

# FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



MAY 1984 NUMBER 29

**FOR the first time for many years, workers in South Africa held major celebrations for May Day – Workers' Day.**

They joined millions of workers in countries around the world.

The May Day meetings and campaigns are clearly a sign that the worker movement in South Africa is growing in strength.

For, in the past when workers' organisations have been weak, May Day has been forgotten.

The last major May Day celebrations in South Africa were way back in the 1950's.

The growth of independent unions starting in 1973, has taught workers that strength lies in unity.

Now, those unions are working towards forming an

meeting, the general secretary of the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, John Erntzen said the union movement was growing and would become a powerful voice in the country.

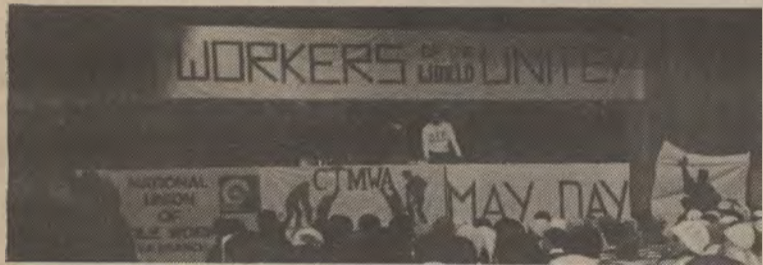
The assistant general secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union, Edison Steven explained the history of May Day and spoke of the importance of contact between workers and unions of different countries.

'The same companies are operating around the world,' he said, 'and they do the same things to workers'.

He told the meeting of how Australian companies had moved their operations to Taiwan where the wages were low and where there were no unions



(Above) Workers at Hart in Durban celebrate May Day – the majority of them wore stickers. (Below) A worker hands out May Day pamphlets outside the Frametex mill.



even greater unity – a new super federation.

To prove that this unity will not be just words, the unions involved in the unity talks decided to jointly organise May Day celebrations.

In Cape Town more than 3 000 workers – some from as far as George and Tulbagh – crammed into a local hall on May 1 to express solidarity.

And in Natal, thousands of workers wore May Day stickers and handed out pamphlets explaining the origins of May Day in the factories.

Opening the Cape Town

In the same way, he said, South African companies were moving their factories to Transkei, Bophuthatswana and other border areas.

Speaking about the new federation the national treasurer of the General Workers Union, Moses Mbotwe said it would realise the old ideal of uniting the working class.

'Building the federation is like building a house – its foundations are in the factories,' he said.

Virginia Engel, the branch secretary of the National Union of Textile Workers

spoke about the government's new deal.

She said a vote for the new parliaments would be a vote for apartheid, for the unjust war on the border and for the 'same rotten deal' that working people were now experiencing.

'We can have no part in this new face of apartheid,' she said, 'We can have no part in making exploitation and oppression work better'.

In Natal, the May Day campaign began by joint-union meetings of shop stewards in all the locals where unity and the history of May Day were discussed.

Shop stewards were asked to hold meetings in their factories to explain May Day and to hand out pamphlets and stickers.

On May 1, workers in Pietermaritzburg, Hammarsdale, Pinetown and Durban all wore May Day stickers as a symbol of unity with workers in South Africa and workers in the rest of the world.

This May Day has re-awakened an old workers' tradition in South Africa – workers have begun to consider how best the worker movement should mark this important day of international worker solidarity.



# MAY DAY UNITY



# May Day – workers' special day started over a hundred years ago but the tradition lives on

IT is usual in South Africa to celebrate a number of days as public holidays, for example Founders' Day, Good Friday, Republic Day, Day of the Vow. These days are chosen by the government. There are also a number of other days chosen by organisations opposed to the present government which are usually commemorated by holding meetings and issuing publications. Examples of these are Sharpeville Day, June 16, Women's Day, October 19 and Hero's Day. But of all these days there is only one that is specially for the working class and that is May Day – May 1.

Internationally, May Day is more than a century old. In South Africa, too, it has a long tradition. In the past when the working class has been strong and well organised, May Day, has been recognised as a holiday by the current South African government, or workers, have simply taken the day off. But when the workers have been weak and disorganised May Day has been suppressed by the government and neglected by opposition political organisations. Today as the working class is mobilising again and building stronger organisation, May Day is once again being taken up as an important day in the workers' struggle. It is a time for expressing working class demands and uniting workers in a show of international working class solidarity.

## The Origin of May Day

May Day began in Australia on May 1, 1856 when workers held a work stoppage and meetings aimed at limiting working time to eight hours per day. Entertainment was also arranged to celebrate the day as a workers' holiday. Due to its popularity it was decided to continue celebrating May Day every year.

By 1886 the idea spread to America when the workers of Chicago, demanding the establishment of an eight-hour day, came out in huge demonstrations on May 1. Many strikes broke out throughout the town where employers refused to meet workers' demands. Armed police attacked striking workers and killed eleven. The American government tried to suppress the demand for the eight-hour day but the American workers extended their organisation and planned for an even greater demonstration in 1890.

Meanwhile, workers in other parts of the world were mounting campaigns for the eight-hour day. In France in particular, in 1888, workers in 50 industrial cities sent delegations to the local town halls on May 1, demanding a reduction of their working hours.

Encouraged by workers' response, the French worker leaders decided to raise the issue at the International Workers' Congress in 1889. They introduced a resolution calling on workers to display their solidarity 'simultaneously in all countries on a given day', May 1. This was accepted.

The following year work stopped on May Day in 138 French cities and a few mining areas; in some Italian cities workers marched in procession through



A May Day meeting at the Johannesburg City Hall steps in 1931 (Pic: The Star)

the streets; demonstrations also took place in Britain, Sweden, Portugal, Catalonia, Warsaw and Lodz. A few days later over 100 000 workers demonstrated in London. In Australia there were huge demonstrations and in Germany public meetings were held.

And so in 1890 May Day was born. It has continued to be celebrated in many countries around the world. Its significance has become broader than the struggle for the eight-hour day.

## May Day Comes to South Africa

A May Day meeting was first suggested in South Africa by the Johannesburg and District Trades Council at a meeting in February 1895. It was agreed to hold May Day on May 1 that year.

But it was not until May 1, 1904 that May Day was really taken up and a demonstration

and procession organised. The celebration was organised by the Rand and Pretoria Trades Councils, the Transvaal Miners' Association and 14 societies, among them the Social Democratic Organisation. These were all white workers, bringing socialist ideas with them from Europe.

On Sunday afternoon May 1 workers gathered at Von Brandis Square in Johannesburg. The organisers trotted up and down on horse-back with huge red sashes across their chests as the whole gathering of about 2 000 marched off with banners, floats and singing, down Commissioner Street to the dusty Market Square in front of the Johannesburg Post Office.

Two trek wagons were drawn up to be used as platforms for the speakers, one for English and the other for various other Eur-

opean language-groups. There was a big display of red badges and ribbons, the colour of socialism.

## May Day in South Africa: A Workers' Tradition

This was the start of May Day in South Africa. It continued to be celebrated each year. In Durban in 1909, a crowd of over 5 000 marched from Albert Park to Ocean Beach where speeches were made. Speakers urged people to support the Natal government rail workers strike which was on the go. A Mr Knowles encouraged women to 'form an organisation to help the workers' union.' He said they should refuse to dance or play tennis with the men until the men were in the fighting line of the political army of workers.

May Day celebrations died down after this meeting but they

were again revived after the First World War. 1919 was the first year that black workers celebrated May Day. However, in the early 1930's, the conservative craft unions barred black workers from their May Day meetings. From hereon there were two May Day meetings – one for the registered unions and an 'unofficial' mass meeting of both black and white militants organised by the Communist Party. In 1936, with the formation of the United May Day Committee in Cape Town, South Africa had its first really representative non-racial May Day.

Interest in May Day once again decreased during the Second World War but revived again in 1946, reaching its peak in 1950. This year the Communist Party and some ANC members organised a national stay-at-home in a demonstration against the Suppression of Communism Bill. In spite of police harassment and promises of protection for those who went to work, the stay-at-home was 80 percent successful. Rioting began when police charged 500 demonstrators in Benoni. In Alexandra township a crowd was fired on and a cinema burnt down. In Sophiatown crowds were also shot at. At the end of the day 18 people were dead and 30 seriously wounded. May Day continued to be celebrated during the 1950's, but with worker organisations banned and growing government repression, interest was declining. By 1961, the government took steps against May Day itself by excluding it from wage determinations and industrial council agreements.

## May Day Celebrated Again

The worker movement in South Africa has rapidly been growing stronger since the forming of the independent trade unions in the 1970's. May Day is once again being celebrated and is likely to become a significant day for expressing the interests of the working class of South Africa.



Workers at the 1950 May Day rally protest against the Group Areas and the Anti-Communist Bills (Pic: The Guardian)



# The fight for higher wages in the metal industry is on

THE battle for higher wages and better working conditions for the metal industry's 380 000 workers has started again.

And once again as the biggest representative of unskilled workers, the Metal and Allied Workers Union is in the centre of it.

The first meeting of the industry's industrial council was held on April 10 in Johannesburg.

And as was to be expected, the metal employers, represented by SEIFSA, rejected most of the demands put forward by the unions.

But it is still early days and worker pressure on employers is likely to increase.

At the end of the day, SEIFSA was only prepared to offer a 12c increase on the minimum wage which would bring it up to R1,65 an hour — a long way off MAWU's demand of R2,50 an hour.

Speaking for the employers, Mr Sam van Coller said the important thing was for the metal industry to be more competitive so that South African companies could compete against companies overseas.

He said SEIFSA was committed to improving the standard of living of workers — but workers must get the better standard of living through increases based on merit and promotion.

Responding to MAWU's demand for a 40-hour working week, Mr van Coller said that the length of the working week could not be reduced because there was a shortage of skilled workers — so cutting normal hours would only force factories to work more overtime.

On the union's demand for compulsory access when a union has over 50 percent membership, he said that the relationship between a union and the company

had to be built voluntarily.

He added that SEIFSA was strongly opposed to the principle of the union representing the majority of the workers being the only representative in a factory.

Mr van Coller said that severance pay could not be discussed at these negotiations — it must be negotiated at plant level.

He also rejected the union's request for 30-days notice of termination of service because, he said, this would hurt the workers as they would have to wait a month before they could resign to take better jobs.

MAWU's president, Jeffrey Vilane, in a hard-hitting attack on the employers, said only workers could decide what was enough for a living wage.

He said that the R2,50 an hour minimum (R112,50 per week) that MAWU was demanding was only the first step towards a living wage.

He said workers could not depend on overtime to get enough money.

'They must get a living wage and they must get a shorter working week, so that they have enough time for themselves and so there is more work for more workers,' Brother Vilane said.

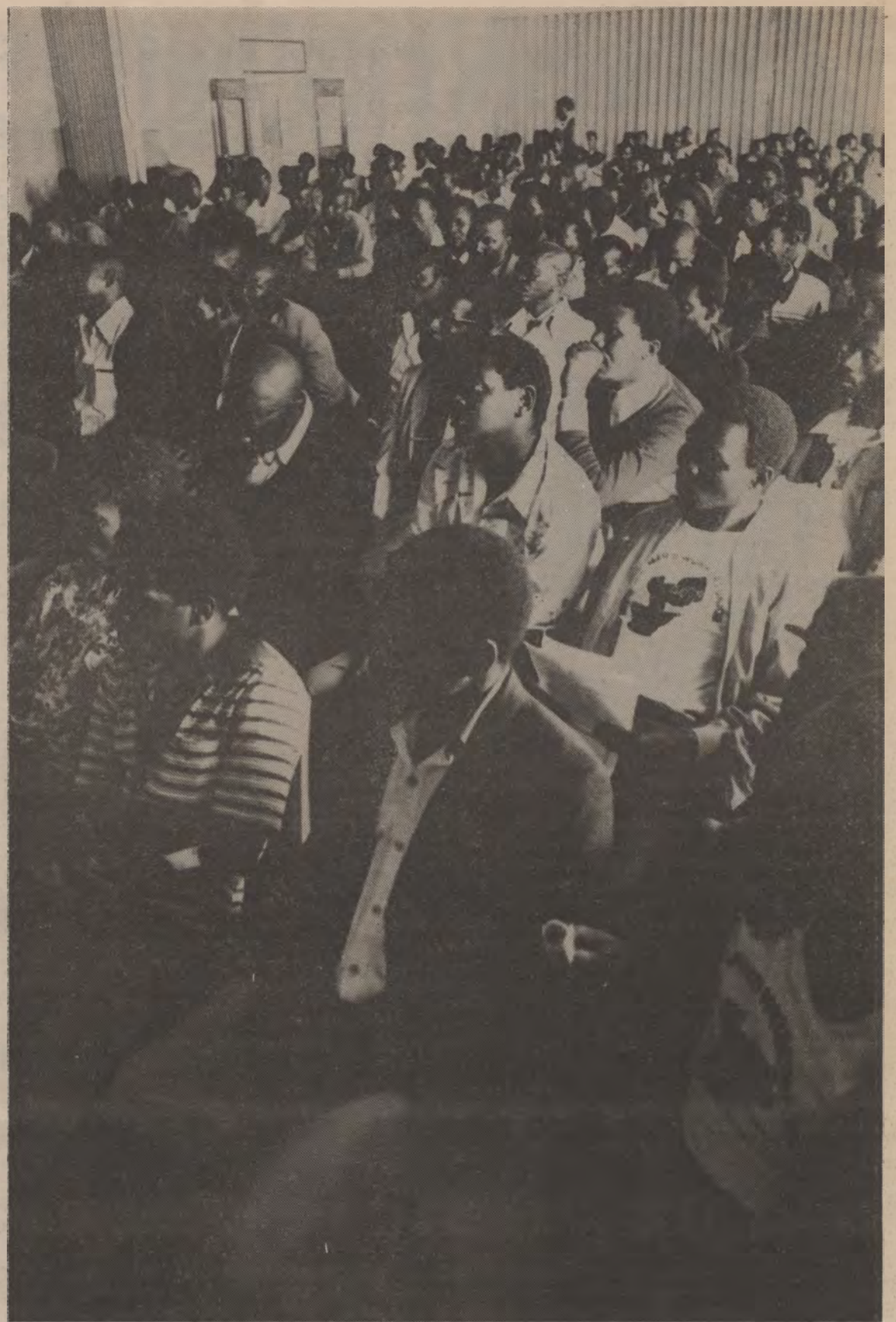
He said it was not true that workers resign — they are dismissed.

'The employers don't want to give a month's notice because they want to dismiss workers immediately.'

All the unions at the meeting rejected SEIFSA's offer and it was decided to hold a further meeting on May 1.

Shortly after the industrial council meeting, MAWU shop stewards from SEIFSA factories throughout the country overwhelmingly rejected the employers' wage offer.

At meetings in the different



Metal workers listen carefully to a report back on the industrial council negotiations at a Durban meeting.

locals the shop stewards mandated the negotiating team to continue to push for a more reasonable wage offer.

The shop stewards also rejected SEIFSA's demand for separate negotiations for the foundries and the companies which make agricultural tools.

The second meeting of the industrial council began with the employers making their 'final wage offer'.

They offered a 15c wage increase on the bottom grades — 3c up on their original offer.

However, at the end of the day, SEIFSA increased this final offer by another 2c on all the grades — this would bring the minimum wage rate up to R1,70 an hour.

SEIFSA also offered to increase the leave bonus and to give workers an extra week's leave in their fifth year of service instead of only in their sixth.

In addition, the metal employers have also agreed to give compulsory stop order rights to all unions on the industrial council.

And for those unions not on the industrial council, if the employer agrees to give stop orders they will not have to apply for an exemption from the council.

Previously, if metal employers wanted to give stop order rights to a union which was not a member of the industrial council, they would have to apply for an exemption — a problem MAWU often faced before it

joined the council.

Once again MAWU demanded to take these wage offers back to its membership and it was agreed to hold another meeting on May 15.

At this stage all the unions are united and they, (including the craft unions) have agreed not to sign an agreement with SEIFSA until the employers agree to a satisfactory minimum wage rate.

At last year's wage negotiations, the craft unions sold out MAWU by signing an agreement with SEIFSA which was clearly not acceptable to the industry's unskilled workers.

It remains to be seen how far the craft unions will maintain this united front with the other unions.

## Big profits made while workers suffer

IN 1983, the companies in the metal industry told the unions that they would make very little money and therefore could not afford to give big increases.

But now the company annual reports coming out show that the companies made very big profits.

It is true that some small companies closed down because of the recession.

It is also true that in general profits were less than in 1982, but that it is only because 1981 and 1982 were record

years because of the boom in the economy.

The metal industry in South Africa is completely dominated by a few very big companies.

These big companies are responsible for more than 70 percent of the employment and more than 80 percent of the total production in the metal industry.

Here are some examples of the profits which they have made in 1983. (And remember, there are many ways in which companies can hide profits, so they may

have made more.)

Altech	R71,6m	(R54,5m)
Altran	R71,7m	(R54,5m)
Powertech	R13,3m	(R12,5m)
Scottish Cables	R1,7m	(R8,0m)
Anglo American	R200,5m	(R244m)
Scaw Metals	R56,4m	(R63,5m)
Highveld Steel	R63,6m	(R46m)
Boart Metals	R55,2m	(R50,1m)
Asea	R12,3m	(R11,1m)
Haggie Rand	R50,4m	(R55,5m)
Barlows Engineering	R80m	(R90m)

All the profits above are in

millions of Rand and in all cases, apart from Anglo and Barlows, are the profits before tax — the figure in brackets is the profits for 1982.

Most of the companies made these profits with fewer workers than in previous years.

At the same time these big companies are getting even bigger.

Anglo American Corporation last year controlled 51 percent of all the assets listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

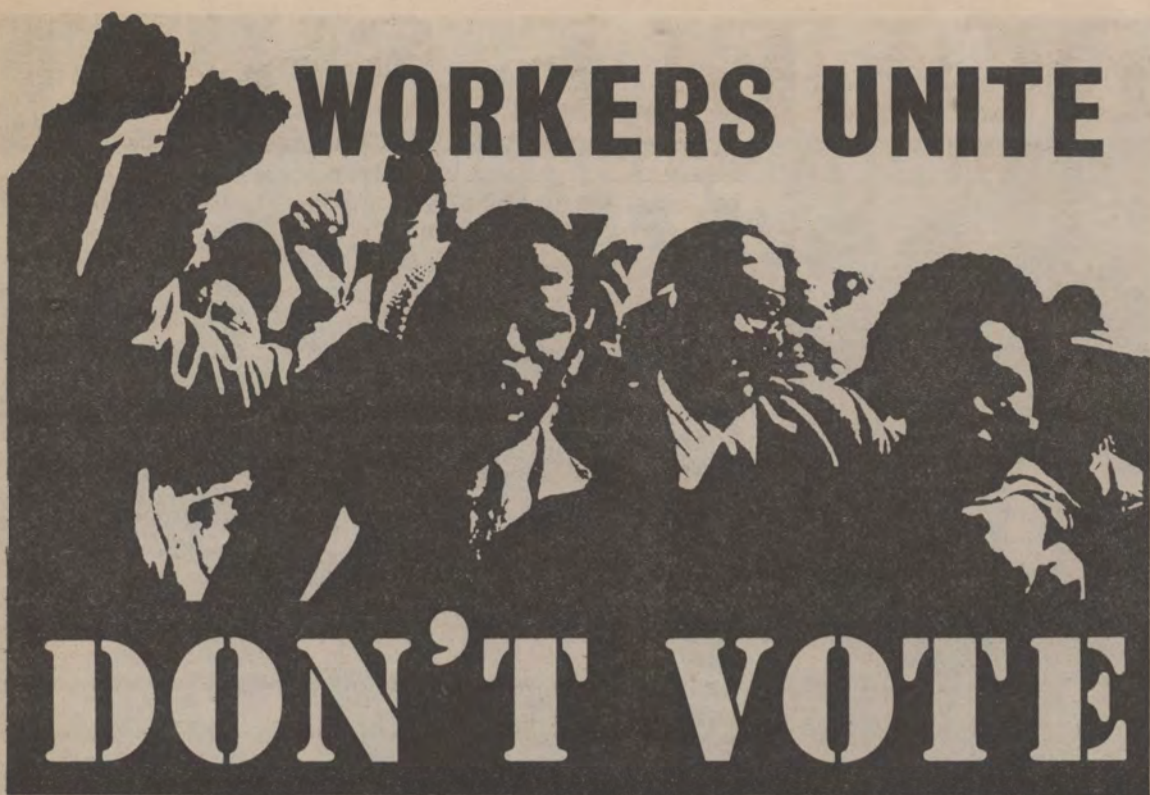
This year they control 54 percent — more than half of the whole economy.

So when companies say they are suffering because of the recession — they are talking nonsense!

There are no shareholders whose children are starving and directors of big companies get bonuses (in the form of shares) worth hundreds of thousands of Rand.

Workers don't get these profits or these bonuses — but their families are starving.





**UNDER the slogan 'Workers Unite - Don't Vote', FOSATU has launched its campaign against the August elections.**

In August, so-called coloureds and Indians are due to go to the polls to elect people to represent them in the two new puppet parliaments

Once again FOSATU has condemned the constitution which has set up these parliaments as undemocratic racist and anti-worker.

FOSATU will be calling on all workers to stand together against the new constitution.

In a pamphlet which will be widely distributed throughout South Africa FOSATU calls on so-called coloured and Indian voters to boycott the elections and 'unite with the great majority who do not have a vote'.

'Forget those who for their own self seeking reasons are trying to lead us back to apartheid. Without support they cannot govern anything,' the pamphlet says.

The pamphlet also tackles the major arguments that have been put forward by the 'sell-out' leaders.

In response to their saying that the time for boycott politics has passed, FOSATU says that these people have never been involved in boycott politics.

'The Labour Party entered the Coloured Representative Council, The Solidarity Party and National People's Party leaders sat in the South African Indian Council and on the President's Council.'

'What are these two parliaments but the CRC and the SAIC dressed in new clothes,' the pamphlet says.

It says that a successful boycott needs unity and strength but the 'racial division accepted by these sell-outs can never build unity and strength'.

FOSATU also attacks these people for saying that the Nationalists are changing and that they must make sure that change is in the right direction.

'Where is the real change? The fact is that racism is still the law of the land - we still have the Group Areas, Influx Control, the Immorality and Internal Security Acts.'

FOSATU slams the sell-outs

for saying that once they are inside the system they will use this to negotiate for the African people.

'A minority cannot negotiate for a majority. No minority can be liberated in South Africa if the majority remain oppressed,' the pamphlet says.

FOSATU says that the solution to exploitation and racism, which are part of the social and economic system in South Africa, cannot be negotiated between the strong and the weak.

'The strong know this very well and their aim is to buy allies in the Labour Party and the Solidarity Party so that they can play a game of negotiation that confuses people.'

'The solution to South Africa's problems lies in hard bargaining between strong and strong,' the pamphlet says.

'We must build our strength and not destroy it for fat parliamentary salaries.'

FOSATU calls on people to make their contribution to the struggle for a 'truly democratic South Africa, free of political and economic oppression' - Don't vote!

## Unity going well



TALKS between the six major independent union groupings about the formation of a new federation have been going well. Since the April issue of FOSATU Worker News, two more meetings of the feasibility committee have taken place - one in Durban and the other in Port Elizabeth. After discussions at FOSATU's Central Committee, it was decided to expand the federation's delegation to include representatives from all our affiliates. So a larger FOSATU

delegation went to the Port Elizabeth talks. At the talks, the unions have been discussing, in detail, the possible structures and policies for the new federation. The talks have now reached the stage of drafting a document which could form the basis of the federation's constitution. After it has been drawn up, the draft document will be referred back to the members of the unions involved in the unity talks. (The above picture was taken at the Durban meeting

of the feasibility committee. FOSATU's delegation is in the foreground - (from left) Joe Foster, general secretary; Chris Dlamini, president, Alec Erwin, national education secretary. Sitting next to Brother Foster is the Council of Unions of SA delegation and next to them the Food and Canning Workers Union representatives. To the right of Alec Erwin, the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union delegation can be seen).

## LETTER

The toiling voiceless masses of South Africa - workers and scores of unemployed - once more are compelled to carry the heavy yoke of apartheid on their strengthless shoulders.

Not long ago we were introduced to the new GST which is now 7 percent. Rents have gone up! In fact the whole thing has turned into 'an economic free for all game'. Petrol has gone up! Postage! Coal! Bread! Phones! Hospitals! Milk! Transport! I am sorry I just cannot put everything here but to sum it up, everything borders on insanity! Stark-naked capitalism!

As if the above is not enough, SABC and its cohorts have a nerve to tell us that very soon PEACE and STABILITY will soon be the order of the day in troubled Southern Africa. I do not need to be a guru or a genius to tell fact from fiction. Can there ever be peace and stability when the grassroot problems are simply avoided like poison.

It is a known fact that the vast majority of the people of South Africa have a yearning for peace and stability. Furthermore, our aspirations can only be achieved if the policy of ONE MAN ONE VOTE can be put into effect. We all agree that no matter what, 'Land is a social asset available for use by all members of the society.'

We have recently been fed with a whole load of hogwash under the guise of the Komati Accord. We are given the impression that the very 'champions' of 'peace and stability' (South Africa in this case) has taken great pains and a lot of sacrifices to try and promulgate such a 'mammoth task'. Indeed this is true when they look at things through their own rose-coloured spectacles! But the facts being what they are, this capitalistic regime has bullied Mozambique into agreeing with their preposterous and unreasonable terms.

So long as the people of South Africa, both black and white, do not strive for true freedom, democracy and justice, we will remain chained for the rest of our lives. Let us proceed with the Workers' Struggle!

We as the workers have the power in our hands. We are fortunate enough to have good and unquestionable leadership which we have chosen from amongst ourselves. All that we need now is patience, fortitude and precision to fulfill our aspirations. Unity is of great significance in every organisation. We have it through FOSATU. Confidence and unfailing loyalty are needed to attain our ultimate goal. Let us all work together through FOSATU and prove to all and sundry that it is a workable and independent alternative which serves as a catalyst for all political groups with different views.

Amandla! Ngawethu! Forward with the Workers' Struggle!  
A TRANSVAAL SHOP STEWARD.

Send letters for FOSATU Worker News to: The Editor, FOSATU Worker News, P.O. Box 18109, Dalbridge. 4014. Please keep them short!

## Transpoly pays out R35 000 and takes back half of strikers

TRANSPOLY, a Johannesburg packaging firm, has agreed to take back 32 out of the 72 workers who went on strike at the end of March.

And it will pay the remaining workers R35 000 since they were not being re-instated.

The company reached this agreement in an out-of-court settlement with the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union.

The workers went on strike when management started firing union activists only hours after receiving a letter from the PWAWU asking for recognition.

At the start of the strike, the company called in the police and refused to talk to the union. A union organiser was arrested and charged under the Internal Sec-

urity Act.

But when the union began drawing up legal papers, Transpoly agreed to talk.

During the 18-day strike, workers met every day to keep up their unity. Only two out of 74 broke ranks and returned to work.

In the settlement the company has also agreed to recognise the PWAWU.

The union says 'it is now in a strong position to take the struggle forward'.

Talks have already been held with Transpoly, where the company has agreed to reduce working hours to a reasonable level and to investigate back-pay claims caused by years of underpayment

## Robot on strike!

HAVE you heard management's stories about the beauty of bringing in robots - they never go on strike, demand pay rises, or talk back to management?

Well it's not true!

According to the International Labour Reports, in November 1982 a robot at a jeep plant in Toledo went on strike.

The robot, a spot welder 'grabbed hold of a car's back end and refused to let go'.

It then met the same fate as human strikers often do - someone grabbed a plank and began beating the robot in the hopes it would change its ways.

However, the robot stood firm and management finally

had to shut down the assembly line to pull the plug on the machine.

Talking about robots, a recent survey in Japan reports that between 200 000 and 500 000 workers will have lost their jobs by 1985.

The replacement of workers by robots has hit a number of Japanese unions so hard that they face bankruptcy.

Some unions are arguing that management should pay union dues for the robots in order to keep the union's on their financial feet.

Imagine a union full of robots! What would that do to the worker struggle?



# WOMEN'S DOUBLE SHIFT

FIRST of all we wish to make everyone aware of the differences between a black working woman and a white working woman. They do a double shift.

This is what life is like for a black working woman:

She gets up early in the morning and is up until late at night. Doing what?

She starts by preparing a fire to warm up water for washing the family. No electricity means more work! Thereafter she prepares breakfast — which is only bread and tea and nothing better because of low wages. When the water is warm, she washes the smaller children and dresses them before giving them their tea and bread. She has to leave for work before they go to school. How can she ensure that her children are at school? She still has to prepare herself for work and make sure she's there on time.

With townships being far from the industrial areas, she has to travel for at least an hour or so. This means a lot of her time is spent travelling. Because of problems with public transport, she sometimes gets to work a few minutes late. Then there is the employer who will not even listen to the woman's reasons for being late — she gets threatened with reprimands and dismissals.

Already her day is spoiled. Out of depression she'll lose concentration which affects her work. And she will still be blamed by the employer. As if this is not enough, the employer makes it a point that he sits on the woman's back the whole day, pushing her around — 'kom, kom, kom, kom', 'do this', 'do that', 'go there', 'quick!' On top of this women continually experience



sexual harassment.

Women suppress their anger because they need to keep their jobs — they think of all the mouths to feed at home. If their anger shows, and they try and demand human respect, then they will pay. This shows that the employer has no respect for a black woman! Can you imag-

ine this happening to a white woman? No, way!

The poor black woman got up two of three hours before her employer even thought of getting up. Her day will be even longer if she is forced to do compulsory overtime — but she will still be bossed around for the whole day. Management does

Problems being faced by women workers are beginning to be taken up by FOSATU unions. To start off with the unions have been tackling the problem of maternity, but this is not the only issue which women workers feel strongly about. Here Kate Sibiyi, a shop steward at Auto-plastics near Pretoria, discusses the 'double shift' which most women workers have to work. She suggests some demands which could be put to employers in order to ease the burden carried by black women workers. Next month FOSATU Worker News will carry an article on maternity.

not realise that by doing this he is making the black woman stubborn. He thinks he is killing the woman's pride whereas without the black woman in the factory he is unable to do anything for himself. He even prefers to have black women in the factory because he pays them less than the men. In other words he is saving by employing black women. Employers mustn't think that we do not see this, we realise it very well.

When her miserable day has ended at the factory, the black woman is left with the long journey home. As soon as she arrives she has to start a

different job — preparing food for the family. Whilst the food is being cooked she must tidy the house and wash the children. Sometimes the children even fall asleep before the food is ready. Can children who go to sleep with empty stomachs be healthy? The next thing the child is sick. The woman goes to the employer to ask for a day off to take the child to the doctor. She gets words like 'You must choose! Your job or your children! I can't have this! Every month you come with child stories. I'm letting you go today, but next time — you're out!'

## DEMANDS:

- \* The employer should ensure that all employees are paid the rate for the job. No wages should fall below a living wage of R3,50 per hour.
- \* No overtime should be compulsory — compulsory overtime means three shifts. This does not mean all women do not want overtime — they may need the money just like men. Women are not all in the same position. Overtime should be voluntary not compulsory.
- \* Employers should ensure that sexual harassment is not condoned. If it occurs then disciplinary action should follow

## immediately.

- \* Employers should realise that women do a double shift — at home and at work — and that she is continually torn between employer and family. These problems should be valid reasons in disciplinary hearings.
- \* Employers should give low interest loans to all employees to help them buy electricity for their homes. Workers should not be expected to put down a deposit because low wages mean they cannot afford these. It costs R700 to install lights and plugs — it cost a lot more for hot-water geyser.

## Manager gets final warning?

A MANAGER getting a final warning? Never!

Well, it did happen.

Recently at Plate Glass at Germiston, two Indian workers joined the Chemical Workers Industrial Union.

However, they did not get the wage increases that were recently won by union shop stewards.

So, the shop stewards took it up with the personnel director who said he would phone up their department manager to find out what had happened.

He did this, but some time later the department manager called the two workers into his office.

Senior shop steward, Baznaar Moloi said the manager had said to them that now they were members of the union, he was going to treat them as members of the union.

He told them that as members of the union, they would have to have clock cards and would have to start work at 7.30 and finish at 5, Brother Moloi said.

The two workers reported this victimisation to the shop stewards who then called a meeting of all the workers.

Brother Moloi said the two workers had reported what had

happened to the general meeting and one of them had said that he had been told by this manager that he was to be dismissed.

'This was a clear violation of company policy that workers are allowed to join the union of their choice and on top of this it was a racist attack,' Brother Moloi said.

Workers at this meeting said that the manager should resign.

A further meeting was held over lunchtime with the workers in the same department as the two workers and they all said they would not go back to work while the manager was still there, Brother Moloi said.

Soon after this, the rest of the workforce joined in and refused to go back until he had been removed.

Talks were held between top management and shop stewards and it was finally decided that the department manager be given a six month warning and that should he do the same thing again he would be immediately dismissed.

Satisfied with this, the workers then returned to work.

Since then the manager has written an apology to all the workers at the plant.

## Eastern Cape companies pressurized to meet the needs of communities

IN the Eastern Cape, FOSATU has established a Community Action Programme with the aim of pressurizing companies to help meet the needs of their workers' communities.

The Community Action Programme (CAP) was originally started by the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union but it was decided at the end of last year to revive the programme and involve all the FOSATU unions in the region.

CAP is chaired by NAAWU's president, Jury Harris, and involves shop stewards from all the FOSATU factories in the area.

At the VW factory in Uitenhage, the shop stewards decided to tackle the part of the budget that the company sets aside for the community every year.

Chairman of the VW branch, John Gomomo said the shop stewards gave VW a list of priorities which workers felt that this

money should go to.

One of these priorities was the child care centres for retarded children both in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage.

Brother Gomomo said CAP had investigated the needs of the child care centres and it was found that the social workers badly needed transport.

'We then took this back to VW, who agreed to donate a car plus R500,' Brother Gomomo said.



VW hands over the car to be used by a social worker working in community child care centres — on the left are NAAWU's full time shop stewards at the Uitenhage factory.



# PART SIX: GOLD MINING BEGINS

# The making of the WORKING CLASS

IN 1886, two gold prospectors – Harrison and Walter were given permission to dig for gold on the farm of Langlaagte on the Witwatersrand. It soon became clear that the Rand was one of the richest gold producing areas in the world. Thousands of white diggers rushed in to try their luck. Hundreds of mining companies were formed.

To begin with many of the companies were quite small. But within ten years this had begun to change. The first gold to be mined was on the surface of the ground, but this was just the top of the reef inside which the gold bearing rock was to be found. The rest of the reef sloped deeply underground. To mine this gold deep shafts had to be sunk thousands of metres deep. This needed advanced machinery and lots of money (capital). Also the companies were never certain how rich any particular bit of the reef would be in gold as this varied a great deal. So to raise the capital they needed and to spread their risks, the companies began to join together. Some joined together of their own free will, other were bought out by the bigger companies. Before long huge groups of companies had formed which together controlled 114 gold mines – Rand Mines and Consolidated Gold Fields were two of the largest. These companies were extremely wealthy and powerful. Big capitalism had now arrived in South Africa in the form of the big monopoly gold mining groups.

**'In order to keep profits high, mine companies tried to reduce workers' wages'**

From the beginning of deep level mining, these big capitalist companies had problems. Some of these took more than 20 years to solve. Unlike other minerals, the price of gold was fixed by the large international banks. So increases in the costs of gold mining could not be passed on to the buyer of the gold through higher prices. To keep their profits high these mining companies therefore had to keep their costs low. The biggest of these costs was labour. In 1898, for example, most of the big companies spent over half of their total production costs on labour. One of the main ways in which gold mining companies tried to lower their costs was to reduce the cost of labour. They did this in two ways. They tried to reduce the numbers of more expensive skilled white workers from overseas and they tried to reduce the level of wages of the majority of the workers – the unskilled black labour. In 1890, in 1896, in 1900 and in 1903, they tried to drop the wages paid to their black workers.

For a long time these efforts were unsuccessful. Black workers resisted the wage cuts in various ways. The Star newspaper said the 1890 wage cut 'made the kaffir take an instant dislike to Mr McMillan (the mine manager)'. His house was burnt down. He probably considered himself luckier than the mine manager at the Anglo-Tharsis mine

– his house was blown up by a stick of dynamite someone had stolen from the mine. Six years later, after the wage cuts of 1896-7, gold thefts jumped so much that the profitability of City Deep mine was seriously threatened. In both cases, the mines were forced to raise the wages to the previous levels.

**'Black workers' refusal to work on the mines caused a desperate shortage of labour'**

But resistance of a different kind was more important in forcing mining companies to keep wage levels up. Black workers refused to come to the Witwatersrand to work. In those days most Africans still had land to provide enough to live on. The most urgent need they had for cash was to pay taxes. It was, therefore, possible for them to withhold their labour for a certain period of time – this is what happened after the wage cuts of 1901-2. A desperate shortage of labour developed. As late as the end of 1904, mines had less than half their requirement of unskilled labour.

This was disastrous for the mines. For some of lower grade mines it took 80 percent of the gold they produced to cover their costs. So any drop in production due to a shortage of labour cut deeply into their profits.

Many mine managers responded to this situation by trying to steal labour from other companies. Secretly, they would offer higher wages to workers already working on other mines. This again pushed the level of wages back up. More and more the mines realised they needed a strong government to stop competition among themselves and to provide enough black labour for their needs. As early as 1890, the Chamber of Mines wrote that: 'Private enterprise has repeatedly failed in attempting to organise and maintain an adequate supply of kaffirs. The task must be undertaken by the public authorities (the government).'

**'New pass law forced Africans to wear a metal arm badge'**

After the deep level mines were opened in 1895, these demands grew louder. The government was sympathetic. A new pass law was passed forcing Africans to wear a metal arm badge. A Masters and Servants Law which sent people to prison for breaking contracts already existed. The new law was meant to identify deserters from the mines more easily. New and more severe punishments were laid down. At the same time a Liquor Law was passed which prevented the sale of liquor to Africans – this was intended to stop the 'long weekend'. The Rand Native Labour Association was formed in order to stop competitive recruiting between mines.

However, in spite of all these efforts the industry still found itself short of black labour. The Boer government in the Transvaal was too inefficient to organise an adequate supply of labour and was also unwilling to threaten the labour supply of the Boer farmers in the rural areas. Soon many mining capitalists began looking to Britain to overthrow the Boer government and to replace it with a more efficient administration. The Anglo-Boer War of 1899 - 1902 did this. The British formed a new government in the Transvaal and looked carefully after the interests of the mines. African workers in Johannesburg who had burnt their passes in celebration at the arrival of British troops were soon to be disappointed. The British helped the mines extend their recruiting to other parts of Southern Africa. They also succeeded in controlling the number of workers who deserted the mines. By 1912 the average loss of labour from desertion was down to 1.83 percent. The Native Affairs Department, in particular, co-operated closely with the Mining Industry Native Affairs officials often joined the Chamber of Mines in high positions while Mining officials also joined the government. Strikes and the breaking of contracts were severely punished. Between 1902-3, over 3 000 Africans were punished for breaking their contracts and other 'offences'. In the same period, government inspectors only investigated 28 complaints over wage irregularities. Strikers found themselves under immediate arrest.

**'The Chinese were used by mine owners to discipline African workers'**

Perhaps the most important single action by the British was to import 63 695 Chinese labourers for the mines on 3-year contracts (these contracts controlled Chinese miners in the same way as Africans). These Chinese workers lived in compounds under the same terrible conditions as blacks. They also had to leave their families behind and they were paid even lower wages than black miners. As a result, the mines were able to turn away black miners and their numbers dropped from 98 845 in mid-1905 to 77 577 in mid-1906. The Chinese were used by the mine owners to discipline African workers and break their resistance.

As a result, from August 1907 the numbers of black workers on the mines increased rapidly even at the lower wages offered. In that year 105 027 were working for the mines. By 1912, when the Chinese workers had been returned home, this had risen to 189 253. For the time being the loss of land, tax, the pass laws, the compounds, the Masters and Servants Act and the Chinese labour had defeated the African working class on the mines. It would take some years before they found more effective means of resistance.





(Pictures: The Argus Group's Barnett Collection)  
FOSATU WORKER NEWS PAGE SEVEN



MORE and more black students are writing the National Senior Certificate Exam (Matric) in the hope that this will be a gateway to a better future.

But the majority of them will just face the disappointment of failing the exam.

In 1977 only 11 000 pupils registered for matric, compared with 73 841 who wrote the exam last year — of these as little as 8 182 received a university entrance pass.

Why is this so? The department of Education and Training blames the high failures on the fact that the teachers are underqualified.

Teachers blame their pupils who they say are lazy and do not take their work seriously.

the schools?

The struggle does not end at the factories, there is also a struggle going on in the schools which is why there are school boycotts.

What we should ask, then, is how education fits into our capitalist society.

The majority of the pupils at school are the children of the very workers involved in the struggles at the factories.

And as we all know the government and the bosses do not have the interests of the working class at heart, because they will always live at the expense of the working class.

Why, then, does the government offer schools and education?

Why do so many children fail at school? Is there any relationship between the worker struggle and the struggle being waged by students at the schools? Why is it that workers' children tend to become workers themselves? These are some of the questions that a young Transvaal worker has tried to answer in this article — for quite some time he has worked closely with youth in a township. We hope that worker parents will find it interesting and will pass it on to their children to read. In fact, you should always pass FOSATU Worker News on to them.

Some pupils blame the teachers for not being capable or blame themselves for not being able to do schoolwork.

Parents blame their children or both the teachers and their children.

But few people really understand the problem.

It is important to look at the school situation and how it fits into society.

This needs to be done because schools are not neutral but are part of the political struggle in South Africa.

Because our society is capitalist, there are two main groups or classes — the bosses (capitalists) who own the factories and the workers who have to sell their labour to the bosses in order to live.

As bosses want to keep their profits as high as possible and because workers want higher wages, there is a continuous struggle between these two classes.

This is why there are always strikes, disputes and other conflicts over wages and working conditions at the factories.

But what has this to do with

Working class children are the potential workers of tomorrow. They are necessary to replace their parents when they die or get too old to work.

So the government wants children to be educated, so that they may be able to do their jobs in the economy, to read and write, to calculate, understand English and Afrikaans and so on.

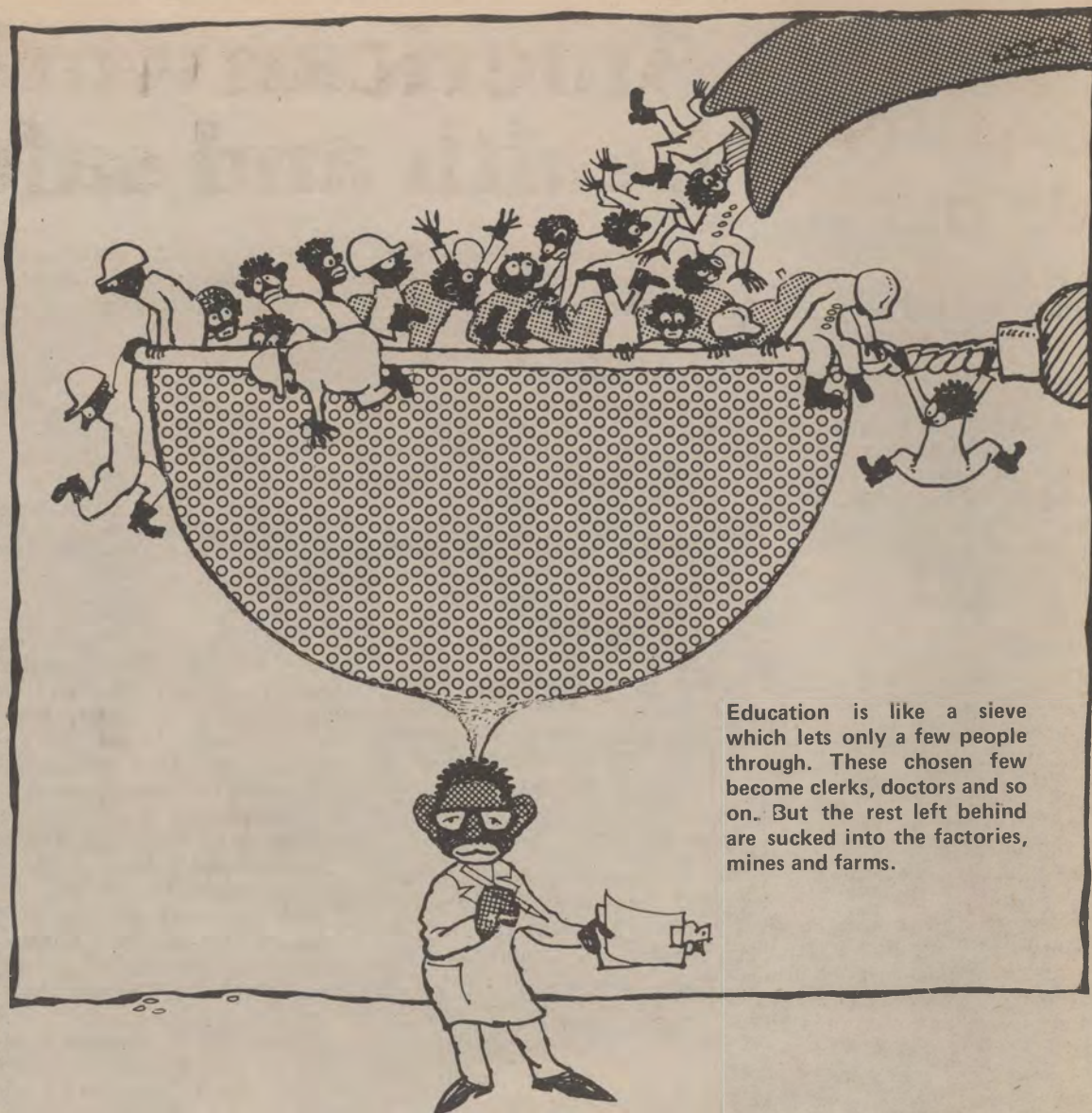
Some of these children are going to be semi-skilled or skilled workers, others bank tellers, clerks at the Administration Board offices to collect rents and things like that.

The government wants to use schools to control pupils and shape and prepare them for their future in labour.

The government and the bosses do not want 'politically' minded schoolchildren who are critical of South Africa's oppressive society.

These kind of pupils are likely to make demands while they are at school and when they become workers, they will question the rights of the bosses.

Capitalism is not fond of this kind of worker, it prefers cheap



Education is like a sieve which lets only a few people through. These chosen few become clerks, doctors and so on. But the rest left behind are sucked into the factories, mines and farms.

and peaceful labour.

But what has this to do with the high number of failures?

Examinations supposedly test whether pupils have learnt their work.

But there are already inequalities that exist among pupils brought about by our society.

Some pupils are from ambitious families, where there is already some education. They know the 'advantage' of education and encourage their children to work hard at school whatever they might be taught and under whatever conditions.

These families also often have enough space to allow students to get away from family noise to study properly.

With workers' families it is unlikely that the parents will have any education or accommodation large enough to allow

## Education who does it serve?

their children to study in peace.

Workers' children, then, start school with a big disadvantage against them.

They also often have to go to school with an empty stomach so that their concentration is low.

Examinations do not take

these inequalities into account, they instead weed out the majority of the children who will be forced to work in the factories — if they can find a job.

So what examinations do is reproduce the inequalities of society.

## End of year-wait for wage hike in sight

THE end of year-long wage negotiations between unions and the Putco bus company is at last in sight.

Last year in July, the Transport and General Workers Union deadlocked with Putco after the company offered a 'measly' increase of R4 a week — the union demanded a R30 increase.

The TGWU has been joined in its stand by CUSA's Transport and Allied Workers Union which

also participated in the wage negotiations.

After the deadlock, the dispute was referred to mediation but there was still no settlement.

Because the passenger transport industry is regarded in law as an 'essential service' the unions could not call a legal strike so the wage dispute was referred to the industrial court for arbitration.

This is where an arbitrator,

who is like a judge, listens to argument from both sides and then makes his own decision.

TGWU members have had to wait from August until March this year for the case to come before an arbitrator but they have agreed to wait as any final settlement will be fully back-paid.

Management, however, started to play games just before the arbitration started.

They said they were going to give an immediate increase of R7 to all workers without consulting the unions.

The unions attacked this action saying that it would provoke a national strike.

Putco was forced to back-down when the arbitrator ruled that there should be no interim increases.

At the arbitration hearings, union lawyers have argued that

the wages have not kept up with inflation or wages in other companies.

The TGWU also did a detailed survey of workers' cost-of-living which was submitted to the arbitrator.

The arbitration is due to start again at the beginning of this month when the company will present its arguments.

Right from the start of negotiations, Putco has argued that it cannot afford to pay the increase demanded by the union.

However, TGWU is convinced it can pay.

Asked whether the delay had been worth it, TGWU general secretary, Jane Barrett said, 'Obviously we have to wait for the outcome of the arbitration before we can say whether it has been worthwhile waiting.'

## Breakthrough in transport industry

IN SPITE of massive opposition from employers, the Transport and General Workers Union is now on the verge of breaking into the goods transport industry.

For the last few years the TGWU has been battling against bosses in this industry who have been favouring TUCSA's African Transport Workers Union.

The goods transport companies have been using all sorts of excuses in their attempts to block the TGWU — some refused to talk to the union because it was not registered for certain Transvaal areas.

And the employers' organisation has consistently smeared the union and its organisers and has discouraged companies from recognising the TGWU.

But members continued to push management and in the past month their efforts have begun to show results — two companies have now agreed to hold discussions.

One of the biggest trucking companies in the country, Cargo Carriers, has agreed to recognition talks with the TGWU.

The union views this as a 'special' victory as a year ago it

suffered a defeat at the hands of Cargo Carriers when workers at the Elandsfontein depot were fired after going on strike.

TGWU branch secretary, Mama Lydia Kompe said, 'They have obviously seen that workers' spirit and their faith in the union cannot be broken by such action.'

After resisting the union for two years, Wadeville Carriers has also agreed to meet the TGWU with the whole workforce of 60 as observers.

'Our people just never gave up,' said Mama Lydia, 'they made it clear they would only

talk to management through the union.'

The TGWU is hoping that these two victories will lead to other companies recognising the union.

The union said it was clear that the bosses had been forced to realise that smearing a union and putting it off with weak excuses would not make it disappear.

'Workers in the transport industry have had enough of having no say. They have found a voice in the Transport and General Workers Union,' a union representative said.

### Confident

'But we are confident of our case and the arbitration case has been useful in other ways.'

'We now have a lot of information about the company and wages in other bus companies which we will be able to use in future negotiations,' she said.



## Can experts do our jobs?

A YEAR ago, management at SA Tioxide at Umbogintwini near Durban put together a team of experts from its factories all over the world to study the work in its South African factory.

Management assured workers at the time that the investigations would 'improve the company'.

Some months later, management began to change some of the jobs, and announced that its intention was to reduce the size of the workforce.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union shop stewards insisted that any changes to the job content be negotiated with the union — an agreement was later signed.

Now all the changes to job content are being negotiated.

An interim agreement on plant cleaning — which had been a sore issue with operators for some time — has been signed. Now special cleaners do the job and not operators.

Negotiations on one particular part of the plant have been going on for several months.

Management says that with the new machinery, only one worker is needed.

Workers insist there is a need for two workers.

Management has accused the workers of 'feather bedding' but workers are demanding that to prove their point, management's team of experts should come and do the job for a few months.

If the experts manage to do it, then the workers have said they will agree to the change. But the company has refused to bring in the experts.

# American workers' fight for health and safety laws

UNTIL the late 1960's American unions were not actively involved in the issue of health and safety, according to Matt Witt, the director of the American Labor Centre.

In fact the coal miners who began campaigning around the issue of Black Lung (a coal dust disease) even faced opposition from their union, he said.

Matt Witt together with an American doctor, David Christiani, recently gave a seminar on industrial health in America to Natal organisers.

At one time, he was the editor of the mining union's newspaper but now has set up the American Labor Centre which works closely with a number of American unions.

### Strike

Speaking at the seminar, Matt Witt said in 1968, the miners began to demand that laws be passed giving compensation for Black Lung and for controls to be introduced in order to keep down the level of coal dust.

He said in the biggest coal mining state (province) the miners went on strike and shut down the whole coal mining industry in support of their demand for health and safety legislation.

### New Law

Eventually the state (province) passed the legislation but the miners continued their campaign demanding major changes in the health and safety laws which cover the whole of America.

Brother Witt said once again it was only under a threat of a strike which would close the entire coal industry that the government passed a new law covering Black Lung.

From then on other workers

began demanding health and safety legislation but initially it was almost always outside of the unions, he said.

Textile workers set up a Brown Lung Association in order to campaign against this cotton dust disease, he added.

Matt Witt said that in the early 1970's unions themselves began getting involved in health and safety and some of them have even employed full time health and safety officers.

### Investigate

He also said that in some factories, unions have set up special health and safety shop stewards who would go to seminars on health and safety and would be required to investigate accidents at work.

Both Matt Witt and David Christiani said a major problem facing unions in the area of health and safety was that because of management's propaganda workers have begun to believe that accidents at work were their fault.

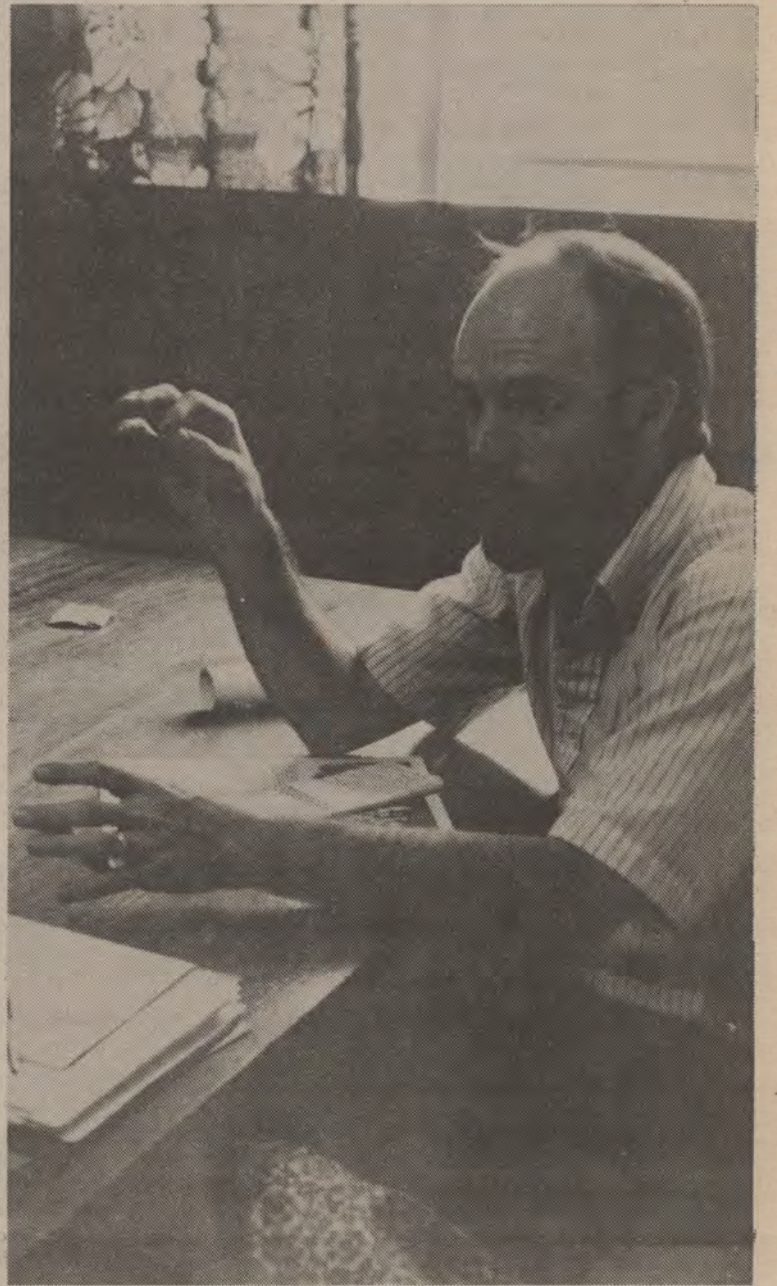
In attempting to make their factories more 'safe', management emphasises in posters all over the walls that workers must be more careful.

'This distracts the workers from things like ventilation, noise levels and so on, which the management is responsible for,' Matt Witt said.

### Prizes

American companies, often, also awarded prizes to factory departments where there were no accidents over a stated period of time.

'What happens with this, is that if a worker gets hurt he often doesn't report it because he doesn't want everybody in his department to lose their prize,'



Matt Witt — director of the American Labor Centre

Brother Witt said.

Management also sometimes say to the injured worker 'look come to work and we'll give you

an easier job'.

'So, in this way, a high proportion of industrial accidents are never reported,' Matt Witt said.

## Thirty-six fired workers taken back in union's Sasol victory

IN October last year 53 workers at the Synthal plant at Sasol III were escorted by armed guards and put on trains to various homelands.

Their crime? They protested against the dismissal of a fellow worker.

Early that morning all the operators from all the shifts had gathered at the plant and demanded to speak to the divisional manager about the dismissal.

Five hours later, nothing had been resolved and the plant was at a standstill.

Management gave workers 10 minutes to return to work or leave the premises if they were not on shift.

While the workers were considering the ultimatum, management announced that they had all been dismissed.

Armed security guards moved into the plant, surrounded the workers and escorted them to the personnel offices.

They were then transported in the same way to the hostels.

Each person was taken by a guard to his room to collect his belongings.

They were again escorted to collect their money and finally to various railway stations where they were bought tickets and put on the trains.

As one worker said, 'We were

not even allowed to visit the toilet without a guard being present.'

Without a union, these workers would have been left to rot in the homelands.

However, the Chemical Workers Union, which only recently won stop order rights for its 4 000 members at Sasol, decided to take legal action against the company.

The CWIU charged that mana-

gement's actions were 'totally unacceptable'.

'Workers were being treated like criminals when they were only trying to resolve a legitimate industrial grievance,' the union said.

Preparing for the case was extremely difficult as the workers were now scattered all over South Africa.

But the CWIU persisted and workers from East London,

Transkei, Pongola and many other places returned to make statements.

After several months of negotiations an out-of-court settlement was finally reached with Sasol, in which the company agreed to take back 36 workers immediately.

Sasol workers see this as their first victory — a first step in the struggle for decent and humane treatment.

## TUCSA member assaults steward but Table Bay refuses to fire him

TABLE Bay Spinners, a Western Cape textile factory, is heading for a major clash with the National Union of Textile Workers over its refusal to dismiss a shop steward of a rival union.

The shop steward of TUCSA's Textile Workers Industrial Union, Jeremy Haas, attacked a NUTW shop steward and threw him against a machine.

He then removed copies of a letter from NUTW's shop steward, Brother F May.

The company refused to take any disciplinary action against the TUCSA shop steward.

In protest, the majority of the workers at the factory stopped work on March 12 but returned

two-hours later when the union said it would take the matter up with the company.

The letter, which had been picked up by NUTW members and passed on to Brother May, was from the general secretary of the TUCSA union and contained a number of extremely defamatory remarks about NUTW's health and safety officer, Dr Neil White.

It demanded that the company stop Dr White from entering the factory premises as his conduct was 'highly unethical'.

NUTW has been conducting a Brown Lung campaign at Table Bay Spinners and Dr White has been testing union

members for any traces of this cotton dust disease.

Table Bay Spinners was one of the first textile factories in the Western Cape to cross the floor from the TUCSA union and join NUTW.

NUTW has now declared a dispute with the company for refusing to take 'appropriate disciplinary action' against the TUCSA member.

The union says that in terms of the company's standard rules, Jeremy Haas should have been instantly dismissed.

NUTW is also demanding that Table Bay Spinners pay its members for the time they stopped work.

## Dairy workers victimised

THE Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union predicts a tough road ahead as it begins its drive to represent the 1 200 union members in the dairy industry.

The union reports that it has members in the two major dairy companies in Natal — Creamline and Clover.

However, the union expects to face tremendous opposition from the employers.

And already, dairy workers have complained that they are being victimised for being union members.

At Clover Dairies in Durban, the workers recently stopped work and demanded the re-instatement of a fellow worker and the dismissal of the factory manager.

The workers said the dismissed colleague had been unfairly disciplined. He was taken back but the company refused to dismiss the manager.

Soon after this, another three workers were dismissed for supposedly failing to obey instructions from the general manager.

The workers have applied for a Conciliation Board as they felt the company was unfairly victimising them because they were union members.



## Unfairly fired worker paid R1 000 by Maritzburg firm



MAWU Pietermaritzburg organiser, Dumisane Mbanjwa hands over the R1 000 cheque to Brother Shabalala.

ONE thousand Rand has been paid to a dismissed worker by Pietermaritzburg company, Filpro, in an out-of-court settlement with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Brother Shabalala was fired in March when a foreman tried to force him to sign a final warning for coming late.

A MAWU organiser said that Brother Shabalala had already reported that he was going to come in late so he refused to sign the warning.

When he refused, the manager was called in to again try to get him to sign the warning, the organiser said.

He persisted in his refusal and was then fired by the manager.

Seeing this as an unfair dismissal, MAWU declared a dispute with the company as the first step towards an unfair labour practice case.

Filpro decided to settle out of court and offered Brother Shabalala R1 000 which he accepted

after discussing it with his fellow workers.

However, the union still has another court case pending against Filpro.

This time the company 'retrenched' a union activist because, they claim, there was no job for him.

Filpro, though, has still been recruiting people at the factory.

MAWU will be taking the company to the industrial court on the basis that it had unfairly retrenched Brother W Molife.

# End of Frame's detours?

THE end of a long road towards victory at Frame's New Germany complex, may at last be in sight for the National Union of Textile Workers.

All along the road, the Frame company has set up detours in order to delay NUTW's journey towards recognition at the mills which form the heart of the Frame empire.

The detours have taken the union into just about every Natal law court.

But a recent victory in the Natal Supreme court has set the union back on the road — Frame's detours have been unsuccessful.

In a final attempt to stop NUTW from taking it to the industrial court for refusing to recognise the union, Frame went to the Supreme Court.

### Rejected

The company argued that there was no longer a dispute with NUTW and therefore the union could not take it to the industrial court.

The Natal Supreme Court completely rejected the company's arguments so in the near future Frame will find itself facing charges of unfair labour practices in the industrial court.

Meanwhile, with 19 of its members NUTW is to test the Frame company's retrenchment procedure.

The union argues that the company's procedure is unfair as it offers no job security for workers.

The company recently issued a notice detailing its retrenchment procedure.

The notice said that retrenchment would be on the basis of Last In First Out but that workers would be offered a transfer where possible.

### No Guarantee

However, the LIFO principle is to be applied by department, so workers who accept a transfer do so on the understanding that they are the 'last in' in their new departments — no matter how long they have worked for the company before.

There is also no guarantee of re-employment for retrenched workers if the economy should improve.

Recently, 10 Frametex workers won temporary re-instatement after they were retrenched by the company in terms of a similar procedure.

The case is an important one in FOSATU's battle for fair retrenchment procedures.

## Country-wide Mondi wage protest

ABOUT 700 workers at Mondi's Merebank, Springs and Piet Retief paper mills stopped work at 12 noon on Wednesday April 18 while a union negotiating team met management in an attempt to break a wage deadlock.

And at a fourth Mondi mill, Umgeni at Durban, workers gathered outside their manager's office during their lunchbreak.

The workers all sent messages demanding progress in the wage talks.

The Paper Wood and Allied

Workers Union members have demanded a minimum wage of R3 an hour.

At present the company's minimum wage ranges from R1,58 to R2,02 an hour.

### Turns Down

So far, Mondi has turned down the workers' demand and three meetings called by the pulp and paper industrial council have failed to break the wage deadlock.

On April 18, shop stewards

from the five Mondi mills again met with management.

A PWAUW organiser said that on hearing that the workers had stopped work, management at first refused to continue negotiations until everybody went back.

'But after a while they realised that this would only aggravate the dispute,' she said.

The organiser said the Mondi workers were 'extremely' dissatisfied with the 'abominably' low wage increase which had

been given by the industrial council in January.

At 4 pm the 250 Springs and 300 Piet Retief workers decided to return to work having shown their solidarity.

### Stay Out

The 150 at Merebank decided to stay out and finally went home at 6 pm.

They agreed to gather at 12 the next day to hear the final results of the talks which were still in progress.

The talks, however, once again deadlocked and Mondi has refused to negotiate further with PWAUW unless it applies to join the industrial council.

As the dispute has not yet been resolved, the way is now open for PWAUW members to go on a legal strike or take the matter to the industrial court.

The Merebank workers have already decided to hold a strike ballot but this still has to be discussed by workers at the other mills.

## Anti-union group of companies

A GROUP of SEIFSA companies seems to be emerging in Natal with the aim of blocking the Metal and Allied Workers Union from winning plant-based bargaining rights.

Over the past few years, MAWU has won plant bargaining at 15 Natal factories — all of

which are affiliated to the giant metal employers' association, SEIFSA.

A MAWU organiser said the plant-based bargaining had been successful and had taken into account the National Agreement which sets the national wage minimums.

'But now a small group of anti-union companies, including Hart, Pineware, Pefco, Ocean and McKinnon Chain have decided to set back the clock and crush developments by MAWU,' he said.

He said that the union had begun to discuss a strategy to deal with these companies.

'For a start the union's National Executive Committee has decided to take McKinnon Chain to the industrial court for refusing plant-based bargaining rights.'

'Obviously the result of this case will affect the other plants as well,' the union organiser said.

But, he said, the union would not stop there.

'Further actions are planned against this small cancerous growth of anti-democratic employers.'

'The clock will not be set back by this small group who want to engage in super exploitation of their workers,' he added.

## Workers beaten with batons at Brits plant then taken to court

THE Metal and Allied Workers Union has slammed Auto Cables for consigning 176 workers to a possible two-months in jail merely because they disagreed with management.

The workers were arrested on April 25 during a protest stoppage by the workforce of this Brits company.

They were protesting at the arbitrary firing of a prominent union activist, Brother Piet Machete.

The 176 workers appeared in court later that day where their case was remanded until June 25. The bail was set at R100 each.

To bail the workers out, MAWU needed R17 600 — a figure way beyond the reach of the union or the workers.

Had the money not been rais-

ed, the 176 workers — most of whom were women with children — would have been forced to spend two months in jail waiting for their case to come up.

MAWU organiser, Bernie Fannaroff said that it was despicable that the company manager consigned the workers to prison for nothing other than withdrawing their labour because they disagreed with an arbitrary action by management.

He said that it was 'quite by chance' that the money was raised by the union.

MAWU is now investigating claims by a large number of the workers that they were beaten with sjamboks and batons inside the factory by the riot police.

## One day wage strike

AT Federated Timbers at Mobeeni near Durban, about 150 workers staged a one day strike at the beginning of April.

They demanded an interim wage increase and the speedy signing of a recognition agreement with the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union.

After the last wage increase in October last year, the workers at two Federated Timbers factories went on strike over the low increases they had received.

At the time, management led them to believe that there could be another increase in April, so

they returned to work.

However, when the PWAUW shop stewards asked to negotiate the April increase, management denied that they had promised an increase.

On April 4, workers demanded to see the manager who had made the promise to them and when he refused to come, decided not to go back to work.

At the end of the day, the Federated Timbers' workers agreed to return to work while awaiting the outcome of recognition talks.



WORKERS in the sugar and milling industries in Natal have rejected the cost-of-living wage increases being offered by their bosses as 'pathetic' and are continuing their fight for a living wage.

As a result the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has declared a dispute with major sugar company, CG Smith, and Tongaat Milling.

Both companies have only offered increases which match the rise in the cost-of-living.

The workers are fighting for a living wage of R2 an hour.

They argue that the cost-of-living increase does nothing to improve their standard of living.

The CG Smith dispute is awaiting the appointment of a Conciliation Board by the Minister of Manpower. The SFAWU and Tongaat have not yet agreed on what steps to take to resolve the dispute.

A SFAWU representative said, 'We are determined to win our struggle for a living wage.'

'For too long the bosses have been interested only in making big profits and making us subsidise the high wages of skilled

# Sugar workers reject 'pathetic' wage increases

workers,' he said.

Meanwhile, the union is involved in another battle with CG Smith

Last month the company was granted an urgent interdict by the Supreme Court barring the union and its shop stewards from preventing the company employing a worker at its Noodsberg mill.

The SFAWU said the interdict follows a dispute over the assault of a union member by a non-union member.

The non-union member was dismissed in terms of the disc-

iplinary procedure but the company then re-instated him during an appeal.

The non-union member then abused workers by saying that they were 'FOSATU dogs, who think the union owns the factory'.

The next day the workers held a meeting and then sent the shop stewards to demand that the general manager address them on the issue of the abuse of the union by not later than 3 pm that day.

The next day, when it was clear that the general manager

was refusing to discuss the issue, hundreds of angry workers forced the non-union member to leave the mill.

The company, then applied for the interdict claiming that union members were 'attempting to undermine the authority of the company.'

On May 18, the SFAWU intends to contest the interdict.

A union representative said, 'Workers feel that the company is discriminating against union members. We will not allow anyone to abuse FOSATU in our factories.'

## Carmel's attitude sweetens

A SWEET company accused by workers as being fiercely anti-union, has agreed to take back 25 members of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

In statements which were to be used in an industrial court case against Carmel Chocolates and Sweet Industries, workers described attempts by managers to get rid of the union.

One women worker even claimed that she had been offered R30 if she resigned from SFAWU.

At the end of last year, management closed the factory early and when it re-opened refused to take back the 'union ring leaders'.

SFAWU then applied to the industrial court to declare the dismissal of the workers an unfair labour practice and to order Carmel to take them back.

Before the case could come before the court, the company agreed to take back the workers and to pay them two week's back-pay.

Carmel has also said it would be prepared to negotiate a recognition agreement with SFAWU.

## New education video



IN its continuous attempts to find more effective ways of educating workers on trade union issues, FOSATU has ventured into the world of videos. Here, workers at a recent Northern Natal Regional Congress watch a video programme on 'Grievance Procedures'. The

video, which was a joint venture with the Centre of Applied Legal Studies, shows by a number of short plays how not to handle a grievance and then how to handle it correctly. Some of the plays are extremely funny but it is also a serious look at the silly mistakes that shop stewards can

make and sometimes do make. The Northern Natal workers discussed the video afterwards and all agreed that it was extremely useful. Copies have been made for all the FOSATU regions, so if you want to use it for a shop stewards course - contact the regional secretary.

## 'Jabula provokes strike'

ONCE again, a FOSATU union has found that a major South African company's factory-floor actions make a mockery of its supposedly liberal pro-union policies.

About two years ago, the National Union of Textile Workers attacked Barlow Rand for its handling of a strike at Uitenhage factory, Veldspun.

Now, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has accused the Premier group of trying to smash the union at its Jabula factory in Springs.

Shop stewards prior to the Easter weekend arranged with management that Easter Monday be an unpaid holiday so that the workers could go back to their homes.

However, just before workers were due to go off, management handed a document to the senior shop steward stating that those who did not report to work on Easter Monday would be disciplined.

The senior shop steward told management that it would be impossible to get the workers to come back to work as many of them had already prepared to go back to the rural areas for the weekend.

No workers reported to work on the Monday and when they returned on Tuesday, management fired two workers.

They said that the workers already had two warnings and were therefore fired for not reporting to work on the Monday.

The entire workforce immediately stopped work but returned the following day when SFAWU said it would discuss the issue with management.

Jabula initially wouldn't allow union representatives in to the factory but eventually backed-down.

SFAWU president, Chris Dlamini said, 'We explained to the manager that the handling of this issue proved that the Prem-

ier group has a very negative attitude towards unions.'

He said it was clear that the company had provoked the strike.

'We left the room while the manager phoned the company's chairman but when he called us back in he said the workers were on strike again and told us to leave the premises,' Brother Dlamini said.

'We were not even allowed to talk to the workers,' he added.

Brother Dlamini said workers were told to return to work immediately or be dismissed.

'They were not even given a reasonable amount of time to go back to work,' he said.

Brother Dlamini said that as long as Jabula was a food company they would have to eventually come to terms with SFAWU.

He said the union would be taking legal action against the company.

## Explosion kills worker

A WORKER was killed recently in a strange explosion at Triomf's Richards Bay plant.

Brother David Mpanza was piping oil from huge drums stacked outside the plant when the drum exploded.

He suffered severe burns and died a week later at Ngwelizane hospital.

Triomf shop stewards said the drums were heated before the pumping of the oil could be carried out - nobody had been trained to do the job and there was no satisfactory way of telling when the drum was empty.

They said that since the explosion, management had immediately changed the whole system.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union have investigated the explosion and will be presenting evidence at the inquest.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### BAKERS

AFTER two years of negotiations, major biscuit company, Bakers, has finally signed a recognition agreement with the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

The agreement covers the 700 workers at the company's Westmead factory near Pinetown.

SFAWU already has preliminary agreements with two other factories in the Bakers group - one in the bread and cake division and the other in the milling division.

### FIRESTONE

ONLY a strike at Brits tyre factory, Firestone, forced the company to fire a foreman.

The workers in one department stopped work in support of a fellow worker who had been assaulted by the foreman.

The assaulted worker formally submitted his grievance against the foreman but the company seemed reluctant to take any action.

So the workers downed tools saying that if had been one of them who had hit the foreman, Firestone would not have hesitated.

The workers went back after a few hours when the company agreed to dismiss the foreman.

### PRILLA

A THIRD textile factory in the Tongaat-Hulett's group has signed a recognition agreement with the National Union of Textile Workers.

Prilla mill at Pietermaritzburg now joins David Whiteheads and Hebox which are both represented by NUTW - only a fourth small Western Cape factory remains to be organised by the union.

The NUTW is now holding divisional negotiations on issues like health and safety, retrenchments, pension schemes and so on, which cover all three factories.

### MILLER ENGINEERING

Until the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union came into the picture, Miller Engineering had been paying workers the minimum wage laid down by the industrial council.

The about 140 workers at this Pretoria West factory joined the union towards the end of last year.

A recognition and retrenchment agreement was negotiated and shortly afterwards, wage talks began.

The union has now pushed the wage from the industrial council minimum of 85c per hour to R1,30 an hour - a massive 65 percent increase.

### EDUCATION WORKSHOP

WORKER choirs, plays and talks will again be part of the activities at Natal's FOSATU Education Workshop on June 9.

If you missed last year's fun day make sure you are at the Beatrice Street YMCA in Durban on June 9 this year.

The best worker choir at this event will represent Natal at the main FOSATU Education Workshop to be held in Johannesburg on July 14.

Contact your shop steward or union official about transport arrangements.



# Mooi klein Boesman's

## first job

On the 3rd of February 1964, I set foot on a train for the first time. I was going to Carletonville where I was promised a job, plumbing. I met my cousin there. He is the one who taught me plumbing. When we arrived at the place he was residing at, people were happy to meet me. I felt at home.

The following morning we went to work. I had to wait for the manager, to get his approval to work there and to see whether I myself was satisfied with the conditions set down by the firm. Minutes ticked away slowly. I was eager to see myself working. In fact, there were other people waiting too for the manager who were also looking for a job.

At nine o'clock work stopped, but still no manager appeared. It was tea time.

A story by Alfred Qabula

ed to him with a water pipe. They poured water all over his body. They also used an air pipe. When he came around to his senses again they took him to a cooler place. This incident did not affect the way people were working. They were still being hurried. It wasn't something to be taken notice of. The foreman went on shouting: 'Kom muntus. Mina funa phelisa lo silep today, hay tomorrow wena yizwa kashle. Muntus mina funa wena vuka ayifika yifa lapha msebenzi kamina.' (This is 'fanakalo' - roughly it means 'come on muntus I want to finish the slab today, not tomorrow do you hear? Muntus I want you to wake up, not to

ed him immediately.

He told us that at 10.15 the 'Makhulu Baas', the 'Big Foreman' would come and see us to find out whether we were suitable for the job. He wished me luck because he sympathised with my cousin because he was the only Transkeian on the building site. He told me that my cousin worked well, was respectful and was dedicated to his job. He was one of the few workers not to use his absence as an opportunity to loaf.

Of course I agreed with everything he said. What troubled me was whether I was able to work under these harsh conditions. To persevere.

At 10.15 the Manager

### 'Sweat was pouring down their half naked bodies'

It lasted until 9.15. Work resumed.

I was struck by the way work was done there. It was unlike the way we worked back home. People here worked at a very fast pace. Sweat was pouring down there half naked bodies. They were wearing nothing from the waist up. Some were building houses, others were pouring cement for the foundations. Some were doing the roofing and others down doing the job I was to do, plumbing. They worked in a very determined manner. I wandered around all the departments looking carefully at the work carried out in each of these. There was a nasty job where concrete was mixed. The sun was hot. The black workers, from the ground floor to the third were pushing wheelbarrows filled to the brim. The planks looked so unsafe. I felt as if I was dreaming. I was scared.

Suddenly, one man who was pushing a wheelbarrow fell. He fainted. They rush-

come and die here, in my work')

Then the foreman came to us. We were watching what was happening. He greeted us. He asked if we were all looking for a job. Eight of us wanted the job but the rest said they were only looking on. Then he said all those who wanted work should stand on one side. Those who didn't want work must 'fakofu'.

He didn't want anyone hanging around. Seven hurried away.

After chasing them away he turned to us and inquired whether anyone of us was Humphrey's cousin. I said, I am here Baas. He said I looked like Humphrey but added 'you look like a Boesman. Are you a Boesman? Anyway I'm giving you a name: Mooi Klein Boesman. Do you hear?' (Raising his big hoarse voice) I agreed immediately that I was his Mooi Klein Boesman. He came at me threateningly as if he was about to hit me had I not answer-

arrived. Some more of the people waiting were no longer prepared to work because of the way people were being hurried. They were driven off like a prison span. One by one the manager asked us what kind of job we did. We told him. I produced my documents. He read them. He smiled and said I should start work that very moment. He then took me to Mr. Jacobs of the plumbing department.

Alfred Qabula's face is probably familiar to many people in FOSATU, although only a few will know his name - he was in the Dunlop play. The short story carried on this page is part of a book that Brother Qabula is writing which is based on his life experiences. At this stage, he has written about his youth spent in Flagstaff in the Transkei, his first job in the Transvaal and how he came to end up at Dunlop in Durban, where he has worked for the past ten years. It is not the first time that Brother Qabula has written something. Ever since his school-days, he has written short plays which were put on in his church back home. But, this is his first major piece of writing and we hope to carry more parts of it in future editions of FOSATU Worker News.





**Collection Number: AG3307**

**Collection Name: FOSATU WORKER NEWS, 1979-1985**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand

*Location:* Johannesburg

©2015

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of a collection held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.