

## THE POLITICS OF MIGRANT LABOUR

I am not going to spend time talking about the suffering caused by South Africa's system of forced migrant labour. If you do not know about that by now then you are incapable of learning.

This seminar is about the politics of migrant labour. I want to use my 20 minutes to make two points. The first point is that the system of migrant labour is not something which grew up by accident. It was created by political action by the white holders of power.

The second point is that the policy of homeland independence cannot hope to solve the political problem of migrant labour.

So I want to begin by talking briefly about the origins and purpose of the system of migrant labour. Some people seem to think that it started as follows: They think that whites came into uninhabited areas of South Africa and developed them. The Blacks living in the neighbouring areas saw how nice life was in the developed areas, and they began to stream voluntarily in to look for jobs. Because they are foreigners they naturally cannot expect the same rights as native white South Africans. But anyway they benefit from the privilege of being able to work in the industries created by the whites, and then they can return to live in their own countries.

Now this is of course nonsense. White control was imposed over the whole of South Africa by military conquest. ~~Africans were~~ Much of the African land was taken away from them. This was done for two reasons. Firstly it was so that white farmers could have the land. But the second reason was just as important. It was done so that the Africans would not have enough land and so would be forced to work for the whites. ~~Africans did not come~~ Most Africans do not come voluntarily into the white areas. They were forced to do so by a conscious policy of land alienation, & taxation. Development in ~~the~~ white-controlled areas and underdevelopment in the reserves is not produced by white hard work and black laziness.

And it was not out of kindness that the Africans were left with 13% of the land, instead of having it all taken away. It had two big advantages for capitalists. The first advantage was that while workers had some land in the reserves they could be paid wages below subsistence level. The reserves were designed in such a way that the men were forced to work, but their families could produce some food in the reserves. Wages could be lower and profits could be higher.

The second advantage was that the system of compounds and pass laws made it much easier to control African workers and to prevent them from organising trade unions. This also helped to keep down wages.

Answer/Impendulo:

1. It can sell shares, borrow money, or reinvest its profit.  
Ingadayisa amashezi, ingatshelaka imali, noma ifake izinzuzo zayo ebhizinisini iyizalanise.
2. We call it the company's Liabilities.  
Siyibiza ngokuthi ama Liabilities enkampani.
3. They are a part of its Fixed Assets.  
Ayingkenye yama Fixed Assets ayo.

QUESTIONS & NOTES/IMIBUZO NAMANQATHI:

1. What are the three main ways in which a company can get the money which it needs?  
Yiziphi izindlela ezintathu ezisemqoka inkampani engathole imali eyidingayo?

2. What do we call all the money which the company owes?  
Siyibiza ngokuthi yini lonke imali ekwelwa inkampani?

3. Are the machines which the company uses part of the company's fixed assets or part of its current assets?  
Ingabe imishini esetshenziswa yinkampani yingkenye yama fixed assets enkampani noma yingkenye yama current assets?

So the homelands and the immigrant labour ~~system~~ and the reserves are a central part of the economic system which has permitted a great increase in the wealth <sup>under</sup> ~~in~~ the control of the whites. Blacks are forced to work for low wages in ~~white areas~~ the so-called white areas to produce wealth which is owned by whites and which is taxed by the white government to pay essentially for services to whites.

This is what South African politics is about, and this is what the politics of migrant labour is about. It is not about whether <sup>+</sup> can marry Mr Vorster's daughter or about whether <sup>+</sup> can eat in a restaurant, or about whether Afrikaans culture will survive. These are just pieces of nonsense which have been invented by white politicians to obscure the real issue. The real issue is whether the whites will continue to monopolise South Africa's resources, and whether they will continue to control the wealth produced in large part by black labour.

It will be obvious from what I have just said that the policy of separate development and independent black bantustans can never solve the problem. The principle of separate development is that the blacks can never have any ~~right~~ right to share in control over the commonly produced wealth of South Africa. Migrant labour and separate development are virtually identical. The white-controlled area will benefit from the productive activity of black workers. The homeland governments will be expected to look after those who are not productive: the children and the old, and the sick. The whites get all the benefits ~~in~~ with none of the responsibilities.

All but one of the homeland leaders have rejected the idea of homeland independence. Most have, like Chief Buthelezi, <sup>made it clear</sup> that they use separate development in practice with the aim of overthrowing it in practice. <sup>principle</sup> The institutions of separate development offer a temporary channel through which black leaders can put their demand for a share in power and wealth. But the point is that separate development itself offers no real power. At the meeting with the Prime Minister last month, the homeland leaders could ask for things, but they could not bargain.

Chief Buthelezi warned of the possibility of civil disobedience and disruption of services. This warning must be taken very seriously. It must be remembered that there are already many blacks who are disillusioned with the small gains made so far by the homeland leaders. Blacks have great potential power.

Power can be ~~used~~ <sup>work</sup> in one of two ways. Take the example of workers in a factory with the right to strike. They have power and the managers know that they have power. On this basis they can negotiate an agreement without actually having to use that power. But when management refuses to admit that the workers have any power, then they are forced to use it. A recognition of power leads to negotiation. A refusal to recognise power leads to conflict.

QUESTIONS & NOTES/IMIBUZO NAMANOHI:

1. How much money did the company pay to the shareholders?  
 Inkampani yabakhokhela malini abaphathi bamashezi?

.....

2. How much tax did the company pay to the government?  
 Inkampani yakhokha intela engakanani kuhulumeni?

.....

3. How much money did the company save to pay for machinery that was wearing out?  
 Inkampani yonga malini yokukhokhela umshini cwawuguga?

.....

4. This company made an extra profit this year, apart from the ordinary profit from selling its products. Can you see from the Income Statement what that extra profit was, and where it came from?  
 Lenkampani yenza inzuzo engaphezulu kulonyaka, ngaphandle kwenzuzo ejwayelekile etholakele ngokudayisa umkhiqizo wayo. Ungabona kulesitatimente semali engenayo ukuthi leyonzuzo engaphezulu yaba yimalini, nokuthi yaphuma kuphi?

.....

.....

Answers/Izimpendulo:

1. R384 800

2. R323 579

3. Depreciation = 595 043 / Okudlekiile = 595 043

4. The company sold a subsidiary company, and made a profit of R560 180.  
 Lenkampani yadayisa inkampani eyengamele, yathola inzuzo ka R560 180.

Managers cause strikes by refusing to recognise the power of the workers.  
Governments cause revolutions by refusing to recognise the power of the people.

I am not trying to say that some sort of total revolution is likely tomorrow. What I am saying is that without any institutions through which bargaining over the issues of power and wealth can take place a society is inherently unstable.

Nobody wants widespread unrest and social conflict. We would all prefer a negotiated settlement. But the possibility of negotiation presupposes a recognition that South Africa is one country ~~in~~ to which all its inhabitants have equal rights. But this means that the system of migrant labour is not just one political issue among many others. It is the core of the whole problem. Migrant labour expresses in the clearest possible way the fact that in South Africa ~~the~~ Africans are not citizens. They are merely objects to be used by whites for their own convenience.

The point is this. Negotiation presupposes a recognition on the part of the white government that blacks have rights in South Africa. But once they recognise this they must at the same time recognise that migrant labour is unacceptable.

So migrant labour is and will remain a central cause of social and political conflict and instability.

I have been invited here to speak as a trade unionist, not as a politician. So I am not going to talk about the problems of political strategy and tactics facing the black peoples at the moment. Instead I want to conclude by talking about the role of trade unions in the present situation.

Here I want to make two points. The first point is that some people argue that migrant workers are not ready for, or not interested in trade unions. But this is nonsense. A migrant worker is not a farmer who comes to the city for a short time to earn extra cash. A migrant worker is a worker who is forced to return periodically to a small patch of land which can never support him and his family. He is a worker and he has basically the same needs and interests as other workers. Our experience is that migrant contract workers are just as interested in trade unionism as are other workers. The only difference is that they are even more vulnerable than other workers to victimisation by management. But this is scarcely an argument against giving them trade union rights.

The second point I want to make is that a trade union is not a political party. But it is concerned with power. The purpose of a trade union is to give the workers more power in determining what will happen to the wealth which they produce.

This means that while trade unions are not directly concerned with the question of government power, they can play an important part in altering the overall balance of power between the different classes in South Africa. African trade unions may be legally recognised by the state, or they may force employers to recognise them directly. In either case a valuable negotiating channel will have been set up which will ease social tensions. That is, trade union rights can be an important intermediate step in solving the problem of political institutions in South Africa. . . .

This fact has two important consequences. Firstly, those homeland leaders who are really working for change in South Africa must fully support the trade unions. Secondly, the two main white opposition parties in South Africa both claim to be working towards a shared South Africa. We know that most white businessmen in South Africa support one or the other of these two parties. When we hear these parties calling for change, and yet find their supporters refusing to negotiate with African unions, we begin to doubt the sincerity of these parties themselves. The point is that it is not enough for the United Party and the Progressive Party to call for the law to be changed to recognise African unions. African unions can be recognised immediately, without any change in the law. These parties must campaign to get businessmen to recognise and negotiate with unions immediately.

By doing this the white opposition parties can help to bring about an important change in South Africa now, without waiting for a change in government. They can also ~~display~~ show to black South Africans that they are really sincere in wanting to share power.

To return to the question of migrant labour. I do not suggest that trade unions can by themselves solve the problem of migrant labour. But they can do two things. Firstly through trade union organisation migrant workers can improve their wages and working conditions. The improvements which they can bring about by themselves in this way are much more significant than anything which can be achieved by charity work from outside.

Secondly trade union organisation can help to change the whole political climate and the balance of power in South Africa. Trade unions can change the power relations in the factories. And at the same time they can produce trained and competent working class leaders and organisers who can help to make the trade unions a force in the society as a whole.

Migrant labour is a workers problem. The solution to the politics of migrant labour is intimately connected with the growth of worker organisations.

written by

Richard Turner 1974/5

South Africa's system of forced migrant labour did not grow up by accident; it was created through political action by the white holders of power, and the policy of homeland development they have created cannot hope to solve the political problems of this system.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

The system originated in the imposition of white control over the whole of South Africa by military conquest. Much of the African's land was taken away from them -- for two reasons -- so that white farmers could have land, and, so that Africans would not have enough land and be forced to work for the whites.

Most Africans did not come into the white areas voluntarily. They were forced to do so by a conscious policy of land alienation and taxation -- development in the white-controlled areas and underdevelopment in the reserves is not produced by white hard work and black laziness.

Richard Tume'

$\frac{1}{m} =$  a dash  
= a hyphen

## THE POLITICS OF MIGRANT LABOUR.

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This seminar is about the politics of migrant labour. I want to use my 20 mins. to make two points. The first is that the system of migrant labour is not something which grew up by accident. It was created by political action by the white holders of power.

The second point is that the policy of homeland independence cannot hope to solve the political problem of migrant labour.

So I want to begin by talking briefly about the origins and purpose of the system of migrant labour. Some people seem to think that it started as follows: they think that whites came into uninhabited areas of South Africa and developed them. The blacks living in the neighbouring areas saw how nice life was in the developed areas, and they began to stream voluntarily in to look for jobs. Because they are foreigners they naturally cannot expect the same rights as native white South Africans. But anyway they benefit from the privilege of being able to work in the industries created by the whites, and then they can return to live in their own countries.

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And it was not out of kindness that the Africans were left with 13% of the land, instead of having it all taken away. It had two big advantages for capitalists. The first advantage was that while workers had some land in the reserves they could be paid wages below subsistence level. The reserves were designed in such a way that the men were forced to work, but their families could produce some food there. Wages could be lower and profits could be higher. <sup>percent</sup>

proportionately

The second advantage was that the system of compounds and pass laws made it easier to control African workers and prevent them from organising trade unions. This also helped to keep down wages. So the homelands and the migrant labour and the reserves are a central part of the economic system which has permitted great increases in the wealth under the control of the whites. Blacks are forced to work for low wages in the so-called white areas to produce wealth which is owned and which is taxed by the white government to pay essentially for services to whites.

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All but one of the homeland leaders have rejected the idea of homeland independence. Most have, like Chief Buthelezi made it clear that they use separate development in practice with the aim of overthrowing it in principle. They claim <sup>that</sup> institutions of separate development offer a temporary channel through which black leaders can put their demand for a share in power and wealth. But the point is that separate development itself offers no real power. At the meeting with the Prime Minister last month, the homeland leaders could ask for things, but they could not bargain.

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Blacks have great potential power. Power can work in one of two ways. Take the example of workers in a factory with the right to strike. They have power and the managers know that they have power. On this basis they can negotiate an agreement without actually having to use that power. But when management refuse to admit that the workers have any power, then they are forced to use it. A recognition of power leads to negotiation. A refusal to recognise power leads to conflict.

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Nobody wants widespread unrest and social conflict. We would all prefer a negotiated settlement. But the possibility of negotiation presupposes a recognition that South Africa is one country to which all its inhabitants have equal rights. ~~But~~ this means that the system of migrant labour is not just one political issue among many others. It is the core of the whole problem. Migrant labour expresses in the clearest possible way, the fact that South African Africans are not citizens in South Africa. They are merely objects to be used by whites for their own convenience.

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Migrant labour is a workers' problem and the solution to the politics of migrant labour is intimately connected with the growth of worker organisations.

Some people argue that migrant workers are not ready for, or not interested in, trade unions. This is nonsense. A migrant worker....

Trade unions by themselves cannot solve the problem of migrant labour, but through trade union organisation the workers can improve their wages and working conditions. The improvements they can bring about for themselves in this way are far more significant ~~than~~ gains than anything which can be achieved by charity work from outside.

.....

Trade unions are not political parties....

This has two important consequences....

And, the two main white opposition parties....

By doing this the white opposition parties....

Trade union organisation can help to change the whole political climate and balance of power in South Africa. Trade unions can change the power relations in the factories and at the same time they can produce trained and competent working class leaders and organisers who can help make trade unions ~~are~~ a force in society as a whole.

ends

# What is the role of trade unions in this situation?

Some

~~I want to make 1 point.~~ The first point is that ~~some~~ people argue that migrant workers are not ready for, or not interested in, trade unions. ~~But~~ this is nonsense. A migrant worker is not a farmer who comes to the city for a short time to earn extra cash. A migrant worker is a worker who is forced to return periodically to a small patch of land which can never support him and his family. He is a worker and ~~he~~ has basically the same needs and interests as other workers. Our experience is that migrant contract workers are just as interested in trade unionism as are other workers. The only difference is that they ~~are~~ even more ~~vulnerable~~ <sup>are vulnerable</sup> than other workers, to victimization by management. But this is scarcely an argument against giving them ~~some~~ trade union rights.

## Trade unions are

~~The second point I want to make is that a trade union is not a political party.~~ <sup>parties,</sup> But ~~it is~~ <sup>they are</sup> concerned with power. ~~The~~ <sup>their</sup> purpose of a trade union is to give the workers more power in determining what will happen to the wealth they produce. This means that while trade unions are not directly concerned with the question of government power, they can play an important part in altering the ~~overall~~ overall balance of power between the different classes in South Africa. African trade unions ~~might~~ <sup>might</sup> be legally recognised by the state, or they ~~may~~ <sup>might</sup> force employers to recognise them directly. In either case a valuable negotiating channel will have been set up which will ease social tensions. ~~That is~~ trade union rights can be an important intermediate step in solving the problem of political institutions in South Africa.

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HAROLD B. NXASANA. Institute for Industrial Education

4, February 1974.

Richard Tones.