

regularly in spite of harassment. We called for the return to offices of officials except those being hunted more than others.

Contact at national level was established, and a decision was taken to hold a CEC [Central Executive Committee] on the 1st July. A whole range of demands were also prepared and circulated for discussion at all levels of the organisation. The CEC meeting also involved local representatives. Arising out of the CEC was a broad plan of action.

The state of emergency was seen as an attack on the people of South Africa and on their democratic and human rights. It was also seen as an attack on COSATU and its affiliates through harassment, attention and office raids. It is a political attack on the labour movement and an attack which we could not allow to go unchallenged. Consequently a systematic programme of action was drafted to achieve the demands that we set out. We called for an end to all harassment of workers, shop stewards and officials; the release of all detained leaders; an end to repression and a move towards democratic solutions to the problems of our country.

We also made demands that related specifically to our continued operation on the shop floor. [The demands included paid time off for shop stewards to attend to union business; guaranteed jobs and pay for detainees; the right to hold union meetings on company property on company time. These demands were largely conceded by the major employers federations. - ed.]

We further decided that if these demands were not met by the 10th July, COSATU would be forced to take further action. This would fundamentally place the whole system of industrial relations into serious jeopardy, but our belief is that these structures that have been won through bitter struggle and negotiation depend on there being a balance in the power relations between labour and capital. The repressive actions taken against us have severely disadvantaged trade unions in their continued participation in these structures. COSATU therefore reserves its right to initiate further action.

After the first spate of detentions there was a spontaneous reaction with thousands of workers coming out on strike, especially in the retail sector, but what began to emerge very rapidly was a more co-ordinated response to the attack on us.

- Rocla strike -

On Monday June 17 another meeting was held with management. When the shop stewards clocked out the rest of the workers followed suit and left the company premises. At this meeting the liaison committee was present again. The shop stewards then decided to leave the meeting and returned to find the rest of the workers on strike. In a hurriedly convened report back meeting the workers decided not to go back until management gave an undertaking to recognise the shop stewards committee and not the liaison committee. They then decided to march peacefully to the Rocla head office which was near the factory. At first management ignored the workers but under pressure by the afternoon decided to approach the workers.

Montanu Dudlane, chairman of the shop stewards committee, explained:

Management wanted to know the reason workers were on strike. They told them that it was because of the clock out which resulted in shop stewards losing money. They also said that they wanted the shop stewards and the union to be recognised as well as the demands of the petition met.

The management of Rocla refused to accede to the workers demands and for two days the workers assembled outside the head office. Although the police were present, and kept a careful watch, no arrests were made. Union telexes and attempts to get management to the negotiating table during the early stages of the strike proved futile.

On Wednesday June 19 BCAWU general secretary, Aaron Nithinya, met management who insisted that no negotiations will take place unless the workers returned to work. When this was explained to the workers they refused to return unless management informed them personally of this. This was done over the public address system and the workers reluctantly returned. Although the strike has ended the workers demands remain to be met.

(Roodepoort correspondent, July 1985)