

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICA  
(..PkoVloIoNAl HEAD^UAKTEIttS )

P.O. Box 680j  
MOROGORO,

United Republic of  
Tanzania.

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A BklEF on the invitation  
to Tier HkTt?Tbir~TtOfnF' tjitsf 'cum oil  
BY the""SUUTE 'IFSICSmSUE 'OUoA@"CoTMciL

If anything, there can be no doubt that South Africa is undergoing a serious economic crisis. Inflation; nation-wide strikes by Black workers; shrinking markets coupled with the dollar crisis; mounting international campaigns to isolate her; the dearth of skilled labour; the growing spirit of resistance and defiance among the Black people and a host of other problems, are threatening to shake the very foundations of apartheid.

The South Africa lobby has become more vocal with its sham reasoning that trade with and investments in apartheid South Africa will substantially improve conditions of the Black man and, eventually lead to a relaxation of racial discrimination.

The South African Trade Union Council whose declared policy towards the African, Coloured and Indian workers has always been to subject them "under White control and guidance if necessary on a limited rights basis"<sup>11</sup>, has not been slow to climb the political band-wagon. Its invitation to the British Trade Union Council to send an investigating team to South Africa should be seen as motivated by the desire to persuade people abroad that continued industrialisation would speed up the process of breaking down colour bars. At the same time, it was also to give the impression of a growing "liberal mood" that is supposed to be building up in South Africa to seek change for but not (and this is the crux of the matter) with the concurrence of and on equal terms with the Black workers.

Hereunder, we reproduce a letter addressed by SACTU to the trade union organisations and trade unionists in Britain on April 6, 1973 in an effort to correct these deceitful impressions .

5'The invitation by Mr. Arthur Grobbelaar.of the South  
African Trade Union Council to the British Trade

Union Council to send an investigating team to South  
Africa, and especially his appeal to investors to  
retain their capital stake in South Africa and not  
to withdraw, focusses attention on the role of the  
White trade union movement in South Africa and its  
THE ROLE OF THE WHITE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT  
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relations with African workers and their struggles for union organisation and for economic and political rights, we should like to make a few salient points to you.

"It is surely common cause that apartheid has had damaging effects on all aspects of South African society, including the role of the white workers and their unions. White workers form a labour aristocracy and they have achieved inflated standards at the expense of the black majority. Arising from this division in the ranks of the workers, the history of the white trade union movement has been one of efforts to achieve a protected and highly privileged role for white unions, and to turn a blind eye to the needs of African workers. Thus white workers fought tenaciously to protect their privileges even when this meant fighting not only the government and employers, but also African workers. In fact the outstanding characteristic of the trade union movement in South Africa, especially since the 1922 white miners' strike, has been the convergence of interest between government, management and white unions at the expense of the African workers and their attempts to organise unions.

"When it comes to organising and co-ordinating activities, the white trade union movement is not altogether unified. Thus there is the Co-ordinating Committee of Trade Unions which has an all-white membership and has consistently, in its statements and policy, upheld the principle of job reservation and regarded government policy on labour questions as its own. The Trade Union Council of South Africa, with a White, Coloured and Indian membership, has been less consistent. Between 1963-9 TUCSA did make some attempts to organise the Africans into trade unions, but it encountered opposition from some of its affiliated unions, particularly the craft unions. In 1989 TUCSA took the step, as a result of government criticism and this internal opposition, of altering its constitution to debar African unions from membership. It thus moved sharply away from universal trade union principles.

"Certain TUCSA unions, such as the South African Typographical Union and the Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Union - have extended some assistance to African workers at times, have defended their interests in negotiations and have opened some social security benefits to them. But this action has been essentially of a paternalistic nature and does not represent any significant sharing of power between white and African workers. Over the longer term, it has been essentially

the fear of potential undercutting of white workers by blacks which induced white trade unions to seek to include black workers. Thus Mr. Tom Rutherford of TUCSA, revealed this underlying motivation in evidence to the 1955 Select Committee on the Industrial Conciliation Bill. He said on this occasion

'Up until 1927 we refused to have Indians in

the Typographical Union. They then commenced

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negotiating separately and practically eliminated the European (white) printer from Natal. We then took them into our Union in order to stop that. The result is that I suppose we can count the number of skilled Indian printers in Natal on the fingers of your one hand. They have been almost eliminated. That happened because we took them into the Union,<sup>1</sup>

"This is quoted from ^outh^Africa! s Starving Work Force, by Adam Guelke^an3H3uanley"Sle5eF67~^ew~ST5ates-man7\*"23 March 1973\* This article is a useful description of the limits, legislative, administrative and other, placed on the bargaining power of the African workers.

"It is significant that it is invariably when African workers seek to assert their rights, as in the present wave of strikes, ^£hat white unions are prompted to offer to organise African workers in order, we fear, to control them.

"Even the slogan of the rate for the job, though on the face of it this might appear to be an equitable solution, serves to defend white worker interests at the expense of African. This is because in South African conditions where Africans are denied education and training and access to skills, the white worker is more productive than the African and insistence on the rate for the job thus becomes a way of driving the blacks out of skilled jobs.

"We make these points in order to demonstrate that for reasons rooted in the divide-and-rule apartheid system, the interests - of African workers can essentially be guarded and asserted only through their own organisation. It should be noted that during the current wave of strikes, when Africans have attempted to make modest wage claims and have been dispersed by teargas and by troops used as blacklegs (as in the Richards Bay disputes), the white trade union movement has remained- Silent on this crucial issue of government repression of African workers! rights.

"Any TUC or other international trade union consideration of TUCSA's role and policy must therefore scrutinise with great care the special interests of white workers and unions and their consequent inability to project the demands of African workers. This divergence of interest can be demonstrated not only through the history of South Africa's trade union

movement, but in the role of the white unions in

relation to Africans in specific industries and especially at times of crucial wage negotiations\* (In this connection the process of job dilution, through which white unions connive at the system under which African workers do white men's work but continue to receive 'black' rates of pay, is described in some detail, on their railways and in the engineering industry, in *The South African Connection*, by Ruth first, Jonathan Steele~an3~CHris^a'5el Gurney7 publisher Temple Smith, especially pages 71-77)â€¢

"African workers in our country are battling valiantly to organise against starvation wages. Meaningful international trade union solidarity could take many forms. These will undoubtedly be fully canvassed at the forthcoming Geneva conference on South Africa which is due to take place in June (International Labour Organisation, Workers Section). Meanwhile we would stress that urgent priorities are the categorical condemnation of South African government repression of African strike action; a concerted demand for the right of African workers to organise in fully recognised trade unions5 and the dismantling of the political and economic structures of apartheid which use migrant labour, coercion, of labour through the pass laws and the denial of all civil and political rights to Africans, in order to buttress the cheap labour system and thus the super-exploitation of the African workers of South Africa\*1

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These .are but some of the stark realities which may have been eluding many of our sympathisers abroad. Whilst their support has been of encouragement to our efforts to get South Africa isolated, we cannot leave them to embark on initiatives that only serve to assuage the conscience of investors in South Africa and depress the fighting spirit of millions of Black workers. It is certainly not only detractive but extremely injurious to the aspirations of the oppressed. Half-hearted gestures can never be a substitute for resolute action. To allow the undisturbed reaping of economic benefits of continued capital investment can never stimulate any meaningful pressure on South Africa to compel it to overhaul its abhorrent system of apartheid.

In the following article quoted from the *GUANIAN* of April 14, 1973 Adam Raphael makes the point that the latest increases in the African pay-packets would not affect South Africa's soaring profits. On the contrary, wage increases will result in a reduction of what may be considered surplus African labour. This is where the point of divergence arises

between ourselves and some of our sympathisers.

In a system whose primary assumption is the security of the white man and boasting a military budget of some £237 million for that purpose, any amount of alms-giving, can be tolerated

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so long as it does not hold prospects of "bringing about radical modifications in the effective control over those to whom the crumbs of an illusory comfort are dispensed.

Is it any surprising therefore, that the South African regime should display little of its jack-boot juggernaut?

## THE WAGES BEHIND THE i:KAFFIKi; PROFITS

- by Adam Raphael

The wages of Africans working in outh Africa's gold mines went up last week by 23 per cent, -The mining finance houses made a great splash, showering city editors with details of the increases. But the press handouts missed out a few significant facts.

They did not mention that many black miners will be forced to put in up to 60 hours a week of back-breaking toil to earn less than £4-. Nor did they think it worth noting that many white miners, some with far less experience than the Africans they are meant to be supervising, will earn up to £100 a week.

The press releases did not of course, recall that in the 80 years to 1969, the real wages of black miners actually declined while the real wages of whites increased by two thirds, increasing the gap between white and black wages to a staggering ratio of 20 to one\* The new increases may raise African wages marginally above their 1889 levels, but they won't do much to narrow this gap.

Nor, of course, was there any boasting about the gold mines' safety record. In the last 30 years, nearly 20,000 miners, 93 per cent of them black, have died as a result of accidents, and this appalling record appears to be getting worse as the Orange Free State mines grow deeper. In 1968 alone, 23,000 Africans were disabled for at least 14 days as a result of accidents, and nearly 300 were killed.

"To get some idea of the working conditions with those actually mining the gold have to cope it is perhaps easiest to start thinking of a road labourer digging up a pavement with a jack hammer drill. Now imagine him doing that work thousands of feet underground, in intense heat, where he cannot even begin to stand upright and where the drill is not going with the aid of gravity into the ground beneath, but where it has to be held horizontal and driven into the wall in front.

"Add to this picture the noise of the road drill magnified several times by the confined space; dust which invades the lungs and the possibility that the roof of the mine may suddenly cave in under pressure, or that the spark from the drill or a careless cigarette might ignite a pocket of methane gas

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and one has some idea of the work of a machine  
hoy, s (Dr. Francis Wilson, !; Lahour in-the South  
African Gold mines 1911-69, - Cambridge University  
Press, Å£4Å«60. Dr. Wilson is senior economics  
lecturer at the University of Cape Town.)

There was, of course, no mention either of any  
intention on the part of the gold mines to change  
the system of short term contract workers, nearly  
80 per centâ– imported from other African countries.

The men are housed in compounds t,nd well fed to  
increase their productivity and occasionally dosed,  
according to some, sources, with bromides to reduce  
their sex drives.

The socially destructive effects of the migratory  
labour system have been fully documented and condem-  
ned by many sections of Dutch Reformed Church which  
called it "an evil canker in our society."

Lastly it should have been noted, but wasn't, that  
the latest African wage increases .will do nothing to  
affect the soaring profits of the gold mines.

A director oi one of the "Big seven" mining finance .  
houses - Anglo-American, Johannesburg Consolidated  
Investments, Rand Mines, Union Corporation, Anglo  
Transvaal, Consolidated Goldfields and General Mining

- told me the chief consequence- of the increases  
would be to reduce surplus African labour.

"I don't think it should hurt profits a great deal,"  
he said with a confident smile. George Orv;ell's  
description in "Down The Mine" is worth remembering  
perhaps by those who own gold-shares.

"In a way it is even humiliating to watch miners  
working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about  
your own status as an intellectual and superior  
person generally. Ilor it is brought home to you  
that it is only because miners sweat their guts out  
that superior persons can remain superior. You and  
I and the Editor of the Times Lit. Supp. and the  
poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X,  
author of Marxism for infants, all of us really owe  
the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges  
underground with their throats full of dust driving  
their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles  
of steel...."

South African gold mining shares are called "Kaffirs" on the London Stock Exchange, but their investment - status is high. Dividends are good, profits better, and the hopes of large capital gains better still. Last year the pre-tax profits of the South African gold mines soared by 63 per cent to nearly Â£300 million. with the gold boom continuing, the prospect can only be for greater profits this year.

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For that reason South African mining shares occupy a prominent place in the share portfolios of most British institutional investors, including it should be noted the Guardian's pension fund which is controlled by all the workers on the paper, journalists, printers, and office staff.

British investment indeed is so large in the gold mines that, though it is difficult to quantify precisely, it ranks only behind South African investment as a controlling stake. The only mining house that is still registered in London is Consolidated Goldfields, but British investors have considerable interests also in Anglo American, Johannesburg Consolidated Investments, Rand Mines, and Union Corporation, the last of which is 60 per cent controlled by British finance.

There can thus be little quarrel as to who is ultimately responsible for the wages and conditions on the South African gold mines. British investors were not only setting them up they still have a major say in their operation.

:"You will remove them (the natives) from that life of sloth and laziness, you will teach them dignity of labour, and make them contribute to the prosperity of the state and make them give some return for our wise and good government..." Cecil Rhodes' argument for the introduction of an African poll tax still finds a frequent echo in the rationalisations offered to explain the treatment of African gold miners. Those who seek a more factual answer should read Mr. Wilson's survey.

His authoritative study shows how the Chamber of the Mines, the body which represents the mining employers, succeeded in suppressing black wages. It is, after all a remarkable achievement, even by South African standards in an industry making enormous profits and employing more than half a million workers to prevent any real wage increases for 80 years.

The mine owners were able to achieve this with the collusion of the white mining unions, by forming a cartel so as to prevent competitive bidding for labour. When South African blacks proved unwilling, in spite of their dire poverty, to work in the mines for starvation wages, the Chamber, with the encouragement of the South African Government, began importing Africans from Mozambique, Botswana and other African countries on short term contracts.

This process of undercutting South African labour has now gone so far that, by the end of 1971s nearly 80 per cent of the African labour force on the mines came from foreign sources.

Not surprisingly there has only been one strike by African gold miners for higher wages. The Government

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was not slow to act in 1946 notes Dr. 'Wilson  
"Strike leaders on all the mines involved were  
arrested, police surrounded the compounds, and when  
stoned at one mine, fired the miners\* In another  
mine, a baton charge, was made and in another the  
men were driven underground from their compounds at  
bayonet point.

"Seventy men were dismissed, nine were killed, and  
more than twelve hundred injured." At no stage was  
the Government or the mine owners willing to discuss  
the grievances of the strikers because as General  
Smuts, who was Prime Minister at the time, put it  
!The native strike was not caused by legitimate  
grievances but by agitators." Four days later it  
was all over.

Shortly afterwards, the Chamber of Miners, issued a  
statements "The gold mining industry considers that  
trade unionism as practised by Europeans is still  
beyond the understanding of the tribal native."

That still remains the position of the mine owners  
today.

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With respect, Adam Raphael should have added that as last  
year's pre-tax profits soared by 6p per cent, the consumer  
and food price indices which directly affect the Black  
workers rose to a new-high level of 9 .and 14 per cents  
respectively. It is all so much like the classical biblical  
allusion of giving to those who have and taking away from  
the poor, the little that they have.

The campaign to expose overseas firms with capital invest-  
ment in South Africa should not, as we see it, be geared only  
to the restoration of the British, American or West European  
honour. That objective is quite irrelevant and misleading.  
The issue at stake is, and this is what this campaign should  
be intended to achieve, the total elimination of the evil  
and hated system of apartheid. To achieve that, as we have  
argued before, requires a committed response to the call for  
total disengagement from South Africa - economically, diplo-  
matically, culturally and militarily.

We need to remind some of our friends and sympathisers and,  
the sceptics in particular, that the collective economic  
measures carried out with some modicum of resolution during

1971 - designated the United Nations International Year for  
Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination - produced

the desired effects. South Africa's foreign reserves showed a sign of a visible falling off. "The only thin^ that saved South Africa from bankruptcy1,, as the South African Financial Mail of October 1, 1971 was to comment in obvious relief, "was an incredibly high R3&5 million of capital from

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abroad, that underpinned total foreign reserves, which, at the end of June were down to R690 million (Â±Â£'1,030 million a year before).

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Secretary" for Admi