

Thousands strike in Richards Bay

Twelve workers in hospital after police action.

YET another major dispute has broken out over the pensions issue, this time in Richards Bay.

About 1 700 workers from the MAWU-organised Alusaf factory and 500 from the TGWU-organised Richards Bay Coal Terminal downed tools after disputes over the companies' pension schemes.

A near-general strike followed when two construction firms were also affected and workers from the Enseleni township refused to turn up for work.

Union leaders say the Richards Bay disputes underline the problems of unrepresentative industrial councils which take decisions in which the majority of workers have no say.

It also demonstrates, they say, the dangers of huge industrial councils which move so slowly that it takes months for a dispute to be resolved.

DEMANDS

As long ago as 15 September last year, Alusaf workers expressed their unhappiness with the Alusaf Pension Fund. During lengthy discussions with the company, workers demanded that Alusaf:

- withdraw from the Metal Industries Group Pension Fund
- establish a new fund for which the workers could negotiate the rules.

Alusaf told the workers that changes would take a long time as the fund was nation-wide.

However, after the workers submitted a new petition on pension and wage demands on May 25 this year, it became apparent that the company had not even taken the first step of applying to the industrial council for exemption from the fund.

SIT-IN

According to the MAWU organiser for Alusaf, workers' patience was at an end, and on June 15 1 700 workers staged a sit-in in the factory.

Management responded by calling in the police, who attacked the workers. Twelve workers were so

badly injured that they were hospitalised. Sixteen were arrested.

The company also asked two neighbouring construction factories, Grinakkers and Fraser and Chalmers, to lend workers to Alusaf. This led to these workers joining the strike, although Grinakkers management apparently refused the request.

STAYAWAY

On June 19 and 20 the police intervened again. Meetings in the township were banned for the weekend, which only angered workers more. On Monday June 21 there was a complete stayaway of workers from Enseleni township and a partial stayaway of people from other smaller townships around Richards Bay.

Finally, at a meeting on Wed-

nesday the 23rd, Alusaf management agreed to take the proposal for withdrawal from the pensions scheme to the industrial council.

Workers began returning to work soon afterwards.

According to FOSATU representatives at Richards Bay, management and police action again emphasises the need for a full legal right to strike, including the right to picket and hold meetings.

Jeffrey Vilane, president of MAWU and chairman of the shop stewards' committee at Alusaf, has added:

"Police intervention and the charging of workers under the intimidation Act have also not solved any problems and can only lead to worse confrontation in future."



JEFFREY Vilane, president of MAWU and chairman of the shop stewards' committee at Alusaf, addressing the union's annual general meeting earlier this year... "police intervention has not solved any problems," he has warned.

Effective strike rights demanded

FOSATU is to consider proposals demanding the right to effective legal strikes at a future central committee meeting.

The proposals have been drawn up following a national seminar on strikes attended by all FOSATU affiliates last month.

Delegates at the seminar shared their experiences of strikes and discussed strikes in the individual factory, area strikes like those which occurred in Uitenhage in June 1980 and Isithebe earlier this year, and the rolling strike like that which took place on the East Rand last year and earlier this year.

UNWORKABLE

During the discussions it was agreed that the present strike laws are unworkable and are themselves responsible for worsening industrial conflict.

Delegates noted that many employers had begun to realise this, but were still in two minds. Many had signed agreements with FOSATU unions which accepted that the companies would not

dismiss striking workers for up to three days.

Also, during the recent East Rand strike wave when there were 40 strikes in MAWU factories alone, employers started by allowing two days or more for a resolution of the disputes.

However, employers were still not ready to accept disputes procedures which grant an unrestricted right to strike and the East Rand employers later hardened their attitude by dismissing striking workers as soon as they had downed tools.

CONFRONTATION

This immediately increased tension in the area, leading to worse confrontation as striking workers tried to stop strike-breakers from taking their jobs. They also began to consider ways of widening the dispute to other workers.

The State's attitude has also been contradictory and backward, the seminar heard.

Almost all the strikes have been illegal because workers have needed a speedy remedy to their problems

and have not been prepared to use the official channels, which involve long delays before a legal strike is permitted.

Despite this, the State has not usually sent in the police to break up strikes and arrest workers, as it used to do two years ago.

It has, however, acted to stop picketing and when it claims intimidation or violence has taken place.

Then, as during the TMSA strike in Springs last year, it has also banned public meetings and arrested striking workers.

Delegates reached the conclusion that the law itself is responsible for much of the violence which has accompanied some recent strikes.

RIGHT TO PICKET

Several delegates who had seen confrontations develop with the police argued that it was essential for workers to have the right to picket.

If workers could not stand outside the factory gates and exert moral pressure on strikebreakers, which is common practice in democratic

countries, they were more likely to resort to violent forms of pressure, they said.

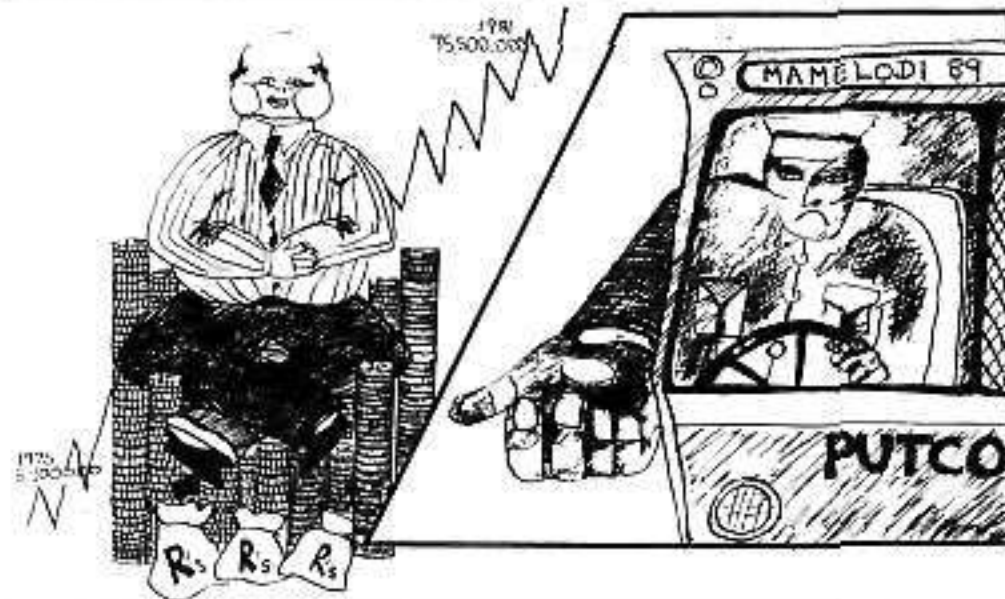
REPORT-BACK

The right to hold report-back meetings during strikes was also essential, delegates said, as this was the only way in which disciplined collective decisions could be taken and violence avoided.

RESOLUTIONS

The seminar also voted to recommend the following resolutions on strikes to the central committee:

- The right to an effective legal strike should be written into the law and the present delays in the official procedures removed
- unemployment payments should not be affected by the fact that a worker has been on strike
- the right to have strike funds should be conceded
- no FOSATU affiliate should accept an anti-strike clause in any agreement. Instead, an effective and speedy disputes procedure culminating in the right to strike should be negotiated.



Little joy at Putco

DESPITE what Putco management has said in the past, South Africa's biggest private bus company is extremely wealthy.

From 1975 to 1981, the value of Putco shares rose from R5,9 million to R75,5 million, and in the year 1980/81 the company's turnover increased by 25 percent.

And yet, in May this year, the company agreed to increase wages by a mere 16 percent. This means

that the lowest paid workers are getting a basic wage of only R58 per week, and the highest paid workers R110 a week.

UNHAPPY

The TGWU is extremely unhappy about these increases. The union, representing workers at the Springs Putco depot, put forward wage proposals far above those agreed to by management. However, because the union is not yet formally recognised, these proposals were not taken very seriously.

According to management, TGWU representatives were only invited to sit in at the wage talks out of "courtesy", and union officials were not invited.

The union based its proposals on FOSATU's "living wage" demand of R2 an hour for last year, and increased this to R2,30 to take account of a 15 percent increase in the cost of living.

Union representatives were opposed to percentage increases, as this always means that the lowest paid workers get the smallest increases. The union feels that the wage increases should close the gap between unskilled and skilled workers rather than increase it.

ACROSS THE BOARD

Therefore, representatives

demand an across the board increase of R53,50 a week, which would have pushed the lowest wages up to R103, 50 and the highest to R148,50.

The union believes these demands were reasonable and could have been met by management. In contrast the increases granted will barely cover the rise in the cost of living over the past year, which means that wages of Putco workers have not really improved at all this year.

TGWU was also unhappy that no effective joint stand could be taken with the Transport and Allied Workers' Union (TAWU), a CUSA affiliate.

Without consulting TGWU, TAWU submitted far lower proposals to management, namely a 25 percent increase for those earning R62 and above and a 30 percent increase for those earning below R62.

WEAKENED

TGWU could not accept these proposals and the two unions ended up submitting different demands - thus weakening the bargaining position of both.

TGWU hopes this will not occur again. It also hopes that by May next year the union will not only be fully recognised by management but will also have grown in numbers and in strength.

Latest wage increases

HERE is a list of some of the wage increases and other benefits won by FOSATU unions in recent weeks.

Henred Freuhauf (Wadeville): MAWU wins minimum wages of R2 an hour.

AA Fabrics (Edenvale): NUTW wins a 40 hour week with no reduction of pay and a 10 percent shift allowance on all shifts.

This is in addition to the 11,3 percent wage increase negotiated by the TUCSA-affiliated National Union of Clothing Workers, which was refused a 40 hour week during industrial council negotiations.

Union Liquid Air (Germiston): CWIU wins 50 cents an hour

increase, 30 cents immediately and 20 cents in January, raising the minimum wages from R1,31 to R1,81 an hour.

Natal Thread (Hammarisdale): NUTW wins R10 a week across the board for the next nine months. This followed a strike when workers rejected a management offer of R4,05 a week.

Hebox (Hammarisdale): NUTW wins 23 percent increase for the next year, in addition to the 10 percent increase granted in April - a 33 percent increase altogether.

Rolfes (Elandsfontein): CWIU wins 50 cents an hour increase for this year, plus one week's extra

leave to compensate for the time migrant workers spend travelling home.

Kelloggs (Springs): SFAWU wins R9 across the board increase. Minimum wage increases from R72 to R81 a week. Also 5 percent afternoon shift and attendance allowances, and one week's wages as Christmas bonus.

Revertex (Durban): CWIU wins R2,03 cents an hour minimum wage and R2,20 in December. This is a 46 cents an hour increase since April.

Viljoen's Transport (Wadeville): TGWU wins back leave pay from R100 to R300 for its members.