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### African Agenda, October 1972

African American Solidarity Committee

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# AFRICAN AGENDA

Vol. 1, No. 8

October, 1972

Monthly 10 cents

## A Letter to the Workers of America

by

Mark Williams-Shope, Gen. Secretary  
South African Congress of Trade Unions  
(Abbreviated Ed., May 1971)

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) places on record its most sincere appreciation and full support for the initiative taken by the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers' Movement (PRWM) to prevent the products manufactured by the Polaroid Corp. from being used in the implementation of the policies of **apartheid** of the Govt. of South Africa.

We fully endorse the demands made by the PRWM, that is, "that Polaroid Corp. disengage completely from South Africa" and "that the management meet the entire company and announce its position on apartheid in the U.S. and South Africa simultaneously." SACTU believes that the action taken by these black workers gave leadership and guidance to the role that the workers of America can and must play in the struggle against racialism and racial discrimination in South Africa.

As a result of the action of the PRWM, a vice-president of Polaroid issued the following statement: "Polaroid has in the past prohibited the sale of its identification system to the South African Govt. for use in the apartheid passbook programme. We are now discontinuing sale of any Polaroid products..."

There are three major trade union coordinating bodies in South Africa. The Govt. recognizes the South African Confederation of Labour and the Trade Union Council of South Africa. The Confederation of Labour consists of registered trade unions of white workers and identifies itself completely with the policies of the racist Govt. The membership of the Trade Union Council of South Africa consists of registered trade unions of white, Coloured, and Indian workers.

The third major trade union coordinating body in South Africa is the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) which is not recognized by the Govt. but has on the contrary been subjected to continuous attacks in the form of banning, detention or imprisonment of every known official. The public functioning of SACTU has been made impossible by the Govt. practice of destroying its leadership, and has forced it to operate under conditions of semi-legality.

African workers are excluded from the definition of "employees" and thus are deprived of the right to register their trade unions. The Industrial Conciliation Act provides for registered-but racially separated trade unions

*(continued on page 4)*

## Proletarian Internationalism and Black Workers

It is the judgment of this writer that, never in the history of the Afro-American liberation movement has the Black community and its most important and numerous component, the Black workers, faced such a historic challenge as at this crossroads in the history of our country. Further advances in the Black liberation movement, the peace movement, and the working class movement will require that we discard general, nebulous phrases as guides to action for slogans and ideological positions that have proved their mettle in class, race, and national struggles throughout the world. Such a scientifically verified, correct position and world outlook, is the ideology of proletarian internationalism.

We must introduce this world outlook, concretize it, and make it the main underpinning in all movements in this country. Proletarian internationalism is also the necessary slogan to guide our approach as Afro-American workers to the African liberation movement as one of many components in the world wide anti-imperialist front. We are not sectarians; we do not oppose linkages with other progressive forces; though sometimes ideologically unclear elements, attempts to strengthen their ties with Africans. Ideological unclarity will result in those progressive elements missing some of the most important turns in the road in

the development of African liberation. Not only are the Africans at such a turn in the road where national and class tasks are now intimately intertwined, but Black workers in this country must assert their hegemonial role in all phases of the fight to extend democracy in this country. The great Lenin once said that the ultimate test of your democratic sentiments is your approach to the question of peaceful co-existence; just as the test of your internationalism is your approach to the national chauvinist position of your own nation as manifested most graphically in its expansionist annexationist policy.

Twentieth Century history of U.S. imperialism has verified Lenin's prognosis that the predominant form of expansion by the U.S. imperialists has been via economic annexation. It would be a variety of neo-Kautskyite social chauvinism for the left, labor, and Black liberation forces to renege on their obligation to oppose such motion by American imperialists at this moment in the general crisis. If we do not come up with ways as Black and White workers to link our national struggles with an international strategy for peace, democracy, and socialism, we shall become renegades from the international movement. Again Karl Marx once said that the in-

*(continued on page 3)*

## Conference of Black Trade Unionists Against Imperialism

The Black Trade Unionists Conference, an historic national conference of more than 1200 delegates representing the unionized section of the Black working class, took place in Chicago, Ill. during the weekend of Sept. 23. Never in the history of the U.S. have so many organized Afro-American workers gathered to deal with national and international problems affecting Black people and the whole working class.

The initiators and planners of the conference were Nelson Edwards, Vice President of the United Auto Workers; Charles Hayes, Vice President of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America; William Lucy, Sec.-Treasurer, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; Cleveland Robinson, President of the Distributive Workers of America and the National Afro-American Labor Council; and William Simons, President of Local 6, American Federation of Teachers.

The conference reflected a very strong pro-McGovern feeling and called for the defeat of Nixon in the 1972 elections as well as his anti-labor policies. The entire conference approved a reso-

lution to immediately stop the war in Vietnam. There was also a call for support of the following resolutions: organize all unorganized workers; support of women's liberation; end the wage freeze; tax the big business monopoly; pass more effective health safety and workmen's compensation laws; end police brutality and attacks upon labor and trade unions; and end all forms of racism and discrimination in industry and in the trade unions wherever it exists.

Prof. Harold Rogers participated in one of the conference workshops and spoke on the role and dangers of U.S. imperialism and neocolonialism in Africa, particularly in Southern Africa and Guinea Bissau. From this workshop came the main resolution calling for Black workers and the whole trade union movement to support anti-imperialist liberation movements in Africa.

The conference marked the emergence of new and younger elements of Black trade union leadership, destined to play an important role in the Afro-American communities, in the U.S. trade union movement and in national and international life.

★ ★ ★



'And, please Lord, bless Dow Chemical, IT&T, General Electric, Standard Oil, Boeing, Lockheed...'

## Proletarian Internationalism In Action

American workers and especially Black people are well aware of the deepening economic crisis facing the USA today. We suffer rising prices and higher unemployment while the large monopolies reap record profits.

The monopoly capitalists and their front man Nixon would like us to believe that the real source of our economic ills are the Yellow, Brown and Black workers of other countries who must work for lower wages. Supposedly they are responsible for the ability of foreign industry to undercut and undersell the American corporations. American workers are advised that it is our "patriotic" duty to increase productivity through speed up and at the same time accept a freeze on our wages.

These well calculated, vicious and outright lies have a two-fold purpose. First they are designed to protect the interests of the monopoly capitalists by hiding who is really making the money. Secondly, they serve to divide American working people from working peoples all over the world. In the long run, this second facet is the most dangerous. Recent history has clearly demonstrated that proletarian internationalism, solidarity of working peoples the world over, is a necessary ingredient in any progressive movement or revolution.

Why should American workers concern themselves with the nature of the struggle in Latin America, or why African miners in Namibia are on strike, or the plight of thousands of Blacks in South African industries? The reasons are simple and sound. We have a common enemy, the monopoly capitalists.

Old style colonialism used outright coercion and theft as the major tool for making huge profits from underdeveloped countries. Today the old style colonialism is being replaced by neocolonialism. The goals are the same, but the forms of exploitation have changed. Young inde-

pendent countries want to develop industry and economies of their own. Unfortunately many are following the dangerous and reactionary path of neocolonialism. Under neocolonialism, American and European capitalists are able to direct and control the economies of much of the world either by direct investments like the proposed Ford plant in Southern Africa; or through mixed companies (where American, European and some local capitalists jointly own the stock).

The capitalists have set up an international division of labor that directly affects the lives of millions of workers in the USA and abroad. It is this division of labor which is the basis for the present profits being made by the monopoly capitalists. One of the underlying principles is to move the labor-consuming, technologically simple parts of the productive process to Asia, Africa and Latin America. This will cut down on production costs and allow the further development of the capital-consuming and technologically complex productive processes in the USA and Europe.

This shift in strategy is borne out by the facts. In 1900 only 17.5% of direct US investments in Latin America were in the manufacturing sector; by 1968 it had jumped to 33.6%. In Africa (excluding South Africa) US investments in the industrial sector increased six-fold in a twenty year period, in Southeast Asia the increase has been ten-fold.

Today we see International Harvester close down an American plant and move abroad throwing thousands of people out of work. Ford and GM layoff workers in Detroit and build new plants in Africa, while Firestone Rubber is currently building a plant in Mozambique.

By dividing the proletariat of the world they keep wages down, create false issues which directs attention away from themselves. They

deliberately seek to divide the only force which threatens their existence, the world's proletariat.

A few years ago West Coast dock workers were involved in a contract negotiation. When the talks were going rough and a strike seemed likely, Nixon threatened to use Navy personnel to insure that ships would be loaded and unloaded. From around the world came messages from other dock workers; they would refuse to unload and load ships not loaded by union labor. So with international support the American dockworkers won their demands. This year Americans dockworkers refused to unload Rhodesia chrome thus protesting Rhodesia's inhumane and racist treatment of Black Africans. Black workers at Polaroid are waging a struggle against that company's support of the minority South African government. Workers all over the world came to the support of Cuba to help that tiny island survive the American economic blockade. The solidarity shown to the Vietnamese peoples by progressive workers around the globe is well known. While Angela Davis was in prison, workers made up the bulk of the international demands for justice and her release.

It would be a grave mistake if American workers do not begin to take a more active role in supporting the struggles of their brothers abroad. For Black and Brown people the failure to create strong international unity with progressive people around the world would be suicidal.

**WE URGE ALL AMERICAN WORKERS TO IGNORE MEANY STYLE POLITICS AND JOIN THE PROLETARIAT** of the "Third World", Europe, and the socialist world in order to defeat the forces of suffering, poverty, starvation, and war.



The Staff of the African Agenda welcomes your comments and any article that is less than 400 words.

# Editorial

In the pages of the African Agenda, we have repeatedly spoken of U.S. business interests in Southern Africa. U.S. business investments in Africa total nearly 3 billion dollars but in South Africa alone the U.S. has over 1 billion dollars worth of investments. Over 300 American companies such as Ford, G.M., etc. are in South Africa with an average rate of direct investment returns close to 20% representing the highest rate of direct investment returns in any country.

In order to maintain U.S. business investments, and economic relations with South Africa, U.S. corporations are openly supporting the South African government's policies of apartheid, which, among other discriminatory measures, prevents Africans from forming trade unions to bargain collectively with their employers, or to be employed in jobs classified as semi-skilled or skilled. Over 70% of Africans working for U.S. corporations in South Africa live below the South African government's established poverty line. U.S. corporations are able to reap huge profits because strikes and other protest activities that could be undertaken by Africans to better their conditions are prohibited by law.

It is in the interest of Black and White workers in the U.S. to live up to our duty of proletarian internationalism (worldwide workers' solidarity) and to demand that U.S. corporations in South Africa protest the South African government's policies of apartheid. The movement of U.S. corporations to Southern Africa means less jobs and deteriorating living conditions for people in the U.S. Trade unions that do not represent the interest of African workers in South Africa means slave-wages for people in South Africa and increased productivity for the American working class in order to maintain a high rate of profit for U.S. corporations. G.M. pays less than 50 cents an hour to Black employees in South Africa which accounts for one of the reasons that more than half of G.M. profits are made outside of the U.S. Cheap wages for Africans can only mean moving more of the productive process outside of the U.S. to South Africa and other countries.

The Staff of the African Agenda strongly urges Black and other American workers to raise the issue of U.S. corporations' relations with the South African government by demanding in their union locals that U.S. corporations publicly denounce the South African slave labor system of apartheid; that Africans be allowed to form trade unions of their choice; and that Africans be trained for and employed in skilled jobs.



# News Briefs

New York — After meeting with the Organization of African Unity in August and stating that they would not sign the contract to fight in South Africa, which they had been considering, Muhammad Ali and his manager Herbert Muhammad had a change of heart. The contract was signed and Ali was scheduled to arrive in South Africa on Nov. 8, 1972 and to box Al Jones, a Black American, on Nov. 18th. Three weeks ago, Ali decided not to fight in South Africa. Had Ali not had this last change of heart, he would have been in opposition not only to the OAU, but also to the sentiment of the African people, and to millions of Afro-Americans.



Lincoln University Pa. — On Oct. 15, 1972, Mr. Amilcar Cabral, Secretary General of P.A.I.G.C., the liberation movement in Guinea Bissau, received an honorary Doctorate of Law degree. In his speech, Mr. Cabral explained the role of national culture as a force in fighting colonialism and imperialism.



Pass on this copy to your shopmate or friend

# Black Workers

(continued from page 1)

terest of general social development of the world takes precedence over the working class and national struggle in your individual nation. This is, indeed correct in respect to our movement since we as Blacks and workers, are in the center of world reaction. Hence we have a role to play, not dissimilar from the role the German people failed to play prior to the takeover of Germany by the fascist beast, Hitler, namely, the implementation of a united front strategy as advocated by the great Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi Dimitrov.

It is not leftism to call for Black working class leadership in alliance with other strata in a national democratic front at this time in view of the fact that other strata and organizations in the Black community are showing signs of wavering in their approach to Black and African Liberation. Their class positions are colliding with their democratic sentiments.

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 25, 1972, by Mr. Arthur Fletcher, former Assistant Secretary of Labor delivered the clarion call to proliferating Black opportunists. He duly noted that "should Negroes take a page of labor's book in the same way that such traditional Nixon's opponents as the Jews and Chicanos have found ways to accommodate the President (Nixon), then they might be able to achieve a share in the leadership of the movement."

What movement is he talking about? Nixon's movement to the right no less. It would be anti-Marxist to believe that this process will not take place with certain strata of blacks in relation to Black liberation and African liberation. As Lenin once said, "We, the proletarians, have seen dozens of times how the bourgeoisie betrays the interest of freedom, motherland, language and nation when it is confronted with the revolutionary proletariat."



## Recommend Books

1. *History of Labor in the U.S.*, by P. Foner, Four Vol.
2. *American Labor and the Indochina War* by P. Foner.
3. *Apartheid Axis*, by W. Pomeroy.
4. *Black Worker in the Deep South* by H. Hudson.
5. *African Trade Unions* by I. Davis.
6. *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950* by H. J. and R. E. Simons.

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**TABLE 1**  
**AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARIES AND WAGES**  
**IN DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS**  
1967 and 1968 (in dollars)

Economic sector	Whites	Africans
Mining (1967) .....	395	24
Construction (First 4 months of 1968) .....	357	60
Manufacturing (First 4 months of 1968)...	343	65
Public Service (1967) .....	209	33

Source: 1968, *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa*

**TABLE 2**  
**INCOME DISTRIBUTION, 1969**

	Whites	Africans
Per cent of total population .....	19.2	68.0
Per cent of all income received .....	74.0	18.8
Monthly per capita income (average) .....	\$133.00	\$9.80

Source: Financial Mail, Johannesburg, reporting on research Market Research Africa



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ons of whites, Coloured people and Indians (Africans are excluded). The different groups can, with the permission of the Minister of Labor, have a registered union with mixed membership on condition that the executive committee consists of whites only.

The denial of basic trade union rights to the majority of workers of South Africa has resulted in the deterioration of their working conditions and a widening of the gap between white and black wages. The following two tables clearly demonstrate the disparity between the earnings of blacks and whites.

On December 11, 1963, the United Nations General Assembly designated the year 1971 as an "International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination." The workers of all countries and all progressive organizations are called upon to increase their support for those struggling against racism and racial discrimination.

The South African Congress of Trade Unions appeals to the workers of America to extend the move-

ment started by the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers' Movement into each and every industry, each and every corporation and plant with South African connections. In particular, we appeal to you to submit the following demands to employers in these corporations and plants.

(a) that all African employees of all South African branches and subsidiaries should be given the right to organize themselves into trade unions and to engage in collective bargaining directly with these employers; and

(b) that all skilled jobs in these branches and plants in South Africa should be opened to all workers irrespective of the color of his skin. We further appeal to the workers of America to demand:

(c) that all trade union and political prisoners in the South African prisons be released; and

(d) that the bans imposed on the African political organizations in 1960 be lifted.

★ ★ ★

The African Agenda needs funds. Please send all financial contributions to our mailing address.

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