

Statement condemns detentions of Union leaders

A STATEMENT roundly condemning the recent spate of detentions has been released by the independent trade union movement.

The statement was signed by the South African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU), the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA), the Black Municipal Workers Union (BMWU), the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu), the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA), CUSA and Holtelica.

"We note in anger, that the authorities have not seen fit to release any of the trade unionists detained in their prisons. Instead the most striking development has been the further detentions of one member of Mwasa, 33 members of Saawu and 4 from Macwusa, as well as the arrest of more community and student leaders," the statement said.

"We condemn all these detentions in the strongest terms. As far as the detentions of Mr Joe Mavi (President of BMWU), Mr Sisa Njikelana (Vice-President of Saawu), and the Macwusa leaders are concerned, we can only conclude that their transfer to Section 10 of the Internal Security Act means that the state is unable to charge them even with the heavily loaded arsenal of repressive security laws at its disposal.

"It is appropriate that at this time of large scale crackdowns on the Trade Union Movement the public should become aware of the state's plans for dealing with independent trade unionism.

"We would like to say that these heavy handed actions will not achieve industrial peace. They serve only to make the workers more suspicious of the state's attitude towards trade unions, we therefore again call on the government to release all the detained trade unionists with the least possible delay.

"Failing this we pledge that we will do all in our power to ensure that the work of the affected unions does not suffer because of the moral and practical support we can provide."

A PROMINENT Uitenhage community leader has accused the Federation of South African Trade Unions in the Eastern Cape of planning to infiltrate community organisations for its own ends.

Fosatu have rejected the allegation but have admitted that there is no bar on Fosatu members joining community organisations and standing for elections to the executive committee.

This is a significant shift in Fosatu policy which has maintained that trade unionists should not be involved in civic or "political matters".

The former president of the interim executive of the executive of the

Uitenhage Black Civic Organisation, (Ubco). Mr Thomas Kobese, said he had resigned as secretary of the Ubco executive last month because the elections were "undemocratic" and rigged in favour of Fosatu supporters.

At the meeting, the president of the Fosatu-affiliated National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers (Numarwosa), Mr Jurie Harris, was elected Ubco treasurer.



GAWU President Samson Ndou.

R2 for motor workers

A MINIMUM wage of R2 an hour for unskilled male workers came into force at a Uitenhage factory this week.

The minimum, negotiated by the workers' committee of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers (Numarwosa) at the Swedish SKF bearings plant, is believed to be the highest in force in South Africa at the moment.

The minimum rate for women will be R1.80.

Mr Freddie Sauls, general secretary of Numarwosa, said that the agreement would mean that a male worker would collect about R360 a month before tax once he had served a probationary period

But while this was a step in the right direction, it had "nothing to do" with a just wage.

Ultimately, a just wage was a political question, and involved an equitable distribution of the wealth of the country.

Mr Sauls said the vast majority of companies in South Africa could pay a minimum wage in excess of R2, and that if they were really concerned with the welfare of their employees, they should pay at least that basic amount.

"In most centres there are companies that can afford to pay their workers a minimum of R3 or R4 an hour," he said.

He said he thought the new min-

Workers hit hard by new pension laws

A NUMBER of worker disputes have arisen after changes in the laws governing company pension schemes were proposed last year.

Black workers believe that as the people most affected by this, they should have had a major say in drawing up the new legislation.

Instead, the proposals came after debate between the State, insurance companies and management in consultation with white union officials.

SASPU NATIONAL looks at why the issue has become such an important one to black workers.

The most important changes the government wants to introduce are the following:

- Workers won't be allowed to withdraw their own contributions to the fund, plus interest if they resign or are dismissed. Until now this has been possible and only the employers contribution has remained in the fund. The proposal change keeps as much money in the pension fund for as long possible.

- Only a maximum of one-third of the accumulated pension money will be paid out in a lump sum when a worker retires. The rest will be paid in monthly instalments. Until now many workers have been able to draw the full sum at once.

- One of the aims of the proposals is to include more workers in pension schemes and also improve be-

nefits. The changes will however, cost workers the choice of when they can withdraw their pension contributions and how much they can get at any one time.

Many feel that these measures are another example of unnecessary state interference in private pension funds.

The problems that are experienced with the State's administration of both unemployment insurance funds and pensions, have made many workers sceptical about the motives behind the new proposals.

Some bosses are crying out that the state is interfering in their private pension schemes. Most however see it in their interests to support the new scheme. They will now be released from their responsibility towards workers in the field of pensions.

The state, management and insurers argue that a national preservation fund will improve the quality of life of pensioners.

In a country like South Africa where wages are low and unemployment high, pensions have been an important source of money during hard times when people are out of work.

The average life expectancy of black men in South Africa is still about 50 years - it is hard to see how people will benefit more from the proposed fund if money can only be withdrawn once a worker retires or turns 60.

Management and insurers have interests in seeing the growth of large preserved funds. The money can be used for their investments. Larger profits can be drawn if greater sums of money are invested over a longer period.

The money that the workers contribute year after year, together with the bosses contributions are invested to benefit the bosses.

The workers are having to pay part of their wages into funds and the returns that they are getting are shrinking given the spiralling inflation rate. The proposed pension legislation will hardly alleviate the workers' burden. If anything it will make it worse.

associations.

He said Ubco would soon find itself "organising in self-isolation" and would become an organisation with little support.

The executive initially refused to accept his resignation but later declared he had resigned at a mass meeting last month.

Mr Kobese said he was barred from speaking at the meeting attended by prominent Fosatu unionists, Mr Fred Sauls, secretary of Numarwosa, and Mr Les Keteldas, regional secretary of Fosatu in Port Elizabeth.

The acting secretary of Fosatu in Uitenhage, Mr Edwin Maepe, said there were "no plans for the union to take over Ubco". He said the president of Numarwosa, Mr Jurie Harris, had been a Ubco member for "quite some time".

"Mr Kobese should not lose sight of the fact that the community is made up of workers and Fosatu members form the majority of the entire workforce in Uitenhage," he said.

Ubco leader in walk-out over allegations of Fosatu infiltration

In a surprise move earlier this year, Mr Kobese resigned as Fosatu secretary in Uitenhage to join the rival Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa.

He said he was dissatisfied with the union in the area and at least 200 Goodyear workers, where Mr Kobese works, left the Fosatu-affiliated National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers to join Macwusa as well.

Mr Kobese said that conflict between the two unions - which is most serious at Ford and General Motors - should not be brought into Ubco.

There has, however, been growing antagonism between the two

motor unions, ever since workers at Ford's Cortina plant rejected the Fosatu union during the 1979 Ford strike and formed their own Ford Workers Committee (FWC).

The FWC was affiliated to the then mass-based civic organisation, Pebco, lead by Mr Thozamile Botha. The move was criticised by Fosatu unionists who said unions should not be involved in "civic matters".

In an interview, Mr Kobese said although Macwusa had "good relations" with the Pebco leadership at present, this was because of "goodwill" between the organisations and not a planned strategy. Both organisations retained their independence.

imum would spread to other factories, but only if workers pushed for it.

"I don't think managements, generally speaking, will introduce this without pressure," he said.

Mr Sauls said he did not regard the new minimum as a victory for Fosatu so much as a victory for the Numarwosa workers committee at the factory, which had negotiated directly with SKF management.

The R2 minimum was higher than the minimum of R1.36 set by the Industrial Council for the Steel and Engineering Industry, and the workers committee had been under some pressure from the council and the Iron and Steel Employers' Association not to "rock the boat".

He said Fosatu had violated the autonomy of Ubco and was attempting to use the organisation to improve its image in Uitenhage.

Mr Kobese said at least half the members of the new executive had not been democratically elected at a recent meeting - called to elect a new executive to replace the interim executive - but had merely been nominated.

Mr Kobese, who did not stand for the position of chairman, was elected secretary.

Soon after the meeting however, Mr Kobese objected to the way the elections had been conducted and criticised the new executive's policy of not co-operating with other civic