

INDUSTRIAL COUNCILS : UNION STRUGGLES CONTINUE

FOSATU unions are continuing the fight against unrepresentative industrial councils and we are winning.

Bosses all over South Africa are demanding that unions join these councils. Companies such as Colgate Palmolive and Sappi have said they will only negotiate wages and working conditions at industry-wide level through industrial councils.

Both the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU), FOSATU affiliates, rejected this demand. CWIU said it is not opposed to representative bargaining on an industry wide level, but it will not give up its right to negotiate wages and working conditions at the factories where it is representative.

At a meeting with the employers' association P.W.A.W.U. demanded to know:

Whether by coming into council, the union would lose its right to negotiate at plant level?

Whether by negotiating at industry level, in a council where the vast majority of workers were still not represented, the agreement would cover unrepresented workers?

Why the employers demanded the union be representative in the factory before granting recognition but then tried to force unions into unrepresentative industrial councils?

The employers association has not yet given satisfactory answers to these questions.

Why are employers pushing so hard for industrial councils? Their idea seems to be to force black unions to negotiate wages for the whole industry when they have only joined up a small number of the workers.

They want workers to negotiate at a place where they are weak, and not in individual factories where they are strong.

FOSATU has repeatedly rejected unrepresentative industrial councils. When unions are representative of workers in their industry, and where workers retain democratic control over negotiations, industrial councils can be made to work to the workers' benefit.

This is true of the Automobile Assembly Industrial Council in the Eastern Cape, where the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers, for the first time in South Africa, won the right to a living wage.

But in most cases, the newly registered black and non-racial trade unions do not yet represent a majority of workers in the industry, and the industrial council acts to set wages throughout the industry at a uniformly low level.

The problems are worst where an industrial council already exists to keep the bosses united. In the chemical industry there is no strong industrial council or employers' federation, and the FOSATU affiliated Chemical Workers Industrial Union was able to resist employers' demands that it join. Even then the C.W.I.U. had to call a

boycott and threaten a strike before the bosses gave in.

In the Wood and Paper industry, there is a stronger employers' federation and they took the same stand. P.W.A.W.U. shop stewards at the Sappi Paper Mill were shown a letter by their bosses written by the Industrial Council saying that no company should sign a recognition agreement with a union that had not agreed to join the council.

Only after seven months of struggle by the union and six hours of continuous negotiations at which the shop stewards threatened to strike, did Premier Paper Mill agree to drop its demand that the union enter the industrial council.

Premier's statement to union shop stewards at the end of the negotiations stands as a warning to workers all over South Africa. "We never wanted the industrial council", "But we were under so much pressure from the employers' association that negotiations had to get to this point before we could give in".

Together with P.W.A.W.U. FOSATU hopes this drives the last nail into the coffin of the industrial council as it presently exists.

In the Steel and Engineering industry, FOSATU unions face the most powerful industrial council in South Africa and the strongest employers' federation. As a result, when workers go on strike in a single factory and the employer begins to give in to their demands, the employers federation steps in to make sure the company resists.

Recent negotiations and strikes by members of the FOSATU affiliated Metal and Allied Workers' Union make this clear. Only one company, Vaal Metals, granted a direct wage rise. Hendler and Hendler gave a R5 a week attendance bonus as a way out of the problem and Salcast and Dorbyl gave nothing at all.

When we look at who owns Salcast and Dorbyl the reasons for their stubborn refusal become clear. About 60% of Salcast is owned by the South African Government's Iron and Steel Corporation (IsCOR) and the other 40% by Anglo American Corporation. The biggest part of Dorbyl is also owned by these two companies.

Together with one or two other large companies, these giant firms control the industry's employer federation (S.E.I.F.S.A.) and the industrial council. It is Anglo American in the engineering, in paper and other industries which is trying to ram the industrial council down black workers' throats.

They know that in one factory will lead to improvements elsewhere, so they use their federation and the industrial council to take a common stand.

Workers can still gain concessions by united action in their factories as happened in Hendler and Hendler and Vaal Metals. But to make major advances the industrial council must be reformed or set aside.

Only when workers can match the employers' strength in a powerful, national industrial union will major gains be won. Only then will industry-wide bargaining make sense.



Chris Dlamini, FOSATU'S Transvaal regional Chairman, addressing workers at a FOSATU rally in Richards Bay. Beside him is Jeffrey Vulami, MAWU president.

Fosatu membership soars

FOSATU membership has soared in the first half of 1981. All regions and all unions report the same story of rapid growth and stronger organisation.

The figures make this clear:

- . Active signed up membership has risen from 60 000 to 70 000
- . Paid up membership has risen from 33 000 to 48 000
- . Recognition agreements have been concluded or are being negotiated with over 50 companies, 5 times more than for the previous 5 years.
- . Over 20 strikes have taken place in FOSATU organised factories, more than in any other group.

Even at a time when all union in South Africa are growing, it is clear FOSATU is making the fastest progress of all.

Some areas of FOSATU have grown particularly fast. In northern Natal and the East Rand, in the National Union of Textile Workers and the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union expansion has been spectacular. Branches of M.A.W.U. P.W.A.W.U., C.W.I.U., and S.F.A.W.U. have been established in Northern Natal so that most of the factories and the workers are now organised in FOSATU unions.

On the East Rand, workers are flooding in to join FOSATU unions. The FOSATU Workers' Project has organised 18 factories with a work force of 5 000 before transferring them to FOSATU unions in the region. At present, a further 20 factories are being organised.

The Transvaal branch of M.A.W.U. has also grown at an amazing rate. Over 20 new factories have been organised in the first half of 1981. Branch membership which stood at 8 000 in April last year has climbed above the 16 000 mark.

Equally big steps have been taken by N.U.T.W. and the S.F.A.W.U. The N.U.T.W. now has 12 000 members and is organising extensively in Natal, the Eastern Cape and the East Rand. The S.F.A.W.U. is far advanced with negotiation in two factories near Pietermaritzburg and workers in many others are close to winning their demands. Empangeni, Mooi River and Estcourt are also fast becoming FOSATU towns.

As FOSATU's General Secretary, Joe Foster, recently remarked: "With each month that passes FOSATU comes closer to its goal of strong national unions with the power to secure major working class demands."

Wits course for workers

FOSATU has signed a unique contract with Wits University to provide courses on worker economics and politics for members of their unions.

In an official statement, FOSATU hailed this as "A break through for workers as university resources which have so far been reserved for the sons and daughters of management will now be available to workers."

Each course will consist of an introductory section lasting three weeks and a one-week advanced course.

Participants will stay on the campus and will have access to all

university facilities such as the libraries.

The first course deals with the development of the factory system and the history of worker organisation. It examines the history of workers in Europe, America and South Africa.

The advanced courses look at the South African economic system, Government labour policy and worker reaction to it.

The courses have been designed by a joint committee of FOSATU and university representatives.

Any worker interested in attending the courses should apply to FOSATU through his union.