

Pietermaritzburg's own workers' pamphlet:

"We are looking after these people very well and we pay them well, besides this we never run short of labourers which proves we pay them fair wages. Look we pay them from R7,20 - R32,00 a week, just for pocket-money, the rest we provide".

This is a press statement by Portlands' Cement manager in Pretoria.

Let's look at this statement.

What does he do with these people when they get old and can no longer work? Where are their families? Do they give them sufficient pensions? Are they aware that they have separated fathers from their families who are away in the homelands where they starve and suffer from malnutrition whereas the fathers are fed in the Compounds with only pocket-money given to them and nothing to send to families.

Does this mean that the black worker should be looked after as if he is an animal and the white worker can earn better, feed himself, save the money, get decent pensions, stay in mansions with enough money for the education of their children. You as the black worker eat "Phutu" and children with Kwashiorkor and claim to be a worker? For how long should we be underpaid and keep quiet?

Black dissatisfaction with white exploitation began as early as 1875 - when a group of construction workers in the Cape Colony attempted to organise a strike. For a hundred years the plea for a living wage has been largely ignored. Protest and strike action have been continually frustrated by token concessions, or brutally squashed by the police. However the recent strike action in Natal shows signs of being more successful. The persistence and participation of 1,000's of workers has demonstrated for the first time to the government, employers and the workers themselves the power and solidarity of the oppressed (or of the Black workers). The stimulation and concern from overseas can only do good in South Africa.

Question

Shouldn't you be earning more by now? Increase your wages! Only you have the (bargaining) power; your employers are aware of your power, and they are afraid of your power.

Organise yourselves!

The main newspapers of South Africa have now all taken up the outcry over the very low wages paid to Black people. For weeks they carried stories of the terrible conditions many are talking of widespread improvements in wages and conditions. Public opinion is favourable at the moment. What the workers must do is organize themselves.

Works Committees!

We want a trade union!

We want more money!