is the belief of the majority of Black workers that effective Black trade union movement should NOT be organised on "craft" (job category) basis. Black workers should be organised into a GENERAL Black Workers Union. This could be called "Black Allied Workers Union."

Workers belonging to this union would be grouped according to their job category (craft) and their interests would be catered for in like manner. That is, salesmen, clerks, drivers, road diggers, builders, metal workers, teachers, etc., would be grouped accordingly while all are belonging to one umbrella union. This arrangement would enable Black workers to bring their resources -- manpower, financial and skills -- together to become a strong viable labour movement. As it has been shown above that Black workers are not being discriminated against, ill-treated, ill-paid, etc., because of their respective occupations but because of the colour of their skin, this arrangement would enable them to face and meet their economic disadvantages squarely as a united force. Their solidarity and power would force de facto recognition by the Government and employers leading to a de jure recognition. The onus is on the Black worker to prove himself and to bring about a change by organising himself into a force that would command the respect of other racial groups.

The Sales and Allied Workers Association has, therefore, decided to meet this challenge by taking it upon themselves to organise Black workers into a general union. They are putting an emphasis and stress on the "ALLIED" feature of their membership so that they can accomodate workers who do not belong to the sales occupation. They have started with the practical work by:

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- a. Printing membership cards that would be suitable for all workers in various job categories.
- b. Establishing local organisers to recruit workers into this general union.
- c. Consulting with leaders of existing black and semi-black unions to the effect of calling "all workers conference" as early as January 1973 where the "Black Allied Workers Council" shall be elected.
- d. Appointing an education committee to work on the education and training programmes for black workers.
- e. Looking for a centre (office) where matters of black workers could be administered.
- f. Consulting with various employers, business magnets, firms (foreign and internal), institutions and individuals, asking them for assistance both financial and materially -- and also, to assist with their human resources -- the know-how and skills in the running of organisations and general administration.
- g. Obtaining advice from whoever is interested in Black labour movement and the improving of Black workers.

The basic task of the Black Allied Workers Council shall be NOT to solve problems; economic or racial in South Africa but to change the system that is making the Black worker an economic underdog and an object of pity and charity, and by virtue of belonging to this economically deprived workers, being able to bring about a labour formula that would liberate the Black from the abyss of poverty. The emphasis shall not be on equality or the creation of equal job opportunities for all, but on equity and improvement of the Black workers lot and the creation of an equitable society.

Specific Practical Needs:

In order to accomplish the above task, Sales and Allied Workers Union, which is, at present, the caretaker union to effect the formation of the Black Allied Workers Union, and to call the Black Workers Conference, need (a) Personnel, (b) Finance, and (c) other essential means.

Personnel and Material:

They need:

- (1) A research worker to obtain data on the Black labour conditions in the country and will advise on Education programmes.
- (2) An organiser/s to visit various trade unions and individuals and recruit them into the Black Allied Workers Union.
- (3) General Secretary or Director who will administer the Black Allied Workers Council matters -- finance, education programmes and staff.
- (4) Office: where administration of Black workers shall be executed. It will also be the Workers Training Centre for the meantime.

- (5) Office staff: to carry out the office routine jobs.
- (6) Telephone: for effective communication
- (7) Vehicle: to organise and travel to other parts of the country.
- (8) Other accessories essential for effective organization and running of a trade union.

Cost Estimates Per Annum

Director	R3,000	
Organiser	2,400	
Research Worker	2,400	
Typist	1,200	
Typewriter	280	
Duplicator	500	
Office Rent	1,200	
Telephone & Postage	500	
Auditor's Fees	200	
Printing & Stationery	2,000	
	<u>R12,680</u>	Total

Purchase of Vehicle:

VW 1600 (Beetle)	R1,998	
(or VW Combi)	R2,880	
Cost of Running	1,000	
Travel (member of staff)	500	
Sundry Expenses	500	
	<u>R16,678</u>	Total

N. B. The Black Worker's Project shall need the amount of R17,000 per annum. In order to make a successful organisation we shall need not less than five years subsidy. This amount will gradually diminish as the organisation grows towards a point of self-sufficiency.

Executive Committee Members:

1. Sales and Allied Workers Association
 - Chairman: Mr A. Mahlangu (acting)
 - Secretary: Mr D. K. Koka
 - Treasurer: Mr J. Molosi
 - Organiser: Mr S. Mabuza

Committee members: Mr A. Phoofolo
Mr E. Ngeleza
Mr T. Boya

2. Consultative Planning Committee

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Mr I. Tekane	-	IBM Personnel Manager
Mrs M. Ntseke	-	Garment Worker
Mr M. T. Moerane	-	Editor -WORLD
Mr L. B. Mehlomakulu	-	Bank Manager
Miss E. Marokane	-	Research Worker
Mr C. Mfanekiso	-	Young Christian Worker
Mr F. Mogajane	-	Sales Supervisor.

GENERAL SECRETARY.

Collection Number: AD1715

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

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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