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UNITY IN THE HEALTH SECTOR - SEEN AGAINST UNITY OF MDM

M. M.'s Speech.

Friends and Compatriots.

I am here today, to talk about Unity! I'm here to echo that deep cry from the heart of every oppressed and exploited person in our country. History charges us to close ranks and unite in action and fight for a non-racial democratic and healthy South Africa.

Our country is sick, plagued by that malignant tumor which is born of a system in decay. A system declared a heresy, a system which is no different from that propounded by none other than Adolf Hitler and Mussolini.

But history has favoured us with the right anti-bodies which have begun, ever increasingly, to neutralise any further advance of this Apartheid tumor.

That comrades is the backdrop against which this launch is taking place. It is a backdrop, on the one hand, of a government which has lost all political arguments and is completely directionless, and a mass movement on the other hand, which has shown a remarkable resilience in the face of the severe repression this country has ever known.

Apartheid has sown the seeds of its own destruction. Apartheid, once the favourite child of every would-be capitalist has now become a fetter which is slowly but slowly beginning to kill the racially structured economy which was originally designed to feed.

Gone are the days of the \$800 mark gold price. A consistently negative balance of payments has meant that "one" of the world's greatest producer of gold and other precious metals is unable to pay its debts.

With the government no longer able to pamper whites like it used to, a serious crisis of confidence in the ruling party has set in. Unemployment, once a scourge for Blacks only is wreaking havoc even within the white block.

As the crisis deepens, and the realisation dawning upon our rulers that they cannot rule us forever, they increasingly place a reliance on their repressive machinery to perpetuate their hold on political power.

When today, almost four years since a (partial) S.O.E was proclaimed in South Africa, you unite to form the SAHWCO, you thereby make a statement so profound that no amount of media restrictions can keep out of the public eye.

Our celebration of this occasion should not only lie in the fact that we've had a successful conference, but in the fact that we've taken stock of the challenges facing us as health workers and in spite of what the "Lords of the Manor" may want or not want us to, have rededicated ourselves not only to fight for people's health but also to become part of the forces fighting to eradicate the prevailing unhealthy apartheid environment. (Failure to do so would be tantamount to making us healthy for Apartheid).

UNITY

In an article in the March edition of SAHWCO's magazine, one writer from the HWO makes the point that "we need to build and promote the unity of the working class and all levels of the oppressed people", whether in the community or at the workplace and overcome all obstacles in a such a process, whether these obstacles be racial, ethnic, tribal, religious or sexual.

The significance of this statement is obvious. The unity of all the oppressed and democratic forces remains our battle-cry. But the unity of all health workers can only be more meaningful if it is a unity based not only around struggles within the hospital but unity in action together with all other democratic forces ranged against Apartheid.

Yes indeed, some things are easily said than done. This fantastic launch itself can never have all the answers. The real test of our unity lies outside this hall, it lies in those dusty streets of Soweto, and Botshabelo, it lies in the health slums of South Africa, above all it is going to lie in the manner in which we'd choose to challenge those who've ensured that 80% of our population become victims of some of the world's vicious diseases while they wax in the fat of the land.

Our comrades in the prisons have shown us how to do it. The workers' summit taking place this weekend marks a major thrust in the direction of greater unity in action of the working class of our country.

In sports, we're talking unity. In culture the watchword has become the unity of all cultural workers. All around us there is an outbreak of unity.

But comrades, let me add a word of caution. Unity, as I have stated earlier on, is not an automatic process. Unity in Action even more so. It is not going to be a straight path. There will still be differences. We will still have divisions, some will consciously try to undermine our drive towards the broadest possible unity of all democratic forces, yet some unconsciously through actions they believe to be in the interest of the movement can also blunt the sharp edge of united mass action.

Our approach to unity must not be uncritical. We must be vigilant; not only against those who want to divide us by staying outside these united mass advance, but most importantly against those, wittingly or unwittingly who would do so from within.

Needless to say that we must deepen democratic practices in our new organisation. Accountability from top to bottom and from bottom up must be inherent to our practice. We cannot trade our unity for ^{uct} ~~drive~~ acts of individuals, be they in the leadership or the rank and file. The unity which we are building today we must guard jealously.

My speech will not be complete if I were not to say anything about SAHWCO's relationship with NEHAWU.

There is no doubt that to talk of even greater unity in the health sector we'll have to talk of NEHAWU and COSATU. SAHWCO must strengthen NEHAWU. That is our historical task. In a sense SAHWCO's relevance in the broader struggle against apartheid health and the exploitation of the health workers will lie in the extent to which SAHWCO will strengthen its relationship with NEHAWU and thereby COSATU. Our slogan remains :

ONE UNION ONE INDUSTRY!

AMNDLA!!!