

Brits factory occupied

AN occupation by workers of their Brits factory had German multinational, Robert Bosch, rushing to settle its wage dispute with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Some 300 Bosch workers decided to occupy the factory on September 5 after management fired them and ordered them to leave the premises. They had been on a legal strike since 4.30 pm the previous day.

The strikers asked organisers to fetch blankets, food and other necessities in preparation for the stay-in.

'By 5.20 pm the company was finally convinced that the workers were not going to get out of the factory unless the

dismissals were withdrawn and their demands were met,' Transvaal organising secretary, Moses Mayekiso said.

The company was so eager to settle the matter there and then that it continued negotiations right the way through to 3 am in the morning.

At 4 am on September 6, the Bosch workers accepted management's offer of a 12c per hour increase backdated to July 1 and a further across-the-board increase on October 1.

The company also agreed to reinstate all the workers without any loss of benefits or loss of service recognition. And no disciplinary action would be

taken against any workers absent on September 6.

Both the union and the company have also agreed to finalise recognition negotiations by the end of November and to stick to the disciplinary, grievance and consultation procedures in the future.

The wage dispute began at the beginning of September when workers rejected the company's offer of a 12c and 18c per hour increase from January 1986.

After a day-long strike on September 3, Bosch offered a 11c increase from July 1 and a further increase of 7c per hour on January 1 1986.

With this offer, workers decided to hold a ballot among themselves to see what support there would be for a legal strike — 350 out of 370 voted in favour of the strike.

Commenting on the occupation, Moses Mayekiso said 'All companies must know that as they introduce new tactics of oppression, exploitation and victimisation, the workers will also devise new tactics to fight back.'

'The multinationals and all metal companies must know that the workers of today are not going to accept these exploitative measures lying down. They are going to fight back!' he added.

Battle for shorter week has begun

THE battle for a shorter working week has begun! At a Boksburg factory, Colgate Palmolive, workers have won a three-hour reduction of their working hours following an overtime and company canteen boycott.

The battle for shorter working hours has been at the centre of worker struggles from as far back as the 1800's when large-scale factory production had only just begun. In those days the workers (including children) were forced to work for up to 15 hours a day.

From the 1830's in Britain

the 'Ten Hours Movement' fought for the hours of all workers to be reduced to ten hours a day. The May Day strikes in 1868 in America were in support of a demand for an eight-hour-day.

In both Europe and America the eight-hour-day has long since been won. Now workers in Germany are campaigning for a 35-hour-week (a seven-hour-day).

But working conditions in South Africa have lagged far behind. Most industries are still working more than nine

hours a day. However, workers have begun to fight for more reasonable working hours and at this year's May Day rallies the call was made for an eight-hour-day (40-hour-week).

At Colgate, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union took up this call during the annual negotiations.

Several rounds of negotiations were held but all ended in deadlock so the union called for the establishment of a Conciliation Board.

In the meantime the workers launched an overtime boycott.

They also boycotted the canteen in response to a rise in the food prices.

After two meetings of the Conciliation Board, Colgate agreed to reduce the working hours to 43 hours and to grant May Day as a paid public holiday.

In terms of the agreement, workers will also get a 42c an hour increase backdated from July 1 which has hiked the minimum wage up to R3,14 an hour. Workers will be compensated for the wages lost because of the reduced working hours.

Students agree to protect bus drivers

TRANSPORT is a political issue in South Africa because workers are forced to live many kilometres away from their workplaces.

Buses have become a symbol of the apartheid system and because of this have often been stoned and burnt as an expression of people's hatred of this system.

Tragically, bus drivers find themselves caught in the middle.

However, a new agreement between FOSATU's Pietermaritzburg Shop Stewards Council and a number of local youth and student organisations signals the beginning of a new relationship

between bus drivers and the communities they come from.

Over the past few months at least 11 drivers have been injured in stoning incidents in the Imbali township on the outskirts of Maritzburg.

This led to the drivers refusing to enter Imbali and the buses have been dropping passengers at the Sutherland Road turn-off to the township.

Students began stoning the buses shortly after police detained a student leader about two months ago. They also began boycotting the schools.

The violence spread when it was rumoured that the taxi drivers had urged the students

to stone the buses. In the fighting which followed two men died and four kombis were burnt.

In an attempt to resolve this conflict in the community, FOSATU set up a meeting with the Imbali Youth Organisation, the Congress of South African Students, the Imbali Youth League and the Azanian Students Movement.

The FOSATU affiliated Transport and General Workers Union represents the Pietermaritzburg Transport Department's drivers. These drivers played a crucial role in the recent stayaway called in support of the Sarmcol strikers.

At the meeting on August 23, all the organisations agreed that the buses should be allowed to enter the township again. And that they would act against anyone who tried to stop or harass the drivers.

The student organisations said that in future they would not take any action on any issue which affected workers before holding discussions with FOSATU.

The local shop steward council secretary, Bheki Ngidi said the meeting successfully brought peace to the township.

'From then on the students looked after the buses before they went to school and after school,' he said.

Brewery workers win 55 percent increase

IT is not often that workers get a 55 percent wage increase, particularly in the midst of a recession. But, it is even less likely for government workers to get an increase of this size.

Well, the unlikely has happened! The Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has just won a massive 55 percent increase for lower grade workers at the Administration Board's Durban brewery and at liquor outlets spreading from Empangeni to Port Shepstone.

This increase is a far cry from the 12 percent originally granted to Administration Board employees at the beginning of 1984.

The 12 percent was rejected by SFAWU members and thus began an eighteen-month struggle to win a living wage from a tough adversary — the Pretoria government!

SFAWU submitted its own demands to the Administration Board and early in 1984 it negotiated a substantial increase



Congella brewery workers during their demonstration in support of the bread strikers

Activists dismissed after bread strike

SOON after Durban's bread strike, two bakeries attempted to fire two union activists — both had played important roles in the strike.

However, their attempts were foiled by the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

At the enquiries held to discuss the dismissals, the companies' reasons for sacking the two workers were so feeble that they were forced to take them back and to pay them backpay.

Sobantu Msweli, whose car was used during the strike, is a driver at BB Bread. He was sacked for 'low performance'.

A union organiser said the company had initially tried to dismiss him for arriving late at work.

'Three other people arrived with him, but they just wanted to dismiss him,' the organiser said.

'No sooner had we resolved that issue in the enquiry when the company suddenly said that Sobantu's performance was bad.'

'It was clearly just victimisation. In the second enquiry the company decided to take him back,' the organiser added.

The second worker to be sacked was Brother Ntshalintshali who is a steering committee member at Blue Ribbon and was a member of the strike committee.

Prior to going on strike, Brother Ntshalintshali was sick for two weeks. When he went back to work after the strike management refused to let him in because he had not let them know he was sick.

'It is common practice at the factory for workers to only present their medical certificates at the end of sick leave but management were obviously keen to make an example of him,' a SFAWU organiser said.

'The company suspended him until an enquiry was held. At the enquiry management decided to take him back,' he added.

with the Board's Business Undertakings department.

But, this had to be referred back to the Minister of Cooperation and Development in Pretoria who controls the Administration Boards. He rejected the increase.

The union went ahead and declared a dispute. Because government employees are barred from taking legal strike action, the dispute was automatically referred to the Industrial Court.

The Industrial Court recently awarded the Administration Board workers increases ranging from 55 percent on the lowest grade to 11 percent for the highest grade, backdated to March 1. This effectively raises the minimum wage from R2,15 to R3,33 an hour.

And this was not all! On top of this, workers also received a general 5,5 percent increase backdated to January 1. How lucky can you get.