

SOUTH AFRICAN... LABOUR BULLETIN



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COVER BY ZED B.M.

Growing Militancy in the Retail Trade

1982 has seen a dramatic increase in action taken by workers in the retail trade pushing this sector into a new phase of industrial relations. A series of strikes have occurred at major employers affecting a large section of retail workers.

The strikes have been characterised by a high degree of solidarity, discipline and level of organisation amongst the workers involved and all have ended successfully with significant worker gains. Another characteristic has been the hardline attitude taken by the managements concerned, during the events leading up to the strikes and while the strikes have been in progress. For example in most cases there have been attempts to fire all striking workers,

SALB Vol 8 No 1 outlined worker action taken and gains made at three major employers - OK Bazaars, Woolworths and the Edgars group. Since then more progress has been made at these companies and workers in another company, CNA, have taken action to significantly improve their working lives.

• On Oct 21 a wage agreement was signed between CCAWUSA and OK Bazaars, resulting in substantial improvements in wages for all OK workers, the majority receiving a R40 increase immediately and a R25 increase in April 1983 with new wage negotiations to commence in Oct 1983. The increases were negotiated by CCAWUSA for some 24 000 workers in 175 establishments throughout South Africa.

Recognition talks between CCAWUSA and OK Bazaars and Woolworths are progressing, with the introduction of strong and viable shop steward systems and good grievance, disciplinary and retrenchment procedures on the cards. CCAWUSA is paying particular attention to the position of women workers, ensuring that the elimination of sex disrimination is written into all recognition agreements. The union has stated that it will not sign any recognition agreement until a suitable maternity agreement is negotiated, ensuring that women are not discriminated against through pregnancies as far as their working lives are concerned.

On Oct 25 CNA workers in Johannesburg went on strike. This strike is a good example of the current nature of worker action and management attitude in the retail trade.

The strike was a sequel to a series of attempts by CNA workers in

Johannesburg to raise their grievances with CNA management. Prior to Oct 25, CNA workers had requested that CNA management meet with union officials and 3 worker representatives. CNA management refused saying they would only meet with union officials. It was pointed out to management that this was unacceptable and that no principled union would meet with management in the absence of worker representatives. Despite a number of attempts by the union to persuade CNA management to meet with worker representatives they remained adamant. No reasons were given by management for this. When warned by the union that this could lead to considerable unrest management stated that they were prepared to take the chance.

At a meeting of CNA workers on Oct 24, it was decided to go on strike due to management's refusal to give them a hearing. All the workers from the CNA warehouse and workers from many city-centre stores assembled at the union offices in Khotso house. At this stage about 600 workers were involved and their grievances centred around low wages, non-recognition of their union, CCAWUSA, and the dismissal of 6 workers at the Carlton Centre branch. Management stated they would fire the striking workers and that the dismissals at the Carlton Centre branch had been carried out in terms of normal company disciplinary procedure "which is very generous".

By Oct 27, apart from all the warehouse workers, some 20 CNA retail outlets in Johannesburg and the East Rand were involved in the strike and white supervisory staff had to operate tills. CNA management stated they would not talk with the union until the workers returned to work and the workers stated they would not budge until management approached them.

On Oct 28, management approached the union and on Oct 29 worker representatives and union officials had a 7 hour meeting with CNA management. At the meeting management agreed in principle

- to recognise CNA shop stewards and CCAWUSA
- that all workers return without loss of pay or benefits
- that an investigation be held by the union concerning the dismissed workers
- that they would table a firm proposal relating to worker wage demands by Nov 15.

At this time CNA management circulated letters to warehouse workers, stating, amongst other things, that "I can give you my confident assurance that the full co-operation of the South African Police and Riot Squad is with us. They are assisting us in every way we require and have taken all the precautions they deem necessary." And referring to the striking workers -

"The action they have taken, as undesirable as it may seem, is caused probably by their inexperience in handling matters such as these and by intimidators of their own group who are threatening them with violence."

After report back meetings on Oct 30 and the morning of Nov 1, the workers returned to work. Throughout, the strike was characterised by a high degree of unity, discipline and co-ordination amongst the striking workers and strong worker leadership. For example, when the decision was taken to return to work all workers were back at work within an hour.

On Nov 2, a meeting was held to investigate the dismissals of 5 of the Carlton Centre workers. The union established that all were clear cases of unfair dismissal and the leaders were all reinstated.

CNA tabled wage proposals at a meeting on Nov 15 but these were rejected by worker representatives. On Nov 17 CNA submitted new wage proposals which were again rejected. On Nov 19, a wage agreement was signed. Amongst other aspects the agreement provides for a minimum wage in urban areas of R235 per month effective from Nov 1. This is a substantial improvement on the present wage of R160 per month.

Negotiations for a recognition agreement are now underway.



CCAWUSA, JNb, Nov 18

Shift to the Right

ATTENDING a TUCSA conference would be a strange experience for members or officials of the emerging trade unions. The delegates are smartly dressed and are accommodated at 3,4 and even 5 star hotels. On the stage is the South African flag. No freedom songs punctuate the proceedings, there is no fighting spirit and the evenings are taken up by lavish cocktail parties. The conference is opened by the mayor of the host city (always a white person), and observers from management, government and the diplomatic corps mingle with the delegates. Most importantly, though, is the striking lack of worker delegates. Those that do attend take little part in the proceedings, which are dominated by full-time union officials. Not one worker was elected to the 30-person National Executive Committee (NEC)!

TUCSA's 28th Annual Conference, held in Cape Town in September, was no exception to this pattern. Fifty-six affiliates, representing 435 000 members' (over 100 000 of them white) attended. Their recent growth in membership from 370 000 last year - was the source of much self-congratulation. However observers point out that all the major unions within TUCSA recruit members on the basis of having closed-shop agreements with the employers.

Some points can be made about the congress.

There was a definite shift to the right. A resolution calling for the charge or release of detainees was defeated, despite it having been watered down to remove a reference to Dr. Nell Aggett's death. Opposition was spearheaded by the S.A. Society of Bank Officials (SASBO) and the Artisan Staff Association (ASA). The ASA had not even been able to support an earlier resolution, proposed by the NEC, calling for a police-administered code of conduct regarding the treatment of detainees.

In similar vein, a split was averted when "to avoid discussion", Lucy Mvubelo of the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW) withdrew her motion calling for June 16 to be a public holiday. The motion had already been watered down to call on affiliates "to consider negotiating" a special holiday for that day, and noted that "this day is sometimes exploited for political purposes offensive to those who genuinely mourn for the events of 1976."

In some respects delegates were even to the right of the government. The director-general of the Department of Manpower, Dr. Piet van der Merwe, refused to accede to the demands of some delegates that all unions should be forced to register. Mr. D. Benade of the Tramway and Omnibus Workers Union

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(Cape), felt that forced registration would have prevented the SATS dispute by stopping GWU from operating in SATS.

In other debate, a delegate appeared to feel that God supported the legislation preserving pension funds! Mr. Andre Maiherbe of SASBO felt that the legislation had been used by the 'ungodly' to whip up fear among unsophisticated workers, and expressed concern that the legislation had been withdrawn.

The shift to the right within TUCSA reflects the extremely conservative nature of many of its affiliates (e.g. SASBO, ASA and S.A. Footplate Staff Association), as well as attempts to recruit to its ranks other right-wing, predominantly white, unions. Possible future affiliates are the 34,000 member Amalgamated Engineering Union of S.A. and the 14,000 member Building Society Officials Association of S.A.

In gaining new affiliates on the right, will it lose any unions on its 'left'? The shopworkers unions (NUDW and NUCCAW) have already withdrawn because of TUCSA's failure to take a stand on Neil Aggett's death. They were also allegedly having difficulty in meeting their financial commitment to TUCSA. It has been speculated that the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union (MICWU) and the Natal Garment Workers Industrial Union (GWIU) may decide to leave. But this will depend as much on the personal outlook of their respective secretaries as on their unease with aspects of TUCSA policy.

Talks with a number of officials from TUCSA affiliates reveal firstly, that "TUCSA has been hijacked by the right" and secondly, that there is no 'left' within TUCSA although there may be a few relatively enlightened individuals. It appears that TUCSA has now replaced the Confederation of Labour as the government-approved "official" trade union centre. Although resolutions mildly critical of government policy were passed, they are certainly closest to the government's labour policy in their thinking.

Although it presents a multi-racial image, <u>TUCSA remains dominated by whites</u> in its attitude and its leadership. Past allegations persist of control by white secretaries over the voting behaviour of delegates from the black parallel unions.

Only about one-quarter of the members of TUCSA affiliates are believed to be white. A number of African delegates attended the conference together with a large number of coloured and Indian. Altogether black delegates made up roughly half of the total of delegates. However, of the ten office-bearers elected, only two were not white. The incumbent (white) general secretary was re-elected. There is therefore a growing imbalance as one looks from the

bottom to the top of the TUCSA structure.

The election for the position of 2nd vice-president was revealing. Des East of CMWIU was overwhelmingly defeated by Robbie Botha of the Mine Surface Officials Association of S.A. (MSOA). Less than a year ago, Botha stood as a candidate for the post of nominated National Party M.P., Does his election reflect the thinking of black workers?

The conference highlighted TUCSA's close relationship with the employers. Many employers seem to provide the TUCSA union in their industry with free supplies of sweets, cigarettes and wine. Delegates to the conference sat eating Wilson-Rowntree's sweets, despite a continuing union-backed boycott of that company's products. City Tramways, the Cape Town bus company which in recent years has been the target of boycotts and court actions by community organisations, provided free buses for tours of the Western Capa. The company appears to have a very friendly relationship with the Tramway and Omnibus Workers Union.

Another indication of the close relationship with management is that Homes Trust insurance company hosted, as it usually does, one of the cocktail parties for delegates.

All this is justified by TUCSA's acceptance of the ideology of tripartite labour relations - close collaboration between labour, management and the state and the belief that all three essentially have strong common interests. Reflecting this, speakers at the conference this year included Dr. Kleu of the Board of Trade and Industries, and Piet van der Merwe of the Department of Manpower. The only black guest speaker in recent years was Mr. Sam Motsuenyane, the leading businessman.

• It appears likely that TUCSA's membership will grow as a result of new affiliations and extensions of closed shop arrangements. But will this be more than a growth in paper membership? More importantly, does TUCSA reflect the interests and views of rank-and-file black workers? Do black workers really not oppose detention without trial? And do they really have common ground with the white workers in, for example, Robbie Botha's MSOA or Grobler's ASA?

J. BASKIN, Jhb, Oct B

Picking Apples for R12 a week

FARM workers in the Western Cape are generally believed to receive better wages than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Recent interviews with a number of workers in the Ceres-Bokkeveld fruit-farming area revealed that conditions are poor and wages are still extremely low. Those interviewed were all town dwellers who still had close links with workers on the surrounding farms, often in the form of immediate family.

Workers spoke of wages of R2-R3 per week for men during the 1950's. By the late 1960's, according to one account, this had risen to R7.50 per week with children earning R3-R4 per week. At present Coloured male workers earn in the region of R10-R15 per week. On one farm men earned R12.85 per week. On another coloured men earned R15 p.w. whilst African labourers there earned around R10.50 per week the same wage as young women fruit pickers earn. During the picking season some townspeople find temporary work on the nearby farms. They earn slightly more than the permanent farm-workers.

One worker related her father's story of work in the early 1970's. "My father would leave here for Grabouw (the nearest juice factory) at A am and return by 9 or 10 at night. He'd go to bed with his clothes on because he'd have to get up soon again. Our underwear was made from flour bags. My father was a driver, one of the better-paid jobs. If he finished early he'd still have to work with packing things and unloading. For 5 years now he's been unable to work. When he stopped in 1977 it was R15 p.w. he got. He worked for 32 years as a driver on this farm in the Kouebokkeveld."

Hours of work are long and generally seem to follow the sunrise to sunset pattern common to agriculture. One woman spoke of working from 5 am to 7.30 pm. Saturday counts as a working day.

The whole family is expected to take part in farm work. In some cases the women work as domestics in the farmer's house. In others they join in the farm-work, at lower rates of pay. "The wife and children must work together with the man. If he refuses he must leave his house. Everybody has to work - from children to 80 year olds. This 80 year old man starts working at 7 am in winter sitting and cutting the frosty grass. The children work from 12 years anwards because the parents don't have money to keep them at school."

Children do not generally, it seems, begin working as young as in the old days. One man recollected how he began working in 1939 on a farm in the neighbouring Calvinia district, at the age of 61 indications are that, at

least since the 60's, children begin working on the farms from the ages of 10 to 12 years, with few exceptions.

It was difficult to establish exactly what farmworkers received in addition to their cash wages - the so-called 'in-kind wage'. All these spoken to indicated that workers bought their food from farm shops. One person indicated that these were slightly cheaper than town shops. Most people said that one had to buy from the shop on the farm. If you were caught buying at a neighbouring, and cheaper, farm shop then you could could be thrown off the farm.

Wine is also provided on a number of farms, sometimes as payment for overtime. The major 'benefit' provided free is housing. A family working on a farm is allocated a house. If you remain on in old age, without working, you are expected to pay rent. The conditions of the houses vary greatly. No-one spoke of having electricity or basic facilities. Cooking was done over an open fire, according to one worker. One man, now working in a factory, described his house on the farm as follows: 'There were 2 rooms, and no ceilings. The windows were pieces of wood. There was no electricity and the ceiling sweated a lot. Black drops would fall and stain the blankets and clothes. The farmer had to maintain the house. But in all the years we were there, no maintenance was done. The house is still like that today.'

The workers have many complaints. One persistent allegation was that the farmers hit and assault them, and that they can be thrown off the farm at the whim of the farmer. One worker complained of sickness caused by inhaling insecticides. Another spoke of a worker cutting a tree which fell on his back and injured him badly. He was fired and can no longer work. The lack of legislation protecting farmworkers is obvious in this case.

From all accounts life on the Bokkeveld farms is tough. One factory worker in Ceres, recently from a dried fruit farm, described how husband and wife must both work. "If they have a small baby it has to lie under the drying tables where it gets bitten by mosquitoes and everything. There's no chance to look after the baby", she said. "You get paid 15c to 20c per rack and work from 5 am to 7.30 pm. The women must still cook after work. Between 7 and 7.30 am you are given breakfast. You work on this the whole day. The men get a little bit of wine". Apparently the 'dop' system of maintaining semi-alcoholic labour still occurs although it is hard to establish on what scale.

With low wages, poor housing and few prospects but without the restrictions of the pass laws, why don't coloured farm workers move into the

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towns? There seem to be many reasons for this. Until recently wages in neighbouring towns were not significantly higher than on the farms. In addition, bondage through debts and simple conservatism seem to have kept many families on the farms. But the reason most frequently given was the unavailability of housing. "It's very difficult for them to come to town", one Ceres packer said of her cousin in the Kouebokkeveld, "because the housing conditions of the coloureds are very bad here in Ceres. Most of the houses are owned by the factories". So unless they come to a particular job, the chances are slender of farm workers finding accommodation in town.

J. BASKIN, JNb, Aug

AFCWU in Queenstown

QUEENSTOWN is one of those small towns which has been introduced to trade unionism for the first time. During the last weekend in May 1982 the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) established a branch there. They have recently acquired a union office and have their own workers' committee and two officials, Diaki Vani and Nomtunzi Nel. The union has membership at a number of establishments including KSM, Dunn's Bakery, Imperial Bakery, Frontier Meat Products, Bluebird Milling, Bokomo Distribution, Kentucky Fried Chicken, East Cape Agricultural Co-op and Melton Dairy.

According to the union the first approach came last year from Queenstown itself when some workers arrived in East London looking for help. They went to St. Johns Road, which houses AFCWU, SAAWU and GWU. Since they were food workers the task became AFCWU's responsibility but they were told to wait until Bonisile Norushe (the chief organiser) was released from jail. Eventually in April and May 1982 organising began.

None of the workers had been in a union before. Nevertheless they joined at a rapid rate and soon the union had about 800 members spread over some 10 plants. Since the factories were generally small this constituted, according to Norushe, "the overwhelming majority of the workers". Meetings were held in the local Miungisi township, and included residents from the dormitory township of eZibeleni. The main grievances to emerge were low wages (eg R21 per week at Melton Dairy) and dissatisfaction with the Haison committees.

Queenstown district was first settled by whites as late as the 1850's. The town itself is situated in the "white corridor", a strip of rich farming land which separates Transkel and Ciskel. It is the commercial centre and focal point of the northern Cape midlands. It is no easy task organising in

small towns such as these. For one thing, management and the authorities are invariably ultra-conservative.

This was highlighted during the strike at Frontier Meat Products on July 22. Approximately 120 workers were demanding a minimum weekly wage of R60 p.w. - the existing minimum being about R17 p.w. They also wanted two workers, who had been sacked after asking for an increase, to be re-employed. Sahd, the owner, took a hard line and issued a statement saying that management, not the workers, would decide when wage increases should come into effect. He also said the group would not be dictated to by, or become a member of, a trade union movement. "This strong stand is vital to all business houses in Queenstown otherwise we're looking at a turmoil situation." (Daily Dispatch 27.7.82) The strikers were all fired and selectively re-employed at the old rates of pay. The union was unable to help "because membership was low and we had no majority there", according to Norushe.

On another occasion, a wage strike at Melton Dairy by some 40 workers led to mass firing and selective re-employment. The strikers had demanded wage increases from around R21 p.w. to at least R60 p.w. Milk deliveries were disrupted. According to union sources, soldiers from the nearby army camp were brought in to do the loading and delivering. The union committee also felt that the security police had advised management against negotiations. On other occasions members had been visited at their homes and 'terrorised' against joining the union on the grounds that it was ANC.

Not all managements have been unco-operative. At the large KSM Milling Company the union is now recognised and has negotiated substantial improvements in conditions of service. Wages have also risen dramatically. The minimum basic wage was raised to R52 p.w. from Oct 4. It had originally been R35 p.w., before a wage and recognition strike hit the firm on July 29. On that occasion about 200 workers including drivers, clerks, packing and bagging staff and dispatch workers had joined in. The union already had an elected committee (only about 10 workers were not union members), but it was not yet recognised.

Negotiations were delayed when Norushe was detained for a few hours shortly after arriving in Queenstown from East London. "This insensitivity of the State security members can cause a downfall of the economy of the country because the negotiations for the striking workers have been delayed", he afterwards commented. The workers could have returned to work immediately if he had been able to meet with management." (Queenstown Representative

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23.7.82) KSM became the first Queenstown company to recognise an independent black union. Partly it was forced to do so by the strength of the workers but a further factor was that the AFCWU is recognised at other KSM mills around the country.

Late July therefore saw three strikes. A further strike, at Dunn's Bakery, occurred in mid-Nov. These do not appear to have been caused by the union - indeed they were all spontaneous and often ill-planned. They should rather be seen as workers celebrating a new-found feeling of power.

As the only union in town, AFCWU has been faced with numerous workers wanting to Join - such as garage workers and shopworkers. But as an industrial union it restricts itself to food workers. For the moment however AFCWU is forced to have something of a general union flavour. Already its ranks include Kentucky Fried Chicken (and at one time workers from OK and Checkers) as well as other sectors not normally organised by the union. It is keen to hand over the shopworkers, say, to CCAWUSA if and when that union should establish itself in the area. Thus far, only SAAWU and GWU have expressed an interest in spreading to Queenstown.

AFCWU faces a tough future in the town. Although it may gain recognition from certain companies (such as KSM) with which it already has agreements in other centres, some of the specifically local companies are likely to prove a tougher proposition. The situation is not helped by the fact that Queenstown is able to draw on an enormous pool of cheap labour. Unemployment in the two townships is high. In addition the town is within easy reach of resettlement camps such as Sada, Whittlesea and Thornhill. But despite these obstacles, unionism, it would appear, has finally come to town.

J. BASKIN MA Man .

Security Action and Trade Unions

Detentions

IN the period Jan 1 to Nov 15, 22 trade unionists were detained under security legislation. Two journalists, Joe Thiolog (formerly Transvaal Vice President of MWASA, now banned) and Minatu Tsedu (member of MWASA, also banned) detained on June 24, are still in detention.

Inquest

Neil Aggett, a trade union official of the AFCWU, died in detention on
 Feb 5. The inquest into his death adjourned on Nov 4 and will reconvene on

Dec 20 for the magistrate, P. Kotse, to give his findings.

Bannings

- Four trade union officials of MACWUSA, S. Pityana, M. Madlingozi, Z. Mjinjawe and D. Makhanda were banned for two years on April 1, after their release from detention. The terms of their banning order prevent them from entering the office of any organisation or factory premises, amongst other restrictions. G. Zini, organising secretary of MACWUSA, said that "the intervention of the security police made a mockery of any talks of reform by the Dept. of Manpower and served only to strengthen the unity and morale of the working class." (Evening Post, Mar 31)
- Harold Nxasana, former trade unionist from Durban and employee of the Institute of Industrial Education, had his banning order lifted in early Oct,
 3 months before it was due to expire. Nxasana was banned in 1977.

Trials

- Alan Fine, secretary of the Liquor and Catering Trade Trade Union, was acquitted on Nov 9 on charges under the Internal Security Act and alternatively under the Terrorism Act. Fine was detained on Sept 24 1981 under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act and had spent a total of 13 months in detention.
- Philip Diamini, General Secretary of the S.A. Black Municipal Workers Union, was detained on June 1 under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. In Nov he was called as a state witness in the trial of Lillian Keagile, charged under the Terrorism Act. Diamini refused to testify. The magistrate has reserved Judgement on Diamini's position. On Nov 23, Diamini and a number of others appeared in the Johannesburg Regional County, and are facing charges under the Terrorism Act relating to the PAC and AZANYU. The case was adjourned.
- On Sept 24, the State withdrew its charges against Thozamile Gqweta, SAAWU president and Sisa Njikelana, vice president. Gqweta and Njikelana were detained on Dec 11, 1981, released on Apr 4 1982, charged and redetained on May 6. On Aug 27, Gqweta and Njikelana were released on bail of R750 each.
- Oscar Mpetha (73), trade union organiser for the AFCWU in Cape Town was charged with 17 others for murder and on several charges of terrorism in Mar 1981. Mpetha's defence closed its case in Oct. The defence of the 17

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others is continuing. Mpetha, a diabetic, has spent several months of his detention in hospital. Repeated requests by the defence to have Mpetha released on ball have been turned down.

Thami Mazwi, national secretary of MWASA, was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment in Mar for refusing to testify as a state witness in the trial of Khotso Seatholo and Mary Loate. Mazwi had spent 5 months in detention. An appeal against his sentence was unsuccessful.

A review of the period Sept 1981 to Nov 1982 (12 trade unionists were detained in a swoop at the end of last year) showed that none of the 33 trade unionists detained, nor the 4 who were charged under security legislation, were convicted of any offence. Noting this, the independent trade union movement and other progressive organisations have condemned state action against trade unions, and have said that there was now sufficient basis to reject completely Louis le Grange's (Minister of Law and Order) claims that trade unionists were detained because "they were involved in terrorist activities, sabotage, arson or disruption of the economy through illegal strikes." (RDM Nov 15) Dave Lewis, organiser for GWU said "Not even with all the draconian legislation at the disposal of the Security Police have they been able to make charges stick. This establishes what we have always known - the reason why trade unionists are detained is because they have the support of the workers." (RDM Nov 12)

S. MOTALA, JAb, Nov 23

The Trial of Donsie Khumalo

ON Sept 10 1981, General Workers Union of South Africa (GWUSA) held a report back meeting at a firm in which they were organising - Delux Dry Cleaning in north Pretoria. The meeting was called to inform workers of the progress that the union was making in respect of its recognition by the management of Delux. Workers were told by the union organiser, Donsie Khumalo, of the intransigence of Delux's management. On the following day the union was informed that the workers at Delux had gone on strike. Khumalo then went to the firm and approached a Mr. Kaplan for permission to address workers so that he might be able to persuade them to return to work. While in the company of Kaplan, the security police arrived and detained Khumalo. He was released 4 hours later after interrogation and was informed that the police intended laying charges of incitement against him.

Khumalo was summoned to appear in court charged under the Riotous

Assemblies Act for inciting people to strike. After the charges were read out the case was postponed. When the trial resumed Kaplan was called as the first state witness. He told the court that Khumalo had approached him a few days before the strike in an attempt to gain recognition for the union. Kaplan had asked to see the union's constitution which Khumalo furnished him with a day or two later. With the constitution in his possession Kaplan phoned the security police inquiring about the legitimacy of GWUSA. He was informed that GWUSA was an "illegal union". On this information he decided not to have any dealings with the union. Under cross-examination by Martin Brassey, acting for Khumalo, Kaplan conceded that the industrial relations advice he had gained, came from incompetent people.

During the next court appearance, 2 further state witnesses were called. Both were employees at Delux. The first witness told the court that she had attended the union meeting on the day before the strike. She claimed that the subject of the meeting was worker grievances and that Khumalo had called on workers to strike at 10 am the following day. Under cross-examination she said that Zulu was the only African language that she understood. When it was pointed out to her that the meeting had been conducted in Sotho, she told the court that she had been forced to join the union but was unable to explain why she had not been forced to attend the meeting.

The second witness was asked by Brassey 3 times what Khumalo had said at the meeting, and 3 times she gave a different answer. The case has again been adjourned and will resume on Nov 30 1982.

S. RATCLIFFE, Jhb, Nov 15

Casual Status Tested

WHEN the local chairman of General Workers Union (GWU) was dismissed from his job at the Port Elizabeth dockyard earlier this year, investigations conducted at the instance of GWU exposed startling employment practice by the SA Transport Services (SATS).

Jeremiah Stoki Tolwana, who had worked for SATS for 13 years, was given 24 hours notice terminating his services in accordance with policy that classifies all blacks in SATS employ as casual workers, irrespective of the length of their service or job held.

The SA Railways and Harbours Services Act 1960, divides SATS employees into three main categories - casual, temporary and permanent servants.

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The job security of temporary and permanent workers is protected by the

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Act. In most instances disciplinary procedures, involving hearings, have to be adhered to before a worker in either of these categories may be dismissed. Permanent workers may only be dismissed on certain specific grounds. Reasonable notice periods are provided for.

Casual workers on the other hand are not covered by these protective provisions. The terms and conditions of their service contracts are determined by SATS management and until recently allowed dismissal with 24 hours notice.

What became abundantly clear was that SATS had adopted a policy of imposing inferior casual status upon its tens of thousands of black workers despite the fact that the Act does not discriminate by imposing a job category colour bar. It is worth noting that most wage regulating measures in South Africa define casual workers as persons who work no more than three days in any one week.

Tolwana sought to challenge his status as a casual worker by claiming 30 days notice pay to which he would ordinarily have been entitled as a worker with temporary status.

Both parties agreed that as the case had far-reaching implications for SATS employment policy, they should agree on the facts and present a stated case to the Supreme Court in Port Elizabeth.

The crisp point at issue was whether it was correct in law for SATS to confer casual status on Tolwana (given that he had had 13 years' continuous service in its employ) or whether he was entitled to the status of a temporary worker.

At an advanced stage of preparing the stated case, SATS backed out and paid Tolwana 30 days' notice pay without prejudice and without admitting liability.

Shortly thereafter SATS management announced improved terms and conditions of service for its black workers but stated explicitly that their status as casual workers would be retained. The new terms and conditions however fall short of the protection afforded temporary and permanent workers under the Act.

It appears to be only a matter of time before the casual status conferred upon black workers in SATS employ, is tested through litigation.

JHB CORRESPONDENT, Nov 7

Court Rejects Workers' Evidence

THE LEGAL action by the dismissed workers at Union Co-operative Bark and Sugar Company came to an end on Mar 26 1982, almost a year after they had been dismissed and evicted from their hostels on April 3 1981. The workers, most of them members of Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) brought an application to court to have their dismissal declared an illegal lockout and their eviction from the hostels declared an unlawful eviction.

The background to the case was as follows:

- The company decided to join the IC for the sugar industry in order to do so it was required to increase the wages paid to its workers.
- However, the company decided to offset its increased wages by ceasing to distribute free rations which had been a practice for some time.
- The workers felt that if rations were not to be provided then extra money should be paid to them to offset the amount they would have to spend on food.

On Tuesday, Mar 31, 1981, the appointed date for the cessation of the issue of rations, workers refused to work. Management then gave workers till Thursday to commence employment. When workers refused to meet this deadline, management informed the workers that they were dismissed and requested police to remove them as they were now trespasing. After being charged with trespass and released on ball the workers returned to the company. Management allowed them to enter the premises in small groups and only to collect their belongings. While 20 to 30 police were present these workers were escorted off the property.

The workers' case was essentially -

- that the company was unliaterally attempting to enforce on the workers a change in conditions of employment
- that the workers refusal to work was not an illegal strike but an attempt to enforce their contract
- the work stoppage was thus a result of management actions and the workers dismissal constituted a lockout
- that the workers were forced to leave the premises by management and the police at gunpoint or on pain of re-arrest for trespass
- that this eviction was against their will and as they had been in peaceful possession of the hostel, this action was unlawful and they should be allowed back on the premises.

The court decided to reject the workers' evidence including that of FOSATU general secretary, Alec Erwin, because it was too biased in favour of the union's cause. Instead the court decided to accept the company's version of the facts and accordingly decided that

- workers had accepted the company's decision to cease issuing free rations when the company had informed them of this in Jan.
- the substance of the workers' demands when they stopped work was for more money and not rations and thus the workers had stopped work illegally i.e. had taken part in an illegal strike
- accordingly they had been lawfully dismissed and had lost their right to stay on the premises of the company and were thus lawfully removed by the police for trespassing
- the courts decided that the workers had left the hostel voluntarily having accepted the fact that they were dismissed.

It seems that the central basis of the court's decision, was that the workers involved had not demanded the continuation of rations, or money in lieu of these rations, but had demanded only money in an amount in excess of the value of the rations. The court stated that had the workers stopped work to enforce the distribution of rations and been dismissed as a result of such a refusal to work, then the dismissal would have constituted an illegal lockout by management.

JHB CORRESPONDENT, Nov 7

GWU and the Durban Dockworkers

Jeremy Baskin

In May 1981, GWU (General Workers Union) opened its Durban offices, taking up a large room near the docks on the 1st Floor of a run-down old building in Point Road. Its aim was to organise Durban's dockworkers since the union had already done this in the other three major ports. The move from its Cape Town base to the Eastern Cape ports of East London and Port Elizabeth had been relatively straightforward. Organisation had been rapid and GWU came to Durban expecting a repeat performance. After a few months, having recruited only a handful of members, it became obvious that the Durban dockworkers were only going to be organised after a lot of hard work.

A number of officials and workers came up from the other ports to begin organising. The first full-time organiser in Durban was 'Rev' Marawu, who was sent from the Cape Town office. An old man, who had years of trade union and political experience, 'Rev' wanted to be near the workers. So he set up a bed in the office and lived right there. He was soon assisted by Sindi Mngadi, a young Durban woman recently out of school, who came in to run the office whilst 'Rev' was out organising. (Others came up from Cape

Town and the Eastern Cape to assist). An old stevedore from Cape Town Mr., Gwadzi, made a particularly big impression on workers. Having been employed by S.A. Stevedoring Services Company (SASSCO) in Cape Town for many years, he brought his age and his experience with him. He also brought his SASSCO overalls in which he walked around the docks speaking to stevedores. Many SASSCO workers joined GWU as a result of his efforts.

By early December, after six months of organising, only 500 stevedores had joined, out of a potential membership of 2,500. Most of these members were from SASSCO.

Organising had gone very slowly at first. Posters and pamphlets were written and handed out or stuck up on the hostel walls. "We were calling meetings and telling them to join the union and that the GWU is here in Durban", says Mngadi. "We told them what's happened in Cape Town with the stevedores, in Port Elizabeth and East London.They came to join, but only a few of them".

"'Rev' was organising hard, and I was staying in the office. They came to join and others came to ask what is the policy of the union. I told them, me and 'Rev', we are not the union. The office is not the union. The workers who are with the union, they must act themselves because it's the workers who control the union. To that they said, 'No, we don't trust you. There were so many unions who came who were speaking nicely, as you are speaking now". Organising was difficult. There were a number of factors which made it so.

Obstacles

The first obstacle to organisation was the conditions of the workers. Most of the stevedores employed by SASSCO (about 50% of the total) and by the Rennies component of the newly merged Rennies-Grindrod (about 25% of the total) are housed in hostels bordering on the docks. The remainder, ex-Grindrod workers, are mostly housed in township hostels. Workers describe the hostels as 'prisons' - no visitors (male or female) are allowed; the rooms are crowded and without privacy (up to 20 or 24 men live in one room); the beds are without mattresses (workers often sleep on their own mats or on the springs); and the quality of the food is a major grievance. In the past it was worse with no proper toilets (only a hole), and with 30 to 35 men in a room.

Alcoholism is rife. "The workers enjoy drinking Juba (Beer)" one

committee member explained, "because there's nothing else they can do". Isolated from the townships and from their families, and working in jobs that were heavy and exhausting, it is not surprising that the workers were demoralised and often drunk. According to one organiser, the workers had a very low opinion of themselves. "They were treated like pigs so they thought they were pigs". Without confidence in their own abilities, organising was difficult.

A second obstacle to organisation relates to the fact that the dockworkers generally come to Durban on contract from remote rural areas of KwaZulu. Many still have some access to land. They bring with them a high degreee of Zulu ethnic consciousness, partly as a consequence of the greater and more recent resistance of the Zulu people to white rule. This is also reinforced by their experience of homeland authority as less oppressive than Xhosa-speaking workers have found Matanzima and Sebe. This strong Zulu consciousness therefore made the workers suspicious when Xhosa-speakers from the Cape arrived to organise. "They thought Xhosa's are coming to bluff them, like other unions who came here some years back", an organiser explained. "When I see a Xhosa coming, I put my hands in my pockets to hold my money and run away", was one worker's response to early attempts at organising. Although the two languages are very similar, the distrust was a major obstacle that had to be overcome.

The third obstacle to organisation was a result of inter-union rivalry. Three unions had membership amongst the stevedores although none had anything approaching majority support. The largest was the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), affiliated to FOSATU. By the time GWU arrived, according to a TGWU organiser, their membership was 300 in Grindrods, with smaller membership at SASSCO and Rennies. Two other unions, the National Federation of Workers (NFW) and S.A. Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) had pockets of support. NFW agreed to GWU organising and gave over its members. SAAWU and TGWU were opposed to withdrawing from the docks. Competition between unions generally makes workers suspicious of all unions. In addition, bad experiences of unionism are likely to leave workers more disorganised than no union experience at all..

But despite all the obstacles, by late December and early January 1982, the stevedores were flocking to join GWU. The main reason for this was that GWU was seen to be successful in fighting proposed retrenchments. In early December, SASSCO management, had informed GWU that it intended retrenching 150 workers. GWU organisers had gone to see management together with 4

elected workers. When they arrived, management only wanted to speak to the union officials, but this was rejected because it was against union policy. Eventually they all met management, who agreed, mostly under pressure from workers in the other ports, to postpone retrenchment. Workers who resigned voluntarily would receive R300.

The result was that the remaining SASSCO workers decided to join GWU. Rennies-Grindrod (RGCS) workers also joined, but more slowly. What had impressed the workers was both the favourable deal that the union had won, as well as the fact that worker representatives were included in negotiations. The trickle of membership turned into a flood as a result of the successful struggle over retrenchment. But without the earlier organising efforts, which laid the groundwork, the union would not have made any headway. The union had been building up its credibility by the simple fact of sitting it out, talking to the workers every day and convincing people by their actions that they were serious and that they weren't planning to disappear. The fact that 'Rev' Marawu and Sindi Mngadi (assisted by others) had sat it out for months beforehand, laid the basis on which the union could grow. During the strike by SASSCO workers in September 1981, GWU organisers had tried to be present, not trying to direct the strike but simply listening and talking to the workers. (At the time GWU membership in SASSCO was less than 30). After that strike a number of workers began to realise that with the help of a union they might have been more successful. "We criticised GWU when it became active", one stevedore recalls, "but we remembered GWU and then we joined. By that time GWU had not done anything. They were just telling us about unity, so that we can get our rights from the bosses."

The location of the offices, right near the hostels of SASSCO and the Rennies component of RGCS, also worked in the union's favour. The union was seen to have persevered and to have stayed around, through all the problems. "From that time they started to come", says Mngadi. "They saw the help of this union. Each worker was talking to other workers to join the union."

By January/February 1982, GWU approached and got recognition from the SASSCO management. The negotiating of a formal recognition agreement was postponed until GWU had organised the RGCS workers. The intention was to have a joint constitution negotiated between RGCS and SASSCO on the one hand, and the workers committees in the two companies on the other. This has been the practice in the three other ports. But GWU, obviously elated by their progress at SASSCO, severely underestimated the amount of organising effort

At the time GWU had approximately 75% membership in SASSCO, 33% in ex-Rennies, and very small membership in ex-Grindrods.

needed and the obstacles still in the way of effective organisation in RGCS. It was to be another six months before proper negotiations on a joint constitution would begin.

The move to Durban

Why did the GWU decide to open an office in Durban? For many years it had been based in the Western Cape where it had become a significant force. Its emergence in the Durban docks (as well as in East London and Port Elizabeth) can be traced back to 1980. It was a turbulent year in the Western Cape - students organised and boycotted classes, City Tramways bus company faced a widespread boycott of its buses following fare increases and June 16th was commemorated by a highly effective stay-away from work. In the midst of this the meatworkers, organised by the Western Province General Workers Union(WPGWU) as it was then known, came out on strike for recognition of their union in two factories. The communities backed up their demands by implementing a boycott of red meat and collecting money to support the striking workers. After a protracted battle, during which the state detained a number of WPGWU officials, the workers were defeated. It was a serious setback for the union. The meatworkers had been well organised but they were unable to make any headway in the face of extreme management intransigence.

In the reassessment which followed, the WPGWU came to two conclusions. Firstly, it would have to move outside of Cape Town if it was to avoid being localised and isolated. Secondly, it would have to concentrate on specific industries if it wanted to consolidate its base.

The practical results of these conclusions were that it changed its name to the GWU and it decided to begin organising the stevedores in other ports. In Cape Town it had a well organised committee amongst the stevedores, and had won significant victories and recognition following a brief stoppage in the docks in December 1979. Organising dockworkers elsewhere seemed the logical place to begin.

In moving to Durban the GWU brought with it the policies and practices of the union. Its basic principles were 'non-racialism and democratic control by workers and democratic leadership of the union'. This meant that it didn't organise on the basis of promises to workers, and it saw the need for strong grass-roots organisation if anything was to be achieved. Its policies on the state are to 'work for the right of workers to participate fully in the

market the service was to the service the service of the service o

democratic government of the country'. In relating to other organisations of the workers and people of South Africa, it is committed to 'co-operating and working constructively with all organisations which are committed to the same basic democratic principles and aims'.

Some Background

Stevedore workers fall into four categories: the vast majority, known as stevedorehands; gangwaymen; winchmen; and indunas; workers are divided into gangs of different sizes. Typically, there could be a gang consisting of eight stevedorehands, one gangwayman and one induna. The winchmen operate separately from the gangs. There may be a number of gangs and winchmen on a ship, all under the control of a foreman, most of whom are white. Gang-sizes are a continual area of struggle, the bosses obviously wanting a specific loading job to be done by as few employees as possible. The workers interests are the opposite since smaller gangs mean that the work is harder and sometimes more dangerous. 'Skelm' gangs are often formed by taking one or two workers from a number of gangs and making an additional, unofficial gang. This practice has been fought successfully by the workers committee in SASSCO. *

The struggle over gang-sizes and the intensity of work reveals an interesting aspect about the nature of dock work. There is a sense in which dockworkers have a greater degree of freedom than factory workers. The work is spread out geographically and not subject to the same degree of managerial control and production discipline. A worker may work at one wharf on Monday and at another on Tuesday. The goods which require handling may vary considerably and require very different skills. So, unlike in most factories the dockworker is not tied to one particular spot, doing one job and being expected to produce a clearly defined output. When the day begins, the dockworker does not 'clock-in'. Instead he 'signs-on' ('bhala's) in his own time before the day begins and is informed whether or not he has work that day. The struggle against corruption in the allocation of work, and over how long before work begins it is necessary to 'bhala', have therefore been major issues.

The greater degree of control which they have over the work process gives the workers greater power, or at least greater scope for struggle. Resistance to management discipline is often a major area of struggle. The nature of the work may account for the militancy shown by dockers "skelm" gangs have not been a feature at RGCS.

The stevedoring industry has been a declining one for a number of years, largely because of containerisation. Competition has been fierce to retain a share of the dwindling business. In the process a number of firms have gone under or merged. By 1981 three companies were operating in Durban - SASSCO/Freight Services, Rennies, and Grindrod-Cotts. By August 1981, the last two had merged to form Rennies Grindrods Cotts Stevedoring (RGCS). The merger has not yet resulted in the consolidation of their respective labour forces. The result is that GWU is faced with three basic labour areas, but only two employers. At present RGCS and SASSCO have roughly equal shares of the Durban market and employ a similar number of workers. Both are the mainstay members of the South African Stevedore Employees Association (SASEA).

The two companies are interlinked with larger interests. SASSCO/Freight Services is strongly connected with Anglo-American, whilst RGCS falls under the Rennies group and has links with General Mining Union Corporation. This makes it difficult to ascertain exactly how well these companies are doing. Before the merger, Grindrod Cotts Stevedoring was described in the Financial Mail of October 24 1980, as "an important money earner for the (Grindrod) group...in spite of a general decline in the stevedoring industry." The, Rennies group as a whole was forecasting its 1981 pretax profits as R35 million, a massive increase over the previous year's figure of R25.7 million. Its report said that each of its three divisions (i.e. including shipping) had "substantially increased their operating profits..." The position of SASSCO is more difficult to ascertain. So although stevedoring is regarded as a declining industry it would still appear to be highly profitable.*

In their attitudes towards unionism, the stevedoring bosses have been relatively progressive. This is perhaps more true of SASSCO than of RGCS. For some years the employers have shown a preparedness in the other ports to deal with GWU, despite its unregistered status. In Durban they have indicated their preparedness to speak to GWU, as the union have majority membership. Their attitude is essentially a realistic one. They are prepared to negotiate with the most representative union, unlike many employers who feel that they have the right to dictate which unions are acceptable and

world-wide.

GWU has been organising the stevedores in a period when the industry has been shrinking, basically as a result of containerisation. Containerisation has meant a decline in the number of workers employed and in the amount of work available. At Rennies-Grindrod the average working week for stevedores is 4,6 days at present. In earlier years, an older stevedore recalls, "it was impossible to get a week or two to go to your family on the farm. You'd only get a month or so per annum. There was a lot of work in those times, unlike now." At present, workers are forced to take short-time leave of 6 weeks after working for only three or four months. Retrenchment will become an ever-increasing problem, especially with the recent containerisation of the Far East trade. GWU's successful handling of the retrenchment issue was seen by workers as a major victory.

The fact that work has been less frequent than in the past, has made the wage issue important. What the workers needed was some form of guaranteed earning, and not simply an increase in the daily wage. The wage situation in Durban is as follows:

- At present SASSCO pays its stevedores R12 per day basic with 4 days pay guaranteed if there is insufficient work.
- RGCS pay a basic R46,50 per week with an additional R2,20 paid for every day actually worked.

In practice this means that Durban stevedores earn roughly the same if they work for RGCS or SASSCO. The R12 per day earned by SASSCO's Durban employees compares with R15 in Cape Town, R14 in Port Elizabeth, and R13 in East London. Overtime work is paid extra. (Note: this was the situation in

In RGCS a worker who works a five day week can expect to earn R57,50 (stevedorehand), R60,45 (gangwayman), R63,95 (winchman), or R72,70 (induna). Earnings are therefore extremely low, especially if one remembers that workers cannot expect five days of work and if one takes into account that unpaid leave must be taken frequently. However, wages have risen over the years. At the time of the 1973 strikes, workers were earning R6,50 for five days work. By January 1981 workers earned R10 per day.

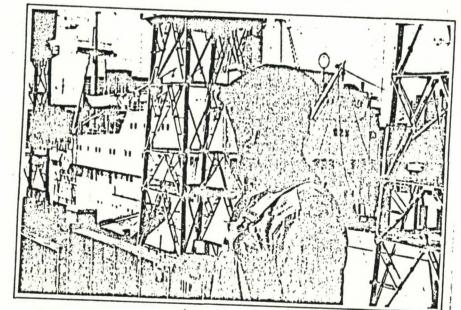
With work declining, the implementation of a weekly guarantee has been a major victory for the workers. In the other ports it was a result of union struggles. In Durban it came after the struggles in other ports. RGCS only introduced a guaranteed weekly wage in November 1981. SASSCO had done so earlier with a three day guarantee introduced in early 1980 and a four day

Rennies were recently able to announce their sponsorship of polo, for this year alone, involving an amount

Since the completion of this article, RGCS and SASSCO have merged, with the latter likely to be the dominant pariner. Stevedoring is now a virtual monopoly run by SAS Ltd. One effect of this 'rationalisation' is that

guarantee in 1981.

The grievances of the dockers are numerous. Apart from the problems such as money and gang-sizes already mentioned, there are other questions such as hostel conditions, safety clothing, leave problems and long-service benefits. Prior to GWU obtaining recognition, there were no effective channels for raising grievances. Other unions which had organised, never achieved majority support and they remained unrecognised. The official channels of communication consisted of liaison committees. A former member of the SASSCO liaison committee, now a leading member of the GWU, explained that in his experience it was "a bosses committee. There is nothing you can do to develop it. You're only told by the bosses to go and say this to the workers, that's all. The workers thought that we didn't pass their grievances to the bosses. But 'we did tell the bosses what they've sent us to tell. But nothing was done, no further steps were taken. I decided to leave the liaison committee because it was a dummy committee".



But no meaningful worker representation didn't mean no worker action. Workers were forced on a number of occasions to strike in order to make their demands known. It is impossible to compile a comprehensive list of strike

action. According to workers, strikes occurred in 1959, 1969, 1973 and 1981. All these strikes concerned wages. With the exception of the 1981 strike (which only occurred amongst SASSCO workers), all the strikes resulted in widespread dismissals and the employment of new workers. The 1972 strike lasted two days and revolved around the demand that wages be increased from R6.50 to R18 for a five day week. The strike was significant in that it preceded the strike wave which hit Durban in early 1973. It was only broken, according to workers, after police and army intervention. Workers were given 30 minutes to return to work. Those who didn't were fired.

Inter-union Rivalry

No study of the Durban dockworkers would be complete if it did not examine the effects of inter-union rivalry. When the GWU began organising it discovered a workforce that was disillusioned with and suspicious of trade unions. This fact was borne out in interviews I conducted with a number of workers. Some had become anti-union whilst others were cautious in their attitudes. "I became bored and decided to withdraw myself", one worker commented. "They gave us so many promises but they were not fulfilled", was the view of another.

After the suppression of SACTU in the early 1960's, no unions were present in the docks for a number of years. When GWU arrived in Durban there were three unions active - TGWU, SAAWU and NFW. NFW immediately withdrew, its membership never having been very large. SAAWU remained but with fairly limited membership, its claims of support appearing to be unrealistic. TGWU was the most established and it, together with SAAWU, was to come into conflict with GWU. This conflict has not yet been resolved, although TGWU appears to have withdrawn from active organisation in the docks, whilst SAAWU's handful of members appear only to play a disruptive role in the one section where they have a presence.

TGWU had started organising in the docks in 1972. At that time workers joined the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund (GFWBF), which later decided to divide itself into a number of industrial unions, one of which was TGWU. Membership of dockworkers was limited. In 1978 the union started making more concerted efforts there. By 1980 it claimed a membership of 300, mostly from Grindrods, but also including some Rennies workers. Management refused to talk to TGWU on the grounds that they were not registered. After having

This should probably read 1972. It is an indication of the militancy of Durban's dockers that their 1969 strike was almost the only major worker action in that period. Their October 1972 strike, involving some 2 000 workers, proved to be the forerunner of widespread worker actions (the Durban strikes of 1973) and preceded the revival of the black trade union movement.

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