

PARALLEL UNIONS - HOW DO THEY WORK ?

In 1979 the Parallel unions mainly with the support of TUCSA and its affiliates began to be very active. The important question is - How do these Parallel unions work? Last year FOSATU prepared a long report on the activities of the Parallel Unions. Here is one example of the way Parallels work that is taken from that report.

PARALLEL UNION ACTIVITY AT S. AFRICAN GENERAL ELECTRIC BENONI.

PARALLEL UNION INVOLVED:
Electrical Allied Workers of
S.A.

Around the end of September the Black Personnel Officer called the Liaison Committee members and told them that officials from a trade union were coming the next day to speak to them. These officials, the next day explained to the workers about the union and how the union would help them. These were the main points.

1. If they lost their jobs the union will support them with R2,50 a week while they looked for another job.
2. If they died their dependents would get money (the amount not specified).
3. They would be members of a sick-pay fund and receive R3,00 a week whilst sick.

The were told the subscriptions were 50 cents a week and this would be deducted from their wages. A question was raised by the workers about the Liaison Committee - union relationship. Workers asked whether they would be able to form a Works Committee in the firm, rather than a Liaison Committee. One of the officials replied that the management would not allow it. He said that the Liaison Committee and the trade union would work together in the firm.

He also told the liaison committee members that they must not fight in the factory.

Joining forms were given to the Personnel Officer. He gave them to the Liaison Committee members and told them to tell workers about the Union and to give out forms in their departments.

The Liaison Committee members and the Personnel Officer were invited to a Union meeting in Riger Park, Boksburg. The liaison committee members did not attend, but the Personnel Officer reported to them that a Chairman and Treasurer for the East Rand had been elected at the meeting.

The Liaison Committee members were told that the joining forms would be collected by the Personnel Officer on 26 Oct. 1979. No further meetings were arranged between the liaison committee members and union officials, either at the firm or at the Union Offices.

The liaison committee members report that they are unhappy about this union: They have said "It seems just like liaison committee or Industrial Council ... They don't want to solve our problems. They talk about canteens and first aid but if you talk about money, they don't want to hear you".

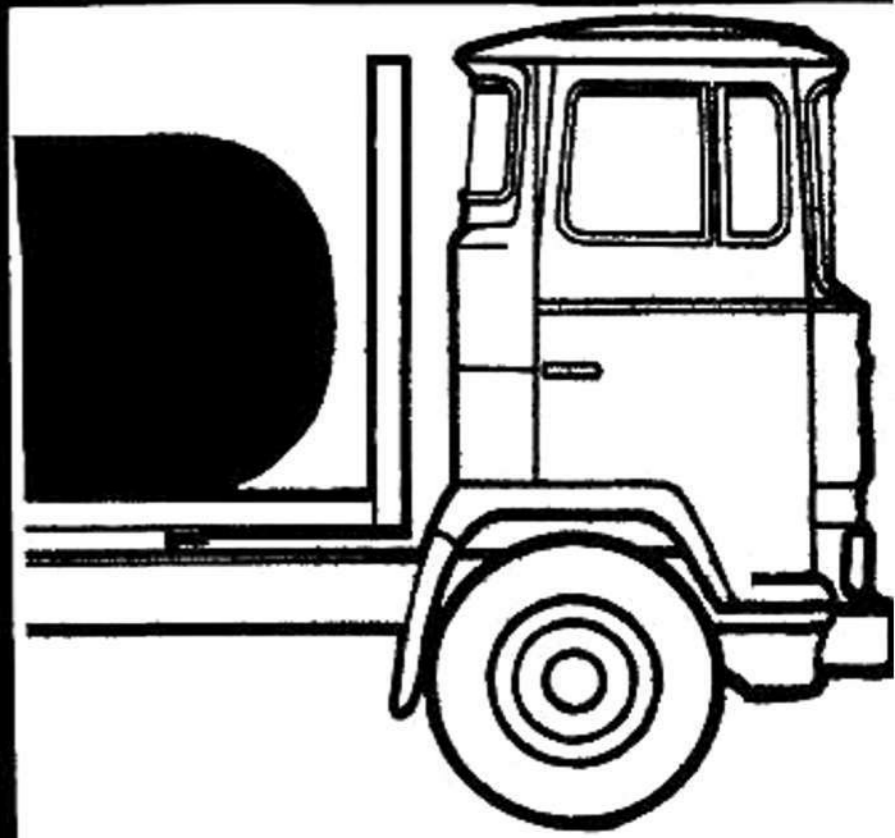
"This Union helps us when we are dead. When we are still alive it doesn't help us".

They report that workers are also suspicious, especially about the 50 cent deduction.

FOREIGN COMPANIES

A FOSATU report released in February shows that in general the record of foreign companies on Union recognition remains bad.

FOSATU stated that the most important test of the Codes was whether they promoted Union recognition. By this test the Codes had been a failure. FOSATU's report which is the most detailed information that has yet been presented in the Codes showed how Companies have delayed, blocked and refused Union recognition.



Leyland

SOUTH AFRICA

After reaching a deadlock and having to go to arbitration the FOSATU affiliate Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union and Leyland reached a new agreement covering the Cape plants.

The Agreement contained wage increases and more important greater rights of union recognition and important new conditions of employment. Its believed that this agreement is probably the most progressive signed by any registered union in South Africa.

CONGRATULATIONS LEYLAND WORKERS.

STRIKE

The seriousness of the wage problem was shown when workers at the Elsie's River plant of Leyland went on a wildcat strike on the . Despite initial management refusal they then agreed to talk to the Union. During the negotiations it was agreed that management would consider wage increases. The strong role of the Union and their discipline saved the situation from chaos. On 12th February, 1979 the management announced increases of between 10c and 20c per hour bringing the minimum hourly wage to 98c per hour.

BRITAIN

Judging by our newspapers one would think that British Leyland shop stewards were

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OVERSEAS NEWS

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crazy and management angels. Here is a brief summary of the actual events.

BRITISH LEYLAND

In September last year, British Leyland in England decided to close 13 of its plants. This meant that 25 000 workers would lose their jobs. At the same time management was demanding drastic changes in established work practices. Shop Stewards of Amalgamated Engineering Workers Union at B. Leyland published a document putting forward suggestions to the B. Leyland on how to prevent this decline of the company. They felt that if their suggestions were put into action no workers would need to lose their jobs.

For writing this document management fired senior shop steward Derek Robinson. Almost immediately 30,000 B. Leyland workers went on strike in protest against this. Management refused to re-instate Robinson but said they would allow a union inquiry into the reasons for his dismissal, on condition that the workers would go back to work. The inquiry recommended that Robinson be given back his job because the reasons for his dismissal were unfair. The union has said that if management does'nt agree to this they will be forced to call their 80,000 workers out on strike.

This letter was sent by the union members at the Atlas Copco plant in Sweden. MAWU is organising at Atlas Copco in Benoni near Johannesburg.

" To our friends in FOSATU
A few words about Atlas Copco's local union "Nacko" situated a few miles from Stockholm, Sweden.

We have about 700 members in our local union. We belong to the Swedish Metal Workers Union. Nearly everybody here are members of the union. At this plant we produce rock drilling machines and compressors.

We have a local executive committee into which members are elected every year. The name of our chairman is Per Erik Njholm and he works with trade union issues full time.

In every department we have one "contact person" and one "safety shop-steward". The "contact person" has to inform workers in his/her department, about discussions, negotiations and agreements with management. The duty of the safety shop steward is to see that all safety regulations are followed and to point out to the supervisors if some machines or other things are out of order.

Five years ago, we in the local union demanded free working clothes from the company. The company agreed to our demand. Every second week we get clean shoes. Also the shoes are free of charge. We have special shoes with iron-toes.

One of the big questions during the last few years has been the wage system. Before nearly everybody worked with piece-rate (ie. we get paid according to how much of one article we

finish in an hour). But most of us felt that this system put too much pressure on the workers. There were always disputes with the supervisors about how much piece-rate should be too. That is why we demanded a fixed monthly rate. Now the wage is set in two different ways depending on the type of the work like if it is heavy, noisy, very boring and on top of that we have a system with "points". You get extra points depending on how long you have been working at Atlas Copco, your occupational experience and how good you are at your work. In the union we often discuss whether the wage gaps are still big.

The workshops are both good and bad. We have some new and modern workshops with air condition and good daylight, but we also have dark and noisy workshop which have too many machines on a small surface. That is why we demand that the company install new modern air-conditioners. Some machines at our plant are very modern and are operated with a computer system, instead of using human labour like before. These machines are very expensive and the management wants to introduce new machines all the time. That is our problem. Employment is decreasing at our plant.

We work 40 hours a week, Monday to Friday. We have five weeks paid holiday in the summer. We earn about Sw. Cr 29/hour (that is about R6 hour but cost of living in Sweden is about 4 times as high as it is here).

Because Atlas Copco is a multi-national company and we here in Sweden are very interested to keep contact with our friends overseas. We think there are many common problems that we could help each other with. We have a special S.Africa group and their task is to keep contact with our friends in S. Africa and to spread information about you and your trade union work to our members.

Until the next time, many warm greetings to all of you from up here in the North!"

Götestrom, full time union safety shop steward in his office at the Atlas Copco factory in Stockholm, Sweden. All depts have a safety shop steward.

