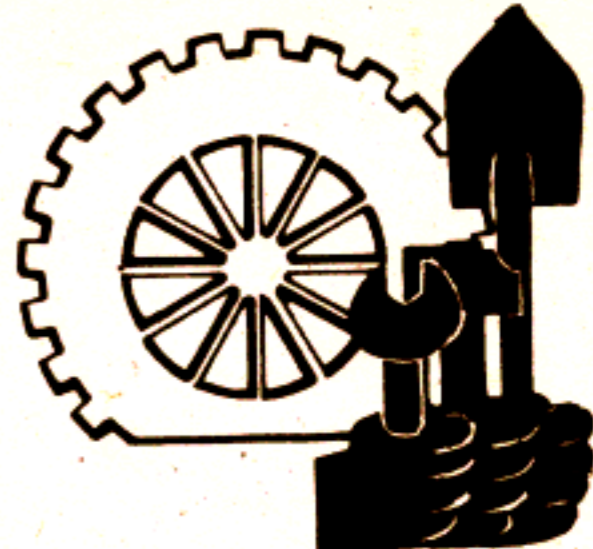


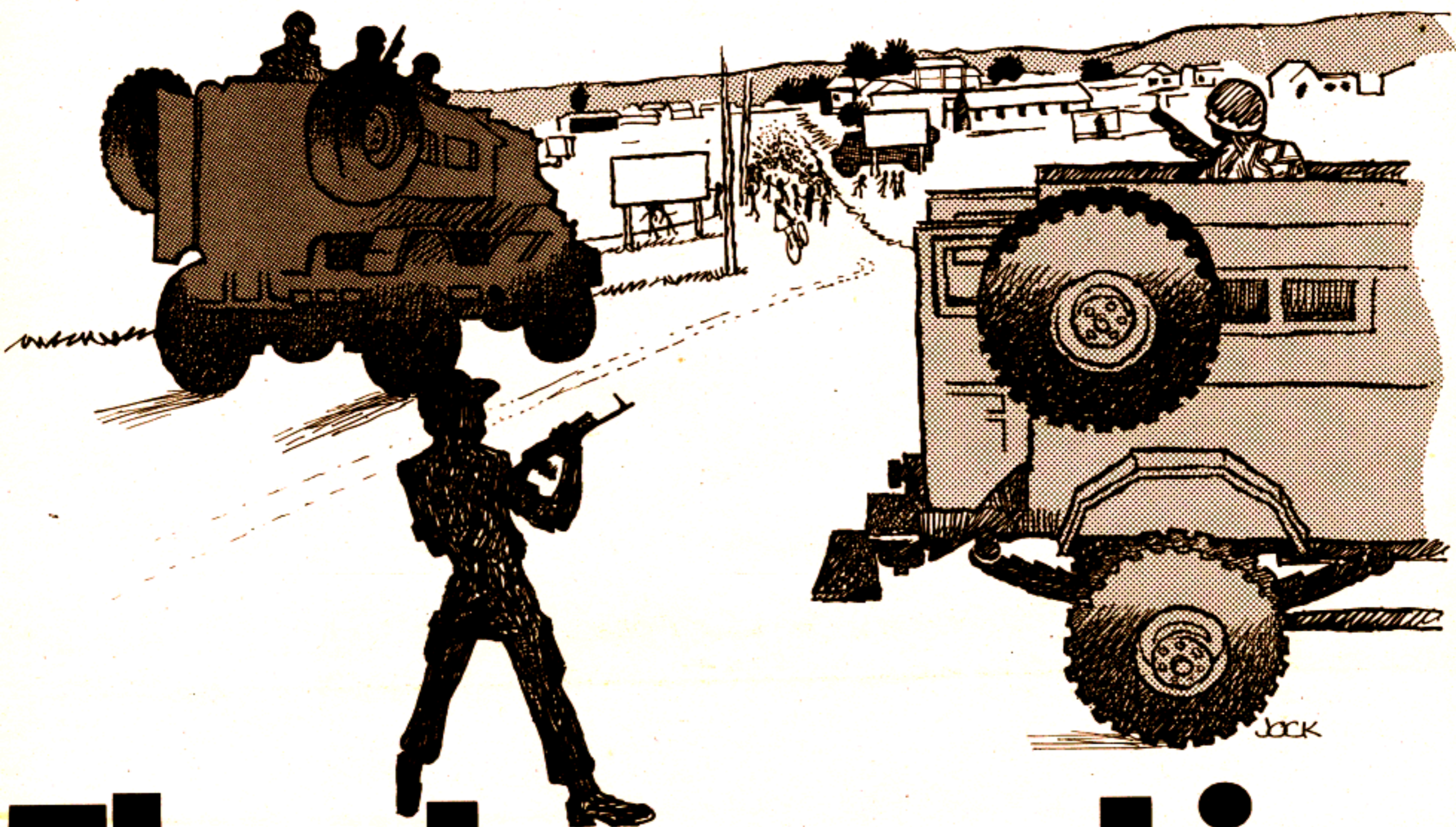
FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



MAY DAY ISSUE No. 37

1985



The Langa Lies

ON March 21 on Maduna Road in the township of Langa near Uitenhage at least 20 people died and 37 were seriously wounded when police opened fire with R1 rifles and shotguns on a marching crowd.

These are the bare facts of the Langa massacre but an air of mystery still clouds the event.

With families still desperately searching for relatives who have been missing since that day, even the numbers of the dead and wounded are open to question.

For days after the shooting, police refused people access to the mortuary and to victims being kept under police guard in hospital, until lawyers intervened.

The official version of the Langa massacre put out by the Minister of Law and Order, Mr Louis Le Grange, was that the police were forced to open fire when a screaming mob of about 4 000-strong surrounded

them and threw stones, sticks and petrol bombs.

However, another version of the events is beginning to emerge at the Kannemeyer Commission of Inquiry which is investigating the Langa shooting.

In their evidence, senior police officers have admitted that there were serious errors in the Minister's statement.

Lieutenant John Fouche admitted that he had given the order to open fire after only one stone was thrown although he claims that many stones were thrown after that.

Warrant Officer Pentz who was in charge of one of the Caspirs said that stones had 'rained' down on the police vehicles.

However, when shown police photographs taken shortly after the shooting, both officers have had to admit that there were no stones anywhere near the Caspirs.

When asked what had happened to the stones, Sergeant Gerhard Stumke told

the commission: 'Maybe, they fell in the kikuyu grass. They bounced off. I only saw stones between the people.'

In the photos the nearest grouping of stones to the Caspirs are about 40 metres away. Eyewitnesses have said that they saw the police themselves gather stones and scatter them among the wounded and the dead before the photographs were taken.

The police have also admitted that no petrol bombs were thrown at the Caspirs, although WO Pentz said he saw 'the leader take a large bottle from under his jacket. The bottle had a pinkish tint'.

Strange facts have also emerged about the broken bottles which police claim to have been the remains of petrol bombs picked up after the Langa incident.

Police experts told the commission that although they found traces of petrol in wads of paper stuck into the tops of the bottles, they could find no traces of petrol anywhere near where the

shooting took place.

Also, the wads of paper, supposedly found in the broken necks of the bottles, were torn from the same page of the same newspaper.

Lt Fouche also admitted that the Minister had been incorrect in saying that the police Caspirs had been surrounded by the crowd.

Mystery also surrounded a young boy who eyewitnesses said was riding at the front of the crowd and was the first shot. WO Pentz denied seeing him and Lt Fouche said he had come up from behind the Caspirs after the shooting.

The young cyclist later told the commission that he had been riding at the front of the crowd when the police gestured for him to go between the Caspirs.

'As I went past, I was shot. I was hit on the head,' he said.

The commission has heard that the Caspirs on patrol were only issued with R1 rifles, shotguns and SSG ammunition — all of which are lethal.

WO Malan Mayer said that he had received instructions from the station commander on March 14 not to issue tear smoke, rubber bullets or bird shot to patrols. Immediately after the Langa massacre he was told to issue these again.

Victims of the shootings have told the commission how after the shooting, policemen went round kicking some of the wounded 'to see whether they were dead'.

The cyclist said he had been kicked twice and on the second time he had lost consciousness.

Eric Tabani said while he was lying on the ground pretending to be dead he had heard police say that the wounded should be 'finished off' and had then felt another bullet hit his foot.

Although, the Kannemeyer Commission has removed some of the cloud of mystery surrounding the Langa massacre, it is unlikely that the full tale of horror will ever be told.

Uitenhage worker tells of what he saw on March 21

THE police's explanation for what happened on March 21 on Maduna Road goes something like this: a mob of about 4 000 people after singing a song about killing whites, surrounded two Caspirs and then began to shower the police with rocks and stones. The police feared for their lives so the order was given to open fire. Here we carry an account of the massacre given by a Uitenhage worker. Which do you think is the true story?

MY house is in the street in front of the square. That day people started gathering in the square and making preparations to go to the funeral at about nine in the morning.

I was in the front room of my house just watching. A Caspir came into the square and drove around chasing people. People would run away into the houses. Then a white policeman standing on the top of the Caspir shouted 'throw' trying to encourage people to throw stones. But the people just ignored him and started congregating again.

Then they started marching down Maduna Road. As they were marching the Caspir overtook them and parked where the taxis usually pick people

up. I started running after the people in order to join them. The Caspir then drove past again and went and parked near 19th avenue.

As we neared 18th and 19th, we stopped and waited for other people to join the march. We were singing freedom songs as we walked. We started moving again and as we were going past the 7th Day Adventist Church the Caspir overtook again and went up to the top of the hill and parked across the road. It was joined by another Caspir which came from the town end of Maduna Road with a landrover and white police truck.

As the crowd reached 15th Avenue, one policeman came

up on top of the Caspir and he raised up his hand. The crowd stopped. Then I saw a small boy on a bicycle come out from the front of the crowd and ride up to the Caspirs. He looked back at the crowd, raised his fist and then started riding again. As he started riding he was shot and then all the police started shooting from both Caspirs.

We all started running. As I was running I saw another Caspir at the back of the crowd. They were also shooting. When the shooting stopped I saw the police come down from the Caspirs, collect stones and throw them among the people lying on the road. Then the ambulances came and started collecting people. I started going home then.

8 000 mourn Langa dead



Workers at Volkswagen sing Nkosi Sikelela during the memorial stoppage

OVER 8 000 workers in FOSATU's Uitenhage factories stopped work for 15 minutes on March 28 in memory of those killed at Langa a week earlier.

Machines were switched off and workers gathered for a short prayer meeting.

At the meetings, worker leaders outlined the history of the struggle for liberation.

Recalling the shootings at Sharpeville in 1960 and now at Langa in 1985, they said the struggle for freedom from oppression would not be halted by events like these, they only made people more determined.

The workers then observed a few moments of silence and finished off with the singing of Nkosi Sikelela.

In many of the factories, workers wept as they remembered loved ones senselessly murdered in the massacre.

In some of the factories, even the clerks, cafeteria staff and medical staff joined in the stoppage.

And staff in the FOSATU offices in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage also observed the time of silence.

E Cape chairman explains why unions did not back stay-away

FOSATU and the unity unions have been attacked for refusing to support the March 16-18 stay-away called by the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco). To put the record straight, we asked the federation's Eastern Province chairman, Thembinkosi Mkalipi, to give some background to the stay-away and explain why the unions decided not to back it.

SINCE the November stay-away in the Transvaal, there had been suggestions in Port Elizabeth that we should also have a stay-away. But an official decision was only taken at a Pebco rally sometime in January. We saw it announced in the press.

On February 7, FOSATU had its first meeting with Pebco and other UDF affiliates. Food and Canning Workers Union and the General Workers Union were also there. In the meeting we asked Pebco why they had now come to the unions when the decision for a stay-away had already been made.

Without any caucusing, all the unions at that meeting took a common stand. We said that because of the economic position in the Eastern Cape, it was ill advised to go on a stay-away.

We said we supported the use of stay-aways as a means of pressure, but all our factories were involved in retrenchment negotiations and Ford was closing. How could we be expected to support a stay-away? Pebco kept on pushing for a stay-away committee to be elected immediately. The unions refused saying they would have to go back to get a mandate from the workers.

At the next meeting, the FOSATU delegation, which for various reasons arrived late, was merely told by Pebco that a decision had been taken and that a stay-away committee would be elected at a Pebco rally.

The only contact we had with Pebco after this meeting was two days before the stay-away. We as unity unions once again said we were against the stay-

away. We also said that the demands for the removal of GST and the petrol price increase were unrealistic. The other issue which worried the unions was that the stay-away would divide workers racially. Coloured workers were not expected to support the stay-away. As non-racial organisations we

said we could not encourage some of our members to stay-away and not others. We said that employers could use the stay-away as an opportunity to replace African workers with coloureds. Also, we said, it was likely that unorganised workers would be fired. We asked Pebco to call off the stay-away and enter into genuine discussions with worker representatives. At this point, Pebco walked out of the meeting.

Now, to evaluate the success of the stay-away. In the press, white businessmen stated that on the Friday business had been as good as Christmas. Black businessmen also said they had benefited from the stay-away. In the light of these statements, it seemed to us that the only people who didn't benefit were the workers. Many workers in small factories were fired, some workers were suspended and most lost wages. We agree that in terms of numbers the stay-away was 100 percent successful. But petrol is still the same price, bus fares have remained the same and GST is unchanged. Nothing has been affected by the stay-away, except workers have suffered.



E Cape chairman, Mkalipi

Workers donate R2 400 to victims' families

FOSATU workers in Uitenhage so far have donated over R2 400 to the families of those killed in the Langa massacre.

To this has been added another R2 000 from the International Metalworkers Federation.

So far, workers at VW, Veldspun, Dorbyl, Goodyear, Borgwarner and Farm Fare have given money to the Langa fund. Money still has to be handed in from other FOSATU factories in the area.

Eastern Cape Regional secretary, Brother M Sam said that the fund had been started on March 27 by the FOSATU Uitenhage Local in order to assist families in meeting funeral expenses and other needs they might have.

He said the money had been divided up between 22 families — each family received about R180.

'Other unions involved in the present unity talks have also said that they will be giving money to the fund,' he added.

Call for charges to be dropped

THE International Metalworkers Federation has called on the South African government to drop 'once and for all' the case against Moses Mayekiso, the Transvaal branch secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Brother Mayekiso, together with other members of the Stayaway Committee, was charged with 'subversion' for his role in the November stayaway — the charge carries a prison sentence of up to 25 years.

However, when the other members of the committee failed to appear in court, the State 'provisionally' dropped the case. It is believed that the others have fled the country.

IMF general secretary, Herman Rebhan, said: 'A provisional dropping of this case makes a mockery of even South African justice.'

'We say that Mayekiso should not have this threat hanging over his head,' he added.

Housing for visiting families

IN an important victory for migrant workers, the Johannesburg City Council has agreed to build special accommodation for visiting wives and families.

For the first time an employer has recognised that migrant workers actually have the right to some form of family life.

One of the most inhuman aspects of the migrant labour system is that it separates husbands from their families for the length of the workers' contract.

Most workers only see their families once a year when the factories shut down because the 'homelands' are far from where they work.

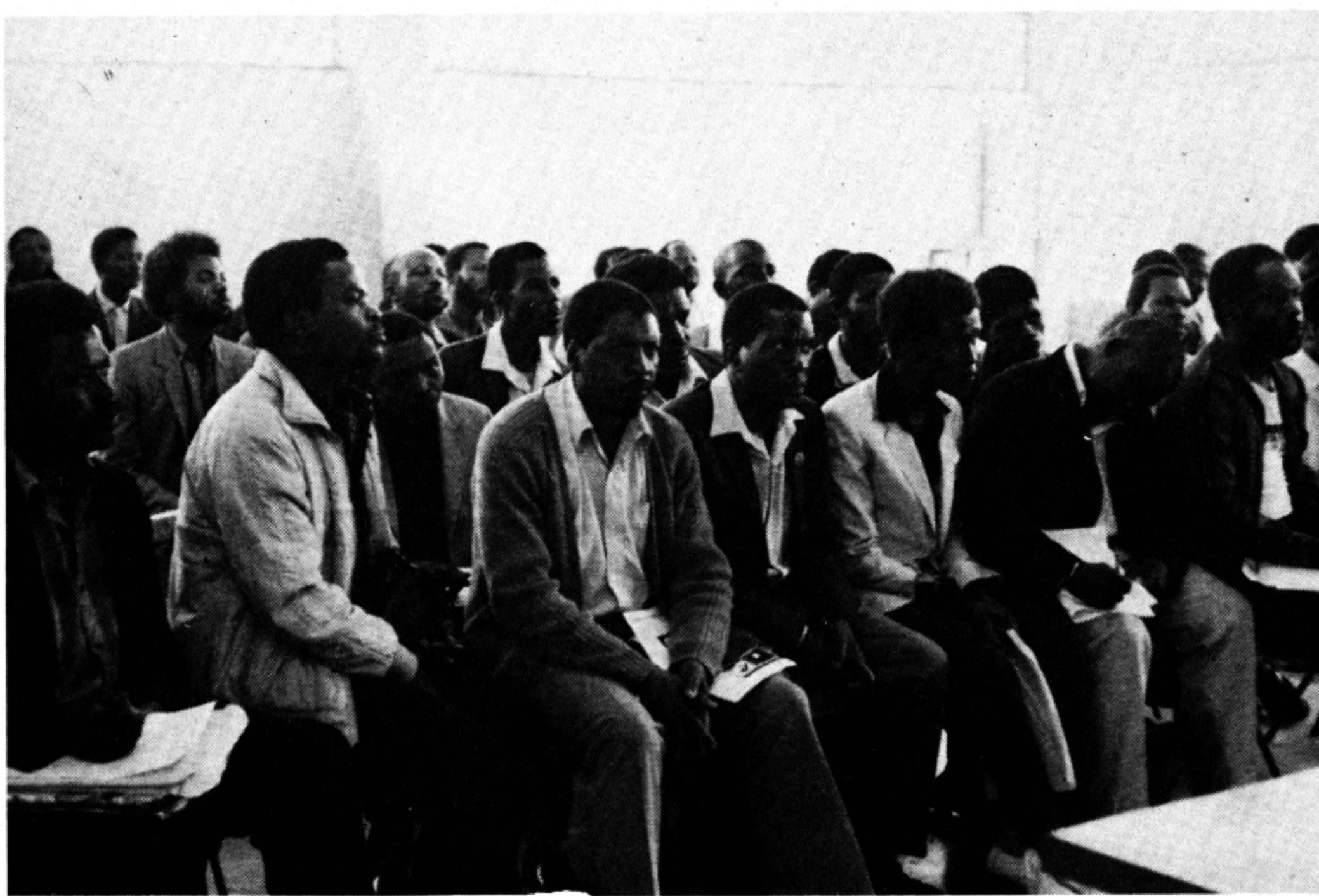
Towards the end of last year the municipality workers complained to the Transport and General Workers Union that even when their families travelled to Johannesburg to see them it was impossible to find accommodation for them.

The workers who live in compounds told the union that when they were sick there were no nearby relatives to look after them.

Although, the TGWU is not recognised by the Johannesburg City Council it decided to raise the issue through the worker committees which have been set up in the six departments where the union is strong.

A union spokesperson said that after a number of meetings with the Avalon depot management it was agreed that special accommodation would be provided so that wives and families could visit for a short time.

'But it is not yet clear whether there will be restrictions on this accommodation which will be completed by July. These are things which the union will continue to fight,' she said.



Shop stewards from MAWU factories in the Transvaal discuss the industrial council wage talks

Is a wage offer on the way?

THE metal employers association, SEIFSA, might make a wage offer after all!

The offer is expected to be made on April 30 when industrial council negotiations reopen.

However, Metal and Allied Workers Union sources say they don't expect the employers to offer much.

This year's metal industry's wage talks opened with a bang on April 2 when the employers said they could not offer any wage increase at all.

SEIFSA director, Sam van Coller told the unions that the South African economy was to

blame.

He said the low gold price, the high inflation rate, too much government spending, and high production costs had affected the metal industry's ability to compete with other countries.

Therefore, workers must agree to take no increase this year so that employers could keep down their costs, he added.

The unions affiliated to the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), which have agreed to take a united stand at the wage talks, attacked this as 'absolute nonsense'.

They said that if the employers were not satisfied with government policies then they must get the government to change them — it is not a workers' government, it is an employers' government.

MAWU president, Jeffrey Vilane said that employers always wanted the workers to suffer when things were bad.

Other MAWU speakers challenged the employers to first tighten their own belts if they were sincere about cutting costs by stopping all management perks like company cars, free petrol and cheap housing loans for directors.

Also, directors salaries

should be cut so that their standard of living was closer to that of the rest of people in South Africa, they said.

Union speakers also said that huge amounts of money was wasted on the apartheid bureaucracy and the joke of a tricameral parliament. This money could be used to create jobs in South Africa.

At the end of the meeting, the IMF unions declared a dispute with the employers.

But at a meeting of the industrial council's Executive on April 13, SEIFSA's Sam van Coller agreed to reopen negotiations.

Workers slam E Cape 'opportunists'

WORKER leaders in FOSATU's Eastern Cape region have criticised a number of 'opportunistic' affiliates of the United Democratic Front (UDF) for using the Langa massacre as a means to boost their own organisations.

The worker leaders told FOSATU Worker News that MACWUSA (the Motor Assembly and Components Workers Union of SA) and GWUSA leadership were deliberately using their positions in the UDF to undermine FOSATU's strong presence in Uitenhage.

'They have hijacked funerals and used them as a platform to attack FOSATU and NAAWU leaders as enemies of the people.'

'More recently they have attempted to smear FOSATU by saying that it was responsible for the Langa massacre,' FOSATU unionists said.

Over the past few months, FOSATU has attempted to meet the Uitenhage leadership of the UDF in order to plan joint action by all progressive groupings. But has been

snubbed.

'Even before the Langa shooting, we tried to meet with them to discuss the general situation in the townships and to plan funerals for those shot by police,' a FOSATU regional spokesperson said.

'At the one meeting that we did have, which was convened by the church ministers, the UDF people said that if they had known that FOSATU was coming to the meeting they would not have come,' he said.

In general meetings at all

FOSATU factories, workers discussed the situation in the Uitenhage townships and the scurrilous attacks being made on the organisation.

Workers slammed the 'opportunists' for trying to create confusion in the townships under the popular banner of the UDF instead of working for unity.

It was decided to hold meetings in Langa, Kwanobuhle and Rosedale in order to challenge the attempts being made to discredit FOSATU and its leadership.

Brother of union organiser killed by police

ON Monday March 18, seventeen-year-old Zamekile Magugu went around to a house in the Uitenhage township of Kwanobuhle to pay his respects to a family whose son had been shot dead by police.

Hours later, he too was dead. His body, riddled with police bullets, was left lying in the street.

Since the beginning of the year, scores of young people have tragically died in similar circumstances in the Uitenhage townships. And it is still continuing.

National Union of Textile Workers organiser, Freddie Magugu, told FOSATU Worker News of the events that led to his younger brother's death.

'My brother, together with other friends of the family, had gathered that morning at the house in Kwanobuhle for a prayer meeting.'

'The dead son was one of those who were to be buried on March 21,' he said.

'While they were in the house, the police came in two Caspirs. One parked outside the house and fired tear gas

into the lounge.'

'Everybody ran out of the house to get away from the tear gas,' he added.

'My brother ran into the next door yard, to the back and jumped over the fence.'

'The other Caspir was parked there and it was from that Caspir that he was shot,' Brother Magugu said.

'The police fired a number of shots so my brother jumped over another fence and ran towards the church. It was while he was running that he was hit by one of the bullets.'

'He tried to get over the fence of the church. They shot him again.'

'He tried to get up and run behind a wall. The police shot again.'

'Another guy who had followed my brother said that after the police had checked he was dead, they shook hands and laughed.'

'The police left his body there and then went back to the house where they arrested everybody who was at the prayer meeting,' Brother Magugu said.

**PART TWELVE:
THE FIRST
INDUSTRIAL
UNIONS**

The making of the **WORKING CLASSES**



A workers' demonstration (Pic from D G Walton's White South Africa, published 1947)

WE saw in part ten that during the 1920's towns grew in size and the number of factories increased. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers were needed to run the factories. At the same time the big landowners were pushing large numbers of black and poor white farmers off the land. They joined the working class in the towns.

Unskilled white workers brought their racism from the Platteland, but they did not have all the privileges of white miners. They were still workers, not supervisors. White women, in particular, took jobs in the factories at very low wages, and worked under poor conditions. But it was these workers, alongside African male workers, who built South Africa's first strong industrial unions.

We saw in part eleven that the ICU failed to consolidate organisation amongst African workers in the towns. In 1927, when African workers went on strike in Durban and Johannesburg, the ICU was unable to give assistance. Also, by this time, Clements Kadalie, had come under the influence of the liberals. He rejected militant trade unionism and expelled communist office holders from the ICU. He declared that 'strikes are wicked, useless and obsolete'.

The expelled communists went out and organised new industrial unions of African workers in the baking, laundry, clothing and furniture industries. The following year, in 1928, 150 delegates met to form the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions (FNETU). By the end of the year FNETU claimed 10 000 members. FNETU elected Benny Weinbren, Moses Kotane and James La Guma as president, vice-president and general secretary. Other leading activists were T W Thibedi, the veteran socialist and member of the old International Socialist League, and Gana Makabeni, secretary of the African Clothing Workers Union. The number of new unions continued to increase — in the dairy, motor, food, metal, rope and chemical industries.

Black workers were taking the lead in militancy. In 1928, 5 074 black workers struck compared with 710 whites. The new unions were highly successful and used lightning strikes to protest over victimisations, conditions of work, wages and overtime. In May 1928, the African Laundry Workers

Union brought Leonardo's Laundry to a standstill, after the victimisation of one of their members. Although the strikers were forced back to work by the police, the worker was reinstated. During the same month, the Clothing Workers Union successfully co-ordinated a one-day strike in three Johannesburg factories to demand full payment for Good Friday. In September 1928, 170 African, Indian and Coloured workers at the Transvaal Mattress Company struck over wages. The newspaper reported: 'Before nightfall the employers had capitulated and advised the Mattress and Furniture Workers Union that the demands of the workers would be met'. FNETU combined trade union militancy with a clear political line, and was affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions.

Important progress was also being made amongst the white workers. The defeat of the 1922 General Strike severely weakened the old white mining and craft unions. When a new Trade Union Congress (TUC) was formed in 1924 the older, more conservative, unions withdrew allowing more radical unions to take the lead. The election of veteran communist, Bill Andrews, as secretary of the TUC was an important choice. He supported 'industrial unionism' — one union for each industry — against 'craft' or 'general' unionism. During the First World War, Andrews had worked in Sheffield (Britain) with J T Murphy, an engineering worker and leader of the shop stewards' movement and a leading writer on industrial unionism.

From 1924 to 1929, the TUC gave its support to a number of newly formed industrial unions in the furniture, leather, and canvas industries. The strongest new union to be formed during this period was the Garment Workers Union (GWU), led by Solly Sachs. The GWU organised mostly white Afrikaner machinists. The union took militant action to improve its members' working conditions. Between 1928 and 1932 the GWU led over 100 strikes, two of which brought the whole clothing industry to a standstill. The union also used the courts when necessary.

There was one general union which the TUC did support, the Women Workers Union (WWU), led by Fanny Klennerman. The union organised unskilled white women (there were hardly any black women

working in industry at this time on the Rand). The WWU held meetings outside shops and factories where women worked. It later formed separate industrial unions for sweet workers and waitresses.

Although white and black workers were organised in separate industrial unions, they sometimes combined against the common enemy, the bosses. The GWU provided money and support for Gana Makabeni's Clothing Workers Union. The registered and African laundry unions formed a joint executive committee. But even when there was co-operation, the registered (white-controlled) unions dominated the alliance. This was a result of the weaker position of African unions due to discriminatory laws and state repression. For a time, however, the Johannesburg Boot and Shoe Workers Union recruited all workers in the industry, without regard to race.

When it came to concrete solidarity action, the black workers were in the front line. During 1928-9 the black clothing, furniture and laundry workers' unions all struck in support of white workers who had been victimised. However, ordinary white workers were influenced by racism and often scabbed on fellow black workers. Even so, the registered industrial unions such as GWU, and later the textile, shop, tobacco, and food and canning unions continued to push for a non-racial policy, and called for full legal rights for African unions. At times this support was translated into action. After a successful sweet workers' strike in 1942, it was said that: 'One of the finest features of the strike was the unity and solidarity between European and African strikers, both determined not to return to work unless the wage demands of the others were agreed to by the bosses.'

FNETU collapsed after three years. The Great Depression, retrenchments, internal divisions and police repression all played a part. Individual unions survived, however, such as Gana Makabeni's Clothing Workers Union. These new industrial unions established a radical and non-racial trade union tradition. This tradition continued to grow in the left-wing of the Trades and Labour Council, in the Council of Non-European Trade Unions during the 1940's, in SACTU during the 1950's, and in the democratic unions of today.



Bloemfontein garment workers on strike for higher pay and three weeks' paid leave: A group of pickets outside their factory (1947).

Bata up to old tricks

CANADIAN-based multinational, Bata, has come under fire in the Canadian press recently for its treatment of black workers in South Africa.

Bata has 90 factories around the world, including four in South Africa. Two of these are in the 'homeland' of KwaZulu.

A report in The Globe and Mail newspaper pointed out that Bata had violated the Canadian government's code of conduct for Canadian companies operating in South Africa.

The newspaper report says that at Bata's two KwaZulu factories — Loskop and Keat's Drift — the company has:

- ignored the 'widely accepted guideline' that companies pay a minimum wage exceeding the poverty line by 50 percent.
- provided no medical, pension or sick funds.
- offered its black workers and

their families no assistance for medical and health facilities, housing or education.

- provided almost no opportunity for the movement of blacks into semi-skilled and skilled positions.

- made a mockery of the code's principle that 'companies should ensure that their employees are free to organise' into trade unions.

- refused to report annually to the Canadian government on its conditions of employment on the grounds that such a report would offend the South African authorities.

Soon after the report appeared in Canada's Globe newspaper, the Canadian government said it would be reviewing the code of conduct.

In 1980/81 workers at Bata's Loskop factory joined the National Union of Textile

Workers but even a lengthy strike could not get the company to the negotiating table.

Now, the NUTW has organised the majority of the workers at Keat's Drift. However, Bata has once again refused to respond to any union letters requesting a meeting.

And recently, the company 'retrenched' eight Keat's Drift workers who when asked by management whether they wanted a union said, yes.

NUTW's general secretary, John Copelyn said the union had invited the Canadian Ambassador to come and meet the Keat's Drift workers 'to hear their side of the story'.

He also said the union would be inviting the Canadian Labour Congress (Canada's trade union federation) 'to come and see for themselves' the activities of Bata in South Africa.

4 000 VW workers on strike over demand for pay increase

OVER 4 000 workers at the giant Volkswagen plant at Uitenhage downed tools on Friday April 19 in support of a demand for a wage increase.

When FOSATU Worker News went to press the strike was continuing and looked like it could spread to other motor plants in the region.

Earlier in April about 3 000 workers at the Mercedes motor assembly plant in East London staged a similar stoppage.

At Mercedes, the strikers returned when management hiked the minimum wage up from R2,15 to R2,60 an hour

and gave an across-the-board increase of 14c for unskilled workers and 24c for skilled.

The strikes are a response to the deadlocked wage negotiations at the Eastern Cape's motor industrial council.

Since November, the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union has been locked in wage talks with the motor employers.

The union is demanding a living wage of R3,50 per hour, the reduction of working hours to 40, better job security and improved retrenchment conditions.

So far, the employers have of-

ferred an across-the-board increase of 12c and 24c to be paid only from August 1 and an improved minimum rate of R2,60.

'This is completely unacceptable because the increase is nowhere near the inflation rate and the actual wage minimum in most of the plants is already at R2,70,' said NAAWU's Les Kettleidas.

As FOSATU Worker News went to press, the workers at General Motors instructed management that they had until Thursday April 25 to consider a demand for a wage increase otherwise they too would consider strike action.



Chris Dlamini elected to the executive of food international

IN March FOSATU president, Chris Dlamini, was elected to the executive of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations (IUF) as the Africa representative.

He is also an alternate vice-president of the IUF which represents more than 2 500 000 food workers in 67 countries around the world.

Brother Dlamini was elected to the IUF's executive at the international's 40th Congress at Geneva which was attended by 252 delegates from unions worldwide, including Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union general secretary, Jay Naidoo.

Sitting on the day after the

Langa massacre, the IUF Congress strongly condemned the 'apartheid regime' and pledged further solidarity action for South Africa's independent trade unions.

After the Congress, Brother Dlamini and Brother Naidoo visited Holland as guests of the VoedingsBond, the food union affiliate of the Dutch federation FNV.

While there, they spoke to striking meat workers who were protesting against proposed wage cuts. The strike by over 3 000 workers brought the Dutch meat industry to a complete standstill.

The hungry search for profit

IN the last issue of FOSATU Worker News, we dealt with the 'voyages of discovery' which led to greater trade between Europe and the Middle and Far East. Due to this increased trade, traders and merchants grew extremely wealthy and became more powerful. They became wealthy because they were able to make huge profits. In this issue, we begin by explaining how profit works and then we move on to discuss how these early capitalists won political power. Remember students if you have any poems, drawings or want to make any comments, write to The Editor, P O Box 18109, Dalbridge 4014. This space is reserved for you!

the rulers of these lands. These rulers had many different names, but had similar powers and duties; for example, kings, queens, ashantis, princes, maharajas, emperors and chiefs.

Now the European capitalists could see that the trade was making these rulers richer, and in their greed, realised that they could make a bigger profit if they could control the trade in the far away lands.

But to do this they had a problem because these rulers had built up armies and navies to protect the control of the trade. This meant that the European capitalists would have to go to war if they wanted to take over control of the trade. To do this, they needed very strong armies and navies. With their own money, the capitalists could not really build up such strong armies, and any-

way, they were too greedy with their money and wanted to spend it on other things where they could make bigger profits. What the capitalists wanted was for the armies and navies of their countries to go to war for them. To do this they had to be in full control of the government of their lands, and also make everyone believe that war benefitted the whole country, and not just the profit seeking capitalists.

The Kings and Queens of Europe lose their heads

Now in trying to control the government the capitalists had a huge problem. This was because most countries in Europe were ruled by kings and queens who claimed that they represented God and earth. Such a claim was almost always supported by the Christian church.

To be a good christian, one had to respect and honour the kings and queens greatly. However, to make sure that they were respected and obeyed, the kings and queens had armies crush any discontent. To understand how big the problem for the capitalists was, we have to understand the position of the kings and queens in relation to the other wealthy and powerful groups in society.

The system of government then was what is known as feudalism which is based on an alliance between the great landlords (feudal lords) and the kings and queens. This alliance made it possible for the kings and queens to make use of the armies which the landlords controlled. The landlords depended on the kings and queens because they owned the land, and only gave the landlords some of it to control. These huge areas of land given to the feudal lords were known as fiefs, and we must remember that the king or queen could take it away from the landlord if the person did not obey orders. The poorest and least powerful people under this system were the peasants. The peasants worked on the land and fed themselves. They also produced a surplus which went to the landlord and the fief's army. In return for the food provided by the peasants the landlord gave them protection against attack from armies in surrounding fiefdoms.

Like peasants, the capitalists

had to pay many taxes. This obviously led to a great deal of conflict and disagreement. The capitalists had different ideas on how the army should be used, but they could do little about it because the army was controlled by the kings or queens and landlords.

So the capitalists, who were growing stronger as they made more capital, led a long struggle against the kings, queens and lords so that they could make more profit. The capitalists said that the kings and queens had too much power. Instead of this kind of government, the capitalists said that there should be democracy. For them, this meant that a parliament should be the government of the land. The people should rule, they argued, by electing others to represent them in parliament.

With these demands, the capitalists won the support of the oppressed peasants and the skilled workers (craftsmen) in the cities. In England, when they chopped off the king's head, the people realised that the idea of divine power (power given by God) was meaningless and great revolutions followed throughout Europe during the next 100 years. However, the peasants and skilled workers soon found out that this new democracy was not meant to include them. In the next issue we look at how the capitalists used their new power to force people off the land into the factories.



IN trade, profit works like this. If a trader or merchant bought a whole roll of beautiful silk material for R90, and it cost R10 to bring it back to Europe by ship, then it would have cost that person R100 altogether. Now when the material is sold, the trader may charge R130 which means a profit of R30. The person buying the silk may make shirts and dresses with the material and sell them for R160 and thus also makes a profit of R30.

As you can see, to start trading you need money to buy goods. The more money you have, the more you can buy. This money is called capital. So the person who has capital is called a capitalist.

To get more capital and to become wealthier, you need to trade at a profit. So the capitalists started their hungry search for profit. In doing this, they were partly being greedy but they also had a problem. They lived in fear of each other. If some capitalists became very rich they might have so much capital that they could pay higher prices, buy all the ships and so control all the trade. The search for profit became like a great race. The capitalists were competing with each other.

Europe goes to war
In the countries of Africa and Asia, where there had already been trade for thousands of years, trade was controlled by

British miners end strike



Led by a brass band, 2 000 miners march back to their jobs through the streets of Grimethorpe in the North of England

Together they created one of the greatest worker struggles of this century.

The way the mining communities were organised for the struggle was very important.

The women set up committees which helped in picketing, in getting support from outside the mining communities, and in providing food for strikers' families.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) set up miners' support groups all over Britain.

These groups collected money and food for the miners and organised demonstrations, rallies and picketing in their areas.

Without their help, and the money which came from British and international trade

unions, the strike could never have gone on for a year. Supporters from all over the world gave R120 million to the British mining communities.

The strike showed how important international links are. Workers from outside Britain gave as much money to the NUM as workers inside Britain.

In Australia workers refused to load coal carried to Britain. In France they emptied trains carrying coal to ships sailing to Britain and dumped the coal on the railway lines, and in Poland, Solidarity criticised the Polish government for selling coal to Thatcher.

But the strike also showed how the weakness of workers in one part of the world, weakens workers in another.

Because the Polish miners do not control their industry, they could not stop their government from selling coal to Britain.

Also, the British coal bosses said they were closing their mines because they could buy cheaper coal from countries like South Africa where the miners are even more exploited than they are in Britain.

When South African miners are strongly organised and well-paid, the British coal bosses will not be able to use cheap coal from here to destroy jobs and break strikes.

During the strike 10 000 people were arrested, 1 500 miners were hospitalised because of police violence, some were killed, and others committed suicide because of what the govern-

ment was doing to communities.

The police rode their horses into the picket lines and bashed the miners. They let loose dogs to chase pickets across fields. There were battles between whole communities and the police.

In some areas, miners were under house arrest and curfew. Miners were not allowed to travel freely around the country to get support from other miners.

The court's took away NUM's funds and, in the end, took away the union from its members and leaders and got unelected businessmen to run it.

The strike showed that a group of workers cannot successfully fight alone when their bosses and the government are determined to crush them.

However, the miners may have lost their strike, but they did win many other important victories.

They created a new political movement which will fight in other workers' struggles and they have weakened Thatcher.

Her anti-working class government is now less popular than the Labour Party and it has much less money to defeat other workers.

The British miners have reached out to workers all over the world and they have shown them the kind of struggles which must be fought to win power for the working class.

Most important of all, they have shown the need for workers' unity both nationally and internationally.



NUM supporters wait as the union executives vote to end the strike

THE great mining communities of Britain, which ended their year-long strike on March 6, point the way forward for workers in all countries.

They have shown the world the power of the organised working class.

The miners are less than two percent of unionised workers in Britain. But to defeat them, Britain's bosses and government had to use thousands of police and they had to spend over R10 billion — much more than it cost Britain to defeat Argentina during the Falklands war.

If this is what only two percent of the working class can do, it is clear that the united working class can achieve much more.

The miners went on strike to defend their jobs and communities. The coal bosses wanted to destroy 70 000 jobs.

But they also went on strike to defend the working class as a whole by struggling against an anti-worker government and its laws.

Since coming to power the main aim of the British prime minister, Thatcher, has been to break the power of the organised working class and to destroy its independence.

Before the miners, Thatcher has attacked steel, car and hospital workers. But it was always the miners who were seen as the main enemy.

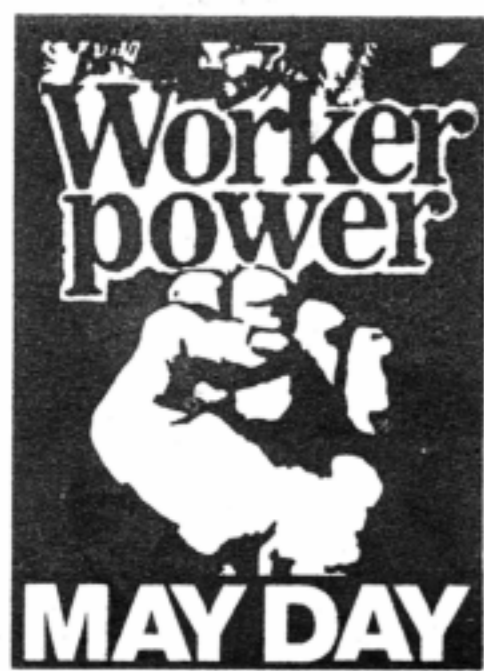
In the 1970's the miners' struggles brought down the conservative government and since then the ruling class in Britain has wanted to crush them.

For this reason, the bosses and the government prepared their attack on the miners very carefully and over many years:

- They built up their coal stocks to 55 million tons.
- They made sure that the power stations could use oil as well as coal.
- They employed non-union lorry drivers to move coal around the country.
- They were ready to use thousands of police to stop picketing.
- They took away most of the social welfare payments from striker's families.
- They tried to divide the miners through a bonus scheme.
- Finally, the miners were attacked many months before the winter (when most coal is used) so that there would be no chance of power cuts for the first months of the strike.

The bosses and the government were sure that the strike would be lost very quickly, that it would not last more than a few weeks.

The miners and their families proved them wrong. Within weeks they had organised themselves and their supporters all over the world for a long fight.



MAY 1

MAY 1 is known by workers all over the world as May Day, or International Labour Day. May Day is a day of unity between workers. It is a day when workers in each country remember their struggle is linked to the struggles of other workers around the world.

Many workers see May Day as a symbol of the workers' struggle against capitalism, and of the workers' fight to win power and control over their own lives.

Celebrating May Day

Every year on May 1, workers around the world celebrate May Day in different ways. In many countries, trade unions and workers' political parties organise meetings and marches.

In socialist countries like the Soviet Union, Cuba or China, May Day is an official holiday for all the people in those countries. On this day, all factories, shops and schools are closed and the government organises mass rallies and displays.

In many capitalist countries in Europe, workers have won May Day as a paid public holiday. It is a public holiday in Britain, Portugal, Spain, Austria and Germany. In these countries, socialist parties organise meetings, mass marches and demonstrations which are often followed by fetes, dances and other celebrations.

In some countries, workers have used May Day to organise strikes and protests against their government. In 1980 in Brazil, a country in Latin America, 100 000 factory workers went on strike on May Day. They marched in protest against the harsh labour laws that their government was using to try and weaken their trade unions.

May Day is celebrated differently in each country. But in every May Day meeting or demonstration, workers talk about one common goal — the international solidarity of all workers around the world.

How did May Day begin?

May Day began over 100 years ago with the struggle by workers in North America and Europe for a shorter working day. They argued that the long hours of work were destroying workers.

Also, by forcing workers to work long hours, the bosses could employ fewer workers. This kept unemployment high and made it difficult for workers to organise.

In some places the struggle for a shorter working day was successful. In the United States, the government passed a new law in 1868 saying that workers should not work longer

than eight-hours a day. But most bosses took no notice of this new law.

Radical worker leaders called for a mass strike. The city of Chicago, which had many factories and workers was the centre of the strike. On May Day, 40 000 workers marched through the streets. Here, the police fired on the strikers and killed six workers.

When the Chicago workers organised a protest meeting in Haymarket Square, in the centre of the city, a bomb was

From this time on, May 1 became the day when workers around the world demonstrated solidarity with each other. In 1889, at the first meeting of the Second International (an organisation which united workers' political parties throughout Europe), it was agreed that all workers should fight for May 1 to be recognised as International Labour Day.

In 1890, there were May Day demonstrations in France, Britain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Bel-

unions even won May 1 as a recognised labour holiday. Later, some industrial council agreements allowed workers to take the day off, as an unpaid holiday.

By the 1920's black workers were also starting to organise in trade unions and political parties. In the 1920's and 1930's, the Communist Party, together with some trade unions that organised both black and white workers started to hold regular meetings on May Day.

In Cape Town, black workers marched up Adderley Street shouting 'Down with Apartheid! Down with passes! We want freedom!'. In the evening police attacked workers. In Johannesburg, the police fired on workers and 18 workers were killed.

After 1950 there were no more large May Day rallies. Although, some unions, like the Garment Workers Union and later SACTU, held some meetings.

In the 1960's the right to celebrate May Day was removed from industrial council agreements. For many years, May Day was not celebrated by workers in South Africa.

May Day Today

Since the 1970's black workers in South Africa have begun to build up their trade unions again. And workers have once again began to demand May Day as a workers' public holiday.

Last year the independent trade unions held meetings and mass rallies on May Day. In Natal a May Day campaign was launched. Thousands of FOSATU workers wore May Day stickers, and handed out pamphlets in their factories, explaining the origins of May Day. In Cape Town, unions involved in the unity talks organised a joint May Day meeting which was attended by about 3 000 workers.

Since then many FOSATU unions have won May Day as a workers' holiday. The Chemical Workers Industrial Union was the first union to win May Day as a paid public holiday — this was at Pilkington Glass in the Eastern Cape.

The Meaning of May Day

May Day was born as a day of struggle. It began as part of the struggle of workers for a shorter working day. Today this struggle continues as workers fight unemployment. A number of FOSATU unions have begun to campaign for a 40-hour working week.

May Day has become a symbol of working class unity. On May Day this year, workers will commit themselves to greater unity, to build their organisations and to strengthen their struggle for a better life. They will also remind themselves that the success of their struggle is linked to the struggles of workers in other countries.

Lastly, May Day has become a symbol of the workers' struggle for a new society, where workers will enjoy political power, and control over their lives in the factories, and in their communities.

Most of this article was drawn from a new booklet called 'May Day: A History of International Labour Day' published by the International Labour Research and Information Group, Box 213, Salt River 7925.



Top: Workers in South America demonstrate on May Day, 1976
Bottom: The annual May Day march in the Soviet Union

thrown at the police. The police used this as an excuse to attack the workers and smash up union offices.

The police arrested a number of radical worker leaders and accused them of organising the bomb attack. Four of these leaders were eventually hanged for this although there was little proof that they had anything to do with the bomb attack.

In Europe, workers' industrial unions were also fighting a militant struggle for a shorter working day. When they heard the news, they organised strong protests against the hanging of the American labour leaders.

gium, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Australia and the United States. These May Day demonstrations strengthened the message of international solidarity in the working class movement.

History of May Day in South Africa

In 1904, May Day was celebrated in South Africa for the first time. In these early days, it was only the white workers who were organised in trade unions, and in a few, small socialist parties. Through these organisations, they began to celebrate May Day.

From 1919, they began to hold meetings every year. Some

At this time, meetings pledged support for the revolution which had happened in the Soviet Union in 1917. Leaders also spoke to the crowd about the struggle for democracy and workers' rights in South Africa.

But in 1948, the National Party came to power and tried to repress black trade unions and black political organisations.

In May 1950 the Communist Party organised a mass strike on May Day to oppose the government. On May 1 workers across the country stayed away from work. Many factories were quiet and many streets were empty.