

SOUTH AFRICA—TRADE UNION STRUGGLE

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THE murder of twelve Black miners by the South African police follows a year which has witnessed the intensification of the fight for higher wages and better conditions by many groups of workers in South Africa, and also a heightening of the political consciousness of our people.

The wave of strikes which took place in 1972 and early this year, involving more than 100,000 African, Coloured and Indian workers, voiced their long-standing grievances. Trade unionists in Britain and throughout the world must now reconsider the appeal which has been made, not only by the South African Congress of Trade Unions, but by the whole international trade union movement which was represented at the International Trade Union Conference Against Apartheid in Geneva in June 1973.

This conference was attended by members of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, members of the Organisation of African Unity, the governing body of the International Labour Organisation, the three international trade union centres—the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the World Federation of Trade Unions, and the World Confederation of Labour—and other continental and regional trade union federations. For the first time since 1945, the three main international centres, with 380 delegates representing 250 million workers, came together to discuss the policy of apartheid; and the British TUC delegation played an important role in bringing together the two main centres, the ICFTU and the WFTU, at a round table to prepare for the success of this conference.

During the conference, every speaker without exception denounced the South African racist policy of apartheid as a threat to free trade unionism, a violation of the Human Rights Charter and a danger to world peace. The following resolutions were adopted unanimously:

Conference calls upon governments, non-governmental organisations, workers and their trade union organisations, political parties and institutions at all levels, to launch and intensify a campaign for an all-round isolation of

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the racist régime of South Africa, economically, politically, militarily and culturally.

Conference expresses its full support and solidarity with the African workers of South Africa who have courageously taken strike action against their intolerable conditions, and unequivocally condemns the system of works committees, which cannot in any way be regarded as a substitute for genuine trade unions.

Another important resolution of the conference called for the immediate unconditional release of all imprisoned trade unionists and political prisoners in South Africa and for a stop to the rule of police terror and oppression. Before the news of the police attack on the miners, it had been suggested that one step in the implementation of the conference decisions could be a world-wide week of action to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on December 10, 1973. The response by trade union bodies to the recent outrage reflects a need also for immediate action.

I would like here to convey sincere thanks, on behalf of SACTU, to British, including particularly Scottish, trade unions who have earlier contributed morally and materially to our struggle, both at national and branch level. The 1972 Congress of the British TUC reaffirmed its stand against apartheid and unanimously adopted a resolution (1) in favour of withdrawal of trade union funds from those companies with subsidiaries in South Africa, (2) to discourage emigration, and (3) to support the liberation movements. National trade unions which have supported us include the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, with its Foundry, Construction, Technical and Engineering Sections, the National Union of Public Employees, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and allied Technicians, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, the Civil and Public Services Association, the Fire Brigades Union and the Tobacco Workers' Union. Branches of ASTMS, NALGO and APEX have also supported us, as well as the Scottish Trades Union Congress, with many of its trades councils. There are many others.

Some of the unions mentioned above had funds in companies operating in South Africa and took steps to withdraw those funds. The TUC itself has already sold its shares. This is a practical step which in fact influenced the Geneva conference to look for various forms of action against apartheid.

In the present situation, SACTU appeals to trade unions to take

immediate action to protest at the killings and for the implementation of the Geneva decisions by issuing press statements, sending letters and telegrams to the South African government, and by organising meetings and conferences. We urge the British trade union movement to study the resolutions adopted by the representatives of 250 million workers who participated in the Geneva conference, and to discuss ways and means of implementing these resolutions.

The actions by British trade unionists mentioned above have shown our workers at home that they have friends, and this has encouraged them in their struggle for freedom and peace for all South Africans, irrespective of race, colour or creed, and an end to the brutal system of apartheid.
