

URGENT PROBLEMS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A1.3.1

1. The Labour Movement in South Africa is passing through a most critical stage, perhaps the most critical in its history. A wave of Chauvinism is sweeping the country. The reactionary Nationalist and United Parties, in spite of superficial and minor differences are rapidly coming to an understanding on all fundamental questions of policy and may unite into one party in the not-distant future. On the other hand, the working class political parties have lost a great deal of ground in recent years.
2. In the Trade Union Movement, the position is equally as bad. The Trades and Labour Council has quite openly become an appendage of the United Party and the Chamber of Mines. The Fascist elements are very active and are gaining ground. The Mine Workers' Union has to all intents and purposes ceased to function as a trade union and has become a battle-ground between the Chamber of Mines clique and the pro-Fascist cliques. In the Building Trade Unions, the Fascists are taking the lead and there is general confusion and demoralization. The African Trade Unions, which were very strong some years ago, are to-day in a very weak position. Masses of European workers, even English-speaking workers, are losing faith in the United Party and the Labour Party and are turning to the Fascists for a lead.
3. Grave problems require extremely radical remedies. In this critical stage of the South African Labour and Trade Union Movement, the following policy is the only one which holds out any prospect of success :-
  - (a) The progressive trade unions, which have a membership of about 70,000 to 80,000, must withdraw from the reactionary Trade and Labour Council and form jointly with the African trade unions a real progressive national trade union centre, a South African Trades Union Congress.
  - (b) The new national trade union centre must come out with a national policy and with a clarion call to all the workers of South Africa, giving a lead on all major problems, i.e. the right of work for all, freedom of organisation for all workers, the building of a national economy based on sound principles, the protection of the standards of the higher-paid workers and the improvement of the standards of the lower-paid workers, etc.
  - (c) A political home must be found for the masses of European workers, who are rapidly drifting to the Fascists. They will not join the Communist Party, but given the correct lead, tens of thousands can be brought into the Labour Party. The policy of the new national trade union centre should be to urge European workers to get into the Labour Party and alter the policy of the party towards a progressive line.
  - (d) A special Technical Advisory Committee must be set up to help in the reorganization of the African trade unions. African workers must not only be organized into trade unions, but must also find political expression,

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