

Worker Tenant

EDITORIAL

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THE "LEGAL" STRIKE

THE STRUGGLE FOR ADEQUATE HOUSING

NATIONAL LIBERATION?

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This the second Worker-Tenant thus sees the light in a period wherein the ruling class, having shackled the newly independent states on the border can now move swiftly to win over those sections of the black middle class or the upper sections or the black working class prepared to accept the crumbs called the NEW DISPENSATION. At the same time the workers, the creators of the wealth of this country, are being faced with new onslaughts which further erode their already miserable living standards. But it would be false to see only doom and despair. The very necessity (from the ruler's point of view) for a NEW DEAL, the very array of self-ordained "people's" leaders which have suddenly emerged and the very fact that many of these have been forced to borrow from the language of the workers' movement shows that the workers remain undaunted. And it is to the successful struggle of the workers' movement for the right to run our lives that the WORKER-TENANT would like to add its voice.

TRADE UNION LIBRARY AND EDUCATION CENTRE

Trade Union Unity

(A contribution from a member of the Athlone Workers' Club)

The last ten years have witnessed the dramatic growth of progressive non-racial trade unionism. A point of development has been reached where a broad trade union unity seems not only possible, but indeed has become an objective necessity of the class struggle of the proletariat. In this essay we discuss the role of the trade unions and the decisive trade union unity talks with the perspective of the present international blind alley of capitalism and the deepening national economic and political crisis in S.A.

Trade unions have historically served mainly as defensive organisations, basing themselves on the fight to improve the terms of sale of labour power of workers i.e. for higher wages and shorter working hours. Trade unions traditionally function within the framework of capitalist social relations in a reformist fashion.

However, in the present period of capitalist crisis, the reformist basis of trade unionism is steadily eroded as capitalism in its death agony has generally no space to grant reforms. Massive unemployment (2 - 3 million - 21% in S.A.): capital demanding higher productivity, bosses cutting back on the labour force; general refusals to increase wages and rampant inflation mean that trade unions move onto the offensive, or, ceasing to be able to extract reforms, become agents for working class defeat and demoralization.

Under decaying capitalism, economic crises are temporarily resolved at the painful expense of the working class, only to prepare the way for the next crisis of even bigger proportions. Since 1970 the world economy has experienced a downward slide. The economic respite of 1982 saw tremendous influx of workers into progressive trade unions. This temporary episode is now over and S.A. is firmly in the grip of a prolonged economic recession. The perspective of biding one's time patiently and hoping to stay intact for long enough to weather the economic decline, is wholly consistent with reformism. The silver lining theory advocated by many union leaders effectively disarms the workers who, instead of preparing for decisive battles, are being lullabied to defeat. Such a defeat will spell disaster for the progressive union movement in S.A. for a long time. The powerlessness of individual unions to prevent workers from being retrenched and to enforce wage demands through strikes (which have become ineffective since bosses simply fire workers and rehire labour selectively) is becoming increasingly apparent. This is quite unlike the trends of the 1982 period. Progressive trade unions are being pushed onto the road of political action because political action generalises the needs of the working class and addresses them not to parts of the bourgeoisie, but to the bourgeoisie as a whole.

The present situation requires a decisive break with trade union 'routinism' and a preparation for the path of mass workers' struggles and workers' unity. The narrow industrial or factory basis of workers struggle does not match the objective situation of capitalist decline. The generalising of the economic struggle requires the building of working class solidarity. Practical unity i.e. unity in action of all sections of the working class as well as the unemployed for the defense of the already lowered living standards, is immediately demanded by the advanced workers.

The short-lived honeymoon between the state and black trade union movement has come to an end. This is the clear message from the state which is now introducing new, tougher measures against unions in order to bind the unions hand and foot to the state legal machinery. The state is also preparing a major offensive through the "aliens Bill"; it wants to drive those workers not needed in the cities into the "homelands".

Recent strike statistics since June 1983 show a definite pattern of defeat for workers who have come out on strike. Bosses are using individual strikes as an easy means of rooting out union shop-stewards and selectively re-employing workers often on worse terms than before.

TRADE UNION UNITY: ITS MEANING AND FORM

We have stated the view that the need for the united front of trade unions arises firstly out of the urgency for unity of the workers as a class organised for defence against the intensified attacks of capitalism and secondly, out of the conditions of decaying capitalism, which no longer offer the very reforms such as higher wages and rights for workers upon which unions base themselves. Trade union unity, if it is to be of value to the workers, must be the decisive step in bringing all workers together in common struggle. It must mean the beginnings of nation-wide struggle by workers against retrenchment, wage cuts, food price increases and transport increases. As the workers begin to sense their collective strength, offensive struggles towards demands like: "Work for all"; "wage increases with every price increase"; "abolition of influx control" and "full democracy without the exploitation of workers" will be raised.

The problem of Municipal General Workers' Union, SAAWU (a militant union which has led many struggles of workers, especially in the Eastern Cape) and other community-based unions, not forming part of the federations is a major blow to both SAAWU and the New Federation. By putting factional interests above the general class interests and unity of workers, SAAWU has severely weakened itself. The fact that SAAWU may have a different political outlook does not mean that it should not join in and strengthen the new federation. It should have the full right to propagate its views within the federation but it must not take on the role of a strike-breaker or scab in relation to the unity in the trade union movement. SAAWU's affiliation to UDF is of secondary importance: what is primary is that SAAWU and the other broadly based unions should take their place within the trade union movement.

The call for Solidarity Action Committees(SACs) remains the only correct means for mobilising the collective strength of the toilers. SACs were raised at previous unity meetings, but up till now have not been accepted by the majority unions. SACs are the only way of ensuring that union unity is not the leadership agreeing with each other, but real unity from below.

CONCLUSIONS

The New Federation of non-racial trade unions has taken shape at a time when decisive struggles lay ahead for workers. The Federation will either serve as a brake upon the working class, reinforcing reformist illusions, paving the way for defeats or conversely, it will base itself fully on the crisis of capitalism and the militancy of the workers and give clear leadership towards a working class solution to the present economic and social crisis. The correct demands must be advanced to raise the decisive questions and the solution of workers' problems.

The demand for higher wages must be tied to the rate of inflation so that real earnings of workers do not drop.

The demand for "work for all" must be raised along with demand for a "sliding scale of hours". Work must be shared to ensure that no retrenchments occur with workers suffering no pay losses. The New Federation is faced with challenge TO OFFER REAL LEADERSHIP IN GUIDING THE WORKERS TOWARDS ACHIEVING ITS HISTORIC INTERESTS!

Defence of Living Standards

The key to understanding and positing the slogan of the defence of living standards lies in understanding and identifying the objective conditions under which our struggles are waged, namely, that we are living in the epoch of the decline and disintegration of capitalism.

Capitalism, the system based on the relentless pursuit of profits via the exploitation of wage labour, is locked in internal contradictions and crisis. Everywhere, the signs of this ever - worsening crisis is evident. Short-lived boom (or upswing) periods are followed by slumps of longer and longer duration. Inflation constantly forces down the value of money. Mechanization has resulted in the overproduction of commodities which under capitalism has led to the dumping of surpluses and the pushing up of prices. Desperate measures to cover up the ruptures has resulted in wasteful expenditure and vicious attacks on the living standards of worker-tenants. Everywhere the struggles of workers are being ruthlessly suppressed to enable the capitalist powers to buy time and prolong the death agony of capitalism.

This crisis is international in proportion - affecting not only capitalist countries of the world imperialist system, but also "socialist" countries.

Not only has the crisis caused a drop in the real wages of workers in the advanced countries but also creating great hardship for workers in "socialist" countries. Working class organisations have come under increasing attacks in capitalist and socialist countries. The introduction of vicious anti-labour laws in Britain as well as repression of working class organisations in Eastern Europe has been a severe blow to the international working class. The ever worsening crisis of capitalism sees a more vicious attack upon their already declining living standards.

Bosses seeing that their profits are falling, respond by pushing up the prices of commodities, reducing wages and retrenching large numbers of workers. The latter has become the daily reality facing the workers in all capitalist countries. These setbacks reduce workers to a life of misery, poverty and degradation. Already in S.A. the vast majority of workers who are hounded in cities or dumped in homelands are waging a life and death struggle for survival.

The fact of the decline of capitalism must be the starting point of all our struggles. Defending the living standards of worker-tenants thus means defending their living standards against these attacks! via this slogan we must expose the bankruptcy of capitalism. We must demonstrate clearly, through our day to day struggles, that there can be no solution to the problems facing the working class and all other classes under the system based on exploitation and oppression. A scientific, materialist perspective, geared towards deepening the class consciousness of workers and furthering a clear understanding of its objective tasks, needs to be developed. A vital prerequisite for this is the building of working class leadership - capable of consistently and determinedly advancing the interests of the working class.

The task of preparing the working class as the only progressive class, for waging a decisive struggle against exploitation and oppression must proceed vigorously on the basis of driving deeper into the working class and mobilising it not only against all forms of exploitation but more important against the labour aristocracy and the reformist leadership of workers organisations - their politics and ideology so as to remove the fetters holding back the growth of the working class movement.

THE DEFENCE OF LIVING STANDARDS AND OUR TASKS

The organisational slogan, "Workers and tenants, in your factories and in your townships, unite to defend your living standards," has been our major rallying call to worker-tenants in the three years of our intervention in mass activity. Recently it has been the source of ridicule and attack from certain organisation. We welcome these criticisms for they give us the opportunity, by defending it to prove its correctness and expose the shortcomings inherent in the attacks levelled against it.

The defence of living standards slogan has grown out of a particular conception of the nature of our struggle and the major tasks flowing

from this struggle. These tasks are:

(i) To expose the contradictions inherent in capitalism. To show concretely via our struggles that all problems facing the working class and all other oppressed classes can only be fully resolved in a society free of exploitation and oppression.

(ii) To draw all sections of the working class into organized struggle. To build working class unity - laying the foundations for a united front of workers organizations. In this way - by increasing the strength and cohesion of the working class movement and further to base our struggles on a clear programme that prepares the working class for a decisive struggle against exploitation and oppression.

(iii) To defend the independent interests of the working class. To build independent working class organisations led by advanced, class conscious workers. To expose the crisis of leadership facing the working class; to rid the working class of its petty-bourgeois and ruling class ideology. Where the working class rejects reformism and replaces it with a consistent working class consciousness. All organisational work must constantly be measured up against these tasks. The slogan of the defence of living standards can be clearly understood and effectively used only if the above tasks are thoroughly absorbed.

WHAT LIVING STANDARDS ARE WE DEFENDING?

To interpret defence of living standards as defending the existing living standards reveals a very narrow understanding. Clearly existing living standards are very low. But it does not follow that they are not worth defending. If workers in Crossroads are living under inhuman conditions and the ruling class threatens to drive their living standards even lower by evicting them to the graveyards of the homelands - is it not worth defending the right to remain in Crossroads? If the living standards of workers are kept low by the poor quality of state provided housing - is it not worth defending the albeit low living standards of workers against being driven even lower by the state abrogating it's responsibilities towards housing?

The living standards we are defending are defined quite clearly by the demands raised alongside this slogan - hence the danger of seeing and using this slogan in isolation.

Thus the living standards we are defending must be accompanied by demands where wages keep pace with the rise in the cost of living, where rents are determined by tenants at prices they

can afford, where the state takes full responsibility for the provision of adequate housing for all.

But our task is not merely to define the living standards in the above manner. To take it this far only, would be an economicistic approach - from which it does not follow that the slogan is economicistic. The bad carpenter blames his tools. No, the slogan of defence of living standards serves as a spring board or a stepping stone for making propaganda. Thus the economic struggle becomes more directly political. Struggles for better living conditions and higher wages must be linked at every turn to the means for attaining these and the conditions under which these can be attained. The demand for workers' control over production and the running of all aspects of their lives must go hand in hand with the defence of living standards slogan. If we fail to make these links, then the problem lies with us and not with our tools. Tools are useless unless they are used energetically and resourcefully.

OUR DAILY STRUGGLES - A BRIDGE TO THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE

This brings us to our second task - that of building a united and independent working class movement. To achieve this goal, it is necessary that our ideas take root amongst the working masses. It must grow out of the actual life of workers, their common interests, aspirations and above all their struggles. Admittedly, these demands and hopes are limited and vague, clouded by ruling class ideology, but nevertheless, they provide an important part of the foundation for us to build on.

And build we must! We must not only take part in the day to day struggles of workers but be at the forefront. Via our courageous, far-sighted and energetic leadership we must win the support of the working masses.

When taking up the day to day struggles of workers one runs the gauntlet of being reformist or issue bound. A reformist struggle is one pitched mainly at achieving reforms within the existing status quo - where these reforms become the goal of one's struggles. Dedicated fighters defending the interests of the working class are not opposed to reforms. We genuinely want to see and improvement in the living standards of worker-tenants. Reforms won via concrete struggle are not only gains but strengthen the confidence of the struggling masses and their fighting organisations. Reforms must however not become the focus of our struggles. Yet, this has been the feature of issue-orientated struggles conducted in the Western Cape. When

the busfares are increased the demand is for lower busfares - or bus companies run by the "people". Only when one uses busfare increases to demand nationalisation, not only of the bus companies but all major industries under the control of the working class, is one beginning to break out of a reformist struggle. The same applies to the rents and maintenance struggles. Here organisations like Cahac advanced the slogans, "rents we can afford", and "ons betaal ons rent, dus moet council ons maintenance doen". These vague superficial demands in no way prepares the working class for mounting a decisive struggle against exploitation and oppression - in no way does it raise their political consciousness or prepare them for the important tasks facing them.

Defence of living standards has very much been a bridging slogan. When taking up rents, maintenance or busfares we have immediately related these struggles to the need on the part of the working class to defend living standards. In this way the struggle around rents is linked to increases in cost of living and low wages - all attacks on the living standards of worker-tenants. By generalising a seemingly isolated struggle in this way we can begin to show clearly, through our agitation, that all these attacks flow from the system of exploitation and oppression, and that issues can only be finally resolved in the struggle to overcome these factors.

DEFEND OR ADVANCE LIVING STANDARDS

The struggle to defend the living standards of worker-tenants is at the same time a struggle to advance their living standards. However any real advances in the living standards of worker/tenants can only be achieved once exploitation and oppression has been removed and once the working class controls every facet of their existence. Under capitalism there are limits to which the living standards of workers can advance before it comes to challenge the very basis of capitalist domination. Moreover, under conditions of decaying capitalism, the tendency is for the living standards of worker-tenants to fall rapidly. Faced with this rapid drop, the working class has no option, but to defend their living standards. An imiserised, dehusoured, pauperised and fragmented working class cannot wage a decisive battle against exploitation and oppression. By defending their living standards against these attacks, the working class is consolidating its ranks and strengthens its position so that it can prepare for offensive struggle. In South Africa, where we are witnessing a rapid decline in the living standards of worker-tenants, where the working class movement is still weak, where the large

majority of workers are still unorganised and where the bosses, backed by repressive might of the army and police, is incomparably stronger. There can be no question at this juncture of an offensive struggle. The latter position is determined by the extent to which the balance of forces has been altered in favour of the working class.

The "Legal" Strike

(A contribution from a member of the Grassy Park Workers' Club)

In South Africa as in all parts of the capitalist world trade unions increasingly find it difficult to operate or limit-themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class.

In the present period of rapid capitalist decay the state more resolutely acts in the interest of the capitalist class - attempting to halt the process of decline. The period of "free" capitalism, where "democracy" prevailed is no longer. Fascist measures in all aspects of the capitalist economy is the order of the day.

Control of Trade Unions and the working class as a whole has become an important area for the capitalist and the state. In South Africa since the rapid growth of trade unions from the 1970's, together with the growing capitalist crises, the state has waged a continuous battle with the trade unions. So far the state has managed to use the reformist trade unions such as the TUCSA group of trade unions to act as police, to discipline and control the workers. Those trade unions who have refused to act as police for the state in its attempt to control and subordinate the working class, the state has attempted to co-opt and repress via the New Labour Relations Act.

Those Trade Unions that are often referred to as community or political unions have refused to and are still refusing to comply or register under this New Labour Relations Act, strive for independence insofar as they consciously and actively act as organs for the advancement of the "democratic" struggle. They have come under the most severe attacks, suffered heavy repression, detention and assassination of leaders.

The latter two types of trade unions are still assessing whether the tactic of registration or non-registration advances or retards the struggle of the working class. The arguments of the two positions

have been considerably strong and convincing, however real worker-struggles have shown that it depends on the strength and unity and how these are utilized that advances or retards the worker-struggles. Both the registered industrial unions and the unregistered "community" based unions have on this basis won significant gains.

While the tactic of working within or outside the state machinery has led to victories for the working class the use of the "Legal" strike remains questionable and controversial. Trade Unions that up to now have used the "Legal" strike as a method of struggle against the capitalists have failed to make concrete gains for the workers.

Recently the Nationwide Legal strike by 9000 AECI workers showed very clearly that success in "Legal" strikes is almost or near impossible. "its a fallacy" as one AECI worker stated.

The significance of this "legal" strike was the strength, unity and solidarity of workers on a nationwide/national level, however, in terms of their demands being met by the AECI capitalists, the strike was a failure. The legal strike destroys the very basis upon which worker action can succeed.

The Thirty Day period of warning of the intention to strike allows:-

- (s) the bosses to prepare for the strike
- (b) to minimise profit loss
- (c) to prevent maximum disruption of the working days
- (d) to force workers before the strike to work overtime, to work faster—"push up production".

When the workers eventually do go on strike, the capitalist suffers very little loss in profits. The strike by workers is rendered useless.

A strike, workers all know is only effective:-

- (a) if bosses have no knowledge of the strike
- (b) the bosses are unprepared
- (c) that maximum losses of profit, productivity occur
- (d) that the greatest disruption occurs at the factory level.

Only under these conditions do workers learn to have strength and power in a strike. These conditions are further complemented by strong organisation, unity and solidarity of workers. Where workers themselves lead and direct the strike. Workers come to realise the power and strength they have as workers which gives them confidence, not only to fight for better conditions, but to take their proper role as leaders of the struggle of the working class and other oppressed classes for a better society.

The Struggle for Adequate Housing

Nine months have passed since the state introduced its new housing policy on July 1, 1983. Thus the main thrust of this policy has been the sale of houses campaign, where extensive promotion via the media has failed to tempt cautious tenants into effecting this "bargain of a lifetime" deal. As the discount period draws to a close a recent television interview with Community development officials revealed that only 4% of the total number of houses offered for sale had been sold.

It is not surprising that worker tenants have either been slow in responding or indifferent to the sales campaign. The haunting reality of an incessant increase in prices, declining real wages and spiralling unemployment leave no room and indeed strongly negates frivolous dreams about home-ownership offering a more secure future. Still, the fact that its sales campaign is floundering is unlikely to deter the ruling class in its determined efforts to free itself of the burden of providing housing for the working masses. The carrot is to be replaced by the whip, in the form of drastically increased rents which hopefully will force tenants to buy their decrepid housing.

THE DECLINE IN HOUSING STRUGGLES

How has the working class been responding to these devastating attacks on their living standards? Since the introduction of the state's new housing policy there has been a marked decline in housing struggles. This is part of a general lull in mass activity which can be attributed to three factors:

- i) demoralization resulting from defeats suffered by the working class in recent struggles but largely to a betrayal of these struggles by vacillating and opportunist leadership.
- ii) the change in objective conditions of the struggle and the subjective tasks that these place on the agenda of the class struggle - i.e. the deepening capitalist crisis erodes the narrow local base of housing and labour struggles forcing the working class to respond jointly to their deteriorating living standards on a higher, more directly political level.
- iii) the tardiness and bankruptcy of the leadership of workers organisations and their inability to orientate themselves correctly and decisively to these changed conditions of struggle.

CAPITALISM AND THE HOUSING CRISIS

This article attempts to outline the new perspectives which should guide housing struggles. Central to an understanding of these perspectives is a clear understanding of how the housing question is to be solved.

Historically the housing crisis reached major proportions with the growth of capitalist industry and the emergence of large towns. Workers flocked to these towns in thousands. The low wages they earned meant that they could ill afford adequate housing. Instead they had to contend with overcrowded slum conditions, the breeding grounds for disease and a host of other social evils. These conditions became increasingly a concern of the dominant classes as they posed both an economical and political threat. Poor housing conditions and the associated poor health affected the workers' ability to work, pushing down productivity; - increased productivity being essential to the bosses for greater profits.

The concentration of workers in large numbers coupled with growing dissatisfaction with poor housing, working conditions and low wages was a powderkeg, which, once ignited would without doubt direct its fury at the luxury and privilege of the ruling classes, whose wealth depended on the deprivation of the toiling masses. The bosses were incapable of responding individually on a large scale to this problem. If workers were to afford better housing - either increased wages had to be paid or housing had to be made available at prices workers could afford. Both options could only be satisfied if bosses were prepared to drastically reduce profits, a step which no boss would willfully take. The possibility of the bosses forced to do so by the organised collective strength of the working masses, however, could not be discounted.

Thus the collective arm of the bosses, the state, was forced to step in. The state, as the organ of domination, had to ensure the best conditions under which capitalist development and profitability could be fostered, whilst ensuring continued capitalist domination. In response to the housing crisis this meant using state funds i.e. surplus created by workers, for simultaneously introducing rigid controls which would regulate the influx of workers into the city and divisions within the working class which would stave off the threat of united action.

In South Africa the involvement of the state in the provision of housing has been extensive and via the apartheid system, the controls have been considerable. Over the past 60 years over 400 000 housing

units have been built from state funds, yet this has been hopelessly inadequate in terms of reducing the critical housing shortage. Drastic tightening up of controls have failed to stem the influx of workers into the cities or quell the rising tide of discontent or increased resistance on the part of the black working class.

CAPITALISM'S ABANDONING OF THE HOUSING CRISIS REVEALS ITS BANKRUPTCY

What then has led to the recent attempts by the state to abrogate its housing responsibilities? This turn stems directly from the crisis of decaying capitalism. South Africa is locked in a world imperialist system caught in the throes of its death agony. The signs of this crisis is galloping inflation, over-population, decreasing profits, increasing prices and sharp economic fluctuations with short-lived boom periods followed by more protracted downturns. The state is forced to use more and more of the surplus created by workers to bail out ailing capitalists and to strengthen the armoury charged with ensuring its domination. And this proceeds at the expense of the long-suffering toiling masses, who now have to contend with increased brutalities in the form of staggering cutbacks (as with housing), an endless barrage of price increases and chronic unemployment.

Joop de Loor, Director General of Community development, openly admitted recently to the state's inability to solve the housing crisis. This came within the context of an appeal to "private enterprise" for greater involvement in worker's housing - an appeal to the very bosses whose inability to solve the housing crisis led to the state's involvement in the first place. This amounts to a glaring admission of the bankruptcy of capitalism - a sharp revelation to the working masses that their hopes for a solution to their housing crisis is not to be vested in the ruling classes or within their ailing socio-economic system.

REJECT PIECENAL MIDDLE CLASS SOLUTIONS

Neither can the middle class offer a solution. They too are severely stricken by the housing shortage - left to the mercy of the market, where high prices, prohibitive income qualifications and herd to come by bonds make housing inaccessible particularly to the lower sections of this class. Here the responses of the radical and more politicised sections of the middle class, is revealing, acknowledging that their salvation lies in harnessing the struggles of the working class, they now vociferously reject this option. Whilst ducking mounting a concerted campaign calling on tenants to refuse to buy their houses, they hide behind self-righteous arguments about the

'danger of alienating sections of the working class' and 'responding to the mood of the masses in certain areas'. All this amounts to holding the interests of a small section of the working class. (indeed that better-off upper strata) above that of the working class as a whole.

In Zimbabwe the black middle class has gained state power after a heroic and tireless struggle by the toiling masses. Of the oppressed classes, this class is the only one to have benefited materially from Zimbabwean independence while no solution is in sight for the ever-worsening housing crisis of the Zimbabwean masses.

At best the middle class can only offer piecemeal solutions - which for the exploited and oppressed masses as a whole amounts to no solution at all!

ONLY THE WORKING CLASS CAN SOLVE THE HOUSING QUESTION

Clearly the historic task of solving not only the housing crisis but all other crises affecting the exploited and oppressed masses devolves upon the Black working class. This task must proceed on the basis of a struggle to end all forms of exploitation and oppression and terminate for once and for all, the predatory domination of one class by another. Housing struggles thus become part of a political struggle - a struggle led by the working class for direct control over the running of all aspects of their lives. Only in this way can the working class ensure that its interests, and in the process, those of the oppressed middle class who must be won over to their side, are fostered.

As the state's new housing policy exposes glaringly the bankruptcy of capitalism, it simultaneously creates the conditions whereby the political nature of housing struggles is brought to the fore. This must be reflected in the demands and slogans of housing bodies.

However the fact that the housing crisis can only be solved once workers control the running of their lives, does not mean the abandoning of housing struggles until this goal has been fulfilled - nor does it mean merely using housing struggles as a vehicle for making political propaganda. Every effort must be made to link the economic and political struggle. In practice on the basis of their day to day struggles - the working class will learn that their housing struggles can only be solved via struggle against class domination. To the daily economic struggles for reforms must be welded an understanding of the political tasks confronting the working class.

Thus even though we are aware that the state is incapable of solving the housing crisis - we must continue to campaign vigorously around the demand for adequate state provided housing, side by side with the demand for workers control.

Is the demand for adequate state providing housing reformist? The provision of housing by the state is a gain which must be defended and advanced. The working class must constantly strive to ensure that a greater portion of the wealth they have created, is used to satisfy their needs. State provision of housing constitutes the first step towards the socialisation of housing provision for it makes possibly a rational and planned system in the allocation of housing. It also establishes that the provision of housing is a social and a class question.

OUR PRESSING TASK - BUILDING A UNITED FRONT OF WORKERS ORGANISATIONS

Not only must the content of housing struggles be altered but also its form. Up to now these struggles have been narrow and fragmented, fighting for reforms from local authorities for sections of the working class. Indeed this basis has now been eroded.

The implications of the state's new housing policy is that the working class is brought into direct conflict with the national state. Effective opposition means national co-ordination of housing struggles. This applies not only to housing struggles but is a necessary response to the allsided attacks on the living standards of workers. All workers' organisations must be drawn together into an alliance for the decisive struggle against capitalist exploitation.

An urgent task facing the working class is to build the vehicle via which this struggle can be conducted. The historic form given to the working class is the Workers United Front, which is led by the working class.

Here differences must be fought out via concrete struggle. The Workers United Front can only grow and effectively defend the interests of the working class if there is unity in action and decisive and consistent leadership.

A workers united front does not exist at this stage, UDF is a popular front which masquerades as a united front. Instead of leading the working class to victory - it is an alliance geared towards a betrayal of the interests of working class. UDF reflects the middle class ideology and interests of the leadership - aiming to remove apartheid while capitalist exploitation remains intact. The class nature of the struggle is obscured by lumping all oppressed

under the banner of the "people" - which in reality means the dominance and leadership of a middle class ideology within the workers movement.

As a step towards Workers United Front; Committees of Action must be built, serving as organs for direct action, drawing together all organisations in a particular locality or region (workers, housing, youth) in order to vigorously defend the working class against all attacks on their living standards.

RID WORKING CLASS ORGANISATIONS OF REFORMIST FETTERS

A major obstacle to building the workers United Front - is the reformist nature of the leadership of workers' organisations. The class basis of reformism derives from its ability to win concessions from capitalism - and also on the ability of capitalism to buy off a definite layer of the working class in order to use this layer to dominate the working class movement. This feature is clearly evident today in the strategies of the ruling class in S.A. No ruling class can rule alone. In order to rule effectively it needs to win over a section of the dominated classes. Whereas the ruling class in S.A. was initially content to win over the white working class - this is now insufficient for its needs and hence the attempts to create a labour aristocracy as a buffer against the strength and militancy of the working class.

However as the ability of decaying capitalism to grant systematic reforms decreases - reformism enters a crisis. This crisis is clearly evident in the lull in mass activity - which reflects not only the demoralisation suffered by the working class as a result of defeats at the hands of the reformist and opportunist leadership - but also the current inertia and bankruptcy of this reformist leadership - which renders it incapable of giving direction and mounting a concerted struggle against the attacks on the working class.

WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE OR NATIONAL LIBERATION?

Consistency in theory goes a long way to separating the wheat from the chaff in political struggle. For too long the politically starved working class has subsisted on a staple diet of opportunist husks. Since the 1970's, with the outbreak of another world capitalist crisis, the working class has stridently begun to demand more and better. Fearful of this rising class consciousness the populists and the centrists have been forced to react. Never slow at revising their theories and slogans (such is the nature of opportunism) they have come up with 'new' or 'more refined' concoctions. The populists remain mathematically crude in their theoretical offerings. The centrists have however begun to serve up something more sophisticated - something that they have tried their best to look like wheat. Workers will not be long fooled by this fresh attempt to cook up reality. Having been tested for consistency, the imitation wheat will be easily separated from the real wheat and rejected as worthless.

'Nation and Ethnicity in South Africa' a paper delivered at the National Forum in June last year is a succinct expression of the latest centrist theory of the South African struggle. The author's overriding preoccupation is the 'National Question'. For him the struggle is unequivocally for national liberation with the correct theory of the nation, as concretized in the slogan 'One Azania, One Nation' being pivotal. Notwithstanding the compulsory mouthings on exploitation, class struggle and the leading role of the black working class, the author takes great pains in describing the specifically 'national' aspects of the struggle - the development of the system of racial capitalism, the incompleteness of the bourgeois democratic revolution, the ruling class theory of the nation and its divide-and-rule strategy, liberation movement theories of the nation, the author's own 'correct' theory of the nation - are all given ample coverage. An analogy is even offered for the sketchy comments on language and cultural policy. On the other hand a mere eight lines in a paper of fourteen pages is devoted to 'the HISTORIC ROLE OF THE BLACK WORKING CLASS'. The disproportion alone should alert the watchful worker to the dubious purpose of the author's theory.

"But why", asks the suspicious worker. "this preoccupation with national liberation in the first place. What makes a struggle against racial capitalism a national liberation struggle? Surely, if my knowledge of history serves me correctly, national liberation struggles have been characterized by the struggle of oppressed nations against their national oppressors for independence and their right to self-determination. In this way the Mozambican, the Nigerian and Algerian peoples were all nationally liberated from the colonial control of Portugal, Britain and France respectively. In this historically understood sense, was not South Africa nationally liberated when it lost its colonial status by the Act of Union in 1910 already!" "But hold it", interjects the author hastily, "I explain quite explicitly that the 'national bourgeoisie in South Africa could not complete the bourgeois democratic revolution ... They did not incorporate the entire population under the new state on the basis of legal equality, they could not unite the nation', hence the national question remains unsolved and the struggle for national liberation must continue." "By the 'same token'", retorts our worker, "one must then assume that Nigeria is still saddled with an unsolved 'national question', given the absence of bourgeois democratic equality there and the divided state of the Nigerian people. There too one must propose a struggle for national liberation. Most of post-independence Africa by this odd line of reasoning must still solve the national question and struggle for national liberation. This all fails to make any political sense".

Our real disagreement with the author cannot rest at the level of pure formal reasoning. The truth is the author is unable to uncover the root problem that has persistently plagued the struggle in South Africa. He remains hopelessly lost in a mist of petit-bourgeois concerns. All he can see is the failure of traditional organisations to provide a correct theory of the nation. Now that he has heroically stepped forward with a properly working compass we can at last proceed on the correct path, without even a backward glance. Unfortunately the working class has grown more suspicious and less gullible over the last decade, and on looking back over the last forty odd years, amply assisted by its own hard-earned experience, it sees something quite different from what the author does. It sees not a leadership frantically searching for the key to the national question, tacking and weaving this way and that in trying to complete the bourgeois democratic revolution. Nor does it see a man of insight, having gathered the experience of 'successful liberation movements' emerging with the 'correct position' on the national question. No, it penetrates far deeper than any inconsistent centrist

can. Instead it sees the repeated subsuming of the specific interests of the working class under the general interests of 'the people', 'the nation', 'the struggle for democracy' 'the unity of the oppressed', etc. It sees political life dominated by a bankrupt petit-bourgeois leadership. It sees the insidious ploys and manoeuvres of this leadership to prevent the development of an independent working class position. The author wearing the latest in petit-bourgeois blinkers, sees only what he wants to see. Even though he has pondered long and hard on our history, he has surfaced only with a more "profound" more "consistent" rehashing of old 'Unity Movement' conceptions. To this he has comfortably tacked on notions of class struggle and working class leadership. The working class cannot accept this attempt to reconcile the class struggle with the "national" struggle.

To those who say their abiding passion is the unity of the oppressed, we say our abiding passion is the unity of the working class. The division within the working class runs wide but not deep. This does not mean that the forging of working class unity is a simple task. It simply means that capitalism in South Africa in its inexorable development, has objectively reduced the vast majority of the population to the station of wage labourers. The growth of the productive forces has seen the massive concentration of millions of workers in three or four major urban centres. It is to these urban workers, and at first the most advanced, militant layer thereof, that we must turn to, to solve the question of working class unity. It is to the advanced urban workers that we must turn, with the slogan of a workers' united front. They will be the first to grasp the weapon of the united front and as they march boldly forward, layers and layers of other wage workers - urban, rural, migrant and unemployed - will join them in their relentless strides to victory. The community of interests of the entire working class, is the cornerstone of our approach. Every single aspect of working class reality has been fashioned by specific capitalist relations of production. The vast majority of workers have either direct or indirect experience of all the various forms of wage labour - be it urban, rural, migrant or unemployed. Cheap labour means ready hiring and firing. The unemployed worker, rotting away in the Ciskei, carries with him the working class consciousness that he gained while working in the city. The rural worker of today is the urban worker of tomorrow. This rich accumulation of experience needs only to be channelled by independent working class organisation and slogans to make the invincibility of the workers' united front an overwhelming reality. The insoluble world economic crisis, of which S.A. is an internal part, only hastens this development.

The petit-bourgeoisie's abiding passion - the unity of the oppressed, is simply its abiding and passionate fear for its own fate. Frenzied by apartheid, ruined by the capitalist crisis, panic-stricken by its own political impotence, it seeks solace in an alliance with the working class, led by the working class, (proclaims our articulate centrist representative,) but under the banner of national liberation. Unity of the oppressed will not be forged by making 'One Azania, One Nation' the rallying call, 'throughout the length and breadth of our country'. Unity of the oppressed will arise out of the unity of the working class. The working class will not be able to lead the struggle to end exploitation and oppression without first establishing its own independence and its own internal unity. Hence the necessity for a workers' united-front. This is the necessary prerequisite for transforming the petit-bourgeois from an inconsistent force into a reliable and trustworthy ally. The central primary task of building a workers' united front in no way diminishes the need to simultaneously woo the petit-bourgeois, by consistently revealing both in theory and in practice, that its own salvation lay in following the way of the workers. This is our answer to the centrists.

Again one hears the tedious exclamation of the national liberationists, "What about racist oppression? What about the colour cast consciousness of the working class? What about the divisive strategies of the ruling class?!! South Africa indeed has specific features, which any serious-minded democratist faces. There is absolutely no reason why the problem of racist division within the working class, cannot be dealt with, within the context of the stated tactical and strategic position. This aspect will be more fully dealt with in a forthcoming article.

Our national liberationists remain unconvinced. 'What about the incomplete state of the bourgeois-democratic revolution? What about the struggle for democracy?', they moan. To this we say that the working class, is the only class of truly consistent democratic fighters.

Its framework is not the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. In the course of its struggle it will discover and create new, better, more thorough-going forms of democracy. The democratic component of the struggle is the struggle for the discovery and creation of these forms. The call for a Constituent Assembly is but a first step in this unfolding process. This aspect too needs thorough airing in the columns of the Worker-Tenant.

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