

EDITORIAL

ON May 1 workers everywhere in the world, including here in South Africa, celebrated May Day. We did so to remember past struggles and to gain courage for the battles ahead.

During May workers were harshly reminded of that ugly face of capitalism against which we have to struggle.

When economic times were good for companies and they made giant profits, workers did not get a fair share of these profits. We were told that those profits would be used to make more jobs.

Where are those jobs now that we need them?

And now when times are bad, workers are told that they must accept low wage increases. In May, SEIFSA — the largest employers' association which covers the entire metal industry — offered their lowest paid workers an increase of 5 percent (R3,15 per week).

What nonsense is this? Workers are asked to take 5 per cent when inflation itself is 13 percent. Workers are asked to accept R3,15 a week when companies still make millions of Rands profit even in bad times.

When we ask them to prove to us that they have problems then we are told that they cannot do that because to give information is a management prerogative. What is this word prerogative — is it the right to hide employer greed and to treat unions like children.

We are not children and employers will learn this to their cost in the future.

In May, the cowardly destruction of shacks at KTC in the Western Cape harshly reminded us of the ever increasing problem of housing. Employers want our labour in the factories but don't want to hear from us when we are outside the gates. How can we be expected to provide our own housing on the measly wages employers insist on paying us?

South Africa's apartheid system has developed this particular form of exploitation, where men are forced into the cities to work. But their families must remain behind — condemned to a sure death in the drought and poverty stricken homelands. While back in the cities men live in hostels that are little better than worker prisons.

When they try and escape this and get their families to join them, they must live as criminals in shacks. At any time their shacks can be destroyed and all human pride and dignity crushed in rain, mud, bulldozers and tear gas.

Workers know where the problem lies. Employers want our labour for their profits but don't want to bear the costs of a decent life for our families. But our strength is growing in the factories. FOSATU will not hesitate to push employers to push their government to stop this oppression. Employers have the power to do it but like to hide behind the government.

What is done by employers and their Urban Foundation is only a small drop in this ocean of misery.

FOSATU unions will survive this recession and these problems but we will not forget the bitterness of these times. This May Day we faced the challenges of these obstacles but in future we will look back at our victories.

Bus companies wash hands of drivers facing criminal charges

THE lack of protection for bus drivers involved in accidents has been put under the spot light by the Transport and General Workers Union.

This follows a case involving Putco bus driver, Victor Phalandwa.

Brother Phalandwa was involved in an accident where a woman was killed.

He was hauled up before a Springs magistrate and granted a R200 bail.

JUSTICE MISUSED

But it appears that the prosecutor was not satisfied with this and brought him before another magistrate where he was refused bail.

The TGWU angered at this 'misuse of justice' approached the Legal Resources Centre.

The LRC appealed to the Sup-

reme Court to set aside the second magistrate's order and to re-instate the R200 bail. This was granted.

INSTANT DISMISSAL

TGWU general secretary, Jane Barrett said in the case of accidents not only did bus companies 'wash their hands' of a driver involved in a criminal charge, the driver also faced instant dismissal.

She said in Britain the bus drivers were protected by the company against charges for damage to property or people while driving.

'If the accident is the drivers fault, he can have his licence endorsed by the police but he will not be fired by the company unless his licence has been endorsed often,' she said.

SEIFSA's 'wage game'

THE giant metal industries employers' association, SEIFSA, has abandoned its earlier refusal to negotiate wages this year.

This change of position was made at the first industrial council meeting attended by the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Setting an example for the other unions on the council, the entire National Executive Committee of MAWU attended the meeting and all were allowed to speak.

The established unions tend to be just represented by union officials and have only one spokesman.

Although MAWU is not yet a member of the industrial council it was granted full speaking rights.

In its opening speech, MAWU attacked the employers for refusing to negotiate wages and asked what had happened to all the record profits that metal companies had made over the

past five years.

'It seems that SEIFSA does not care about the retrenched workers and their families who are literally starving in the rural areas,' a MAWU representative told the council.

MAWU speakers accused the employers of 'playing games' by trying for years to get MAWU on to the council and now that the union was present, refusing to negotiate.

MAWU reported that after a 'long and difficult' meeting SEIFSA agreed to recommend to its members that they change their position.

STOP PRESS: SEIFSA has come back with an offer of 5 percent — R3,15 per week. This is way below the MAWU demand of an across the board increase of R18 a week and is likely to be rejected by metal workers.

BRAITEX WINNERS!



THESE women workers sure have something to be happy about. After all its not every day you receive part of the largest pay out in a labour dispute in South Africa — the pay out was the R40 000 won by Braitex workers. Joining in the fun is the National Union of Textile Workers' Transvaal organiser, Bangi Solo.

LABOUR COURSES START UP AGAIN

THIS year's Labour Studies Courses will go ahead in spite of the set-back caused by Wits University cancelling its contract with FOSATU.

The Labour Studies Course was initially set up using Wits facilities but in a surprise announcement last year the university cancelled its contract.

However, FOSATU has re-organised the course with the help of the lecturers who were involved from the beginning.

The first course for 1983 is due to start on May 23 and will continue until June 5.

To run the three courses planned for this year, FOSATU has employed a full time co-ordinator.

She is Adrienne Bird who

started literacy programmes in FOSATU unions way back in the 1970's and has since studied worker education methods in Britain.

FOSATU Education secretary, Alec Erwin welcomed her return and said that her position was a challenging and exciting one in worker education in South Africa.

The two-week courses will be each attended by 14 people from all regions of FOSATU.

They are a unique opportunity to study wider theoretical and political developments affecting trade unions.

No doubt the 'graduates' of this year's courses will join those who already play an active role in FOSATU unions.

Unity wins pay rise

WORKERS at Smith Industries in Pinetown have recently won major wage increases from the company after long negotiations and two work stoppages.

The eventual increase agreed to ranged from R12 to R14 per week across-the-board.

The company also guaranteed a further R2 per week increase in August and agreed to negotiate further increases in October.

In order to close the gap between women and men workers, the women have been guaranteed a minimum increase of R4 per week across-the-board in November.

Shortly after negotiations began three weeks ago, a deadlock was reached when management refused to negotiate further.

Workers downed tools and refused to return to work until the company had agreed to re-open negotiations with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

The managing director was called in to address workers and after promising to negotiate further, workers returned to work.

However, at the next meeting between shop stewards and management wage talks again broke down when the company refused to increase its offer.

R26 000 BACK PAY VICTORY

THE Chemical Workers Industrial Union has won a massive back pay claim at Chesebrough-Pond's International at Wadeville which will cost the company about R26 000.

The back pay claim results from shop stewards at the company discovering that many workers were not being paid the correct rate for the job.

This information came to light when the company gave the CWIU an official list of jobs, job grades and rates of pay before this year's wage negotiations.

After many frustrating delays the management finally sat down with the shop steward chairman and a union organiser to check all rates of pay.

It was discovered that out of the 250 workers at the factory, 80 were being underpaid.

Management agreed to correct the rates and to back pay the workers to October 1982 — the date that the CWIU took over from the South African Chemical Workers Union as representatives of the workforce.

FIRING BLOCKED BY UNION

AN attempt to fire two senior shop stewards at Triomf Fertilizer at Richards Bay has been blocked by the Chemical Workers Industrial Union.

The chairman of the shop stewards committee, Emmanuel Mpanza initially faced three charges at a disciplinary inquiry.

He was represented by the senior shop steward, Elphas Mbatha and was acquitted.

NOT THOROUGH

However, a few days later the Triomf production manager decided the first inquiry had not done 'a thorough enough job' and instructed Brother Mpanza to appear before a second inquiry.

At the second inquiry the shop stewards tried to get management to follow the correct procedure but this led to the senior shop steward being thrown out of the inquiry.

That afternoon both Brother Mpanza and Brother Mbatha were told that they had been suspended — Brother Mbatha was also barred from company premises.

ANGRY WORKERS

The company's transparent attempts to fire these leading shop stewards dragged on through six inquiries and was watched closely by angry workers.

Finally in an important victory for the Triomf workers and the CWIU, the company dropped the cases and Brothers Mpanza and Mbatha returned to work after two weeks of suspension and inquiries.

MAWU said this made workers 'very angry indeed' as they felt they had been tricked so workers stopped work again.

This time they refused to go back to work until an agreement had been reached.

After the day-long negotiations, the shop stewards eventually came back to workers with an offer which was acceptable to all.

A MAWU official said by uniting, workers at Smiths had been able to achieve their aims — 'they broke down all divisions between them and proved that unity is strength'.