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Black Labor in South Africa

At the present time, important changes are taking place in South Africa with regard to the status of black workers. A commission headed by Professor N. J. Wiehan called for the right of black workers to "freedom of association, which, in practice, means that a worker should have the right to join a trade union and that trade unions should have the right to organize among workers" and "the right of trade unions to bargain collectively with their employers on wages and other conditions of service" as well as "the right to withhold labor, that is the right of workers to strike."

Rejecting the previous legislation which confined black workers to the most menial of occupations, Professor Wiehan called for "The right to be trained." He urged that "blacks be allowed to receive apprenticeship training in white areas" and also urged that "the elements of racial discrimination, where they exist in the social security legislation of the Workmen's Compensation and Unemployment Insurance, be removed and that the social security laws be made applicable to workers of all populations."

The recommendations of the Wiehan Commission have been accepted by the South African Government and most recommendations have already been implemented in law.

There are some who argue that this change in the law marks an important step forward for a future South Africa in which men and women will be treated equally, regardless of race. Others, however, charge that such changes are simply superficial and do not, in reality, change the degraded status of blacks. Political power, such critics point out, remains solely in the hands of whites.

In October, 1979, the editors of THE LINCOLN REVIEW interviewed Mrs. Lucy Mvubelo, one of South Africa's most prominent black labor leaders. She was visiting the United States to share with Americans her own perspective about the future of her country.

Mrs. Mvubelo is the General Secretary of the National Union of