



PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EFFECT OF THE  
"STATE OF CRISIS" ON LABOUR IN THE EAST  
LONDON AREA

Bew "Z"

TO:- UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT:  
DETAINEES SUPPORT COMMITTEE  
DETAINEES PARENTS SUPPORT COMMITTEE  
SOUTH AFRICAN ALLIED WORKERS UNION  
AND BORDER REGION SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMUNITY  
RESEARCH CENTRE AND THE DETAINEES  
SUPPORT COMMITTEE

DATED 27TH SEPTEMBER, 1983

1 INTRODUCTION

The information contained in this report was obtained during the last three (3) weeks from numerous interviews that were conducted in East London with officials from the South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu), organisers from Johnson and Johnson (Pty) Limited, Chloride Consolidated Textile Mill (Pty) Ltd, Wilson Rowntrees (Pty) Ltd, workers from Car Distributors Assembly (Pty) Ltd, Descom representatives, Roman Catholic priests, people from the Institute of Race Relations complaints service, Health Care Trust, the Industrial Health Research Group and Community Organisations.

This report will relate the attitudes and actions of management in the Border region as experienced by the South African Allied Workers Union and Allied organisations. It will also deal very briefly with the context in which these actions and

attitudes/...

attitudes have arisen. Specific details about the boycott, curfew, the "stadium" vigilantes, torture, intimidation and detention will not be dealt with in this preliminary report as they will be canvassed in a more detailed later report by Fink Hayson.

2 BACKGROUND

THE BUS BOYCOTT

The bus boycott of the residents of Mdantsane has resulted in most workers using trains to travel to work. The boycott is still almost 100% successful, in spite of the brutal actions of the police and their vigilante counterparts. Residents who have sufficient money use taxis to get to and from East London.

CURFEW

There is presently a curfew in operation in Mdantsane between 22h30 and 04h00. People who break the curfew are immediately arrested and taken to the Sisa Dukase Stadium where they are tortured. At one stage there were over 800 people in jail for breaking the curfew.

The effect of the curfew on workers is great. Before the curfew was introduced workers using trains would get up at approximately 03h00 to have enough time to walk to the station to catch the first train at 04h30.

Since/...

since the introduction of the curfew workers have been unable to catch the 04h30 train and now have to catch the next train at 05h25. This results in some workers arriving late for work.

#### ROAD BLOCKS AND SPOT SEARCHES

There are numerous road blocks and spot searches of commuters during which reference books, citizenship cards and Ciskei National Independence Party Cards are demanded. Ciskei police and vigilantes have in the past few weeks stopped demanding reference books from people in the Ciskei as it was brought to their attention that the Ciskei is an independent country and therefore South African reference books are unnecessary.

If the person searched does not have any of these documents or has not paid taxes to the Ciskei government, that person is immediately arrested and in many cases assaulted. One person was very badly assaulted for not having given the required contribution to the statute of Lennox Sebe. These searches and assaults are not the exception, but common practice.

As a result of this intimidation and harassment workers often arrive late for work and on occasions when they are kept in detention by the police or the vigilantes, they do not arrive at work at all.

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#### RESPONSE OF MANAGEMENT OF GOMPO TRANSPORT AND CISKEI GOVERNMENT

The bus company involved in the boycott is Gompo Transport. The Ciskei Government is a shareholder in this company which has suffered huge financial losses due to the bus boycott. Gompo Transport resorted to placing full page advertisements in in/...

the local newspaper, the Daily Dispatch calling on employers in the East London area to persuade their workers to use the buses. The advertisements pointed out that production targets were not being met because workers were arriving late for work as a result of the boycott.

The advertisements were supplemented by an airborne campaign in which loads of pamphlets were dropped from a Ciskei government aeroplane calling on workers to use the buses.

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ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OF COMPANIES IN THE BORDER REGION

Companies have reacted in various ways to the bus boycott and the general state of emergency in the Ciskei.

The major reaction has been neither positive or negative. We say this because we received no reports of any companies actually assisting workers in their struggles. Employers did not:

- \* provide transport to and from work in spite of the boycott
- \* make any funds available to help the workers over these times.
- \* make any overt protestations at the events that took place and are taking place at Sisa
- \* Dukase Stadium nor at the atrocities committed by the Ciskei police and vigilantes on workers.

On the other hand, they have not dismissed workers for arriving late and those that have been detained have not as yet lost their jobs.

In essence it is "business as usual" for most East London companies. For example recognition agreements

continue/...

~~continue~~ to be negotiated with Saawu in spite of the fact that three of the four Saawu negotiators are either in detention or in hiding.

Most of the Industrial workforce in East London operates on a clock card system and are hourly paid. Therefore if a worker arrives late then his or her wages are adjusted accordingly. There are exceptions to the above, which will now be dealt with in detail.

THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES ARE REPORTED TO HAVE REACTED NEGATIVELY

JOHNSON AND JOHNSON  
Voortrekker Road East London P O Box 227, East London.  
Johnson and Johnson is a company which manufactures toilet goods such as baby powder, skin moisturising oils, ear buds etc.

At present the workers at J & J are organised by Saawu with whom the company has a recognition agreement. In the initial stages of the bus boycott, management was approached by the union who informed them of the situation in Mdantsane. The union requested management to understand the workers' situation and not to take action against workers who arrived late for work through no fault of their own.

Although management was initially understanding it has now started to issue complaint forms to workers who are late. The first warning is a verbal one. This is followed by a written warning. The worker then receives a final warning. The next time a complaint is issued against a worker he or she is dismissed. Each warning or complaint is valid for one year after which it expires. Thus if a worker is late four times in one year, he or she will be dismissed.

To date no one has been dismissed but since there is no end in sight to the bus boycott, workers could soon be losing their jobs.

It must be noted however that the management at J&J are at this stage keeping the jobs of detained workers open.

CONSOLIDATED TEXTILE MILL (CTM) Phillip Frane Road,  
East London

This factory is well known for its repressive labour practices in East London. The company has repeatedly refused to negotiate with Saawu on the basis that Saawu does not have a majority in the factory. Saawu claims in fact to have approximately 2600 members out of a total workforce of 4800. Management states that they will only negotiate with the other Union at the plant, namely the Textile and Allied Workers Union (Tawu) a Tucsa affiliate.

We were informed by CTM workers that if a worker wishes to leave Tawu for Saawu that worker is dismissed from the Company. It is also reported that it is extremely rare for the company to employ a Saawu member in the first place.

The personnel manager at the factory is a Mr Coetzee who is an ex-policeman. Workers have reported the presence of security police at the plant and on one occasion, during a raid on the Saawu offices, the police informed Saawu officials that they had been informed by Mr Coetzee of alleged Saawu intimidation of workers at CTM. However no charges or arrests have been made in this respect. During this visit, the security police informed the union that they had been told that Boysi Melifata (an organiser at CTM) was the man to get. Boysi Melifata was detained on 17th August and is still in detention.

CTM/...

CTM workers have reported that any queries or complaints about wages or work conditions are referred to Mr Coetzee who threatens the worker with immediate dismissal. This threat effectively puts an end to any complaints which a worker wishes to make.

We handled the complaints of three dismissed workers from C.T.M. On their dismissal they did not receive their accrued leave pay or their notice pay. Four days later they were rehired in another department without being given the leave pay etc owing to them. The workers said that if they complained to Mr Coetzee they would be dismissed and therefore they were prepared to forfeit their leave and notice pay rather than complain.

We were informed by Saawu officials that this procedure of firing, hiring and loss of benefits is common practice at CTM

CTM'S attitude to the boycott is a harsh one. Workers who arrive late are either dismissed and told to "go and see Gqweta" or workers lose time. In other words they are told to go home and come back the next day.

Saawu members at CTM say that their homes are often raided by Ciskei security police. They also say that during these raids they have seen lists from which the Ciskei police operate containing the names and addresses of Saawu members employed at CTM.

Members' houses are thoroughly searched and people are intimidated and often assaulted. On occasions these Saawu members have been taken to the Sisa Dukasa stadium and tortured there. Saawu members from CTM who get detained are immediately dismissed on their return to work.

WILSON/...

WILSON ROWNTREE, 94 St Pauls Road, East London

We were informed by officials of Saawu that they had been told that the management of Wilson Rowntree intends introducing a system whereby any worker who arrives late three times is dismissed. This system has however not yet come into operation and to date no one has been dismissed.

KAFFRAIRIAN STEAM MILL (PTY) LTD. 5 Dyer Street, East London

Workers at KSM report that they have been threatened with dismissal when they have arrived late. However to date no worker has been dismissed for arriving late as a result of the boycott.

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CONSEQUENCES OF DISMISSAL FOR WORKERS IN THE BORDER AREA

Saawu members who lose their jobs are visited at their homes very soon after they have been dismissed. Their houses are searched and the necessary documents for "survival" are demanded. Rent is always demanded before the 7th of each month. If the worker cannot afford to pay rent, the worker and his family are immediately evicted.

No leaway or understanding is shown by the Ciskei authorities. Consequently large numbers of dismissed workers approach Saawu for financial assistance. Saawu pays their rents and gives as much assistance as possible to enable the worker and his/her family to keep the house.

Dismissal is clearly linked to the issue of unemployment Insurance. Certain Unions in East London have been organising around this issue in recent months. However the problem of UIF is still unresolved.

Workers/...

Workers from the Ciskei or any other "independent state" are endorsed back to the rural area from which they were originally recruited. They are therefore only allowed to apply for the return of their unemployment contributions once they have returned to the area in which they live.

Other workers working in East London who live in Mdantsane are told to go and apply for the return of their contributions in the Ciskei. It is common practice for applicants for UIF to wait for at least six months before they receive payments. Consequently people do not pursue their UIF claims as they prefer to go and look for new jobs. It is clear that workers rarely receive the money that they were forced to contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

Certain unions have requested the Department of Manpower in East London to arrange for the repayment of contributions in East London to dismissed workers. This request has been refused and the Department of Manpower has stated that the money will be sent to the Bantustans and that workers must go home to apply for their money.

Furthermore this procedure is not made easier by many companies who do not give the necessary UIF contributor's card (blue card) to workers when they are dismissed. It is extremely difficult for workers to receive repayments without submitting their blue card.

Workers are not receiving their rights as far as pensions and workers compensation are concerned, however these issues do not fall within the scope of this report and consequently will not be dealt with.

INTIMIDATION/...

INTIMIDATION AND HARRASSMENT OF SAAWU MEMBERS

Apart from acts of intimidation such as dismissals curfew, evictions, roadblocks etc, there has been a concerted campaign to crush and intimidate Saawu membership.

Since the banning of Saawu, there have been countless door to door searches. The door is banged upon and when opened the occupants of the house are assaulted and the house ransacked in search of anything that will connect the occupants to Saawu. Searches and interrogations are done systematically zone by zone.

If people are found to be connected with Saawu they are taken to the stadium for torture and further interrogation.

Saawu members who have been living in Mdantsane for years are finding that their residential qualifications are now being investigated by the Ciskei authorities. One Saawu member stated that she bought a house three years ago and has always made regular payments. She has now been told to vacate her house as she does not qualify to live in Mdantsane.

People wearing Saawu T-Shirts in the streets are beaten up and detained.

Security police are deliberately delaying workers who are members of Saawu, realising that it will in all likelihood cause the dismissal of that particular worker. There is continual harrassment of the Saawu offices in East London which are visited on average once a week by the security police. In a visit two weeks ago, South African security police told Saawu of "the great white army of South Africa" and that they (Saawu) must stop the boycott.

Saawu officials and their families have received many death threats. Due to these threats plus the threat of detention, Saawu officials who have not yet been detained have not slept at home for many months.

SUPPORT FOR WORKERS IN THE EAST LONDON AREA

Very little support has been received from organisations in the East London area with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore the issue has received very little press coverage in the Daily Dispatch although it is hoped that this will improve.

Saawu officials say that they have received very little medical or legal support from doctors and lawyers in the area. Their own lawyer, Hintsia Siwisa is currently in detention.

The main needs expressed by Saawu and Allied organisations are education and funds. With regard to EDUCATION, Saawu has expressed a vital need for educative seminars on the topics of labour and security.

With regard to funds Saawu is paying people's rents subsidising funerals of people killed in recent weeks and also paying for the people's transport costs. There is thus a vital need for funds by Saawu and allied organisations.

CONCLUSION

The response of the Mdantsane residents to the state of martial law and the oppression from the authorities is impressive. Trains from Mdantsane to East London are packed with workers singing their resistance. Saawu has stated that the people are more unified than ever before and that their membership is increasing daily.

The Saawu office is always packed with workers and the complaints service continues to operate at full capacity. Furthermore second level leadership and/...

and organisation has greatly increased in response to the circumstances under which the Union and allied organisations are forced to operate.

In the words of a Saawu official, "the people realise that their strength lies in their unity, in fact the authorities have unified the working class and consciousness is higher than ever before!"

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