

To the South African Federation of Trade Unions

(Editors note: The following open letter of guidance to the revolutionary workers of South Africa is issued by the Executive Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions.)

Dear Comrades,

The profound and ever-growing economic crisis in South Africa, which leads to the intensification of the capitalist offensive against the working masses (reduced wages for railwaymen, miners, etc.; introduction of part time work; increased unemployment, etc.), gives rise to growing dissatisfaction in the whole of the working class, and particularly to a great radicalisation of the native workers (the East London strike, the anti-pass demonstrations, growing membership of the Communist Party). However, despite the fact that the objective conditions favour the development of the revolutionary trade union movement, TU activities are still the weakest spot in the growing revolutionary movement of the country. The Trade Union Federation still continues to lag behind the developing struggles of the masses; the revolutionary trade unions embrace but insignificant groups of workers in the secondary industries, whilst the basic cadres of the working class, employed in the mining industry, in transport and agriculture, have not yet been approached by the Federation.

We are able to note with satisfaction that the Federation is taking steps to remedy the existing unsatisfactory state of affairs (steps taken to organize transport union in Durban; organization of groups in several mines; commencement of activities among agricultural workers), as is to be seen from Comrade Nzula's letter. Nevertheless we must emphasize that this is only the beginning of the turn, and that in order to achieve a determined improvement in all the activities of the Federation, in the leadership of the working class struggle, it is necessary undeviatingly to carry out the decisions of the Fifth R. I. L. U. Congress. In order to realize this speedily the Federation must follow the line of developing the economic struggle, and simultaneously should intensify its organizational activities. The Federation must direct all its efforts to organize new unions, strengthen the existing revolutionary unions, and form revolutionary groups inside the reformist and reactionary unions, whether of European or non-European workers.

The organizational campaign should be carried out on the basis of definite demands of the workers of each given mine, farm, railway shop. The Federation

must seriously confront itself with the question of preparations for the economic struggle. The demands presented by the workers during strikes should include all the requirements of each individual group, and the workers themselves must be got to participate in drawing up these demands, by organizing special meetings, and where for legal reasons this is impossible, by organizing small meetings of groups.

The preparations for and development of the economic struggle should be linked up with the general organizational activities of the Federation for the formation of new unions and strengthening of the existing unions. Only by adopting the line of determined struggle against the exploiting elements, thoroughly preparing the workers for the economic struggle, and independently leading this struggle, not permitting the reformist leaders to betray the workers' interests, will the Federation succeed in extending and strengthening its ranks and building up powerful mass trade unions.

Organizational Tasks.

1. Mining industry legal and illegal methods will have to be combined in organizing the miners, taking into consideration the peculiar conditions in which the miners have to work. viz., the compound system, pass system, the Master and Servants Act, etc. Therefore the Federation should publish leaflets for the miners in its name and organized near the compounds open air meetings to popularise the slogans and demands drawn up by the Federation for the miners. These should not be loud-sounding phrases, incomprehensible for the workers — the slogans and demands should be based on the everyday needs of the miners, for instance: 1) improved food; 2) wage increases; 3) equal pay for equal work, irrespective of race, sex, and nationality; 4) abolition of the "colour bar"; 5) complete abolition of corporal punishment; 6) abolition of the pass system and special guards in the compounds; 7) repeal of the laws for special city districts for the natives and the right of the native workers to live in any city district; 8) repeal of the Master and Servant Acts and the abolition of the contract system; 9) annulment of special taxes for natives and all anti-native laws; 10) free education for native children and free courses for adult workers; 11) freedom of organization and meeting.

The compound meetings must be linked up with practical organizational measures, such as the formation of initiative groups inside the compounds on the basis of which trade union organizations should be formed. In recruiting members to the initiative groups special attention should be paid to drawing in the miners who are members of the **National-Revolutionary Organizations**, such as, for instance, **likhotleng la bafo**. The Initiative Groups must receive definite directives as to the methods of carrying on their agitational work and recruiting new members to the groups.

The Initiative Groups must closely acquaint themselves with the needs of the workers in each individual compound, and on the basis of these needs draw up concrete demands for each pit, mine, etc. These demands in the process of our open agitation and organizational activities must be linked up with the general demands of the working class. The Initiative Groups must conduct thorough preparations for economic struggles, mobilizing the masses around the programme of immediate demands.

2. Transport. A no less important task of the Federation is to organize the transport workers. Great possibilities open up before the Federation in this field. The dockers' strike in Durban and the railwaymen's strike in East London in 1930

prove the extremely favourable grounds for revolutionary trade union work. At the present now that the Government has instituted an attack against the railwaymen it is most easy for the Federation to approach not only the native and coloured workers, but also the White workers. This situation should be taken advantage of for the establishment of the united front of all railwaymen, irrespective of race or colour. The organizational campaign in this field to must be carried out on the basis of the concrete everyday demands of the workers in all the transport services.

As the existing railwaymen's and transport workers' unions only embrace the top strata of skilled, chiefly White workers, initiative groups should be organized in individual shops, depots, stations, ports, etc. The tasks of these groups is to prepare the basis for the formation of industrial unions of railwaymen, transport workers, and dockers. The groups and new unions must recruit workers irrespective of their colour or race. The unions and groups must be organized on a strictly industrial basis and should unite all workers whether skilled or unskilled. The Federation, particularly, in its agitational-propaganda activities must explain to the workers the reactionary anti-class character of the "policy of civilized labour". This policy, which was supposed to be adopted in the interests of the white workers, by introducing splits in the ranks of the workers facilitated the capitalist offensive on the workers to worsen their position.

Besides organizing new revolutionary unions groups of the revolutionary opposition movement must be organized inside the existing railwaymen's unions, in order to conduct the struggle against the reactionary trade union bureaucrats to win the working masses, for independent leadership in the struggles of the railwaymen and transport workers.

3. Agriculture. Besides the mining and transport workers the agricultural workers likewise form one of the most important sections of the working class in South Africa. Their organization, therefore, is one of the fundamental tasks of the Federation. In carrying out this task the Federation should endeavour to lead the workers to the open struggle on the basis of demands which in **each individual instance should be in conformity with the conditions obtaining in the given locality and the special needs of the given section of the agricultural workers.** The general demands of the agricultural workers should include the following: 1) increased wages; 2) equal pay for equal work; 3) complete abolition of corporal punishment; 4) abolition of all overseers; 5) abolition of passes, taxes, and anti-native laws; 6) freedom of organization and meetings; 7) free education for native children; 8) all crown and municipal lands to be given over to the toiling peasants: confiscation of all big landowning corporation and missionary lands, to be distributed between the toiling masses.

In developing activities among the agricultural workers the Federation must pay great attention to the possibilities of utilizing the workers who go from the villages to the towns and back again.

4. Unemployed. Work among the unemployed is beginning to acquire great importance in view of the tremendous increase in unemployment in South Africa. Unless the Federation in the immediate future develops a widespread campaign to draw the unemployed under its banners they will fall under the complete influence of the fascist elements, who already strive to instil white-chauvinist tendencies, and which are very strong among the more backward sections of the white workers. Such slogans as "**drive the natives out of industry and give their place to the White workers**" is one of the greatest dangers threatening the class

interests of the workers, and must be determinedly combatted. In all our campaigns we should point out to the workers the development of the capitalist offensive, the demands for an all-round wage cut and the wage cuts already carried out in many industries. The struggle of the unemployed should be linked up with the struggle of the employed workers, putting forward the following demands: 1) immediate material assistance to the unemployed, irrespective of race or colour, by the government and municipalities; 2) compulsory non-contributory unemployment insurance; 3) the introduction of the eight hour day for adults, 6-hour day for adolescents under 18 years, and 4 hour day for adolescents under 16 years of age; 4) prohibition of employment of children under 14, whether in industry or in agriculture; 5) no dismissals; 6) no wage cuts in any industry whatever.

In order organizationally to reinforce our influence among the unemployed broad Unemployed committees, elected at the general meetings of unemployed workers, should be set up under the leadership of the Federation. These meetings and committees should be organized in the Labour exchanges, locations, or according to the dwelling places of the unemployed, depending upon the conditions in the given locality.

The Federation must expose the reactionary character of Hertzog's "System of subsidies". It must explain to the rank and file white workers that this plan does not solve the problem of unemployment, and that jointly with the native and coloured workers they must fight for the general demands of the unemployed. The propaganda must be conducted in such a manner as to make the workers understand that as long as capitalism exists crises and unemployment are inevitable, and that only in the Soviet Union are there no crises and unemployment, or will there ever be such, as the toilers, having taken power in their hands work not for the capitalists, landlords, imperialists, but for the common welfare. In conducting the campaigns among the unemployed the successes of socialist construction in the Soviet Union must be popularized, so that every worker knows how the Five Year Plan is being carried out and what this plan gives to the working class.

5. Activities in the reformist unions. Besides working to organize the unorganized, a struggle should be waged to win the masses of workers organized in the reformist unions. For this purpose groups of the revolutionary opposition movement should be organized in the reformist bodies, whether of European or non-European workers. The oppositions inside the trade unions are to conduct the struggle against the reformist leaders, systematically exposing their betrayal of the working class interests. The opposition inside the white unions must conduct an untiring struggle against white chauvinism and for class unity.

6. United Front from below. The Federation must put down as one of its basic tasks that of establishing the united front from below, on the basis of the concrete class demands, of the native, white, coloured and Indian workers. Only by establishing the united front from below is it possible in South Africa to organize a genuinely revolutionary trade union movement. Only by the united front from below is it possible to mobilize the broad working masses for the struggle against exploitation and oppression.

In this connection we are able to note that the Federation acted correctly in giving assistance to the white furniture makers of Johannesburg. This was a genuinely revolutionary reply to the treachery of the reformists, who acted as scabs during the mattress makers strike last year.

The Federation: the Revolutionary TU Centre of South Africa.

The Federation, as the only revolutionary trade union centre of South Africa, should bear in mind that though work among the natives is its central task, as the natives form the predominating majority of the toiling population in the country, nevertheless the Federation is not a race, but a class organization, and therefore, should come before the entire proletariat as the leader of the economic struggles, irrespective of race or colour of the workers who are fighting. This likewise is the best means of combatting the fraudulent "unity" manoeuvres, such as, the formation of the South African Trade Council, the chief object of which is, firstly, to instil among the masses of South African workers desiring unity the illusion that the realization of unity is possible on the basis of the old reformist line under the old leadership; secondly, to seize control of the native unions and thereby ensure the dominating positions for the white labour aristocracy, who fear the growing competition of the native and coloured workers; thirdly, to form an apparatus, which would be capable of stopping, or at least weakening, the development of the revolutionary movement among the workers and preventing the development of the class struggle.

The new leadership of the Federation correctly estimated the manoeuvres of the social-reformist bureaucrats. In the future still more attention must be devoted to expose these manoeuvres, instilling in the minds of the working masses the realization that genuine trade union unity is only possible on the basis of the revolutionary class struggle.

Training Native Cadres.

One of the most urgent problems confronting the Federation is the question of training cadres of native trade union functionaries. Native workers should be promoted to all the responsible positions in the union, unemployed committees, strike committees and other militant organs of the working class. Steps must be taken immediately to organize short-term trade union courses, trade union circles, self-education circles. Trade union courses of an elevated type, and where possible correspondence TU courses, should be organized for the better prepared comrades.

Comrades: the conditions for our activities are more favourable at the present time than ever before in the history of South Africa. You must use all measures to combat the vacillating opportunist elements, who still clutch at the old social-democratic traditions. Only bold revolutionary leadership will succeed in carrying out the decisions of the Fifth R. I. L. U. Congress and creating a powerful revolutionary trade union movement in South Africa.

(Signed) **A. Losovsky**, General Secretary: R. I. L. U.
