

## Finger-Tip Facts

# Trade Unionism

### What is a Trade Union?

A Trade Union is an organised body of men and women of a certain trade, formed to protect and improve their common interests, such as, wages, hours of work, annual holidays, sick leave.

### Birthplace of Trade Unions.

Great Britain is recognised as the birthplace of Trade Unions. Karl Marx said that the British working class were "first-born sons of modern industry," so they are naturally the pioneers of Trade Unionism, the organisation of the economic struggle of the new class of working men, against the new class of capitalist employers.

### Trade Unionism comes to South Africa.

Seventy years ago there was not a Trade Union in South Africa. The earliest known Union, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was formed in Cape Town in 1881. This was followed by the Iron Moulders Society in 1896, the South African Typographical Union and the Engine Driver's and Firemen Association (one of the four mining Unions) in 1891.

### First Strike in S.A.

One of the first strikes of any historical significance in S.A. took place in 1907. This was a strike of white miners on the Witwatersrand, over what is today called "dilution of labour." The miners were asked to work three or more rock drills. They refused and a bitter struggle ensued. For the first time in South Africa the military were called in to crush an industrial dispute.

### The Rand Revolt.

The greatest strike in our Trade Union history was the Rand Revolt of 1921-22. This strike started with the coal miners in 1921 and then spread to the gold mines and the Victoria Falls Power Company and by 1922 had spread to many other industries. The main reason for the strike was the determination on the part of the Chamber of Mines to reduce wages and the proportion of European to African workers, not of course for the benefit of the Africans, but to substitute cheaper non-European labour for the highly paid Europeans.

### Over 2,000,000 Workers.

There are over two million workers (European and non-European) in South Africa who could belong to a Trade Union. Of these about 700,000 are Europeans in Transport, Commerce, Industry, Mining, Civil Service and Agriculture. Roughly 50 per cent. of the European workers have come under the influence of Trade Unions.

About 70 per cent. of the wage-earners are non-Europeans, of whom 400,000 are miners. There are over half a million in agriculture and the rest, some 500,000 are in Industry, Transport and Commerce as labourers.

### The I.C.U. is formed.

The first Union of African workers was the I.C.U. (The Industrial & Commercial Worker's Union) formed in 1918 by Clements Kadalie. At one time the I.C.U. claimed a membership of 100,000 workers. When the I.C.U. asked for affiliation to the S.A. Trade Union Congress, their application was refused on the ground that, "the 100,000 would outvote all the other Unions if a discussion took place, as is possible, on race lines."

### The African Worker.

The position of the African worker in S.A. is unique. There is no law against Africans forming Trade Unions, but under the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1937, a Trade Union must be made up of employees (workers), but for the purpose of this Act, "pass-bearing" Africans are not workers (employees), and therefore cannot form themselves into registered (legally recognised) Trade Unions.

The African worker is deprived of the strike weapon. If he breaks his service contract (pass) he has committed a CRIMINAL offence under the Native Labour Regulation Act. The African worker can only strike after he has ended his service contract, by giving his boss notice! In the meantime the boss has found new workers to take his place.

All these difficulties have not stopped the African worker from organising. Today there are in Johannesburg approximately 50 Trade Unions with a membership of 80,000. In 1941 a co-ordinating Council called the "Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions" was formed.

### Trades & Labour Council.

The South African Trades & Labour Council formed 17 years ago represents organised labour in South Africa. Both European and Non-European Trade Unions can join this Council, and send delegates to annual Conferences. At the last Conference, April, 1946, there were 101 delegates, 23 alternates, representing 99 affiliated Unions from all parts of the Union of South Africa. It was reported at the Conference that approximately 175,032 workers in South Africa are now organised into Trade Unions.

### Recognise African Unions.

During this coming session of Parliament an Act concerning Non-European Trade Unions is expected to be passed.

It is believed that the Government will try to pass legislation that will cause African

Trade Unions to fall completely under the influence of the Department of Labour or the Department of Native Affairs. The demand of all progressive Unions is recognition of the African worker under the Industrial Conciliation Act. The words "pass-bearing" must be taken out of the Act.

### The W.F.T.U.

The S.A. Trades & Labour Council of the Transvaal Council of Non-Europeans are both affiliated to the W.F.T.U. (World Federation of Trade Unions). This is an International Trade Union body, formed after the defeat of the Fascists, and represents 70,000,000 workers from all parts of the world.

### 1947 All African Conference.

In April of this year the W.F.T.U. is holding an "All African Trade Union Conference" at Dakar. (All African meaning that all Trade Unions on the continent of Africa are entitled to send delegates). The South African Trades & Labour Council have stated that they cannot afford to send delegates!

The Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions have already elected their three delegates and their two alternates.