

in their plants. Although these unions are technically illegal, some industries and employers have bargained with them without government interference, because of the unions' real strength within the plants. The automakers continue to ignore them, and rely on the police to end strikes and job actions which have occurred over the years in Port Elizabeth, the "Detroit" of South Africa.

LESSONS FOR AMERICAN WORKERS

What has all this to do with U. S. auto-workers? For one thing, it should make clear that the only thing separating us from this kind of treatment is our organized strength, both directly through our unions and indirectly through the laws which we have won that protect our rights.

It should also point out that our strength is dependent on the unity we achieve between Black and white workers, and on our struggle against racism. The wedge of

racism between Black and white workers opens the door not only to economic attacks on all workers, but to the weakening of the political strength of the working class in general. For example, in South Africa all union contracts are subject to approval by the government, and laws against strikes, even by white workers, are much stronger than in this country.

Another important lesson we can learn from the condition of autoworkers in South Africa is that there is a close relationship between our struggles with the companies. 25% of the investment and profit of Ford and GM come from overseas, and it is increasing. These investments provide an important cushion with which to fight the demands of workers at home. Just look at the fact that almost 50% of the rubber industry's profits come from abroad: this was an extremely important factor in allowing the companies to hold out as long as they did in the recent United Rubber Workers strike.

The companies would like to see working conditions in all countries reduced to the conditions of the worst and do everything in their power to prevent unity across national boundaries. We can recognize the need for unity between Black and white in each plant, between the different plants in one company, and within the entire union in our fight with the corporations for better wages and working conditions. Similarly, we should be able to recognize that unity among workers must extend as far as the corporation extends -- that is, to workers in other countries.

Although the forms of support for their struggle are different from those we would show a sister local, they do exist. Direct financial support to the Black and multinational unions of South Africa, boycotts of corporations whose practices are particularly vicious, and pressure on the government to end its support for the racist regime: these all strengthen the position of the South African workers, and ultimately our own position, in relation to the auto giants.

DON'T BUY THE "BUY AMERICAN" CAMPAIGN

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--by ANNA GOLD

It's 2 pm on a hot muggy day and your boss comes up to you and says, "take the rest of the day off and go demonstrate with your union." Impossible? That's just what happened on April 14th when anti-import demonstrations were staged across the country by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Apparel manufacturers who make a habit of threatening their workers for even wanting to talk to their union officials sent everyone off early with their blessing for this particular union function.

Officials claimed that 2000 Philadelphia workers attended the Independence Mall event to hear politicians and labor leaders denounce Jimmy Carter's refusal to impose quotas on imports. Rank and file workers present estimated the number at half that however, and said that many of those there were either union officials or supporters outside the union.

"There isn't anything in it for us," a presser told the *Organizer*. "Our contract is up at the end of May. They're using the whole imports thing as an excuse to sell us down the river in the negotiations."

"If they were really serious about our jobs they would organize down south and they would enforce our contract here. As it is, our contract isn't even worth the paper it's printed on and they go and blame our problems on some poor worker overseas who's in even worse shape than we are!"

UNION CAMPAIGN PLAYS TO RACISM

In the past several years, the needle trade unions have been waging a consistent campaign to stop foreign imports. Union materials carry the barely veiled suggestion that workers in Taiwan and Korea are responsible for our problems here. In an industry that has large numbers of underpaid immigrants, including a growing Asian workforce, this logic plays to racist attitudes towards these workers.

But while most workers are suspicious of the union's explanations, there is a tremendous amount of confusion around the question of imports and justifiable cynicism around Carter's attitudes. After all, the facts are that one out of every four garments sold in the US is imported, compared to one in 20 a decade ago. Two-thirds of these imports come from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost because they were sent overseas.

In 1975 and 1976 alone, close to 35,000 apparel workers were certified by the government to apply for special unemployment benefits as victims of "import penetration."

It is also true that wages in the Far East and South American apparel centers are abysmally low -- often falling to 14 cents an hour compared to the \$3 in this country. While low wages are an incentive for any business, they are particularly important in the clothing industry, because wages represent a higher than usual percentage of the cost of the finished product. This is because the overhead costs are relatively low and because the industry still uses mostly simple and non-automated machinery. The industry is therefore much more competitive than monopolized industries such as auto and steel.

STOPPING IMPORTS THE ANSWER?

On the face of it then, it might seem logical that the solution to the problem is lower import quotas to prevent cheap competition from entering the country. In reality, however, these quotas not only will do nothing to insure increased employment, but in fact they will do just the opposite in the long run -- they will mean more unemployment. Furthermore,

these quotas would insure that prices will remain sky high on the products that all of us have to buy.

And is this really the solution to the problem of unemployment in the industry? Isn't it suspicious that the union find themselves on the same side as many manufacturers on this question? After all, the manufacturer is out to make as much profit as possible out of the worker and the worker is out to get as much of that profit as possible back from the employer. In fact, the most enthusiastic support

for the demonstration came from the many small manufacturers in the city who have understood that low import quotas will mean bigger profits for them.

First of all, it's important to point out that a large percentage of "foreign imports" are in fact produced by companies owned by US manufacturers. Item 807 of the Tariff Schedules of the US provides that American-made articles may be assembled abroad in whole or in part and returned to the US with duty paid only on the value added by foreign labor. This loophole to the import tax has allowed US manufacturers to take advantage of low foreign labor costs and high US prices, reaping super-profits from their operations.

Secondly, it is not at all clear that a stop to imports would lead to more jobs for clothing workers in the US. Stopping imports would in fact stop competition in the clothing market. This would open the door for the manufacturers to set prices very high, and would not necessarily force increased production. The net outcome would be a continued high unemployment of clothing workers in the US and higher prices on clothing for everyone.

AFFECT ON TRADE

Finally, it is important to look at the situation in a broader light. If the US sets low import quotas, this will obviously affect the economies of those foreign countries involved. These countries would not be able to sell their products. They

would be forced to cut back production and would be faced with increased unemployment. Their obvious defense would be to retaliate with similar quotas on US products going into their countries. These quotas would mean that US products won't be sold and their production would be cut back. And there we are back at our starting point: increased unemployment for US workers!

This is exactly what happened in 1969 when the US tried to restrict Japanese imports. Recognizing that such a trade war would be deadly to both economies, the US government was forced to withdraw the restrictions. Clearly then, workers are slitting their own throats by calling for protection of US industry through import restrictions.

So what is the solution to the dilemma? The answer to this question depends on understanding why manufacturers are leaving the big US industrial centers. They are leaving to find cheap, non-union labor. They are finding this labor in two places: 1) in the south and southwest US and 2) abroad, in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and increasingly in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Workers are forced to work for low wages in these countries by anti-labor dictatorships backed up by US wealth and military might. This is the heart of the problem. But neither the ILGWU nor the ACTWU have ever mobilized their memberships to oppose US aid to the corrupt dictatorships of South Korea, Taiwan, or Haiti, to name only a few. The ILGWU is "gung ho" in support of US policy, while the ACTWU registers only token and partial objections.

SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS OVERSEAS

The best protection for workers in the US lies in solidarity with workers abroad, in aiding them in winning better wages, working conditions and democratic rights. Real improvements in their conditions undercut the employer's ability to use cheap labor to the detriment of all workers. Instead of pitting workers of

different nationalities against each other both here and abroad, the unions should be doing:

1) An aggressive campaign to organize the south. While in 1950 only 17% of the apparel industry was in the south, today that figure has jumped to 44%. When the companies run south they are running away from the unions. If the unions are strong everywhere there will be nowhere for the companies to run to.

2) An aggressive campaign to help organizing efforts in those countries which have been singled out by big business as sources of cheap labor. Strong ties must be established with unions abroad.

3) Part of our solidarity with workers overseas must be expressed in an end to US support for anti-labor dictatorships such as in South Korea, Taiwan and Chile.

4) We must push the passage of a law making it necessary for US manufacturers to pay minimum wage to all of its workers, in the US or abroad. This must apply to companies which subcontract work from US manufacturers as well.

5) All tax loopholes must be closed up. The ILGWU and the ACTWU are working to repeal section 807 of the Tariff schedules. This is a step in the right direction.

In the face of the growing crisis in the industry, the apparel unions have abandoned the workers they are supposed to represent and have chosen to join hands in collaboration with the manufacturers. They have undercut the power of organized workers by ignoring the masses of unorganized, and they have pitted American workers against foreign workers. This policy is suicidal for labor.

The only way for us to stop the capitalists from running away from union labor is for all workers to be very clear on their class interests. We must identify *all* workers as our allies. There can be no national boundaries which limit our solidarity, just as there are no boundaries limiting the interests of capital.