

Apartheid must go, says report

IT is in the interest of all workers that the apartheid regime must go. And foreign investment must assist this process not hinder it, says a FOSATU report delivered at a United Nations' hearing held on September 16-20.

'The federation supports and welcomes all forms of pressure against the apartheid state and to the extent that the disinvestment campaign is one of these pressures we believe it should continue for as long as it is an effective pressure on the present government,' the report says.

'However, the federation would not sanction that actual withdrawal of assets by companies from South Africa as we are of the view that this is part of the social wealth of the country created by the workers,' it

adds.

Metal and Allied Workers Union's Geoff Schreiner travelled to New York to deliver FOSATU's report at the special United Nations' subcommittee set up to examine the extent to which multinationals operating in South Africa sustained the system of apartheid.

He was to be accompanied by National Union of Textile Workers' organiser, Prof Sineke, but at the last minute the South African government refused to give him a passport.

Focussing on four multinationals — Transvaal Alloys, Tidwell Housing, Bata and BTR Sarmcol — the report shows how these companies have 'chosen to take advantage of the multitude of laws and circumstances generated by the apartheid State which weaken

union organisation'.

The report details how these companies have engaged in anti-union activities and have been responsible for harsh exploitation of black workers.

'Far from actively opposing apartheid as the constructive engagement argument would ask, these companies actively use it,' the report says.

In addition to this, these companies have 'blatantly' violated the various codes of conduct including the International Labour Organisation's Tripartite Declaration.

'No wonder black workers' anger is rising and the constructive engagement policy and the codes of conduct are viewed with bitterness and outright hostility,' the report adds.

The FOSATU report said the major problems with the codes was that they were unenforceable, it was not compulsory for the companies to stick to them and they were extremely limited in focus.

'There are no provisions in the codes which actually require companies to actively initiate moves towards the eradication of apartheid,' the report says.

And in issues like the BTR Sarmcol dispute, the codes provide a smoke screen cover for 'more sophisticated anti-union activities,' it adds.

The report says that economic and political stability in South Africa depends upon apartheid being removed.

'Foreign investment will have to participate in economic

and political reconstruction if it is to benefit the people of South Africa.'

In its recommendations to the subcommittee, FOSATU said that there was now a need for 'direct pressure on the multinational head offices by the governments of those countries'.

FOSATU recommended that 'clearly defined mechanisms' be set up so that disputes with multinationals could be raised when they occurred.

And when it had been established that the multinationals had breached international laws, practices and codes, there needed to be a commitment from the various governments that they would take strong and genuine action against such companies, FOSATU concluded.

2 400 textile members lose jobs over past year

LAST year was 'the most difficult year' the National Union of Textile Workers had faced since 1976. Over 2 400 union members lost their jobs through retrenchments and closures.

This was the somewhat depressing news given to over 2 000 NUTW members by the union's general secretary, John Copelyn.

He was speaking at the union's joint annual general meeting held recently at the Edendale Lay Centre near Pietermaritzburg.

But not all the news was bad news. Brother Copelyn reported the success of the Frame struggle which, he said, would 'consolidate the union's presence in the major urban textile factories significantly'.

And in spite of the retrenchments and closures, NUTW's membership has grown by over 1 500 workers over the past

year putting its total membership at more than 25 000.

In his report, Brother Copelyn also focussed on the government's decentralisation programme which, he said, had 'resulted in an increasing number of factories closing down their operations in urban areas and moving to homeland areas where the wages are less than R25 per week for most workers'.

'The attractions of cheap labour and government assistance are so great that in Natal the union is unaware of a single clothing factory being started in Durban while there are dozens growing up every day in Isithebe, Ezakheni, Mnambithi, Qwa Qwa and such homeland places,' he said.

'And each and every homeland government has made it as difficult as possible for workers in such areas to organise themselves.'

'The KwaZulu draft legislation provides that unions not registered under KwaZulu cannot have stop orders nor have access to any remedies in KwaZulu.'

'The effect of this Bill being passed by KwaZulu was that clothing employers in Isithebe broke off negotiations with the union and have now come out as openly hostile to any unionisation in the area. They have also effectively ensured that we do not get any office accommodation in the area.'

'These are very serious setbacks in the struggle,' Brother Copelyn said.

Speaking about the crisis of apartheid, Brother Copelyn said it was time that organised labour started to formulate its own demands as to what future society they would like to see.

'Up to now we have been plagued by the lack of a united trade union movement....If we



Jubilant textile workers at their union's AGM

want to play a role in shaping our society, we have got to overcome the petty differences

and deal with our real common interests with other organised workers,' he concluded.

Transvaal-wide strike threatened

METAL and Allied Workers Union members at 70 companies in the Transvaal are threatening to go on strike if their demand for plant-level bargaining is not met.

The decision to go on strike follows the deadlock of wage negotiations at industrial council level earlier this year.

Employers made a final offer of 17c increase across-the-board while the union demanded 50c across-the-board.

The strike will involve between 300 to 1 500 workers at each factory. The strike ballot will be held shortly at different companies — among them are Dorbyl, Siemens, Barlow Rand and General Electric.

In addition to plant-level bargaining workers are demanding:

- a R3 minimum wage;
- May Day as a paid public holiday;
- a 40-hour working week;
- that overtime pay during the week should be doubled;
- that weekend work be treble paid for not more than 5 hours a day;

● that pregnant women have the right to get their job back after confinement;

A meeting called by MAWU on October 14 to discuss the planned strike with support and community groups was told that SEIFSA, the metal employers' association, had asked the union to discuss the possibility of withdrawing strike action.

But a worker from Siemens said the planning of the strike would continue regardless of SEIFSA's letter.

'We will only stop the strike if there is some concrete change,' he said.

Explaining the problem of negotiating only at the industrial council, a worker said 'We can't make an analysis of who is making profits and who is

suffering a loss because all the employers speak with one voice. We feel employers must pay according to how much profit they are making.'

'In industrial council negotiations this year all of them said the same thing: that they wouldn't negotiate at plant-level but only through the industrial council. Employers don't want workers to know their rights at the factory.'

'They have had this disease for a long time because they have always only had to deal with sweetheart unions. They didn't have workers sitting on the industrial council. But in MAWU we have worker-control.'

'We must dismantle the industrial council and start afresh. I doubt whether anyone can fix it up.'

'If plant-level bargaining is accepted by employers, industrial council bargaining will change. Employers will listen carefully and talk carefully because they will know that everything will get back to workers at their factories,' a worker told the meeting.

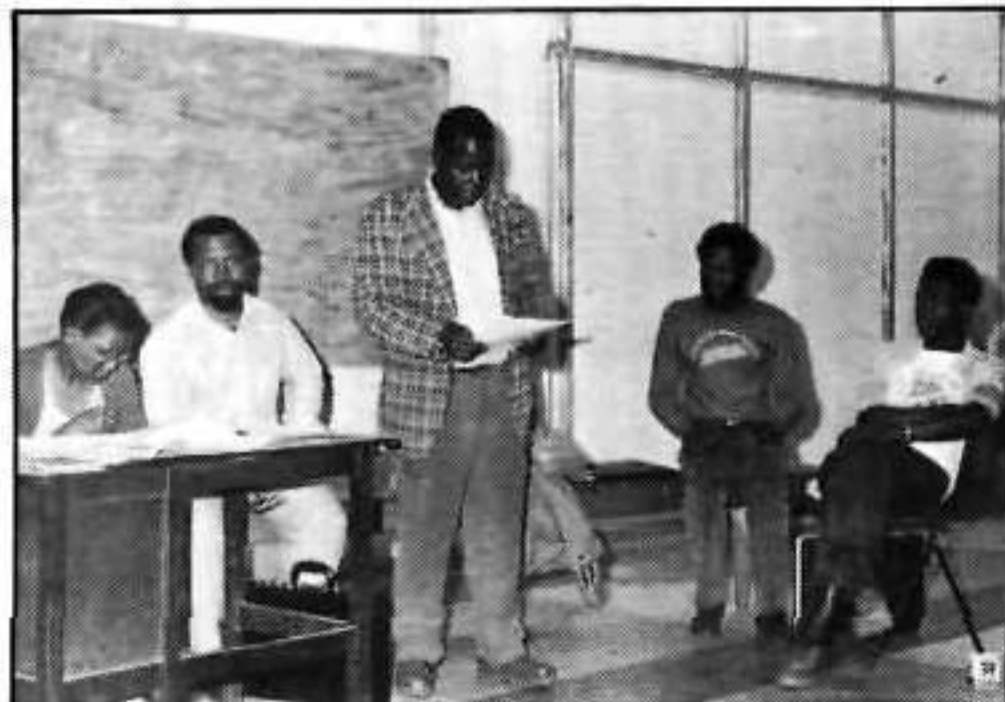
Toyota's maternity agreement

IN a sequel to a strike last year, Toyota has concluded a maternity agreement with the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union.

Towards the middle of last year, 200 workers at this Durban motor plant stopped work in support of a demand for guaranteed re-employment after maternity leave.

In terms of the new agreement:

- re-employment is guaranteed on the same conditions as before;
- maternity leave has been extended to four months (one month more than that required by law);
- the company will pay 25 percent of a worker's wage on top of the 45 percent claimed from UIF;
- contributions to Medical Aid and Pension Fund will be kept up by the company;
- the company has agreed to find an alternative position for any pregnant worker whose job endangers her pregnancy.



KwaThema branch chairperson, David Matubela, speaks at the support group meeting