

## Obituary: Eddie McCarthy 1943 – 1985

Eddie McCarthy died by drowning at St Georges Beach, Port Elizabeth, on January 3rd 1985.

Eddie was employed at the General Motors Electromotive Division at Port Elizabeth, where he joined the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU). He was elected as a shop steward in 1981. Since then Eddie has moved through the ranks of the union and sat on the General Motors Branch Executive Committee and the Port Elizabeth Area Committee. He also sat on the Union's National Executive Committee and its Management Committee. He was part of the union's delegation to the recent International Metalworkers Federation Africa Workshop held in Lesotho.

Not only was Eddie active in his own union's affairs, but he actively gave of himself to FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions). He sat on FOSATU's Eastern Cape Region and on its National Executive Committee. He was a NAAWU delegate to FOSATU Central Committee.

Eddie's years of union activity span the period when the Eastern Cape developed worker militancy unknown in South Africa. He was active during the 1981 "living wage" strike when over 20,000 workers, almost the entire industrial workforce of Uitenhage, stopped work in support of the demand for a living wage. Workers at the Port Elizabeth car plants, where Eddie was working, supported this demand. The strike succeeded in raising the wages of assembly workers in the Eastern Cape to R2,00 per hour – a massive worker victory, not only in monetary terms, but also because for the first time the living wage concept had overthrown the dominant "poverty datum" measurement used by management to justify starvation wages.

It was after 1981 that Eddie began to play a leadership role in the union. His hand was seen in the first strike involving all three assembly plants in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area, Ford, Volkswagen and General Motors. A

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massive 10,000 workers stopped work for between 5 and 15 days while the union moved employers from their original offer of an additional 5c per hour or a minimum wage of R2,15 per hour to an increase which would bring the effective minimum to R2,70 by 1984. It was the first time that General Motors workers had participated in a strike of this nature and suffice it to say that Eddie was in a leadership role during that period.

Eddie's funeral was attended by over 1000 people, workers, colleagues from the rugby clubs where he played a role as an administrator, friends and family. The final tribute was paid to him by his friend and comrade in arms, Jurie Harries, President of NAAWU:

Workers at General Motors will know Eddie is not there when they return to work on Monday. His presence will be sorely missed. But Eddie worked for the struggle of the workers, and while we cannot replace Eddie McCarthy, another leader will take his place to continue the struggle of which Eddie was part.

Eddie made a substantial contribution to the growth of NAAWU and of FOSATU. He was deeply committed to the advancement of the working class and to a better South Africa for all of us.

NAAWU SALUTES HIS MEMORY AND EXPRESSES  
ITS CONDOLENCES TO HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN