

Briefings

ON Feb 5, 1982, Neil Aggett, the Transvaal secretary for the African Food and Canning Workers Union, died in detention. The union called for a nation-wide half-hour work stoppage of organised labour for Thurs Feb 11.

Here are accounts of union responses reported region by region:

They responded with 'conviction and determination'

A STATEMENT assessing the protest by the Food and Canning Workers Union reads:

"We saw the half-hour work-stoppage both as a commemoration of the death of our comrade and a warning to the authorities who are conducting their vendetta against the trade union movement.

"In view of the fact that we had only 3 days to organise the stoppage, we were greatly heartened by the response. There were factories that did not stop work, either those we had not been able to contact or the weakly organised, and there were factories where the response could have been stronger. But by and large the workers responded to the call with great conviction and determination.

"The arrangements for the stoppage were negotiated by our committees at each factory with the management. Only in the case of large groups with several factories did union officials contact management, and then only to ask for approval in principle for the stoppage.

"Although the Union itself had taken no decision as to whether the half-hour should be in work time or be unpaid, in most cases the workers felt very strong that the half-hour should be paid. They also resisted attempts by the employers to incorporate the half-hour into the lunch hour.

"Workers felt that so often they are asked to work more or less time to suit the convenience of their employers and that this time it

was their employers' turn to fit in with what they wanted. At one factory, in a country town where workers are supposed to know their place, the workers were ready to ban all overtime work until the employers finally backed down and agreed to pay for the half-hour stoppage.

"At another factory where the employers had shifted the lunch hour forward to 11.30 and were expecting the workers to return to work after the usual period, the workers held a commemorative service for the half-hour and then took the lunch hour at the usual time for the usual period. No action was taken against them.

"It was significant that, with one exception, no employer refused to allow the work stoppage. Several employers agreed to pay for the half-hour at the onset and in one instance employers joined with the workers at the service held.

"Employers can also not have failed to be impressed by the manner in which the work stoppage was conducted. All the workers participated, even those that aren't usually at union meetings. The committees and workers at each factory decided themselves how to use the half-hour, but in most cases there were tributes to Neil Aggett, some kind of a service, and singing. No one misused the occasion, to slip off to the cafe' etc. Some lorries stopped on the road at 11.30.

"We estimate between 12 000 and 13 000 workers in factories organised by our union stopped work in Western Cape factories. But the numbers are less important than the manner in which this was done - they honoured Neil's memory and without question workers felt more strongly committed to their organisation as a result.

FCWU

Ashton	Langeberg	1 000
Cape Town	Irving and Johnson, Fattis and Monis, SM Milling, SASKO	1 900
Ceres	Ceres Fruit Juices and Canning Co, Ceres Fruit Growers Co-op, Ceres Aartappel Ko-op, S A Dried Fruit Co-op	1 800

Grabouw	Appletiser, Highlands Canning Co, Elgen Fruit Packers Co-op, Kromco	2 400
Hout Bay	S A Sea Products, I and J	500
Montagu	Langeberg	200
Mossel Bay	Langeberg	500
Paarl	Langeberg, All Gold	1 200
Saldanha Bay	Sea Harvest	800
St Helena Bay	Suid Oranje	100
Somerset West	Gants Food	800
Tulbagh	S A Preserving Co	800
Wellington	S A Dried Fruits, Oakglen Canning Co	400
		<hr/> 12 400

NOTE: This list does not include factories at which the amount of support is uncertain.

FCWU, Mar 5

Their action was aimed at the State

IN Cape Town the Food and Canning Workers Union called for a nation-wide half-hour stoppage of organised labour on Thurs Feb 11. The response of the progressive trade unions was that this time the State had gone "too far". The Executive of the General Workers Union, together with many other unions, supported the FCWU's call. At a meeting of all our shop steward committees wide-spread support was given to this decision. The workers made it clear that this action was not aimed at individual bosses but at the government.

About 5 000 members of the GWU in Cape Town downed tools for half-an-hour and held mourning services in their respective factories. The services took place in a most disciplined and dignified manner. The workers who stopped work were from the best organised sectors of the union. These included approximately 700 workers at the docks, about 1 800 engineering workers, about 1 500 building and allied workers, about 500 in the public sector and several hundred workers in a cross-section of other factories.

Several hundred workers in the organised hospitals wore black arm-bands in solidarity with the action of their fellow union members.

The union officials phoned a large number of employers prior to the stoppage to inform them of the workers' decision. The response of employers was generally either cooperative or non-committal. No victimisation has since taken place in any of the factories where the work-stoppage occurred. Many employers realised too, that this time the State had gone too far and that workers' patience had run out.

The events of Feb 11 are of great significance in the history of labour organisation in this country. Organised labour in their respective unions stood together and put aside their differences over this issue. This unity of the trade union movement was a fitting tribute to Neil Aggett. It could also be the basis of further unity and cooperation of a more permanent kind in the future.

GWU, Mar 10

Organised workers protest en masse

THE work-stoppage in the Western Cape was fairly widespread, "particularly in those areas where the Food and Canning Workers' Union and the General Workers' Union are strongest". (1)

It appears that the response to the call for a work-stoppage varied immensely in the Western Cape region. In addition to the strong response from members of the FCWU and GWU, an "effective" number of the 470 members of the Fosatu-affiliated Jewellers and Goldsmith Union downed their tools for the requested half-hour.

Another Fosatu union, the National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union, held a one minute work-stoppage at Leyland according to The Argus. 2 000 workers were involved.

Some members of the Bakery Employees' Industrial Union downed tools for the period while others rearranged their usual lunchtime. A "substantial number" of the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association's members reacted in a "positive" way.

Although the workers did not down tools, they took part in a "rearrangement" of their lunch hour. Unfortunately no exact figures could be confirmed for any of the above unions.

The Western Cape Region of Mwasas as well as employees from the Cape Times, the Argus chapel of the Southern African Society of Journalists (SASJ) and employees of Allied Publishing Company attended a Mwasas organised commemorative service.

At the University of Cape Town workers from the university and a construction site suspended work to attend a meeting during the half-hour period.

Cape Town city centre however displayed little compliance with the work-stoppage. Many workers in the city either did not even know that the stoppage had been called or what it was about.

The response in the Western Cape to the work-stoppage thus varies immensely between different industries and regions and appeared to depend on the unions organising in the industries.

1 The Argus, Feb 11.

JOHANN MAREE and JOHN VAN BREDA, Mar 4

35 000 demonstrate in PE / Uitenhage

ABOUT 35 000 workers in the Port Elizabeth / Uitenhage area joined the call for a national work stoppage.

Unions described the stoppage as a 'complete success'.

The Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) reported about 25 000 workers in 23 firms in the Eastern Cape stopped work at 11.30 a m for stoppages ranging between 10 minutes to half-an-hour.

These included members from the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union, the National Union of Textile Workers, the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union, the Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union, the Transport and General Workers' Union and the National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (Naawu).

The Motor Assembly and Component Workers' Union (Macwusa) and the General Workers' Union of South Africa (Gwusa) joined the

stoppage, after the Macwusa and Gwusa executives gave immediate support to the call by the Food and Canning Workers' Union.

Virtually all leading operations in the Port Elizabeth harbour came to a stand still when stevedores, members of the General Workers' Union (GWU) stopped work for half-an-hour in response to the call.

Railway workers, also members of GWU, showed solidarity for the stoppage by wearing black arm-bands. But many railway workers were unable to work because of the stevedores' action. The GWU advised railway members not to stop work after management threatened to fire all workers if they joined the stoppage. Security and railway police kept a close watch in the harbour area during the stoppage.

A meeting of Fosatu shop steward committees decided to hold stoppages for 10 to 15 minutes. Agreement for a 10 minute stoppage was reached at most of the 23 Fosatu factories in the Eastern Cape, but at Willard Batteries and Ford a full half-hour was observed.

At Cadbury's and Plascon Paints, white supervisors, including factory and production managers, joined in the procedures to honour Neil Aggett, whereas at most firms supervisors and management officials looked on at a distance.

At Ford, both Naawu and Macwusa members stopped work at 11.30 for a jointly-organised meeting.

Hundreds of workers met in groups outside the Cortina engine and truck assembly plants singing, raising freedom salutes to shouts of 'Amandla' while union organisers from both Macwusa and Naawu paid tribute to Neil Aggett and his role in the independent trade union movement.

In the body shop at General Motors a siren went off at 11.30 a m, conveyor belts came to a stop and workers stopped work for 10 minutes at a jointly-organised Naawu and Macwusa meeting. (There is controversy over whether this meeting was jointly-organised - ed).

At most firms, a period of silence was observed followed by prayers and the singing of Nkosi Sikelel' Africa.

In Uitenhage, 4 500 workers downed tools at the Volkswagen plant for a five minute period, gathering in small groups.

At Willard Batteries, shop stewards spoke to workers about the life of Neil Aggett and what he had done for unity in the independent trade union movement.

In Port Elizabeth, Naawu members at Firestone - scene of a major East Cape strike over pensions last year - stopped work for 10 minutes, but Macwusa supporters carried on for the full half-hour, as at General Tyre. At the third East Cape tyre firm, Goodyear, workers staged a 10 minute stoppage.

Macwusa organising secretary, Government Zini, described Neil Aggett's death as a "turning point in relations between trade unions and the State". He said Macwusa, as well as its sister union Gwusa, met "reasonable understanding" from managements contacted about the stoppage.

East Cape firms were generally "sympathetic" to union requests for the work-stoppage, but most firms tightened up their security to bar reporters and tried to sabotage publicity for the stoppage once it took place.

Fosatu:

25 000 workers joined the stoppage at 23 Fosatu affiliated plants.

Chemical Workers' Industrial Union: Plascon

National Union of Textile Workers: Industex, Veldspan, Cape of Good Hope Textiles, Gubb and Inggs

Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union: Cadburys, Farm Fare, Milling and Trading

Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union: Sidwell, Timber Industries

Transport and General Workers' Union: Motorvia

National Association of Automobile Workers' Union: Car Distributors' Assembly, General Motors, Firestone, SKF, Borg-Warner, Bosal Afrika, Feltex Foam and Automotive Products, Apex Willard, Ford, Volkswagen. The stoppage lasted 10 minutes to 15 minutes at most of the 23 firms, and in most cases involved the overwhelming majority of black workers. At Willard Batteries and Ford, the stoppage

lasted from half-hour to 45 minutes.

At Cadbury's, white supervisors joined in the proceeding, while at Plascon Paints foremen also participated. Plascon's personal manager later phoned Fosatu to congratulate it on the way the stoppage was handled.

At Industex, with a workforce of 1 600, the stoppage was absolute except that management had to obtain permission from the union for members of management to operate five machines which required several hours to restart. (Fosatu)

At other firms, e.g. Volkswagen, supervisory staff watched at a distance.

At the engine plant/truck assembly plants of Ford, Macwusa and Naawu held joint meetings - lasting half-an-hour.

Following the call for a work stoppage by the Food and Canning Workers' Union, shop steward committees from Fosatu affiliated unions met to give support for the stoppage and formulate the way in which it would be observed.

The regional congress decided on a 10 minute stoppage, which included a three minute period of silence, prayer and the singing of Nkosi Sikelel' Afrika.

At Willard and Ford, organisers spoke on Neil Aggett and his work for the independent trade union movement. At Ford engine and truck assembly plants, both Macwusa and Naawu organisers spoke.

According to Naawu secretary, Fred Sauls, the majority of firms agreed not to deduct pay for the stoppage, e.g GM, CDA. Smaller firms, e.g. SKF deducted pay according to normal clocking in/out procedures.

Ford management refused to pay workers if the stoppage lasted more than three minutes, and implemented the clock-in deductions. Naawu intends to take the issue of deductions up with Ford.

Macwusa:

Ford - 30 mins, General Motors - 10 mins, General Tyre - 30 mins, Firestone - 30 mins, Feltex - 30 mins, Feraform - 10 mins and Uniroyal.

According to Zini, management reluctantly agreed to half-hour stoppages, realising that it was not an isolated demand but part of a national call.

At certain firms, where there was Macwusa / Fosatu membership at the same firm, the stoppages lasted 10 minutes as Fosatu had already requested this with management. At Ford however, Macwusa had met with management beforehand and a half-hour stoppage was observed.

Gwusa:

A 30 minute stoppage was observed at the following unionised firms. Gwusa said management did not deduct pay for the duration of the stoppage.

Wispeco, (Aluminium Steel), Cape Produce (Skins/Hides/Wool), Pelts Products (Fellmongers), M Stores (Cape Produce owned), South African Abattoirs, ICS Foods Ltd., Industrial and Commercial Cafeterias, Nampak (Ropes and Twines), and Chelsea Dairy.

General Workers Union (GWU) operations in the Port Elizabeth harbour came to a standstill when stevedores stopped work. Railway workers showed solidarity with the stoppage by wearing black arm-bands.

The Transport and Allied Workers' Union in Port Elizabeth - a member of the Council of Unions of South Africa - was initially hesitant about joining the stoppage. The union decided not to participate on the eve of the stoppage. East Cape organisers refused to give reasons for the decision.

East Cape management was reported as being 'sympathetic' in general to union requests for the work-stoppage, although South African Railways threatened workers - members of the GWU - with immediate dismissal if they participated.

The Midland system manager of the Railways, Mr. G.D. Engelbrecht, later denied Press reports that railway employees were

told they would be dismissed.

The Midland Chamber of Industries issued a statement advising its members to allow a one minute stoppage. Every company could however decide for itself how it would handle "this sensitive issue", it said.

"We are concerned about Dr. Aggett's death and sympathise with his parents and relatives. There is no conflict between organised labour and industry at the moment".

On Tues Feb 9, the director of the Port Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce, Anton Masters, issued a statement carried widely in the Press, saying that though the chamber "understood the strong trade union reaction to the death in detention of Neil Aggett", workers should "still think seriously about the proposed work-stoppage. The planned half-hour stoppage would seriously disrupt productivity".

"The chamber does not support strikes or work-stoppages as a last resort measure and in the circumstances it appeals to employee groups to consider carefully the action to be taken if they are employed by crucial industry".

Press complained that on the day of the stoppage management at all firms refused reporters/photographers access to cover the meetings.

The managing director of Nampak, Mr. Hymie Berelowitz, said although he had been approached by worker representatives about the stoppage, the company could not "let outside involvements and political emotions affect out daily production. We are not going to have some stoppage because some guy hanged himself". It was, however, established that a half-hour stoppage occurred at the company's plant in Stamford Road organised by Gwusa.

A Dorbyl spokesman, when inquiries were made about the stoppage, asked the reporter if the call for the stoppage had not been made "by the Eastern Province Herald".

Police generally kept a low profile during the stoppage and there were no reports of intimidation or harassment by East Cape Security Police. However at the docks, security police and railway police patrolled the area.

Four major groups out in East London

ABOUT 6 500 East London workers downed tools for varying periods of time in their protest at the death of Neil Aggett. The workers were members of four trade unions operating in the city – the African Food and Canning Workers' Union (AFCWU), the South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu), the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (Naawu) and the General Workers Union (GWU).

It is impossible to estimate whether unorganised workers participated and if so how many.

The strongest response appeared to come from factories organised by the AFCWU, the union of which Dr. Aggett was Transvaal branch secretary.

An estimated 2 500 workers downed tools for the full half-hour from 11.30.

These workers were from the following factories: Langeberg, Western Province Preserving, Epol, Golden Grain Bakery and Meadow Feeds.

There were no reports of workers stopping without prior arrangement with their managements.

A prayer meeting coupled with the half-hour stoppage was held at two Saawu factories: Chloride and Johnson and Johnson.

Other Saawu factories to observe the half-hour stoppage were KSM Milling, Nairn Industries and Parker Pen. Here too, all factories stopped after agreement had been reached with management. The total number of workers at these factories is about 2000. It is believed, though it is difficult to confirm, that a number of individual Saawu members stopped work at other plants.

At Hoover, however, when workers approached management with the request that they be allowed to stop work, they were told they would not be paid for the half-hour not worked. They did not stop.

At Ark Garments, managing director R. Harris told his workers that they could mourn as much as they liked on Saturday or Sunday but half-hour work-stoppages were out of the question. None risked their jobs.

At CDA, East London's Mercedes Benz manufacturing company, between 2 000 and 3 000 workers observed a five minute stoppage before their tea break. In a statement Naawu branch chairman, Cornelius Fazzie said: "Dr. Neil Aggett stood for one common cause - we only differed on our line of approach to the struggle of the workers".

While Naawu only felt able to stop for 10 minutes it was regarded as significant that Naawu was prepared to side with the other unions - with whom there has been some antagonism - over an issue such as Dr. Aggett's death.

At the harbour about 32 stevedores, members of the GWU, observed the half-hour stoppage. The vast majority, however, continued to work despite the support given by the union at national level to the stoppage and a decision by the branch executive to support the stoppage. The failure of the stevedores to stop was attributed, by local officials of the union, to their not being informed by committee members and to the insistence of supervisors that they continue working.

EAST LONDON CORRESPONDENT, Mar 18

30 000 out in PWV area

IN the central Transvaal the work-stoppage was effected by about 30 000 workers, employed mainly in the band of industrial areas stretching east of Johannesburg - the most intensively unionised in the Transvaal - but also in Pretoria, the West Rand, the Vaal area and Sasolburg.

Initial figures for the number of Transvaal workers who observed the work-stoppage in honour of Neil Aggett now seem an underestimate. Apparently left out of account were the responses of some organised workers outside the main groupings, such as members of the Engineering and Allied Workers Union. Reports of unaccounted for stoppages have been drifting into the offices of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu). The stoppage would have been more extensive but for the short notice.

The breakdown by union and union grouping would appear as follows:

- 14 000 members of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) in 33 factories, mainly on the East Rand and in Johannesburg's Carlton Centre. Half of these were members of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu), and another 4 000 were members of the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (Naawu) at Sigma.

- More than 10 000 members of unions affiliated to the Transvaal-based Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa). Of these, some 4 000 were members of the Food, Beverage and Allied Workers Union on the Reef and Pretoria and another 3 000 were members of the S.A. Chemical Workers Union in Sasolburg and the PWV area.

- 2 500 members of the Food and Canning Workers Union at seven factories in Industria, Isando and on the East Rand.

- About 3 000 members of other unaffiliated unions, including the Engineering and Allied Workers Union and the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (Ccawusa). The General and Allied Workers Union claimed a 'good response' on the West Rand and in Johannesburg, but gave no details.

A surprise bonus was the stoppage at two Wadeville liquor plants by some 900 members of a registered, unaffiliated union informally linked to Tucsa's Garment Workers Union - the National Union of Wine, Spirits and Allied Workers. The workers may have been influenced by the general upsurge in Wadeville, where Fosatu's metal and chemical affiliates had a strong response.

Fosatu attributes its success in Wadeville (where 2 200 of its members in eight factories stopped work) to the strength of its shop stewards council in the area. It was in Wadeville, however, that the federation had its biggest upset - the 2 500 African workers, at what is arguably the most influential single company in Seifsa, Scaw Metals, failed to come out.

Mawu officials attribute this to the fact that the Scaw organiser was out of town and no Scaw representative attended the shop stewards' council meeting on the night before the stoppage.

Fosatu says Scaw shop stewards were not warned in sufficient time to muster general meetings in a plant of that size.

As in other parts of the country, it was factory workers in the Transvaal who bore the brunt of the stoppage. There was little or no response from the commercial and distributive trades, or from workers in transport, building and State and municipal service.

Unions in some of these areas faced special difficulties. "If customers are already in the shop, you can't drive them out", said Ccawusa's president, Isaac Padi. An official of the Black Municipality Workers Union who broached the proposed stoppage with the Johannesburg City Council Staff Board was told: "We will view it as an illegal strike and hold you responsible".

There can be little doubt that the confidence which comes from effective factory-floor organisation was central to the strength of workers' responses. "With some surprising exceptions, it was the best organised workers who responded best", says Cusa's general secretary, Piroshaw Camay. Where organisation had been broken by an unsuccessful strike - at Mawu's Telephone Manufacturers' of S.A., for example, or at the FCWU's H Lewis - nothing happened.

Where unions were recently established, the stance of management also appeared crucial. The Sappi group took an exceptionally hard line. Its chief executive reportedly said: "This Aggett business represents no interface between us and our employees". Also the recently organised workers at the group's Enstra Mill did not stop work.

At Braitex in Springs, where Fosatu's textile affiliate last year won its first agreement in the Transvaal, protesting workers who were threatened with dismissal, sang songs but remained at their looms.

On the other hand, at Light Castings, a Boksburg factory where Mawu has been active for some years, workers refused permission for the stoppage clocked out and clocked in again 35 minutes later. These workers lost their attendance bonus.

This sort of management posture appears, however, atypical. In most instances, no active attempt was made to discourage protest

action, although "no pay for no work" was widespread policy.

The police, too, kept a low profile, although the FCWU's Transvaal officials report disturbing instance at Epol, a Premier Milling subsidiary, in Isando. Here local management crossed head office instructions by refusing permission for the stoppage and locking the factory gates - beyond which police were present in force. This account was denied by management.

The "quality" of worker response is almost impossible to gauge. Officials of all the unions say the observance comprised songs or prayers or both, but have few other details.

There were two striking displays reported from East Rand workers organised into Fosatu's Chemical Workers Industrial Union. At Reef Chemical Corporation, the entire workforce of about 150 workers staged a march through Boksburg East carrying Neil Aggett posters. As they circled the local pass office, workseekers grouped outside joined in their song.

And at Colgate-Palmolive in Boksburg, 180 workers gathered in the canteen were addressed by a shop steward who told them "the whole exercise is to re-affirm our commitment to the struggle".

JOHANNESBURG CORRESPONDENT, Feb. 27.

Fosatu

Cwiu:

Boksburg	Reef Chemicals 150 - 30 mins, Rolfes Chemicals 400 - 30 mins, Colgate 180 - 30 mins.
Isando	Abecol 80 - 30 mins, Henkel 100.
Wadeville	S and CI Chemicals 80 - 30mins, Matthey Rustenburg Refinery 250 - 15 mins.

Sfawu:

Springs	Kelloggs 180 - 30 mins, Westons Biscuits 250 - 30
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Gawu:

Germiston Plate Glass 400 - 30 mins.

Mawu:

Boksburg Hendler and Hendler 1 800 - 30 mins, Vaal Metals 200 - 10 mins, Light Castings 140 - 35 mins, Nickel Chrome 120 - 20 mins, National Bolt 1 117 - 30 mins.

Benoni Chloride 130 - 30 mins, Salcast 400

Isando Siemens (Isando) 450 - 30 mins, Fenner 150 - 10 mins, Automatic Plating 84 - 30 mins.

Wadeville Henred Fruehauf 450 - 30 mins, National Spring 400 - 30 mins, Litemaster 320 - 30 mins, Domani Steel 90, TMF 350, Vesankor 90, Dresser 200.

Elandsfontein Stone Street 60 - 30 mins.

Spartan Siemens (Spartan) 180 - 30 mins.

Heriotdale Krost 1 100

Pwawu:

Kliprivier Premier Paper 350 - 30 mins, Nampak Recycling 90.

Tgwu:

Johannesburg Carlton Centre Employees 250 - 30 mins.

Naawu:

Pretoria Sigma 4 000.

Ccawusa:

Boksburg Pick and Pay indeterminate no.

Edgardale Edgars 400

Johannesburg Carlton Hotel 15

FCWU:

Johannesburg SA Milling, Epol, Langeberg, All Gold/Langeberg,
I and J, Fattis and Monis, SA Dried Fruits
Total No: 2 500

Poor response in N. Natal

THE five Fosatu unions in the Northern Natal area (Mawu, Cwiu, Sfawu, Tgwu and Pwawu) have grown very fast over the last 2 years. Now there is a high membership and much enthusiasm about the unions because of some of the things which have already been won by workers in the short time the unions have existed in the area. But there is still not enough stable organisation for widespread and systematic mobilization of the whole region in a few days.

Slow communication over the vast area we are organising in - Mtubatuba to Stanger - meant that we had to rely on telephoning or seeing one or two people in many of the factories to firstly mobilise the shop steward committee and secondly for them and their membership to make decisions about a stoppage in their factories. A serious shortage of organisers in the region aggravated this problem.

The background to the protest in this region included the attendance of members of Mawu at a national executive meeting in Johannesburg on Sunday Feb 7 where the possibility of a stoppage was discussed. Also over the week-end organisers reported verbally about Neil's death to all worker meetings held - mainly in Port Durnford and Mandini.

On Mon Feb 8 the word spread more widely - again mainly verbally, and by this time the press reports were also having some effect. All workers when told of Neil Aggett's death reacted with shock and horror and said that something should be done.

On Wed management at Triomf called for a meeting with union shop stewards at 10.30 a m on Thurs (1 hour before the stoppage

was scheduled to start). The shop stewards wrote a letter to management postponing this meeting to another day, explaining that Thurs was to be a day of mourning.

On Thurs itself:-

- All 400 employees at the Huletts Paper Mill at Felixton stopped work for 30 minutes between 11.30 and 12.00 with management co-operation.
- The 100 employees in 3 departments of the Richards Bay Town Board stopped work for 30 minutes.
- At Alusaf and Triomf 5 minute silences were observed during the lunch-hour.
- At Huletts Sugar Mill, where management may have been willing to co-operate, the response was disappointing.
- At Sappi Kraft Paper Mill in Mandini a management circular threatened action if a stoppage took place. Nothing was organised.

The experience gained in the first attempt at broad mobilization in this area provided instructive lessons for union leadership to reflect on.

FOSATU, May 11

Action was well co-ordinated

THE protest was well supported by organised workers in Maritzburg, and approached warily by the bosses.

At estimated 2 000 workers in Maritzburg downed tools for the 30-minute stoppage in response to the call from the African Food and Canning Workers Union for which Neil Aggett worked.

The stoppage was clearly a co-ordinated protest by organised workers, mainly in the engineering and food industries where the Fosatu affiliated Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) and Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union (Sfawu) are active.

A meeting of all shop stewards in the area resolved to call the stoppage at some nine plants which had majority union membership. Lunch-time meetings involving several hundred union members were planned at a further seven factories.

The shop stewards further resolved to call upon the bosses not to obstruct workers who wished to observe the protest, to observe the protest themselves and also to condemn publicly the detention of trade unionists.

From the bosses there was a mixed and mainly cautious response. In the engineering sector all the bosses agreed not to obstruct the stoppage. And organisers reported that certain senior executives privately expressed sympathy with the union's protest but none did so publicly.

However, while the bosses had undertaken not to forbid the protest, workers at three of the six metal factories involved were subjected to intimidation in the form of threats to deduct wages if they stopped work. They were forced to clock out if they wished to observe the protest. Most union members did not succumb to this pressure.

Predictably, at lower management and supervisory levels there was more hostility towards the stoppage. White, coloured and most (but not all) Indian workers refused to identify with the protest. In fact at one plant the members of the S.A. Boilermakers Society (SABS), which not long ago opened its ranks to African workers, explicitly dissociated themselves from the protest.

They informed the bosses that they intended to continue working during the stoppage and objected strongly to the fact that those who did not work might get paid as if they had also worked.

This highlights the continuing cleavage between the progressive non-racial trade unions and the established registered unions. The bosses obviously took advantage of this stand by the Boilermakers and refused to pay those who took part in the stoppage. Mawu attacked the SABS bitterly for its divisive stand but observed that it was not unexpected.

Some of the bosses, while not wishing to risk a confrontation by opposing the stoppage were reported to be distinctly unhappy about the event. The issue was a "political issue" they argued, and their workers should not be involved.

Unionists report that there was anxiety in some quarters over the likelihood that an unfortunate precedent was being set and that the bosses would in future be drawn increasingly into struggles over issues external to their factories, such as bus-fare increases. Both Fosatu unions were confronted with such fears.

On the day, some 1 500 metal workers and 1 000 workers in the food industry brought their factories to a halt while they mourned the loss of a comrade.

The stoppage took place at the following Mawu organised factories: Prestige 120, Pillar 50, Ferralloys 550, Scottish Cables 600, McKinnon Chain 100 and APV Kestner 100.

The Sfawu organised factories which came to a standstill included: Meadowfeeds 350, Epol 150 and Noodsberg Sugar 500.

Notwithstanding their opposition to the stoppage, the bosses like those workers who refused to support their workmates, spent the 30 minutes in enforced idleness. Although unionists in Maritzburg are cautious about the significance of the events of the 11th, and impressive 90% of the workers to whom the call for a stoppage was directed, responded in a disciplined way to an issue of far-reaching significance.

In the wake of the events however, Mawu believes that the bosses have resolved to adopt markedly different tactics if similar circumstances should arise again. A reliable union source claims the Chamber of Industries in Maritzburg has decided to oppose from the outset any industrial solidarity or sympathy action as strongly as possible. This is consistent, says the union, with the fact that relations with several firms have plummeted inexplicably since the stoppage.

The bosses are reported to be evasive about the reasons for their change of attitude. The union attributes it to hostility arising from the work stoppage and is contemplating legal action against one firm which breached an agreement which included a stop-order arrangements.