

THINGS ARE GOING

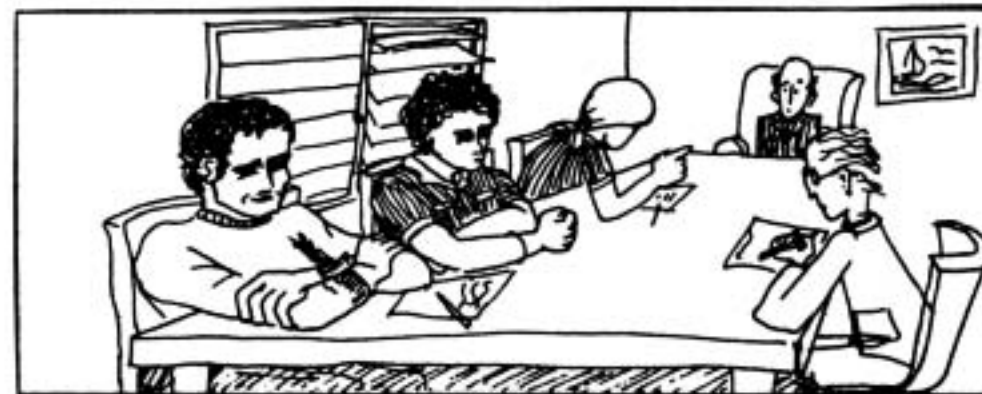
HERE IS THE STORY OF ONE GROUP OF WORKERS' STRUGGLE FOR BETTER MATERNITY CONDITIONS. THESE WORKERS ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMERCIAL, CATERING AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA (CCAWUSA). THIS UNIONS ESPECIALLY ORGANISES SHOP-WORKERS. CCAWUSA HAS SIGNED AGREEMENTS FOR BETTER WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS WITH THE BOSSES OF O.K. BAZAARS, EDGARS, WOOLWORTHS AND A NUMBER OF OTHER SHOPS.

CCAWUSA was one of the first unions in South Africa to negotiate a good maternity agreement for their women members. Such big victories as 12 months leave in some stores have been won, as well as women being assured of a job on the same salary scale when they come back. Some women members of CCAWUSA who are shopstewards at O.K. Bazaars tell us about the agreement:

"The important thing is that now you don't have to choose between a baby and a job. Now it is possible for us to take time off to have a baby, knowing that when we come back to work we'll still have our job - and without any drop in salary or loss of benefits.



But if there were no women shopstewards things would slide backwards again - just as such a good agreement wouldn't have been won in the first place. Even now you get some store managers not telling their workers about the maximum benefits, or making them a little worried by saying: 'One year is a long time, wouldn't it be better to come back after six months?' So then the worker feels she'd better come back earlier - just in case. We must put a stop to that kind of intimidation - and women shopstewards are much more likely to do that. Because we are the ones who understand how a woman feels.



But an important thing is that our male shopstewards have also been very strong about this maternity issue. One of the O.K. Bazaar men shopstewards said: "It is important that there are women shopstewards. Maternity rights is a workers issue. But if you are negotiating maternity rights with management and women shopstewards are there negotiating - they have a better effect because they speak with more force."

OUR WAY AT O.K.



Our union feels that men and women should be equal as workers, so all workers must fight against things that hold women down. A big thing still is money. Because most women can't stay away from work long enough for this reason - money. And you feel so terrible when you have to leave your two month old baby and come back to work. On the bus to work you just want to get off at the very next stop and rush home again rather than go back to work. But at least now you know there is a job waiting for you when you do get back.

One improvement that might be made more easily in maternity agreements is paid time to go to ante-natal clinic. At the moment we have to use our one day off a month to go to the clinic, plus doing the hundred and one other things you have to fit into your day off. The same applies to taking time off for sick children. Now we are able to have children we must be able to care for them too!

At least we're getting somewhere. But we still need more women shopstewards. It's important for workers and bosses to see that women can, and will, fight for their rights. As we women workers become stronger in our organisations, we will be able to get more and more rights - like proper day-care and such things too.

WHITEHEADS WOMEN ARE WINNING

Whiteheads is a textile factory in Tongaat which employs many women. The National Union of Textile Workers(NUTW) organises there. NUTW is part of FOSATU - the Federation of South African Trade Unions. Often these women at Whiteheads are the only breadwinners for their families - in an area where rents are very high. So losing your job through pregnancy means that you are likely to lose your house, on top of all your other problems.

When the workers at Whiteheads first told the bosses that they wanted maternity rights, the bosses took the hard-line position that women must either work, or they must stay at home

