

Trade Union:-by Gurnam S.Sanghera.

"Labour cannot emancipate itself in The White Skins where in the Black's it is branded" Marx.

To earn their livelihood the people work somewhere and thus cannot detach themselves from the objective situation.

The employment involves workers and the bosses, meaning wage negotiations and struggles for money and working conditions. In this way Trade Unions are directly involved in every work situation as Trade Unions are the pivot. So I must deal with the employment and Trade Unions in general and in relation to the coloured people in particular.

In Britain the total employed work force is 23,500,000 and out of this Indians are 176,375, West Indians 191,490 and the Pakistanis 76,440. The total foreign work force in employment is 607,310 which is about 2.5 per cent of the total working populations.

The working class suffers from exploitation and alienation as a whole. The unskilled and semi-skilled people are low paid, have poor housing conditions and suffer from various diseases. Thus very little education. Now the vicious circle goes on due to poverty as mentioned some-where else in this report. But the immigrants suffer doubly due to racialism and language.

There is widespread racial discrimination in employment as is revealed by the PEP report (Racial Disadvantage in Employment 1974).

Rather it is on the increase. The immigrants get the replacement low paid and dead end jobs. The coloured immigrants are working on Shift work (mostly night shift in textiles). They do the Hard Sweat jobs with no future prospects or promotions. There is little chance of getting work in a prospering and progressing firm. The coloured immigrants come here as a ready made labour with age range between 18 - 45 in the 50's and 60's. The Indians came from rural agricultural backgrounds with little or no industrial skill. Later on the educated (including doctors and nurses) and artisans started arriving during the Sixties.

The Indians went to the decreasing Urban cores of expanding industrial regions and reside in low paid areas. They are largely employed in manufacturing industry such as engineering and allied trades and general labouring jobs, Textiles, Transport, Health, Construction Catering, Clerical and professional occupations. But their place in the above Services is at the bottom. The skilled and Supervisory well paid and administrative jobs are the 'preserves' of the whites and are considered 'no go areas' for the coloureds. The white workers indulge in actions, threatened strikes if the coloured worker is promoted. For instance in July/August 1973 the dispute arose when ETU members refused to train a West Indian and 300 workers walked out. All the white AUEW stewards crossed the pickets. The district Committee took no action.

The dispute arose in Mansfield hosiery in Loughborough over the promotion of an Indian which resulted in Strike. Similar disputes arise in various industries. These actions expose the Bankruptcy of even trade union consciousness. Though workers minds are poisoned by the power structure, but still they have colonial attitudes. Secondly this arises out of white workers powerlessness and inferiority complex. Thirdly the fundamental cause is the indoctrination by the ruling class to divide the workers and deflect the class struggle.

The coloureds are considered unfit and incapable to hold any responsible job in any sphere of life though various excuses are put forward. There are restricted opportunities and inter-industry and social mobility is very limited. The coloured person is employed as a last resort when the labour is not available. One can rarely see a coloured face on bank counters, gas and electric meter readers not to say of executive managerial jobs.

It is alleged that corruption is there within the industry and the coloureds are compelled to give money or gifts to get an unskilled job.

Sometimes the gatekeepers and clerks turn away the coloured people seeking jobs.



During a time of unemployment or lay-off, it is the coloured people who suffer most and are made redundant with little or no redundancy pay. They are sacrificed and in the event of crisis they are counted as less than a human being.

The Employment Exchange is rarely used by the Indians to get a job. The Employment Officers do not send coloureds for a job where racialism exists, rather it should fight against the racialists. Secondly, it will offer menial and low paid jobs to the coloured no matter how well educated he/she may be. The coloureds get jobs through their friends or relatives. They have little faith in these Exchanges and they quote that the Employment Exchanges send scab labour when coloured people are on strike as happened in Perivale Gutterman factory in Greenford (Middx) in November 1973. The attitude of the officials is of the colonial type.

A similar thing happens with Youth Employment. Coloured youths are guided into poor career jobs even in schools and Youth Employment Officers are not bothered about the coloured youth. It is ten times harder to get an apprenticeship equivalent to a white youth (with equal qualifications). Youth unemployment is highest among the coloured people. It is about 16.2% whereas among the whites it is 8%. No need to sweep the problem under the carpet. Expose this hypocrisy of equal opportunity. The teenage unemployed reflect the prevailing racial discrimination and the attitude of the Youth Employment officers. The coloured people going through the British Universities also face increasing racial discrimination. Either they do not get an equivalent job or one which is below their intelligence and qualifications. This is becoming entrenched. The racialists may call it 'employability' personality, or say integrated character is required, yet it speaks of racialism.

The educated with higher jobs in mind may suffer from 'mobility pessimism' that is, it may be the result of an achievement value drive which has been blocked and this hindered mobility leads to frustration. Some employers and certain sections show paternalism instead of equality. I am against paternalism as it is tantamount to racialism. I do not desire our people to be treated like pet or less developed persons. We must fight for equality. The words spoken by Lord Kitchener C - in - C in India (1902 - 1909) expresses the present racialism. "However well educated and clever a native may be, and however brave he may have proved himself, I believe that no rank we can bestow on him would cause him to be considered an equal of the British Officer"

The coloured people suffer from deprivation and rejection. It is the coloured person who is not accepted by the majority of whites. The coloured person does not hate the white person but only their system, their racialism and discriminatory practices. The coloured persons detest the arrogance and the humiliating attitude of the white racist. As the dominant ideas are always the ideas of the ruling class, so the imperialist past and general socialization engenders false consciousness of feeling themselves above the coloured sub-proletariat. At least the presence of coloured people at the bottom gives them a feeling of satisfaction, superiority which can lead to division among the working class on the basis of colour. The coloured man starts thinking in terms of 'Trichotomous' system meaning 'us' workers, 'we' coloured and 'them' bosses. These ideas disrupt the unity of the workers, blunt the struggle and ultimately help to prop up the oppressive system. This racial exploitation is a weapon of the rulers. Their minds must be de-colonized then they will see the contributions made by the coloureds. 72% of the coloured adults are economically active compared with 62% of the whole population. Our people fill the tax and welfare coffers and yet they did not get any benefit for their children as they were in India. Millions of pounds were saved by various services due to the absence of thousands of children and wives. Rather, the British Government must compensate the people and the Indian Society who spent money on our ready made labour.

The Trade Union has passed various anti-racialism resolutions and the basis was laid in 1955 Trade Union Congress. Since 1955 Trade Union Congress has been condemning racialism. Jack Jones, General



Secretary of the T. & G. W. U. set out the broad outlines of T.U.C. policy at 1974 Trade Union Congress. He said "The General Council have given evidence to the Select Committee on Race Relations, we have been looking at employment. They very strongly expressed the view that discrimination - some open, some concealed - is wide-spread in Industry, and that whatever the law says, the main remedy lies in the hands of workpeople themselves. I am sure you will agree. There is no union affiliated to this Congress which supports discrimination. Many union representatives have been active in dealing with grievances and complaints. The T.U.C. Guide to Good Industrial Relations makes it clear that arbitrary factors such as race, sex or age should play no part in employment, and we stand firm for integration.

We told the Select Committee that the General Council were prepared to recommend that unions should take very positive action. That action is to promote an active, equal opportunity programme and carry that programme in our agreements with the employers, and so on to the shop floor. They welcomed this undertaking and they called on employers to make positive moves.

I can tell Congress that the General Council are going to carry out this undertaking. We will call on every union for full and active and detailed support. Our aim is equality and the end of disadvantage. Our aim is equal opportunity and an end of discrimination. Our aim is a free and fair society and this is part of it".

Although the T.U.C. did not oppose the Immigration Act 1971 by 1973 the T.U.C. recognised racialism in it and thus passed a resolution calling for the Act to be repealed. But all these noble declarations remain on paper and were never followed and implemented at every level. The T.U.C. have not worked actively for the positive work.

The AUE, EET.P.T.U., ASTMS and APEX passed anti-racialism resolutions in 1973, 1974. Various Trades Councils have joined in this as well. APEX accepted the resolution in 1974, "That this Conference is concerned at the inadequate response of the Trade Union movement to the problems of race relations in British Industry".

The above resolution is very true. Some are closing their eyes, saying there is no discrimination. Now every committee and Government officials accept that racial discrimination is increasing and the resentment, disillusionment and reaction of the coloureds must be avoided.

The coloured immigrants were brought here to meet the labour shortage and plug the gap. They were considered as migratory birds but the situation has altered. To keep a certain section discontented is not in the interests of society.

The coloured people are keen to join the unions. The Indian Workers Association Great Britain has always stood for the united and strong unions and has circulated, leafletted the towns to join their respective unions. They were asked to participate actively in the union affairs. The strength of the union depends upon the members. We do not want membership a ritual. The membership is higher where the union is strong and is also dependent upon the industry, job, nature and officials of the union, its traditions and to some extent 'minority organizations' pressure. Only 60% of the white workers are in the unions. The membership among the female section is lower than the male workers. We are against ethnic or nationality based unions. The black unions will be a retrogressive step and anti-worker. We do not approve all black unions but the unions must put their house in order otherwise the blacks individualists and self-exhibitionists will issue occasional sensational statements.

Even a leading trade union leader of the AEU Sir William Carron said "it would be interesting to obtain detailed statistics applying to the grand total i.e. consumed by educational grant, national health expenses and subsistence payments that become immediately obtainable by the ever growing number of individuals who were not born in this country and who in no way contributed towards setting up a fund into which they so willingly dip their fingers. As they so succinctly put it they know their rights. It would be very acceptable to the rest of us if some small measure of appreciation and thanks were in visible evidence". (The Guardian 25th April 1967). Sir Carron has forgotten the contribution and no expenses of the coloured workers.



The Indians have helped to form new Trade Union branches. The coloured people have shown real industrial militancy for the workers' rights. They can not be used as scab labour. They have shown complete solidarity with their white brothers in every struggle from Barmidale to Postmen and others. Even the coloured women walked out when two white women were sacked at Yarnolds in Wolverhampton (1975). This militancy of the coloureds presents a challenge to the employers and complacent, inward looking trade unions. The coloured people have used the strike weapon for their rights for promotion, conditions of work etc. In most of the strikes initiated by the coloureds, rarely have the white workers come out in solidarity. In the majority of places, the whites went on working and the trade union officials did little for the coloured workers. The Mansfield Hosiery in Loughborough, Imperial Typewriters of Leicester, Coventry Art Castings, Nuneaton, Perivale Gutterman, Yarnolds strikes reveal this bureaucratic and indifferent attitude of the trade unions. In the 'Turban on the buses' cases in Wolverhampton and Leeds, the trade unions role was of racist.

The trade union rules are not for the men but the men are for the rules. The coloured workers are losing faith in the white workers. But there is a case of Dagenham Ford workers coming out at the sacking of a coloured person. We need unity. The trade union ethic is workers' solidarity and their very existence is the symbol of conflict between the workers and the employers. Now the coloureds do not appreciate the role of the unions in many strikes. Even some local union branches are under the influence of the National Front. The role of the union and white workers in various strikes as mentioned in the above few cases help to strengthen their views.

### Strikes :

The coloured workers have realised that they must fight for the workers and their own rights if they are to work and live with dignity. They have been forced to go on strike and in many cases, the indigenous workers have failed to come out on strike, with the coloured workers. This unfortunate split in many places has created misunderstanding and tension. Even the image of the union leadership is not very creditworthy among many coloured people as at Artid Plastics in Slough, Mansfield Hosiery Mills, Loughborough (1972), Imperial Typewriters, Leicester (1974), Coventry Art Castings, Nuneaton etc. The promotion of the coloured people was resisted by the indigenous workers in most of the cases, and the effort was made to keep them out of better jobs. Even concerning the wearing of turbans by the drivers and conductors on the buses was opposed by some indigenous workers and some local union officials as in Wolverhampton and Leeds. Everytime the union's central leadership hesitated and failed to condemn this sort of racialism in time and with force. Indian Workers' Association Great Britain branches helped these strikers financially as well as by mobilising the community through public meetings and socials.

Now the Asian women have shown their industrial militancy by going on genuine strikes in Hitchen, Wolverhampton, London and other towns. The Asian women engaged in cleaning jobs on Heathrow Airport work on shifts, are low paid and their union and other indigenous workers have shown little interest in their miserable and super-exploitative conditions.

### Trade Unions :

The coloured workers say "Every time they have a fight against the employer, they have to give a double fight against the union's bureaucratic machine". Why do the unions enter into agreements with employers without consulting the workers?

The trade unions are useful and essential for the cohesive, collective action in the interest of the workers, within the rules of the present system. The trade unions are of the view that the interests of labour and employers are complementary whereas the coloureds see them as antagonistic. So the coloureds see the unions integrating into the structure of the establishment. Thus in the day to day work as well as during the strikes, the coloureds see the local union officials as disciplining agents of the employers and are understood to be on the side of the white workers. The coloured consider the union officials as proletariat aristocracy. The unions discourage the strikes and the Rank and File action. V. L. Allen has correctly written about the Trade Unions



"their industrial aims have been tailored so as not to disturb the capitalist system or even to upset unduly any individual employer (Militant Trade Unionism p. 29). But the unions cannot always contain the genuine anger of the members. The Industrial Relations Act 1971 was to smash the unions. Indian Workers Association Great Britain opposed it and I wrote an article exposing its nature in English and Punjabi.

There has been sectional action. The general members have instrumental attitude and they expect to elicit some economic benefit and not a revolution. The union leadership demands conformity and not confrontation. Indian Workers Association Great Britain considers trade unions as the pivot and we are prepared to help them to win the confidence of the coloured people.

**political** The trade union struggles have only created union conscience and not consciousness and not a 'school of war'. The notion of class in itself and class for itself is not encouraged and thus the chances of political ideology and political consciousness are very dim and slender. They want reforms and patchwork within the present exploitative system. The reformist union leadership is opposed to the idea of political, class confrontation with the power structure. The result of the underdevelopment of political consciousness is that on the one hand the Dockers fought a marvellous fight under Jack Dash and then in 1972 when the Tory Government was forced to release the imprisoned dockers but on the other hand, the dockers marched in favour of racist Powell. Take another example, The Clyde Ship Building Struggle was won by the workers under the leadership of Com. Jim Reid but he was badly beaten in Parliamentary Election of 1974. Similarly Scottish miners express militancy but when their President Com. MacMagahey attacked the power structure and hinted its removal, he had to face vicious oral and printed attacks. India Workers Association, Glasgow branch, supported Clyde side sit in and the Central IWA wrote letters of solidarity to the postal workers and miners as well.

The imprisonment of the Shrewsbury pickets is a glaring example of political attack on the workers, yet the trade union movement has not made a concerted move for their release. This is what the coloured people hate. It's the rank and file which is running the campaign "Release Shrewsbury Pickets". We express our solidarity with the pickets. The trade union abhors rank and file initiatives.

During all these years, trade unions have tried not to accept that circumstances have changed and we have a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. The Inquiry Committee regarding the Mansfield Hosiery Mills Ltd. pointed out that the involvement of the coloured people is essential. It recommended coloured representation on committees, changing industrial relations, etc. but no action was taken. Then Imperial Typewriters, Leicester had to fight hard and then the Midland Transport and General Workers Union inquired about the situation and produced a report. The National Front was actively engaged against the coloured strikers. This committee also made various but similar recommendations - that agreements with the employers must be entered into with the consent of the Asian workers where involved. "We recommend a re-appraisal of the rule with the object of conducting separate elections for shop stewards" The report points out "if we do not provide the opportunity for leadership to emerge from within our ranks it is inevitable that disgruntled members will look to outside forces." The trade union must make up it's mind to fight against racial discrimination. Racism is in every walk of life. Face it. Not words but deeds should be the motto. The Midland T. & G.W.U. Inquiry report points aptly "The tragedy of the dispute is that it not only fragmented trade union unity, it paved the way for rancour and bitterness which could have been avoided."

The uneducated should be given time off to learn English as it is essential for social, economic purposes. We gave these suggestions in the late sixties.

The young late comers should have skill training along with an English language course. The age limit must be raised for apprenticeship to give a chance to the late comers from foreign countries. Wastage of talent should be checked now. All types of discrimination



must be made illegal. Tests or any type of test which is/are not job related must be illegal.

Extended holidays without causing any inconvenience to other workers should be granted.

The coloured employers should be forced to follow all the laid down rules and must recognise unions.

Action now or delays have dangerous consequences.

The coloured manufacturers and employers must be legally forced to obey the rules and conditions of work. The coloured people are not homogenous. They are split into various strata according to the consumption styles and the relations to the means of production. The coloured owners of firms wholesale traders indulge in various unfair practices. The coloured employers have coloured workers and thus face to face relationships. Due to these informal type of relations, the coloured employer avoids the unionisation of workers and strikers. Where the workers try to unionise themselves, they are socked with certain excuses. Generally, the workers in these sweat shops are coloured female. We should help to unionise these exploited workers with the help of unions. But the unions seem to take little interest in these small industries.

The coloured big business people and others may try to take undue advantage of racialism by monopolising the trade of the coloured workers. Due to their class nature the big businessmen will not share any ideas with the coloured worker except colour. So we should be aware of this exploitation as well and should not shield our coloured exploiters.

We must not ignore the small paternalistically administered firms of the Indians and neither the monopolization of trade.

The Indian Workers Association Great Britain has been playing an active role in advising and educating the workers to join their respective unions and play an active part. So in this way, we have assisted unionisation. We want to see the union consciousness developing into political consciousness, thus seeing the workers political struggle as an essential element. The coloured workers have an important role to play along with the majority workers. The coloured workers cannot be the vanguard of the political fight, but they will be an integral part marching shoulder to shoulder. As the whites are a majority partner, so the major responsibility rests upon them though we cannot just trail behind. We must also give a push to them. So it is inter-related and we cannot be separate from the other. The present events of strikes reveal the militancy, confidence and the determination of the coloureds to wage a fight for their rights. At present, coloured immigrants may not know about union structure, industrial relations and lack English knowledge, so if the solid and correct steps are not taken now, then the future seems to be full of conflicts, which will be the entire responsibility and due to the intransigence of the discriminatory power of union structure.

At present, non-English speaking workers must be provided with an opportunity to learn functional English in the factory with the time paid off. The union should hold courses to educate them in union history, structure and industrial relations. The information should also be provided in their mother tongue. The white workers must be educated about the background of the immigrants and the education course must be run by the immigrants itself. The union papers should cover race relations in their reports. The age for the commencement of apprenticeships should be flexible especially for those immigrant youths who enter Britain late and take time to learn English. The coloured people must be given an opportunity (and encouraged) to become shop stewards, supervisors and union officials at the higher level. It is not the question that coloured people do not want to be officials in the union structure but it's the reverse as they are kept down at all costs. Some coloured shop stewards are given a hell of a time and many times the white workers as well as officials do not co-operate or struggle to throw him out. There are quite a few IWAGB members working as shop stewards and one in the District Council Committee.



T.U. The unions must accept that Race is a major problem and unless it is defeated, the union could be worse. The National Front must be exposed and any member should not be allowed to be a union official as they are trying to sneak in and control union branches. IWAGE is prepared to help the members to fight against racialism and for the workers' rights. Tell the splitters that we have a common cause and immigrants have exposed the cancerous disease prevailing in employment and in the general society, that is inequality, victimization and exploitation of the working class. The trade unions have not paid any attention to the various reports and enquiries as the report of the Midlands Transport and General Workers Union Regional Committee wrote. The tragedy of the dispute is that it not only fragmented trade union unity but it paved the way for rancour and bitterness which would have been avoided. Involve the rank and file and win their confidence.

Worker Consultation :

There is a lot of talk about 'worker participation' etc. Will this consultation change the basic structure or lead to any control? No. This is to make the unions identify with the company, keep the workers under control and help to maximize profits. I am not dismissing the importance and achievement of the Trade Union and it's bargaining. To win material improvements are important as well. It seems the unions do not appreciate the rank and file initiative.

The co-operative ventures are just figuring out redundancy struggles but this is not a real solution as it will work within the same system and prove it's viability. There should be worker majority management with administrative and executive powers.