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TGWU Box

PAPER ON ' THE FUTURE ROLE OF TGWU ' IN RELATION TO
BUS TRANSPORT IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT.
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One will assume that the topic chosen for me to present a paper on, is not the one which looks on organisational and analytic development of TGWU.

I will therefore focus on TGWU 's perspective on the current bus crisis, future perspective and TGWU organisational role in the bus industry. I felt it important to outline a brief background and our perspective on the industry and how that dictates our attitude towards the industry.

This paper is divided along the following sections;-

1. Use of transport in internal economic and labour control.
2. Contradictions and conflicts over transport policy.
3. The future and its implications for transport policy after apartheid.
4. TGWU's organisational role and influence in the industry.

INTERNAL ECONOMIC AND LABOUR CONTROL

Transport is also used for internal economic control, especially control of labour. Transport is also crucial to apartheid's other face, that is the appalling conditions of living and working of the black population. It is these low living standards which generate the high rates of private profit. The apartheid system's separation of home and work, and of black and white, depend on the dreadful public transport system on which black

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In line with the 1983 Welgemoed Commission, the regime has embarked on an exercise of phasing out bus subsidies. As indicated in the last section, that the exercise by the regime has been met by political struggle over bus transport.

Bus subsidies have risen particularly rapidly in the 1970 's and 1980 's. Allowing for inflation, the most rapid increases were in the mid and late 1970 's, under the impact of rising numbers of commuters, higher petrol and vehicle costs, and the inefficiencies implied by the organisation of the monopoly bus companies and the rules of apartheid transport.

An example of the latter problem is the organisation of transport in Mdantsane, in Ciskei, where everyone commuting into East London has to go to a central station and change again before leaving the town for work.

The response of the regime has been to compel bus companies to raise fares, in an effort to contain subsidies.

As a result of these increases, bus fares have become a focus of black struggle through the weapon of bus boycotts. These boycotts have also become a sustained form of opposition to the present organisation of the commuter transport system.

From the Empangeni and Mdantsane boycotts, for example, came demands, not only for lower fares, but also for the establishment of democratic involvement in commuter transport, route changes, and for legalisation of competition by taxis and black-run buses.

These demands pose a direct challenge to the running and control of the commuting system.

The sharpness of the conflict over black passenger transport policy is indicated by the contrast between these proposals from the boycotters, and the 1983 recommendations of the Welgemoed Commission, appointed to investigate the organisation of bus services and the question of subsidies. The interim report of the commission envisaged phasing out of the bus subsidies.

better and more responsive bus service under present conditions.

A new government will therefore be starting substantially from scratch in formulating a bus transport policy . And doing so in a context where people will be seeking to move closer to their places of work; where people are likely to see providing taxi transport as one means of survival and incoming earning; where a substantial body of trade unionists will be anxious about the future of their jobs; where many communities may feel strongly about democratic control of bus transport; and where there is a huge unsatisfied demand for non-commuter public transport in both rural and urban areas.

The central decisions will also have to include among other things, the role of the public sector in the bus transport, including the organisation and planning for that public sector, and the principles of regulation of private sector passenger transport.

The issues which arise include the following;-

What will be the role of urban public bus companies ? One problem with public companies based on large buses is that they tend to be too inflexible, and too low capacity, for Third World cities, except on major high volume transport routes . As South Africa shifts towards an income distribution more typical of the semi-industrialised country that it is, and people can express needs for transport more freely, a cheap , easily maintainable, balanced public transport system will be needed, using a variety of vehicles.

There are strong arguments for licensing and planning the system whatever the mix, in order to maintain standards of operation and safety , control congestion and plan routes for higher volume services at least, since they are a major influence on urban location patterns.

Licensing can also allow a choice about size of firms and ownership structure in private transport for hire. Finally , there will be difficult decisions about fare and subsidy for urban public transport (urban bus services require subsidy) ; about the question of public transport levies

democracy in bus transport.

Experience in Europe suggests the importance of involving staff and passengers in planning urban public transport, in order to make it as responsible as possible to need.

If a new government is not dictating residential location, then it has to use transport provision and cost as one major way to influence both residential and industrial location.

Therefore, in the medium term, public bus routes need to be planned to increase the accessibility and attractiveness of areas to be developed.

At the moment, South African transport investment is focussed on urban, inter-urban.

A much more dispersed pattern of roads and passenger transport is likely to be needed to develop the country after liberation and improve income distribution.

Putting in a good bus service opens up a rural area or makes a small town more economically attractive. To be effective, transport planning has to be allied to other public investment and regulation, in order to influence land use patterns effectively.

This then implies a hard choice between large city and other urban, peri-urban and rural transport spending. Cities of South African type are very expensive to maintain, let alone redevelop in new patterns; at the same time there is likely to be a very serious need for better transport outside these areas, to spread economic activity and national income distribution.

A policy will be needed concerning nationalisation, partial nationalisation of public transport. In terms of control of transport (public), it would make organisational and economic sense for the state to control infrastructure and assets.

Of course, general political and economic policy decisions will play an influential role in determining this.

We are convinced that major players, such as trade unions in the industry,

In these circumstances the response of some operators has been interesting; they are proposing nationalisation! In their highly regulated position, this has some logic.

Companies like Putco and Tollgate are proposing that the new RSCs, which under the 1985 act could be given responsibility for public transport, should they buy assets, and then appoint companies to run the services.

What this means, companies are focussing on two main advantages; viz:-

- a) financial advantages for companies, particularly by reducing risk.
- b) taking much of the political sting out of public transport.

In other words, the bus companies are seeking to shift the economic and political consequences of apartheid transport more clearly from themselves to the state.

This economic issue is a major one because of the numbers of people and the scale of the organisation involved in commuter transport.

Given the scale of removals and the now admitted failure of the industrial decentralisation policies, commuting sustains the industrial and commercial activities of the big cities.

Putco carried 100 million passengers in the Johannesburg area in 1985, and 323 million in total.

At present government policy is balancing between raising fares where it can, and subsidies where it must; between discussing increased competition and attacking boycotters.

The RSC's proposals are clearly an attempt to shift the political and economic issue to a different level, but the issue is unresolvable while separation between home and work for the black population continues to be the basis of policy.

In concluding, transport policy will continue into the future. In bus transport, the subsidies will either continue to rise, or government attempts to cut them will provoke further conflict.

The transport budget will continue to be a major site of economic policy.

THE FUTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSPORT POLICY AFTER APARTHEID

Liberation in South Africa will demand new principles for transport planning. The end of apartheid implies an end to the assumption on which the present transport system is based. But it does not end the need to plan the transport system. A new transport planning system will have to be established, and a new transport spending pattern, to support and help direct a changing economy.

The need for transport planning will arise from the need to plan in the spatial pattern of economic activity in a free South Africa.

Transport policy will have to be designed to lead a new form of decentralisation and spreading of economic activity, related to kinds of settlement and rural based development.

This means shifting transport investment away from the current pattern of new central urban roads and other long distance transport infrastructure. And this implies in turn new aims and organisation for transport planning, integrated with wider economic development policy.

In general, transport policy is a major economic policy instrument which can be consciously used to change economic structure. The present government has done this. A new post-apartheid government has to avoid the trap of a policy which only follows the immediate changes in market transport demand and immediate expressed needs. While it is important to respond to need, it will be equally important that a post apartheid government consciously plan and lead the reorganisation of the spatial use of land. Transport policy is a crucial tool in this: a way to help create changes in the pattern of settlement and the use of land by the provision of transport at appropriate cost.

In bus passenger transport, the government will be faced in the short term with existing sets of demands for more democratic control and lower fares. Not necessarily all compatible, these demands constitute an attempt to get a

employers and all interested and affected parties, will have to play an active role in influencing this direction. We do not necessarily have to wait until apartheid rule is gone, we need to start now to pressurise the regime to keep subsidies in the industry, but our demand should not only be limited to keeping subsidy, but as well demand increased levels of subsidy and all other related aspects of improving the public transport system in the country.

The pattern of vehicle building in the country will need to change, to reflect changing income distribution and changing public transport needs. This might include more buses and minibuses, cars suitable for shared taxis and small cars.

This will involve intervening in the vehicle manufacturing sector, to change incentives or set up new production lines. More investigation is needed to identify what changes in vehicle and rail engineering are needed to back up a changed transport policy.

THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE TGWU

In brief, as indicated in some aspects of this paper, the future role of TGWU and other transport unions will be to continue exercising their influence in the industry and changes that are needed in improving the public transport system in the country.

Not only that, we will continue to represent the workforce in the industry, demand improved wages and conditions of work, and centralised bargaining.

In conclusion, whatever form of restructuring in the bus industry, that is needed according to demand and needs, transport unions must be part of it. If it means transport unions will continue to be isolated, as it is at present, serious crisis will continue to exist.

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CLASS/1 Passenger Transport
CLASS/2 Transport & General Workers Union
CLASS/3 Transport Policy
CLASS/4 Urban Transport
TITLE/1 Paper on "The Future Role of T&GMU" in relation to Bus Transport in a
Changing environment.