

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!

WORKERS AND THEIR BENEFITS

In this magazine, we shall endeavour to bring to the notice of the workers what we feel they should know. The heading will be as above. Look out for it.

Experience has shown that the majority of workers do not know to what benefit or protection they are entitled under the law. Such benefits arise from:-

- a) Industrial Council agreements.
- b) Wage Determination.
- c) Worker's Compensation.
- d) Unemployment Insurance.
- e) The Factories Act.
- f) Shop and office Acts.

Those who do become aware of the fact that they are entitled to certain benefits or protection, often do not know what to do about it, or have difficulty in securing these benefits. It is often the case, too, that there are no channels for workers to put their legitimate problem to their employers and relevant Civil Servants.

Workers face problems on the family and Community front. When financial crises arise, very often the worker borrows money and has exorbitant interest notes to pay. There is need to assist families to find ways of using what money they have to their best advantage. Part of the aim of the Wages Commission is to help workers to gain better knowledge of Trade Unions and Works Committees and to gain understanding of the processes of the wages determination.

In this column readers are requested to contribute by asking questions or any other issue. In our next issue we shall deal with Trade Unions.

Once again the readers are reminded to form Works Committees.

Bantu Radio Broadcasts.

After 7.30 news, Bantu Radio often gives "Sifted News". On Monday 2/4/73 in this talk, strikes were indirectly referred to. It was said that the government approves and supports increased pay for Black workers but it feels it fair to employ great numbers so that everyone can have by meagre wages instead of a few getting enough wages to live. If we examine this, the government implies that we should accept poor wages so that the black workers can be underpaid. This is a direct contradiction of what the government claims to be fighting for. This means that we black workers should accept low wages and yet the government is busy on immigration. Does the government bring the immigrants here so that they can also accept low wages?

We feel it is the government's responsibility to bring industrialists to South Africa so that firms can be established, so that Black and White born in this country can live decently, not to bring ordinary workers.

The rising cost of living

Not so long ago bread went up and now it is milk. What shall we do? How can we live without bread or milk? I don't even mention the price of mealie-meal which we are supposed to eat as "Phutu", whereas our Bosses and White employers live on

battered bread.

In order to meet the rising cost of living the workers must unite and form Works Committees through which they will at least demand R82.00 a month which is just enough to feed a family of six. This amount excludes money for education and entertainment.

KNOW THIS

1. Make your Works Committee work for you; if you haven't got one, form one.
2. The workers strength lies in unity, join together in the goal of obtaining for yourself and your family a basic living.
3. Finally, any worker is invited to send in articles for publication to:- Wages Commission, c/o S.R.C.,
University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Let us talk.

As Black workers let us examine job opportunity for Blacks in South Africa. There is no-one who doesn't know what is meant by job opportunities, what I can only say is that let us examine opportunities and ways and means of helping ourselves as workers.

In 1948 the government promulgated 57 acts and in these acts the Black workers were prevented to seek jobs they wanted in any part of South Africa.

All these Acts make allowance for job reservation and prevention of the formation of Trade Unions (multi-racial). The Black workers are prohibited by law to form Trade Unions and more and above they cannot voice their opinions about their wages.

The Dept. of Labour has the sole responsibility over Black Worker's Affairs. The strikes are not permissible by law but employers and workers can form their own means of communication about the wages. In these Works Committees the majority is elected by workers and others by employers. It is not our duty to say those committees are a success, it is up to you, but we hope that time will come when they really do their job.

The 1970 Bantu Labour Amendment Act empowers the Minister of Labour to prohibit Black Workers from doing certain jobs in certain areas. In these laws the employers are not forced to pay Black Workers higher wages and the employers are often unsympathetic to workers plea for higher wages.

What can we do then to raise Black wages, especially when strikes are illegal? You have seen the strikes in Durban Even today some are erupting in other places as well, all for higher wages. Let us support the works Committees so that we can channel our complaints through them. Those who haven't got these committees must approach the Bosses and form one, it is their legal right.