

What's the use of boots without laces?

THE low percentage polls in the recent elections for the new town and village councils was a real slap in the face for the present government.

During the build-up to the elections, the government had heralded the town councils as an opportunity for urban blacks to take over the running of their own townships.

Blacks were even being given the chance to vote!

But for what?

As one government official aptly said, 'blacks were asked to vote for boots without laces'.

Over the years, as the government has tried to put a new face on apartheid, these councils have undergone many name changes — they were originally called Native Advisory Boards, which then became Urban Bantu Councils, then Community Councils and now town councils.

But although the name has changed, their powerlessness has virtually remained the same.

The new town councils, though, have been given additional responsibilities in terms of the Black Local Authorities Act.

The town councils will be responsible for the 'moral and social' welfare of the residents, sound community development, the beautifying and neatness of the area, parks and public resorts, sport and recreational facilities, libraries, museums, botanical and zoological gardens, bursaries, and building plans.

The councils will control street trading, water supply, sewerage, electricity, and the building of roads.

They will also be responsible for the demolition of illegal buildings, like shacks.

Here are the boots but at this

stage the government is not sure what to do about the laces — it is not clear how these town councils will be funded.

Municipalities in white areas — to which the government has compared these town councils — get most of their funds from rates which factories and other businesses have to pay.

But townships do not have factories or big businesses which can pay rates — townships are really dormitory suburbs of the nearest 'white' town or city.

So by making the townships independent of the cities, the factories have the benefit of workers' labour without having to pay for the upkeep of the areas where the workers live.

One of the few ways the town councils can raise money is through rents — the councils could increase the rent being paid by township residents.

People's anger at rent increases would then be directed at the town councils.

Which is exactly what the government wants.

Dr P J Riekert said 'these local authorities will serve to defuse pent up frustrations and grievances against Pretoria (the government).'

To add to this, in spite of claiming that these new councils are 'autonomous', the government has still retained control over them.

The Minister of Cooperation and Development, Dr Koornhof, will still have the power to take away these new functions of the councils and to dismiss the council.

If no council members are elected for any reason, the Minister can appoint people to fill the empty seats.



Townships get their independence — but at what price?

If a council fails to do the things which it is responsible for, like the demolition of shacks, the Minister can arrange for this

to be done and then charge the council for the costs of the work done.

It is clear, then, that although

these councils have been given a new face, they remain merely as a 'rubber stamp' for the government.

Massive wage increase

Textile gets its foot in the door

WORKERS at NCS Plastics in Pinetown have won a massive 65 percent wage increase — no small achievement in the middle of an economic recession.

Back in 1975, the management of this company managed to crush union organisation in the factory — but the workers never gave up.

And last year they reorganised themselves into the Chemical Workers Industrial Union.

A recognition agreement was signed and the union began its task of sorting out the company's chaotic wage system.

A CWIU organiser said NCS Plastics had had no grading system before the union stepped in.

'One of our members was doing the identical job to a fellow worker, but was getting half his wages,' he said.

The organiser said a grading system had now been introduced and the system of merit increases scrapped.

'Now workers will at least be able to see where they stand,' he said.

As a result of the December wage negotiations, the starting rate has been increased from a disgustingly low 85c per hour to R1,40 per hour.

The CWIU said this was still 'significantly' below FOSATU's living wage demand of R2 an hour, 'but considering the circumstances, it is a definite step in the right direction'.

THE National Union of Textile Workers has managed to get its foot in the door of a closed shop which barred it from representing workers in the Natal clothing industry.

In a ballot at Pinetown clothing factory, James North, the overwhelming majority of workers voted in favour of being represented by NUTW.

Out of a workforce of 269, 219 voted in favour of NUTW and only 43 voted for TUCSA's Garment Workers' Industrial Union.

A new agreement negotiated between the NUTW and James North will now come into operation.

The ballot victory opens the way for further expansion by

the union in an industry which up to now has been dominated by key TUCSA unions.

The Natal-based Garment Workers' Industrial Union which has been thrown out by this ballot claims a membership of 55000.

But judging from what workers at James North say, much of this is just 'paper' membership.

NUTW organiser, Jabulani Gwala said many of the James North workers did not even know they belonged to the TUCSA union.

Wages were negotiated by the Garment union at the industrial council and it had no contact with the workers themselves, he said.

Brother Gwala said workers in

two departments at James North were being paid shockingly low wages because they did not fall under the clothing industrial council — machine operators were being paid labourers' wages.

But the Garment union had done nothing about their wages because they only negotiated at the industrial council, he added.

The James North workers also had problems with dismissals and retrenchments which had not been taken up by the Garment union, he said.

Brother Gwala said the NUTW recognition agreement would change all this as it would bring into being factory level wage negotiations and a dismissal

procedure.

Meanwhile, in the Cape where the NUTW is up against another closed shop — this time dominated by TUCSA's Textile Workers Industrial Union — the union is awaiting a key court judgement.

The union has asked the court to overturn the textile industrial council's refusal to give stop order rights for union members at Table Bay Spinners.

The closed shop does not allow stop order deductions for any other union except the one that sits on the industrial council — the Textile Workers Industrial Union.

And this TUCSA union has repeatedly refused to give NUTW an exemption from this part of the agreement.

Giant step forward for CWIU as 4 000 Sasol workers join

IN a major leap forward, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union has organised more than half the workforce at the giant Sasol plants at Secunda.

Sasol, which produces oil from coal, is by far the biggest company within South Africa's chemical industry and is rapidly expanding.

The union's 4000 members at Sasol has considerably added to the size of the CWIU. The union now stands on the verge of massive expansion.

The addition of the Sasol workers has already more than doubled the size of the union's Transvaal branch.

For over a year the union has been trying to organise these

plants but limited resources and the distance of Secunda from the nearest branch offices made the task extremely difficult.

However, every weekend East Rand shop stewards would travel down to Secunda — a two hour drive — in order to organise these non-unionised workers.

Eventually, organisers were taken off their duties on the East Rand and a major campaign was launched.

The CWIU approached Sasol management for certain facilities during the recruiting drive.

But the company refused to give the union stop orders until it had organised 50 percent of the workers, even though the union knew certain white unions

had been granted facilities.

Sasol also refused to let the union use the hostel hall for meetings

It was only after nine months of recruiting that the CWIU was able to get meeting facilities in the township from the local Administration Board.

Despite the obstacles the Sasol workers refused to give up.

Shop stewards, organisers and the Sasol workers' steering committee mounted a major drive at the end of last year and managed to hit the target of 50 percent.

Having signed up 4000 Sasol workers, the union is now preparing to sign a full recognition agreement with the company.

THIS year FOSATU Worker News will be starting a reader's page in order to give workers a chance to air their views. So if you feel that you have got something to say, or want to tell us about an interesting or funny experience you have had in the factory — then write in. Perhaps you have written a poem or a song — then send it in. You do not have to write in English — Zulu, Xhosa or Sotho will do just as well.

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