

FOSATU WORKER NEWS



THE FRAME STRIKE

Frame Workers confronted by the Police-22nd May

Seven years ago cotton workers in Pinetown made the front page of every national newspaper as they took to the streets in a bitter struggle for a living wage in the Frame Group.

This month again Pinetown/Clermont was shaken violently as more than 5000 workers defied their management and refused to work until they were told what increase they were to get in July.

For more than a week workers clung steadfastly to their stand: "Tell us how much our increase in July is going to be before we return to work." During the strike workers faced great problems. Riot squad police were used and worker gatherings were dispersed with teargas. Management claimed that the strike was over and 85% of workers had returned to work and this was announced on the radio. Workers were undeterred.

The might of the state was thrown even harder into the battle on management's side. Workers meetings were banned for forty-eight hours by the Chief magistrate of Pinetown and three worker committee members were arrested as they left a meeting with Frame management at the Frametex Mill.

The situation worsened when

the company assisted in forming a large armed impi of workers to march into Clermont on three evenings. There could have been a civil war in Clermont. Finally management cracked and announced the July increase would be 15% with a further 10% in January.

Why did all this happen? Wages in the Cotton Industry are regulated by a Black Labour Relations Wage Order - made by government solely on the recommendations of Employers without workers having any say at all. Workers in the Cotton industry are actually getting poorer. The increases they have been receiving are less than the increase in the cost of living. Between August 1977 and April 1980 wages went up by 20% while the cost of living went up 35,5%. At present the lowest wage at Frame is R18 40 a week and the highest wage is R31 90 a week. The minimum estimated income for a family of 6 in the Durban area is R45 08 a week. Frame workers are certainly not earning a living wage and that is what the strike was about!

"We tried very hard to keep order and organisation so as to negotiate, but management would not do so. This lengthened the strike and angered the workers." Jabulani Gwala, chairman of the Workers Com-

FOSATU DENIED OVERSEAS ASSISTANCE

On 6th June the Government prohibited FOSATU from receiving donations from overseas trade unions or from raising donations in South Africa. They did this in terms of the Fund Raising Act which came into effect in September 1979. FOSATU is the first organisation against which the new Act has been used.

The Government action is a serious one and denies FOSATU the right to receive financial assistance from overseas. This is a clear violation of the ILO Charters and is being strongly attacked by the international trade union movement.

FOSATU spokesmen point out that this appears as an attempt to break FOSATU as an effective national federation. "The people who will benefit will be the parallel unions who get management support and can draw on the finances of the registered unions", says a FOSATU press statement.

FOSATU leaders point out that although this is a very serious blow they are certain FOSATU will not collapse.

"We're sure our members will meet the challenge by supporting their organisation at this difficult time. We'll do all we can to change the situation", says Johnny Mke FOSATU President.

There has been widespread criticism of the action by other trade unions and labour observers. So far the Government seems determined to stick to its hardline.

mittee says. The lesson is so clear - either give workers a say in their conditions of work, or carry on deciding their fate without them. The first is orderly negotiation in the mills, the second inevitably leads to confrontation on the streets. One wonders how long some managements will take to learn this lesson.