

Lamontville turns into a battlefield

LAMONTVILLE, a township near Durban, was recently turned into a battlefield.

And it is believed that at least three people have died as a result of attacks by SJ Smith hostel 'impi'.

The Natal region of FOSATU has called on the SJ Smith Hostel workers 'to carry out the real task of workers which is to create unity and not to destroy it'.

Since the residents of Lamontville decided they had had enough of continual price increases and decided to resist both the bus and rent increases, they have been the focus of violence.

Last year the Lamontville people voted to boycott the buses of the Durban Transport Management Board when the Board announced a hike in the fares.

For nearly a year the residents have refused to board the buses and have walked up to 5 kilometres to the nearest railway station or have caught the taxis.

A central figure in the bus boycott was Lamontville councillor, Harrison Dube.

However, earlier this year he was shot dead at point blank range by assassins alleged to have been hired by Lamontville Mayor, Moonlight Gasa.

At this point the violence in the township erupted as township residents showed their anger at the death of their respected councillor.

People stormed out of the memorial services held to commemorate his death, stopped a bus, emptied the passengers and then set it alight.

From then on riot police patrolled the township, fired tear gas, chased people with dogs and allegedly fired shots which wounded completely innocent people.

At this stage the Port Natal Administration Board announced that it would be increasing the rents from May this year.

In community meetings, the residents planned to continue to pay the old rents but not the increase.

They said they would not pay higher rents for houses which were 'wrecks'.

At this point KwaZulu leader, Gatsha Buthelezi, intervened saying that if Lamontville were incorporated into KwaZulu the rents would be lower.

This was totally rejected by the people of Lamontville who rightly feared that if they were incorporated into KwaZulu they would lose their section 10 rights.

The right to look for work in the nearby Durban would then be a 'privilege' governed by the whim of the Administration Board.

However, at a meeting at the SJ Smith hostels, the local councillor criticised Lamontville's decision to not be incorporated into KwaZulu.

The scene was now set for a confrontation between the workers at SJ Smith and the residents of Lamontville.

The opportunity came when a Lamontville councillor invited the SJ Smith councillor to a meeting in the township.

'When they came into the hall it was already packed with people who were singing. The councillors then tried to chase the youth out of the meeting with sticks,' a person at the meeting said.

'There was havoc inside and the youth came out and started to burn cars,' he said.

At that point an SJ Smith 'impi' came across to the township 'to teach the Lamontville people a lesson'.

Scores of people had to be treated for severe head injuries and a woman, a man and a young schoolboy were killed in the fighting.

The next day FOSATU issued a statement urging workers to 'not allow yourselves to be used'.

The statement said 'workers must build a just and equal society for all - they must not plunge into the darkness of attacking children'.

However, the local Zulu newspaper, Ilanga, misrepresented the FOSATU statement claiming that along with the Joint Rent Action Committee, the federation had slammed the SJ Smith workers.

In fact FOSATU's statement

slammed the violence and the police for not intervening sooner to prevent the riot. It was also not a joint statement with JORAC.

Efforts to get the Ilanga to correct this misrepresentation have been unsuccessful.



Above: Since last year police have continually patrolled the township
Below: KwaZulu government cars smoulder outside the Lamontville Community hall - this sparked off the hostel 'impi'
(Pics courtesy of the Daily News)

Wave of metal strikes by Transvaal workers

THE metal industry in the Transvaal has been hit by a wave of strikes over the past few months as Metal and Allied Workers Union members battle against stubborn management.

And in spite of the employer practice of firing all the strikers and rehiring selectively, MAWU has managed to get the majority of the workers taken back.

This is no easy task in the present economic climate where retrenched and unemployed workers are desperately looking for jobs.

At Boart Hard Metals at Springs, workers struck for two hours when the company refused to take back a worker who, workers said, had been unfairly dismissed.

Talks between MAWU and Boart Hard Metals have at this stage deadlocked and the union is considering further action.

At another Springs factory, Union Carriage, workers downed tools for two days when management brought in a white union into retrenchment negotiations with MAWU.

MAWU boycotted the meeting arguing that as the majority union it should have sole bargaining rights.

At VSP Steel workers went on strike when the company suddenly announced that it would not pay any bonuses this year.

On the same day the company dismissed all the workers and closed the factory 'until further notice'.

However after negotiations between MAWU and the comp-

any, management agreed to re-employ all the strikers.

About 200 workers at Coal-equip near Johannesburg have also been taken back after a strike over the dismissal of a worker.

Meanwhile, at Rheem SA workers have refused to accept selective rehiring.

The workers went on strike demanding the dismissal of a supervisor who had said to management that union members were intimidating non-members.

This was dismissed as 'lies' by the workers.

Rheem fired all the strikers and has tried to selectively rehire workers in order to weed

out the 'hot heads'.

At Pretoria factory, Asca Cables, workers have struck on three occasions recently.

The latest strike was sparked off by the dismissal of a worker.

The company fired all the workers and began to hire retrenched workers from other plants.

After long negotiations between Asca and MAWU, the company finally agreed to take back the majority of the workers and guaranteed employment to the rest when there was sufficient orders.

However, three shop stewards were not taken back and MAWU will be making an appeal for them.

Retrenchment blocked

A STRIKE by 200 workers at Port Elizabeth's Carborundum Universal factory recently successfully blocked the retrenchment of seven security guards.

The company told Metal and Allied Workers Union shop stewards that it was bringing in an outside firm to handle security at the factory in order to cut costs and would therefore have to retrench the security guards.

This was not accepted by the workers so the following day they stopped work in sympathy with the security guards.

Negotiations between the Metal and Allied Workers Union and the company resulted in management agreeing to absorb the security guards into production.

Carborundum agreed also not to reduce the security guards wages.

Earlier, it was discovered by the union that the security guards had been working a 60 hour week but were being paid for only 45 hours a week - R117 instead of R169.

After negotiations the company agreed to back-pay the guards the amount they had been underpaid - which in total meant the company had to pay out about R5 000.

MAWU believes that the Carborundum's retrenchment of the security guards had been influenced by this massive back-pay claim.

Christmas cheer

CHRISTMAS is going to be a real time of celebration for Shatterprufe workers in Port Elizabeth.

They have just won a 250 percent increase in their annual bonuses.

And all because they swapped over from the tame Glass Workers Union to FOSATU's Chemical Workers Industrial Union.

For as long as they can remember, Shatterprufe workers have been getting one week's wages as a bonus.

But now in terms of the new wage agreement just completed, workers will get three and a half week's wages as a bonus.

For the bottom grade, this will mean an additional R205 at the end of the year.

The workers have also won a 12.4 percent wage increase

which will push the minimum hourly wage from R1,86 to R2,10.

These wage negotiations have meant a lot to the Shatterprufe workers - not only because they were able to achieve massive increases but also because it was the first time that they had ever participated in negotiating their own wages.

Under the Glass Workers Union, the general secretary would talk to management and then the workers were merely told what their increases would be.

The next step for the Shatterprufe workers is to have the Provident Fund, which was set up by the Glass Workers Union, liquidated.

A new pension fund will then be set up which will cater for workers' needs more adequately.