

FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



March 1982

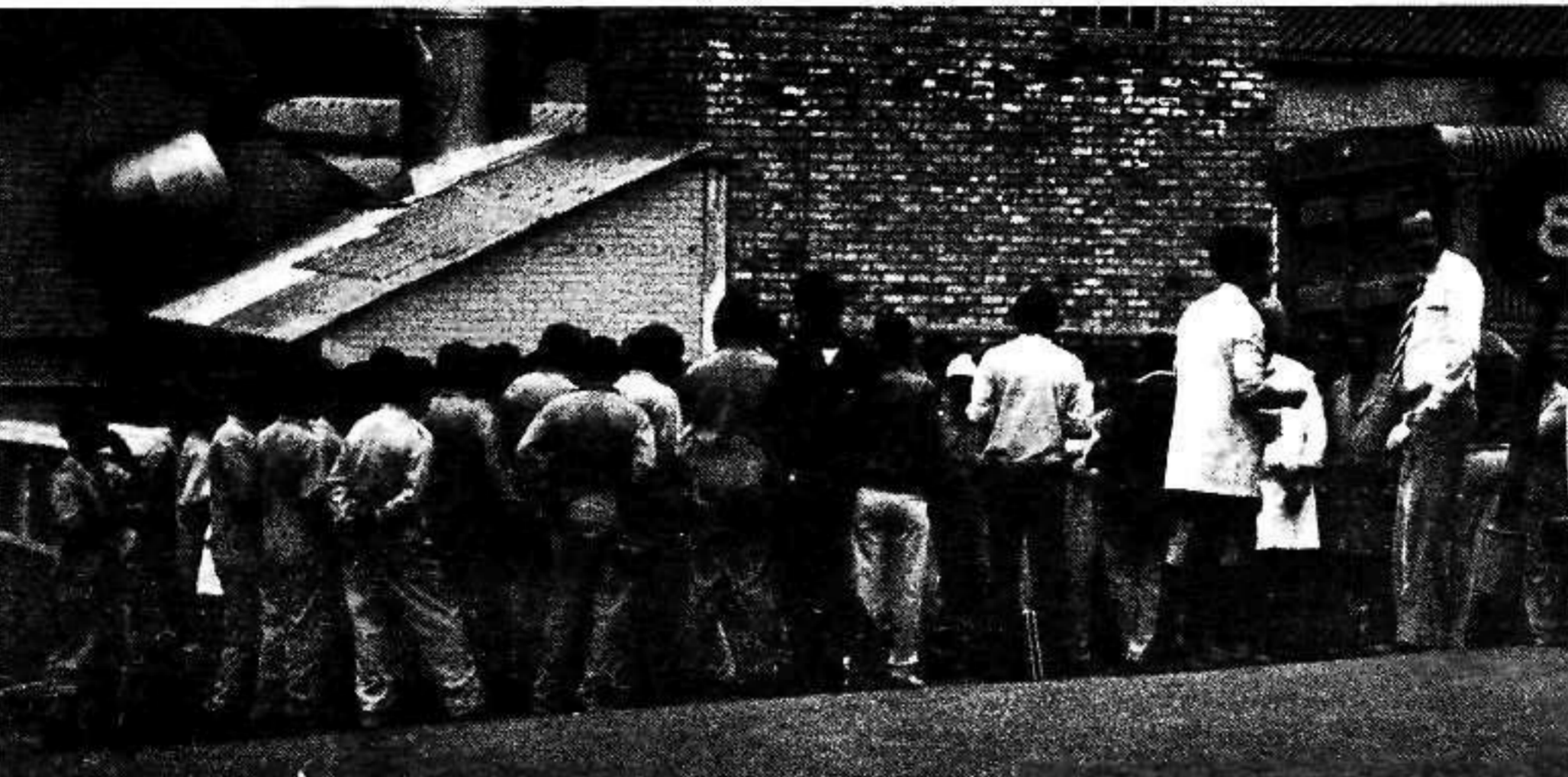
White workers join stoppage at V.W.

AT the Volkswagen factory in Uitenhage, 7 000 workers stopped work on February 11 to mourn the death of trade unionist Neil Aggett — the largest single stoppage in the country.

White workers also joined black and coloured members of the National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (NAAWU) in the half-hour stoppage.

At Cadbury in Port Elizabeth, some section managers and production managers joined the commemorative service held during the stoppage. At Plascon, white foremen did the same.

At all the factories in the Port Elizabeth area which took part in the stoppage, workers observed a three minute period of silence, followed by prayers and the singing of 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica.



WORKERS at SA Fabrics were among the thousands who stopped work on February 11 to mourn Dr. Aggett's death. The vast majority of them were members of FOSATU unions.

Thousands mourn for Neil Aggett

first national stoppage for twenty years

MANY thousands of workers all over South Africa stopped work for half an hour on February 11 to mourn the death of trade unionist Neil Aggett who died in detention.

It was the first national work stoppage for nearly twenty years and the first in which workers stopped work simultaneously in their factories and did not just stay away from work.

Neil Aggett, Transvaal organiser of the African Food and Canning Workers' Union, was hanged while in detention in John Vorster Square on February 5.

He had been in detention since November 27 last year.

'WE WILL NEVER KNOW'

"We will probably never be sure who was responsible for his death," a lawyer closely connected with the case has said. "But everyone agrees that he would still be alive if he had not been detained."

"The recent admission of three other trade union detainees to hospital after twelve to fifteen weeks of detention is clear evidence of the physical and mental pressures to which political detainees are subjected."

As soon as the news of Neil Aggett's death was made known, FOSATU unions began discussing ways of responding to this situation.

UNION MEETINGS

In Durban, the national executives of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and the Chemical Workers' Industrial

Union (CWIU) supported the principle of a stoppage during their executive meetings on February 6 and 7.

In Johannesburg, the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) discussed similar action and over the same weekend, the national executive of FOSATU also proposed the idea of a national stoppage.

On Monday February 8, the African Food and Canning Workers' Union, to which Neil Aggett belonged, issued a call for a half hour long stoppage on Thursday February 11, and all FOSATU unions then supported this call.

VAST MAJORITY

Despite the short time available to organise the stoppage,

workers in FOSATU unions responded well, and the workers in FOSATU organised factories who stopped work on the Thursday represented the vast majority of the workers called out by all unions in South Africa.

In most areas, workers only had little more than a day's warning and in places like Wadeville, they were only informed about the stoppage at a shop stewards' council meeting the night before.

Despite this short notice, all of the factories represented at the council meeting observed the period of mourning.

This even included workers who were only newly recruited and whose unions have not yet

been recognised by their employers.

TRIBUTE

The way in which they consulted fellow workers, approached management, and then organised the stoppage in only three hours the next morning is a tribute to their determination and to their factory floor organisation.

According to Joe Foster, FOSATU's leading role in the stoppage should kill the idea that registration by a union means that it is controlled by the State.

As he has pointed out, the vast majority of workers that stopped work were in factories organised by FOSATU unions, all of which have been granted registration.

REGRETTABLE ATTACK

Workers and officials from several FOSATU unions also describe as regrettable the attacks made by Jan Theron, general secretary of the two Food and Canning Workers' Unions, on those unions that had accepted registration.

Both attacks took place after the unprecedented unity of workers displayed during the stoppage and at the funeral service for Neil Aggett in Johannesburg.

"This was a time when we reaffirmed our commitment to the struggle," said one CWIU shop steward who attended the funeral.

"It was a time to express unity, not division."

Estcourt workers dodge reprisals

WORKERS at the NUTW Burhose factory in Estcourt faced a difficult problem when they planned their stoppage.

Ever since a strike in May 1981, worker leaders had suffered victimisation by the company, and they expected dismissal if they took a leading part in the stoppage.

Workers therefore decided to organise a stoppage in which no leaders appeared.

Shortly before 11 a.m they all started singing at their machines. They then all stopped their ma-

chines and continued singing. At 11 they stopped singing and observed a period of silence. At the end of the period of silence, Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica, the national anthem, was sung, after which the workers resumed work.

No management reprisals have yet been reported.

FOREMEN WORKED

At Industex, a textile factory in Natal, NUTW informed management of their decision to observe a period of silence. Soon afterwards, the union received a call

from the production manager who asked if five machines could be worked by white foremen during the period of mourning since these machines required several hours to restart.

The union referred the problem to the shop stewards who discussed the matter and authorised the foremen to work the machines.

In the rest of the factory the stoppage was thoroughly observed.

BOKSBURG

Management at Reef Chemicals

in Boksburg, agreed to the demands of CWIU workers that the stoppage be held, but said they must observe it outside the factory gate.

When the workers left the factory, the union's 120 members lifted up Aggett placards and marched past several factories before coming back.

Workers waiting outside the pass office burst into worker songs as the procession passed.

Workers had returned to the factory before any police appeared on the scene.