



Workers' shacks at Katlehong

Battle looms over shack destruction

A MAJOR confrontation between the Katlehong Shop Stewards Council and the East Rand Administration Board is on the cards unless it halts the demolition of shacks in the townships.

The confrontation also threatens to draw in the local town councillors who workers said had given their consent to the demolition of the 'illegal structures'.

There are believed to be more than 44 000 shacks in the township, many of which house FOSATU members, whereas there are only 27 000 'legal' box houses.

TOOK UP ISSUE

The Katlehong Shop Stewards Council, which took up the issue when approached by angered union members, represents shop stewards from all the FOSATU unions in the Wadeville area.

It plans to approach employers and ask them to intervene or see to it that accommodation is provided for their workers and families.

Shop Steward Council chairman, Ronald Mofokeng said

employers were always eager to get workers' labour but cared nothing about where they lived.

Shack dwellers told FOSATU Worker News when we visited the area recently that they had moved out of the 'disgusting' hostels and built shacks in order to have their families with them.

FIVE YEAR WAIT

Others with city residence rights said they had been forced to build shacks because 'there just isn't enough houses in the township'.

They said thousands of workers had been waiting more than five years for houses to be built.

'Besides, many of us prefer our shacks to the box houses as we can design them to fit our needs and add on to them when we need to,' one worker said.

Referring to the dispute with the town councillors, a union shop steward said during elections the councillors had said they would allow the building of shacks but now that they were in power they had forgotten this promise.

At this stage the Administ-

ration Board has only demolished shacks in one section of the township but workers live in continual fear that their 'home' may be next.

For migrant workers this would mean sending back their wives and children to the poverty and drought stricken homelands.

'How can I do that to my family? My children don't even know what the homeland looks like,' a worker said.

INFLUX CONTROL MAKES WORKERS' LIVES 'INTOLERABLE' — SAYS UNION

THE new influx control laws are intended to oppress workers, to keep them weak and to keep their labour cheap — say the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

In a statement attacking the proposed Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill, MAWU said that through these laws its members were cut off from their families and forced to live like 'ants in degrading hostels'.

'Furthermore, if they lose their jobs the workers are condemned to starvation in the homelands.'

MAWU also slammed the continuing destruction of shacks in the townships and said it strongly supported the initiative of FOSATU's Transvaal region in mobilising workers in opposition to these measures.

The statement released after a recent meeting of MAWU's National Executive Committee said even though the Bill had been temporarily shelved, the Administration Boards had already implemented many of the worst parts of the Bill:

- * hundreds of shacks had been torn down.
- * there have been increasing raids in all the townships.
- * the West Rand Administration Board has inserted into call-in

cards a section saying that a worker who brings his family to the town faces the cancellation of his contract plus a fine.

MAWU's NEC recommended that it be made clear to employers that the new influx control measures would cause 'great dissatisfaction and instability among workers'.

'Our members do not accept that it can be a crime to be in town at night nor to look for work when there is no work to be found in the 'homelands'.

'Our members do not accept that it can be a crime to have their family staying with them nor that it is a crime to build shacks when the State fails to provide shelter for them,' the statement said.

MAWU said the present legislation and the proposed Bill would make workers' lives in 'intolerable' as it denied them adequate shelter, a family life and the freedom of movement.

'It is little wonder that the union has been mandated to let the 'powers that be' know of workers intense frustration and to put pressure on employers to assist workers in their struggle for decent living standards,' the statement concluded.

'DOM PAS' : HISTORY OF WORKER CONTROL

THE first pass laws in South Africa were introduced in 1760 and applied to the slaves in the Cape but by 1827 all Africans who came from outside the Cape had to have a pass to go there.

Pass laws also existed in the OFS, Natal and the Transvaal, but it was only when diamonds were discovered in Kimberley that the pass laws were fully enforced. This was because farm labourers were beginning to leave the white farms to go to Kimberley. They were leaving because wages were paid in cash on the diamond mines. This they needed to pay the taxes which the Government had imposed on them.

White farmers became worried that they would be left without labourers because of this flow to the diamond mines so they called for the introduction of passes to put a brake on this flow of men away from the farms. In 1890 a law was passed which made it compulsory for all workers to pay a shilling if they wanted to leave the Transvaal.

However, with the discovery of gold in 1896 stricter influx control measures were introduced. Mine owners were faced with the problem that the gold was very deep underground and required a lot of effort to mine. It required many many labourers and these had to be found at the cheapest 'price' to make mining profitable for mine owners.

So the mine owners began to call the tune. They wanted to control the numbers of workers looking for jobs and the places they found jobs. One of the reasons for this was that the conditions on the mines were terrible so workers stayed for

the shortest possible time. Although it was a crime to break your contract, bosses complained that it was not easy to prove a person guilty of deserting the job. So according to the new pass laws any male 'Native' on the Rand had to be employed if he wanted to stay in the area and had to show a metal badge to show this.

Already the mine owners could see that the system of migrant labour suited them well as it was cheaper to feed and house one worker instead of his whole family. But the pass laws and police control were not enough to satisfy the mine owners' need for cheap labour, so in 1901 the Chamber of Mines set up a recruiting organisation — the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). The WNLA sent agents all over Southern Africa who used chiefs to assist them in their recruitment.

So by using the pass laws and a system of organised recruitment the mine owners were able to ensure for themselves a regular flow of cheap male labour whose bargaining position was extremely weak. Workers were not free to move where they wanted and were directed through the pass system to where employers needed cheap labour most. The pass system also meant that the contract system was enforced and that the unemployed were 'weeded out' of the Reef area.

In 1922 it was proposed in the South African parliament that passes should be extended to women. However, just as the mines needed a controlled source of labour so the newly emerging industries actually

benefited from an uncontrolled flow of women to the towns. It was only in 1930 when farmers again complained that too many women and children who they depended on to work their farms were leaving for the towns that the Government amended the Urban Areas Act and gave municipalities the option of issuing passes to women. Later in 1952 the Native Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act was passed and new reference books were issued to men and women. At this time it was not yet compulsory to always carry a reference book. This was introduced in February 1963.

Since the 1960's the Government has continued to make changes to the pass laws. Most of these changes have tightened the control over the movement of black labour. And the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill is yet another attempt to tighten up these controls. Even if the Government decides not to pass the Bill as it stands, it is likely that many of the measures will be introduced through the 'back door'.

However, it must not be forgotten that although it is the Government which is planning the stricter influx control measures, the people who benefit the most from them are the employers. The migrant labour system gives them power over workers who always live in fear of losing their jobs. Working hand in hand with the Government the employers have been able to use the pass laws to provide a steady flow of cheap labour — never too few and never too many.

NEW BILL ANGERS WORKERS

THE Transvaal region of FOSATU has been mobilising union members to fight tighter influx control measures.

Over the past few weeks general meetings have been held in all the locals to discuss what action to take to halt the introduction of the 'horrific' Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill.

Workers at the meetings have been united in their rejection of the Bill which they say is aimed at dividing blacks into 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

They suggested that the Bill was intended to make migrant workers more powerless and exploited 'as everyone knows if a migrant worker loses his job he won't get registered in another'.

The workers said the Bill continued the pattern where first the Government took over the farms and chased the people to the towns and now it was chasing them back to the farms.

The Bill was also aimed at controlling workers by allowing the organised workers to be replaced by others, workers said.

At the general meetings, workers said they had noticed that the pass offices had been tightening control over migrant workers.

They said people from the homelands could no longer get registered for new jobs in the town.

'If a contract worker loses his job in the middle of the year, he can no longer transfer his contract to another employer — even if he has been retrenched,' a worker said.

Workers also reported that people who had worked in one company for ten years no longer get 10 (1) b rights, and children born in the location were classified as citizens of some homeland.

Workers at the meetings resolved to approach employers and their organisations and ask them to support workers' opposition to the new influx control measures the Government is sure to introduce — whether by the Bill or through the back door.

'Now is the time for employers to show that they are opposed to this inhumane system,' workers said.