

# 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



and have babies. So it took a lot of pushing to make the bosses accept that women have a right to work, and a right to have children.



Having heard that CCAWUSA has good Maternity Agreements with the shops where they organise, a shopsteward from Whiteheads visited CCAWUSA offices to find out more about what important demands to have in a maternity agreement.

So through discussions amongst Whiteheads workers, and consultations with other independent Trade Unions, Whiteheads are very close to being another factory where the workers have gained important steps towards proper maternity rights through their union.

## MATERNITY BENEFITS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Women workers in different countries have struggled over many years to win decent maternity rights. Through their struggle in women's movements, trade unions and other organisations, they have been able to force people to take notice of the issue of maternity rights. Whilst there is still a long way to go before the demands of women workers are fully met, here are some examples of especially good rights that have been fought for and won in different countries.

- \* Women in Italy have the right to get their jobs back for up to one year after the birth of their child.
- \* Norwegian women have 12 weeks maternity leave before the birth of their child, and up to 18 weeks after their baby is born. During this time they get their full pay for 16 weeks.
- \* In Finland, fathers are allowed to take paternity leave to look after their children.
- \* French women workers have 1 hour a day to feed their babies. They can do this until the child is one year old.
- \* In many countries women workers get extra benefits if they have twins, a caesarian birth, or other problems during birth.
- \* In some countries workers can take paid leave to look after their sick child.

EVERYBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO HAVE CHILDREN - AND BOTH MEN AND WOMEN ARE INVOLVED. IN THE SAME WAY EVERYBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO WORK, AND HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AT WORK. PROPER MATERNITY RIGHTS ARE NECESSARY IF WOMEN ARE ABLE TO HAVE AN EQUAL CHANCE AT WORK AND IN SOCIETY. SO MATERNITY IS AN ISSUE FOR ALL WORKERS. WORKERS MUST FIGHT THROUGH THEIR UNIONS FOR THE RIGHT TO HAVE AND RAISE THEIR CHILDREN PROPERLY.

