

Unemployed? Time to Organise!

Workers' Solidarity Federation

1995

Every worker has the human right to a job. Yet under the Capitalist system, workers are dismissed from employment in times of crisis, over-production or depression, or just to save labour costs through cutting workers and speed-ups. And then some workers just cannot find jobs in the Capitalist Labour market, either because of discrimination, lack of skills or job training, a "criminal" record, or other reasons.

In the early 1990's, the Ministry of Finance said that unemployment stood 19,3%, a SALDRU survey put it at about 30% in 1993, the 1994 October Household Survey found it to be 32,6%, while some analysts believe it is closer to 50%.¹

With the growth, since 1994, in the level of retrenchments, we are obviously facing a major crisis. All of us should organise and join together in fighting the Capitalist bosses of industry, and demand that everyone be allowed to work.

In every major city in Southern Africa (and even in small towns and rural areas as well) the Unemployed should take the lead in forming Unemployment Councils to fight for unemployment benefits and jobs for the unemployed. These councils should be democratic organisations, organised on a neighbourhood basis (to ensure direct democracy, and against infiltration and takeover by political parties), which would be federated into a local, regional and inter-regional organisation.

Not only would they be a way of fighting for jobs and unemployment benefits, but also the councils would be a way to some form of community power, self-sufficiency and direct democracy, and possibly even the beginning of Municipal Communes when they find out that government will not provide those things for them. It could be the Councils which establish food and housing co-operatives, lead rent strikes or squatting, land and building reclamation projects, establish producer and consumer co-operatives, distribute food and clothing, and provide for other services. They would also establish neighbourhood assemblies to deal with community social and ecological problems and issues of interest, and fight for "neighbourhood control". They would lead hunger marches and would support the revolutionised Unions or any workers who are on strike and are protesting against the bosses. The employed and unemployed must work together! We must unite the entire Working Class, even those without jobs, instead of narrowly concentrating on unionised workers.

¹ Information taken from SOUTH AFRICA LIMITS TO CHANGE: the political economy of transformation by Hein Marais.

We demand:

- Full employment for all (zero unemployment).
- Business and Government funds to pay for the bills, mortgages, and debts for any laid-off worker until s/he can work again.
- Establishment of a shorter work-week so everyone can work.
- Workers Self-Management and Social Revolution
- Full benefits for all unemployed workers and their families. Unemployment compensation at 100% of regular paid wage, lasting the full length of a workers' period of unemployment.
- No taxation of unemployed workers, including mortgage payments.

This is just a survival program for unemployment, the real answer is Social Revolution and Workers Self-Management of industry and the economy. It also shows why we need to democratise and revolutionise the Unions — so we can fight to organise the unemployed workers as well as those who work in industry and agriculture.

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