

FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



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'BLOODY THURSDAY'

At least three people died and scores of others were injured when the working class township of Bellville, lifeblood of the nearby industrial area, came under police siege on August 29 — a day residents will remember as 'Bloody Thursday'.

The day started quietly. Residents went to work as usual and boycotting youth either hung around street corners or gathered at the high school in the area.

A group of University of the Western Cape students, that afternoon, passed through the township, en route to the middle class suburb of Glenhaven to deliver a message of support to the wife of detained cleric, Alan Boesak.

Workers returning from shift, other residents and curious children watched the students in fascination. But the marching students did not get far.

The police, ever alert, ever ready to uphold the governments' brand of law and order — moved in to break up the march.

Teargas, rubber bullets and other ammunition were used in their patrols through the streets to seek out fleeing marchers. Their dedication and efficient enforcement of law and order led to many innocent bystanders being injured.

Peter Blauw, a worker at SA Nylon Spinners and a member of the National Union of Textile Workers was one of them.

'I was on my way to a friend's house when I passed a group of UWC students on the march. A large crowd, among them children,



A Casspir rides over a burning barricade at the height of the protests in the Western Cape

watched. But I continued walking because I had to get to my friend's house before he left for work at 2.20 pm.'

'When I got there we stood chatting outside. I in the road and he on his property. While we were talking I saw a Casspir at the corner of the road.'

'The police in it opened fire in our direction, but we weren't hit. The Casspir then moved off but a few moments later we saw it coming down our road.'

'They were shooting as they drove along. Everyone scattered and we ran into my friend's yard. He had just entered the house and I was about to go in when the birdshot hit me. I thought I would lose consciousness

from the pain. I broke out in a sweat and collapsed on the ground, cringing.'

'We found afterwards, when I reached hospital, that 30 pellets had hit my body. My friend counted about 150 holes in the wall of his house afterwards. But I was one of the lucky ones, others, innocent bystanders like me, have died.'

Children also became targets. A standard 4 boy, Gersun Davids, son of another NUTW member, Mary Davids, was shot in the back.

Mary Davids was at work when she heard that Gersun had been shot.

'When I heard Gersun had been shot, I ran to the nearest phone booth to

phone home but I couldn't get through. I then ran home but there was nobody there.'

'I heard from a woman who saw the whole thing that Gersun had been standing on the corner of a road near our house. A large crowd of youths were there. Policemen arrived in a private car to disperse them and they scattered.'

'Then she saw a policeman draw his gun. She shouted at him not to shoot Gersun, as he had done nothing, he just came to see what was happening.'

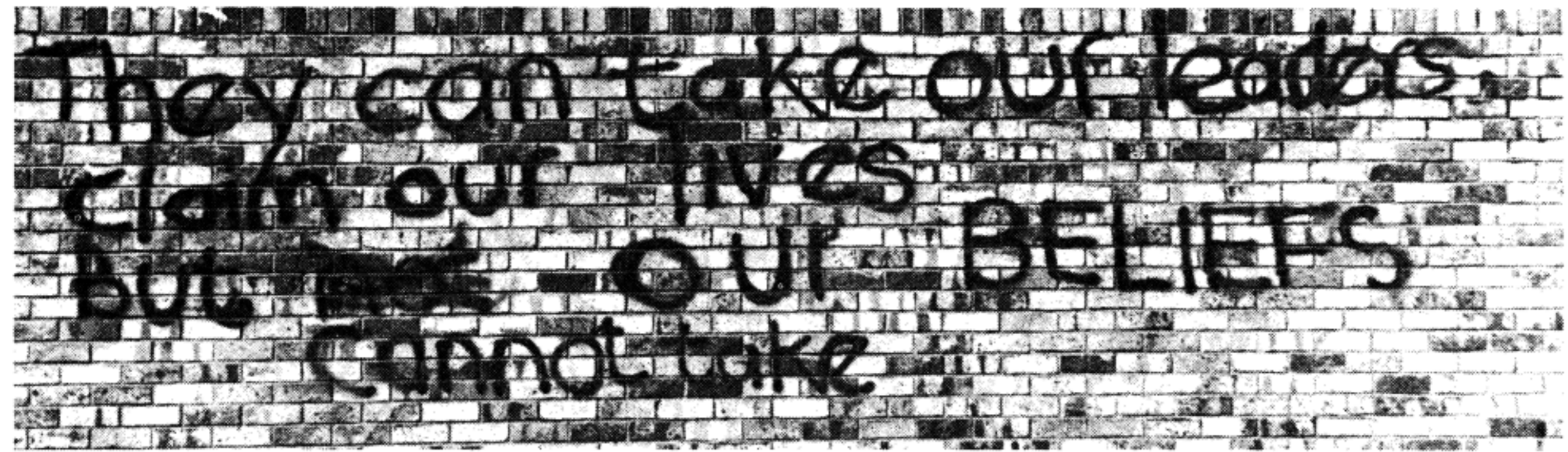
'She told the police that he had not been with the youths. But the policeman shot him anyway.'

'The police would not let

her go near Gersun and took him away in a police van. They took him to Tygerberg hospital where I found him. When I got to hospital he was just coming out of X-Ray. The doctor said that he could not remove the bullet because of where it was lodged in Gersun's spine. There was a possibility that he could be paralysed if the bullet was removed.'

'So now we have to wait for the bullet to move to a less dangerous spot. He will have to stay in hospital for a long time. Now he has less pain I have spoken to him about what happened. He told me that the police had forced him to sit up in the

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The graffiti on this Athlone wall says it all!

FROM PAGE ONE

van although he wanted to lie down because the pain was so bad.'

'The police use too much violence. They are shooting innocent children. The grievances of the boycotting students are legitimate and the government and police's reaction is incorrect. It won't solve the problems,' Mrs Davids said.

The suffering continued that night when police, in hiding, opened fire on people in Armada Crescent. Sara Van Wyk, a Plastics and Allied Workers Union shop steward at USA Brush was killed and at least four people were injured.

Mercia Coetzee was shot in the back and neck and had to have stitches in her face because she fell heavily to the ground. Sandra Cupido may have to have an arm amputated. And 12-year-old girl, Roselind Bar-

on, who was standing at the gate of her house had to have a little finger amputated. Roselind also has a large wound in her hand.

'I was standing at the gate with a friend, watching the people on the corner. When the police came, a boy ran towards us telling us to hide.'

'But we didn't see why we should, we had done nothing. Then the police drove down the road in their Casspir towards us. We became scared and ran. They shot at us.'

'I saw my right hand had a big hole in it and that my little finger looked funny. It looked as though something had eaten away the flesh on my hand.'

'I ran inside and put my hand under the tap before I was taken to hospital. They removed my little finger there and stitched the part

where it had been. But I still have another hole on the top of my hand. I will have to wait some time for it to get better.'

'I screamed when I opened the door and saw my daughter had been shot,' said Roselind's mother, Dina.'

'I knew she had gone to stand at the gate but didn't think anything would happen.'

'Soon after Roselind had been shot, I saw that the street was in darkness. I went outside to see what was happening and could see people lying in the road.'

'People wanted to help them but the police shouted at us to go into our houses and close our doors. We heard later that one of the people lying in the road had been Sara Van Wyk and that she was dead.'

'Thursday August 29 has had a marked effect on people in the area. Almost over

night, their attitudes and views of the world changed.'

Aunty Vivi, a community worker in the area, who witnessed the incidents leading to Sara Van Wyk's death said she understood things more clearly now.

'In 1980 I didn't really know why people were boycotting and protesting. But on Thursday my eyes were opened.'

'The police come into our streets with their Casspirs, drive over the fences of schools and point their guns at us.'

'We have nothing with which to defend ourselves or fight back. People get angry when the schoolchildren throw stones. But what can they do?'

'The shooting in our area that Thursday has made us realise what the police are really here for.'

'Bellville is not an emergency area so why are the

government and its men here?,' asked Jonathan Jappie, a worker at Marley Tiles, who was also shot at but escaped injury.

'People have every right to protest. The students were only on their way to Boesak's house to deliver a message of support to his wife. The Casspir came and shot but the students had done nothing.'

'We want the police out of our area — those that live here as well. We no longer fear them, they can do what they want to, but we don't fear them anymore. The time of fear is passed.'

● A steady stream of victims of police action has been flowing into FOSATU's Bellville office. Many of those affected, including those quoted here, intend taking legal action against the police. The NUTW is compiling affidavits of those wanting to take legal action.

Worker and student militancy

THE most striking feature of the protest sweeping the Western Cape is the militancy of both youth and their working class parents.

1976, 1980, ongoing struggles against management committees and community councillors, and last year's all-out campaign against the tricameral parliament, have all contributed to making workers and the oppressed generally starkly aware of the nature of the South African State.

Besides these political struggles, spiralling unemployment which has hit the West-

ern Cape and the rest of South Africa has made students question the value of formal education. 'Of what use is a matric certificate when there are no jobs?' students ask.

The call this year, from students in Western Cape has been for change in the relationships at the school and the content of education, not for an improvement in material conditions — like for more text books or better teaching equipment.

People are yearning for a new society where the majority will be able to control their own lives.

The school's boycott started off as a gesture of solidarity with the students in the Eastern Cape and Transvaal, and also as a response to the transfer of a teacher and to the declaration of the State of Emergency.

On August 23 the students decided to form a coordinating body which would include universities and colleges. The Western Cape Students Action Committee was born.

They demanded among other things that an alternative education be implemented, students be allowed to form

democratic SRCs, teachers be given right to freedom of speech at school, corporal punishment be abolished, all political detainees be released, the withdrawal of the SADF, and that all community councillors, members of parliament and other collaborators resign immediately.

Police kept a low profile at first but as the boycott continued and spread and students began to have joint programmes at schools in the area, they intervened.

In Mannenberg, Guguletu, and Mitchells Plain particularly reports of police entering school grounds to disperse meetings of students became regular.

Teachers and principals angered at what they saw as unnecessary police action began to make their feelings known publically.

When police move into the townships after the doomed march on Pollsmoor Prison, residents, at first not directly affected, began to see the world around them differently.

While there is concern about their children, not receiving formal education, there is an understanding of the grievances of students and a deep anger at the presence of police in their areas.

Working people are also now calling for the removal of collaborators from their areas.

Where before people were willing to tolerate the presence of police and others branded as collaborators at meetings and as their neighbours, this tolerance is fast disappearing.

Union activists detained

TWO Chemical Workers Industrial Union organisers and the chairman of the union's Transvaal branch were recently detained under section 50 of the Internal Security Act by Security Police.

A CWIU spokesperson said that the police detained Brian Moholo, the senior steward at Sasol, and Beki Ntshalintshali as they came out of a meeting with management on September 12. Tsidiso Ntaopane was picked up at the union offices at Secunda.

On the same day, police also detained Morgan Mathebula, the union's shop steward at Chesebrough, but released him later that day.

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Cape, National Automobile and Allied Workers Union organiser, Makhaya Sam, has also been detained.

A union source said that on the afternoon of Tuesday September 10 Brother Sam had picked up a number of Goodyear workers on his way back to work from Kwanobuhle township.

'Police stopped him and accused him of doing kwela kwela and took him away. Later on we found out that he had been detained under the Emergency Regulations,' she said.

Earlier this month police searched FOSATU's president, Chris Dlamini's house for the third time.

Two-day Cape stayaway

THE full picture of the effects of the two-day stayaway called for September 11-12 in the Western Cape is not yet clear.

However, according to a survey by the Cape Chamber of Industries the stayaway at city businesses on Wednesday September 11 reached 50-60 percent.

A survey of all unionised factories in the Western Cape showed that several factories organised by the unity unions had a high percentage of people staying away.

Some examples of these are: Trammix and Everite, two General Workers Union factories, (100 percent); Steeldell, another GWU factory (66 percent); Food and Canning Workers Union's Blue Continent Cold Store (83 percent).

Bokomo, also FCWU, (49 percent); National Union of Textile Workers' factory Nettex (80 percent) and the Cape Town Municipality, (40 percent).

At others however, there were low percentages or no stayaway at all.

The stayaway call was made through two different pamphlets. No organisation claimed responsibility for either of the two.

The one pamphlet called for a stayaway on September 10-11, and the other for September 11-12.

Nine unions cautiously supported a stayaway from work for Wednesday September 11.

The Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, National Automobile and Allied Workers Union, Paper Wood and Allied

Workers Union, National Union of Textile Workers, Retail and Allied Workers Union, Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union, Plastics and Allied Workers Union, General Workers Union and the Food and Canning Workers Union said in a statement on Tuesday night that the call for the stayaway in the Western Cape was a clear response to the action of police in the township.

'This anger is shared by workers. We have met with our members and it is clear that large numbers of workers intend to stayaway from work particularly on Wednesday. Any victimisation will be met with a united response from unions,' the statement concluded.

Five Tidwell shop stewards get R6 000 in court settlement

IN an out-of-court settlement American multinational, Tidwell Housing, has agreed to pay out R6 000 — nearly a year's wages — to five union shop stewards who were dismissed in August last year.

The five shop stewards were sacked when workers dared to raise questions about their wages. The workers were all fired and then selectively reemployed. Tidwell refused to take back the five stewards and 15 other workers.

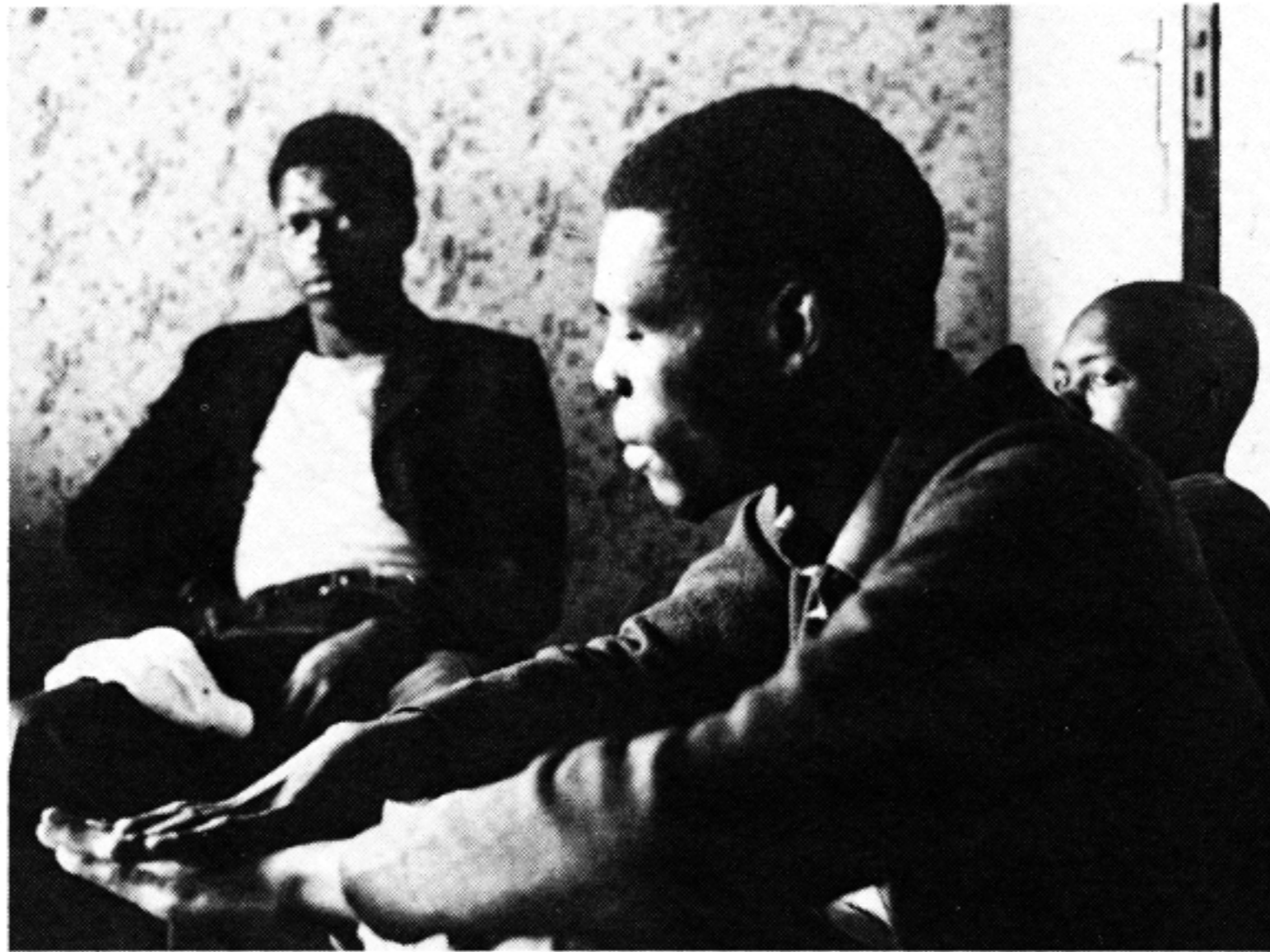
Tidwell Housing, which has its factory in the decentralised industrial area of Peters near Ladysmith, is quoted in union circles as a good example of why President Reagan's arguments in favour of 'constructive engagement' as opposed to disinvestment are so ludicrous.

The President of the United States of America argues that it is crucial to keep American companies in South Africa for the 'upliftment' of its people.

Tidwell Housing pays its male workers R25 per week and its women workers only R18 (a monthly income of between R77 and R107) — this is 283-432 percent lower than the current subsistence level of R410.

And the company continues to pay these poverty wages in spite of the fact that one of the 'advantages' of having a factory in a decentralised zone is that the South African government pays a subsidy of R107,50 per employee per month irrespective of the workers' wage!

A number of companies in



Tidwell shop steward, Christopher Hadebe, together with two of the other sacked stewards

other areas have taken to employing more workers in order to make huge profits out of the decentralisation 'wage incentives'.

Another hidden benefit of operating in Peters, which Tidwell has been quick to take advantage of is that South Africa's Labour Relations Act and all the Wage and Industrial Council determinations do not apply.

The reason for this is that Pe-

ters is Bantu trust land which has been earmarked for inclusion into KwaZulu but for the moment falls under neither South African legislation nor KwaZulu legislation.

So when Tidwell refused to have anything to do with the Metal and Allied Workers Union which organised the majority of the workers at the factory last year, there was little the union could do.

Under South African labour

legislation, it would have been possible to take up an unfair labour practice claim.

More recently, the company has drastically reduced its labour force from some 300 workers down to only 74.

All of these retrenchments have taken place without any consultation with MAWU which is required under South African law.

Not even the workers were consulted. They were merely

told on the day that they were to be retrenched to collect their outstanding wages.

There was also no severance pay nor any guarantee of first option on vacancies should they arise.

And all this from an American company which, according to Reagan, is helping 'uplift' the black people of South Africa and which is supposed to be setting an example to local companies. Some example!

Although most of South Africa's laws do not apply to Peters, MAWU did manage to find a little known clause in the Wage Act which did still apply.

This clause bars the victimisation of people representing a trade union when taking up wage issues. The union then proceeded to take Tidwell to the Supreme Court. The case was due to be heard on August 16.

In the settlement, CI Industries, which has now taken over a sizeable proportion of Tidwell Housing, agreed to conclude a recognition agreement with MAWU which would be similar to the agreement the union has with the company at its Pinetown factory.

CI Industries also said it would discuss the reinstatement of the five shop stewards and the position of the other 15 sacked workers with the union.

It certainly looks like a local company (CI Industries) has had to show an American multinational how to treat its workers. So, who was setting the example?

Paper council is 'useless', says union

THE Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union has called on the pulp and paper industry's industrial council to disband because 'it is being used by the bosses to avoid setting up a proper national bargaining forum where workers can participate'.

This move follows the union's resignation from the industrial council on August 19. PWAU has been a member of the council for a year.

The industrial council sets the wages and working conditions for some 10 000 workers in the pulp and paper industry.

Until last year the only parties to the industrial council were the employers and a number of white artisan unions.

A PWAU spokesperson

said for all this time the white artisan unions had agreed to 'very low wages' except for artisans' wages.

He said that PWAU had been fighting for the right to negotiate wages at plant-level.

'It has won that right at Carlton Paper and at Nampak Paper and as a result the wages at the Wadeville and Kliprivier factories are the highest in the industry,' he added.

'However, Mondi and Sappi have refused to negotiate wages outside of the council so last year PWAU decided to join in order to try and negotiate wages at a national level,' the spokesperson said.

'But we have now resigned because the union has found that the industrial council is a

useless body,' he said.

PWAU's major criticisms of the council are:

- it refused to gazette a minimum wage of R2 per hour for 1985 even though only Sappi is paying less than this.
- it failed to act as a proper national bargaining forum. PWAU, which has organised 60 percent of the industry's workers, had the same status as all the other unions which have a tiny membership.
- the bosses used PWAU's membership of the council as an excuse to avoid proper plant-level dealings with the union.
- the system of bargaining at the council made it impossible for workers to participate fully.
- the bosses continue to deduct

levies illegally from the workers to support the running of the industrial council. Despite the union's objection to this, the practice still continues.

The union spokesperson said PWAU would soon be holding a national pulp and paper shop stewards council to draw up wage proposals for 1986 and to decide what action to take if the employers refuse to negotiate.

In the meantime, the union reports that its strength is growing daily. It now has a clear majority at 14 out of the 18 paper mills in South Africa.

'The remaining four mills are the ones with the lowest wages. But workers from these mills are also beginning to join,' the PWAU spokesperson said.

British unions back economic sanctions

NINETY-EIGHT unions representing 9,8 million British workers voted unanimously in support of a motion calling for economic sanctions against South Africa at the recent annual conference of the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

The TUC also backed trade union moves to boycott South African goods and criticized British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for not imposing sanctions against South Africa.

The TUC conference held on September 5 passed the motion after the Transport and Gener-

al Workers Union's former general secretary, Moss Evans told delegates that 'a determined boycott of South African goods now would drive several nails into the coffin of the apartheid regime. But the decisive blows must come from the governments.'

Mr Evans, who is chairman of the TUC's international committee, said sanctions should apply until South Africa released all political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela.

He said real changes would come only through action by

South Africans themselves.

'But we outside can certainly push Mr Botha, push him hard, and help push him over,' said Mr Evans.

The unions committed themselves to new efforts to get South African goods barred from stores.

They also said they would eliminate any shares the union pension funds had in South African companies and try to get British firms not to invest here.

Britain is the largest investor in South Africa and is the

The seaman union's leader, Mr Jim Slater said seamen and dockers would enthusiastically support efforts to keep out South African goods and added 'we may find we will have to take direct action'.

fourth biggest trading partner.

The unions said they would seek a government ban on new investment in South Africa, a strengthening of the United Nations arms embargo, an end to British bank loans to Pretoria, withdrawal of Britain's ambassador, and the expulsion of South Africa's envoy in Britain.

Uniformed foreman dismissed

A FOREMAN at a Port Elizabeth textile factory, who came to work in his SA Defence Force uniform, was recently dismissed by the company shortly after workers had complained about his behaviour.

Senior shop steward at the Cape of Good Hope, Henry Raymond, said workers had complained that the foreman was extremely rough and aggressive.

When the foreman came to work in his full army uniform the workers saw this as outright provocation particularly considering the role of the SADF in policing the townships.

Brother Raymond said the shop stewards had discussed the foreman's attitude with the general foreman who had said that he would speak to him.

But things came to a head when the foreman issued Henry Raymond with a warning for allegedly refusing to listen to the instructions of another foreman.

According to Henry Raymond, when the case came before the personnel manager the foreman who had supposedly issued the instructions admitted that he had never spoken to Brother Raymond.

'The following day management told the foreman to leave the factory,' Brother Raymond said.

PART
FOURTEEN:
RESISTANCE
DURING
THE 50'S
AND 60'S

The making of the WORKING

In the last issue of FOSATU Worker News we saw how the black working class in the towns grew rapidly between 1936-1946. We also saw how a large number of strikes broke out between 1941-1946, and how the trade union federation, CNETU, grew to 158 000 strong.

These were not the only signs of discontent and militancy among black workers. In the townships workers were faced with worsening conditions. Food and other essentials were in short supply because of the war. Many traders both white and black used this as an excuse to push prices up. Also, housing was extremely scarce. During the war the number of blacks living permanently in the towns increased by more than twice. In Port Elizabeth, for example, it grew from 9 000 in the late 1930's to 35 000 in 1945. In Springs (on the East Rand) it rose from 10 000 in 1939 to 33 000 in 1951. The same thing was happening all over southern Africa, but nowhere was any new housing being built for blacks. As a result people lived in terribly overcrowded conditions, often with 20 people living in shacks in the backyard of a single house.

These difficulties produced a number of spontaneous popular movements among workers in different parts of South Africa. Food committees were organised to try and stop traders hoarding food and pushing prices up. The Communist Party of South Africa was very active in these. A little later squatter movements began to spread. The best known of

these was the squatter movement led by James 'Sofazonke' Mpanza. He led 8 000 homeless people onto open land near Orlando (Soweto) where they built shacks. Because there was no other housing for them, the Johannesburg Council was forced to allow them to stay there. Squatter movements arose in many other towns in South Africa, for example in Cape Town, Durban, Benoni, Alberton, Alexandra and Pretoria. In most cases the local authority was unable to evict the squatters from the land on to which they had moved until they had provided housing for them. It was in this way that most of the modern black townships were built during the mid-late 1950's, for example Katlehong, KwaThema, Daveyton, Mamelodi, KwaMashu.

Increases in prices also led to other forms of resistance. Several times in the 1940's attempts were made to increase bus fares. This happened in 1940, 1942, 1943 and in 1944 in Alexandra. Each time the people of Alexandra boycotted the buses for several weeks and walked the 14 kilometres to Johannesburg. Each time the bus company and the City Council were forced to give in and keep the bus fares at the old price. These successful boycotts in Alexandra acted as an inspiration to people in other townships who faced similar problems, so that boycotts soon spread to Orlando, Pretoria and elsewhere.

In these movements workers took action by themselves to solve their griev-

ances. In most cases they left the leadership of the ANC and other political parties far behind them. This was a problem because there was no political party or trade union organisation that could link these local protests together into a national movement. Bus and other boycotts began, mobilised people, and then died away. They rarely left any organisation behind them to fight other struggles; nor did they link up with other struggles in other places.

But the national political organisations — particularly the ANC — were beginning to change. In 1943 the Youth League was formed by young radicals in the ANC. They believed that the popular militancy emerging in these local struggles should be developed, directed and coordinated by the ANC so as to present a serious challenge to the State. Many of the older, more conservative leadership of the ANC were unwilling to go in this direction. However, by 1949, Youth League members — Mandela, Tambo and Sisulu — were elected to the National Executive of the ANC and a 'Programme of Action' was adopted. This committed the ANC to boycotts, strikes, disobedience and non-cooperation in support of African rights.

One reason why the Youth League was able to succeed in 1949 was the election of the Nationalist government to power in 1948. The Nationalists were committed to a programme of apartheid, which promised to impose much stricter influx control on Africans, to exclude all

blacks from central political power, and to divide the different races completely into their separate 'group areas'. This programme represented an attack on all race groups and all classes in South Africa, and was responsible for the formation of the Congress Alliance. The Congress Alliance was made up of congresses for each of the different race groups together with the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

The various repressive laws which the Nationalists introduced were responsible for many protests and campaigns, for example the



National stay-at-home on 26 June 1950, the Defiance Campaign in 1952 and the Congress of the People Campaign in 1954-5, out of which the Freedom Charter was born.

However, there was another part to the Nationalists programme besides simple



Alexandra township in 1947



Edenvale shanty township before its removal to Thembisa

WORKING



Torchlight parade in Durban during the late 50's

division and repression. They knew that the industry had grown so fast and so big, that a large African working class was in the towns to stay. In order to discipline the working class and to make it stable and ready to work in the factories some major problems had to be solved. No

healthy or stable life was possible without family housing, and no stable workforce was possible without a stable family life. So, the government gave millions of pounds in loans to build cheap 'matchbox' houses for blacks. However, the government expected these loans

to be paid back by the black people themselves, so rents were much higher than they could afford. Also many of the new townships were 10 or more kilometres away from the factories so bus fares were high. All this caused a new wave of protest by black workers. From 1955 the number of wage strikes increased sharply. In 1957 new bus boycotts broke out all over the country (against fare increases). This was followed in 1957 by a one pound a day campaign which was called by a workers' conference of the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

The second problem that had to be solved for the industrialists was youth crime and gangs. Township children who had not been to school were usually very 'undisciplined' workers. It was for this reason that Bantu Education was introduced — to provide schooling of an inferior kind and so discipline children for work.

These various laws and actions of the Nationalist government provoked widespread popular resistance, much of it led or coordinated by the ANC. As a result the ANC became a popular mass based national movement. However, not all the campaigns were successful. The Bantu Education boycott, for example was poorly coordinated and was only effective in Port Elizabeth and on the East Rand. Other campaigns like the 1958 stayaway only mobilised people in a few areas. In many campaigns the ANC seems to have concentrated on protest and demonstration, without developing strong grass roots organisation. A major setback was the failure to put Nelson Mandela's 'M' plan into practice after the 'mobilising' success of the Defiance Campaign. This would have divided the townships up into street, zones and ward committees, and would have given the ANC a strong, democratic grass

roots structure. The idea was to get away from 'the old methods of bringing about mass action through public mass meetings, press statements and leaflets' and to move towards more organised action. However, apart from Port Elizabeth this never happened. This was partly due to the continuous arrests and repression of ANC leaders.

The failure to put the 'M' plan into action was probably one reason why so many migrants and people who had recently arrived in the towns were not mobilised by the ANC, because these were difficult groups to mobilise by any other means. It also made it easier for the government to repress and disorganise the ANC through arrests and detentions (and in the end to ban it in 1960). Without this strong organisation in the townships it was left to SACTU in the factories to mobilise many ordinary working people. It is to SACTU we turn in the next issue.



Pimville residents watch their homes being demolished

NG CLASS

Who controls Noaha?

SOME mineworkers tell the tale of a great snake-like monster — Noaha — which lives deep down in the mines. Occasionally Noaha gets angry and storms down the tunnels leaving a trail of dead miners.

This is their explanation for the fact that so many miners are killed far away from the scene of mine explosions.

On August 13, 30 miners were killed in a methane gas explosion in the Middelbult colliery which supplies the giant Sasol II and III plants at Secunda in the Transvaal.

Thirteen of them were killed near the blast but the rest were up to two kilometres away.

Apparently the force of an underground explosion in the narrow tunnels of the mines is so great that even miners a few kilometres away from the blast are 'concussed' to death.

In statements to the press, Sasol management said that methane gas had always 'plagued' the mine industry.

'The gas seeps out of the exposed coal and because it is odourless and colourless, it is difficult to detect,' they said.

However, it is possible to detect methane gas and many methods have been developed in order to make coal mining as safe as possible for mineworkers.

But mine bosses in their search for profits do not always stick to even the minimum

safety measures laid down by law.

At a similar explosion in September 1983 at the Hlobane Colliery in Natal, 68 miners were killed.

At the inquest, it was found: that the ventilation in the mine did not provide the amount of air laid down by law, that the ventilation in two sections would not have been able to clear the methane, that a week before methane gas had been found but it had not been reported, and that a number of electrical machines were not flameproofed.

At the time of the Hlobane accident, Iscor's Vryheid Railway and Coal Company had a four star safety rating awarded by the Chamber of Mines and two department of Mineral and Energy Inspectors had described it as 'not a bad mine'.

Sasol's Middelbult has been recently awarded a full five stars for safety standards.

But mineworker members of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union report that although modern equipment for the testing of methane gas is supplied, often safety procedures are ignored.

Production, they say, on this the world's most productive coal mine is more important than safety. Naturally Sasol has denied this.

Soon after the explosion the union sent an investigating



team to Middelbult consisting of lawyers, mining engineers, union officials and shop stewards to inspect the area where the explosion took place.

The CWIU will be representing the deceased and injured workers at the inquest where the cause of the explosion will be established.

The Middelbult explosion has once again highlighted the importance of health and safety. And has led the CWIU to declare 1986 as 'The year of the fight for our lives'.

In a recent pamphlet, the

union said that in South Africa 2 800 workers were killed at work each year — roughly every 3 hours another worker is killed.

There are also 355 000 accidents causing injuries each year and 'thousands more of us are dying slowly or getting sick from poisoning by the dangerous chemicals and materials we work with.'

'Let us begin to plan the fight

for our health and safety at work. Money is no good if you are too sick to spend it, or dead,' it concluded.

The CWIU has begun its battle against Noaha — a monster which seems to be firmly under the control of the mine bosses.

Massive force used to crush mine strike

ABOUT 30 000 mineworkers went on strike on September 1 and 2 on one Anglo Vaal, three Gencor and six Goldfields mines after management refused to improve their wage offer.

At least 80 workers were arrested and more than 30 injured in the two day strike which saw widespread police and mine security action against mineworkers.

Hundreds were also bused out while the National Union of Mineworkers took legal steps

in an attempt to prevent mass dismissals.

By Tuesday midday, however, the strike had been reduced to a hard core of five mines involving 10 500 workers.

Anglo Corporation, JCI and Rand Mines gave in to the unions 22 percent wage demand resulting in a settlement for 80 percent of the union's membership.

This was after months of negotiations and a strike ballot by the union which showed substantial support for strike

action.

Three other mine houses refused to increase their wage offer and although the union was not very strongly organised at these mines the workers wanted to go on strike.

The mines effected were:

- Gencor Transvaal Navigation Colliery: 1 500 took action of Sunday afternoon August 31 and returned to work after being dispersed with tear gas and rubber bullets.
- Matla Collieries: 2 000 workers.
- Marievale: up to 1 000 to 2 000 workers took action from Sunday night.
- Beatrix Gold mine: 7 000 workers. Many shaft stewards at the mine were arrested. Workers were also forced to go underground by mine security using dogs and sjamboks.
- Blinkpan Collieries: 1 500 workers were reported to have been starved by management at the hostels in an attempt to force them back to work.
- Stilfontein Goldmine: 400 miners at one shaft attempted action, but two shaft stewards were arrested. Rubber bullets were also used to disperse workers resulting in six casualties and 55 dismissed by Wednesday September 3.
- St Helena: 9-10 000 took action.
- Anglo Vaal's Hartebeesfontein: about 2000 took some action on Sunday

night but were forced back to work. 15 workers were arrested and 100 isolated from the rest of the workers.

● Goldfields' Deelkraal Goldmine: although not on the planned strike list staged a strike of 5-7 000 workers. There were many confirmed injuries at the mine. It was Goldfields' threat to dismiss workers which led to the NUM's taking legal action.

● Kloof Goldmine: the entire leadership was removed before workers could take any action. 23 miners appeared in court related to action on Sunday night.

● West Driefontein Goldmine: attempts to strike were broken through tight security presence.

By Tuesday due to the heavy police presence and threats of mass dismissals the strike fizzled out forcing the union to take legal action in the industrial court. NUM's court case will test management's right to dismiss workers while on a legal strike.

On Wednesday September 4 the NUM won an interim interdict blocking Gencor from evicting mineworkers from Marievale pending the outcome of the industrial court case.

Many shaft stewards said hundreds of strikers were forced back underground at gun point.

At Deelkraal goldmine police

and mine security occupied the workers hostels for two days.

Workers interviewed said 'When we started striking the police came and they started shooting tear gas and rubber bullets and were sjamboking us. Many fled to the nearby hills and slept there for the night.'

'When we tried to regroup they baton charged us. Many of our friends were badly hurt and taken away. We have not seen them since.'

For workers the painstaking process of negotiation seems futile if they can be dismissed when on a legal strike.

NUM general secretary Cyril Ramaphosa condemned 'the despicable and intimidatory behaviour' of mine management.

He added that the union would have to seriously consider future strike strategies.

'By warning management of the strike, on specific mines they were obviously mobilising and prepared to crush the workers. Some of our most effective strikes were taken at short notice where management were not prepared,' he said.

The divided offer by the chamber of mines was an attempt to split the union and attack the union at its weakest areas.

While this has succeeded in some respects it was only possible through heavy handed action by mine management.



Miners drilling for gold

Brits factory occupied

AN occupation by workers of their Brits factory had German multinational, Robert Bosch, rushing to settle its wage dispute with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Some 300 Bosch workers decided to occupy the factory on September 5 after management fired them and ordered them to leave the premises. They had been on a legal strike since 4.30 pm the previous day.

The strikers asked organisers to fetch blankets, food and other necessities in preparation for the stay-in.

'By 5.20 pm the company was finally convinced that the workers were not going to get out of the factory unless the

dismissals were withdrawn and their demands were met,' Transvaal organising secretary, Moses Mayekiso said.

The company was so eager to settle the matter there and then that it continued negotiations right the way through to 3 am in the morning.

At 4 am on September 6, the Bosch workers accepted management's offer of a 12c per hour increase backdated to July 1 and a further across-the-board increase on October 1.

The company also agreed to reinstate all the workers without any loss of benefits or loss of service recognition. And no disciplinary action would be

taken against any workers absent on September 6.

Both the union and the company have also agreed to finalise recognition negotiations by the end of November and to stick to the disciplinary, grievance and consultation procedures in the future.

The wage dispute began at the beginning of September when workers rejected the company's offer of a 12c and 18c per hour increase from January 1986.

After a day-long strike on September 3, Bosch offered a 11c increase from July 1 and a further increase of 7c per hour on January 1 1986.

With this offer, workers decided to hold a ballot among themselves to see what support there would be for a legal strike — 350 out of 370 voted in favour of the strike.

Commenting on the occupation, Moses Mayekiso said 'All companies must know that as they introduce new tactics of oppression, exploitation and victimisation, the workers will also devise new tactics to fight back.'

'The multinationals and all metal companies must know that the workers of today are not going to accept these exploitative measures lying down. They are going to fight back!' he added.

Battle for shorter week has begun

THE battle for a shorter working week has begun! At a Boksburg factory, Colgate Palmolive, workers have won a three-hour reduction of their working hours following an overtime and company canteen boycott.

The battle for shorter working hours has been at the centre of worker struggles from as far back as the 1800's when large-scale factory production had only just begun. In those days the workers (including children) were forced to work for up to 15 hours a day.

From the 1830's in Britain

the 'Ten Hours Movement' fought for the hours of all workers to be reduced to ten hours a day. The May Day strikes in 1868 in America were in support of a demand for an eight-hour-day.

In both Europe and America the eight-hour-day has long since been won. Now workers in Germany are campaigning for a 35-hour-week (a seven-hour-day).

But working conditions in South Africa have lagged far behind. Most industries are still working more than nine

hours a day. However, workers have begun to fight for more reasonable working hours and at this year's May Day rallies the call was made for an eight-hour-day (40-hour-week).

At Colgate, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union took up this call during the annual negotiations.

Several rounds of negotiations were held but all ended in deadlock so the union called for the establishment of a Conciliation Board.

In the meantime the workers launched an overtime boycott.

They also boycotted the canteen in response to a rise in the food prices.

After two meetings of the Conciliation Board, Colgate agreed to reduce the working hours to 43 hours and to grant May Day as a paid public holiday.

In terms of the agreement, workers will also get a 42c an hour increase backdated from July 1 which has hiked the minimum wage up to R3,14 an hour. Workers will be compensated for the wages lost because of the reduced working hours.

Students agree to protect bus drivers

TRANSPORT is a political issue in South Africa because workers are forced to live many kilometres away from their workplaces.

Buses have become a symbol of the apartheid system and because of this have often been stoned and burnt as an expression of people's hatred of this system.

Tragically, bus drivers find themselves caught in the middle.

However, a new agreement between FOSATU's Pietermaritzburg Shop Stewards Council and a number of local youth and student organisations signals the beginning of a new relationship

between bus drivers and the communities they come from.

Over the past few months at least 11 drivers have been injured in stoning incidents in the Imbali township on the outskirts of Maritzburg.

This led to the drivers refusing to enter Imbali and the buses have been dropping passengers at the Sutherland Road turn-off to the township.

Students began stoning the buses shortly after police detained a student leader about two months ago. They also began boycotting the schools.

The violence spread when it was rumoured that the taxi drivers had urged the students

to stone the buses. In the fighting which followed two men died and four kombis were burnt.

In an attempt to resolve this conflict in the community, FOSATU set up a meeting with the Imbali Youth Organisation, the Congress of South African Students, the Imbali Youth League and the Azanian Students Movement.

The FOSATU affiliated Transport and General Workers Union represents the Pietermaritzburg Transport Department's drivers. These drivers played a crucial role in the recent stayaway called in support of the Sarmcol strikers.

At the meeting on August 23, all the organisations agreed that the buses should be allowed to enter the township again. And that they would act against anyone who tried to stop or harass the drivers.

The student organisations said that in future they would not take any action on any issue which affected workers before holding discussions with FOSATU.

The local shop steward council secretary, Bheki Ngidi said the meeting successfully brought peace to the township.

'From then on the students looked after the buses before they went to school and after school,' he said.

Brewery workers win 55 percent increase

IT is not often that workers get a 55 percent wage increase, particularly in the midst of a recession. But, it is even less likely for government workers to get an increase of this size.

Well, the unlikely has happened! The Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has just won a massive 55 percent increase for lower grade workers at the Administration Board's Durban brewery and at liquor outlets spreading from Empangeni to Port Shepstone.

This increase is a far cry from the 12 percent originally granted to Administration Board employees at the beginning of 1984.

The 12 percent was rejected by SFAWU members and thus began an eighteen-month struggle to win a living wage from a tough adversary — the Pretoria government!

SFAWU submitted its own demands to the Administration Board and early in 1984 it negotiated a substantial increase



Congella brewery workers during their demonstration in support of the bread strikers

Activists dismissed after bread strike

SOON after Durban's bread strike, two bakeries attempted to fire two union activists — both had played important roles in the strike.

However, their attempts were foiled by the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

At the enquiries held to discuss the dismissals, the companies' reasons for sacking the two workers were so feeble that they were forced to take them back and to pay them backpay.

Sobantu Msweli, whose car was used during the strike, is a driver at BB Bread. He was sacked for 'low performance'.

A union organiser said the company had initially tried to dismiss him for arriving late at work.

'Three other people arrived with him, but they just wanted to dismiss him,' the organiser said.

'No sooner had we resolved that issue in the enquiry when the company suddenly said that Sobantu's performance was bad.'

'It was clearly just victimisation. In the second enquiry the company decided to take him back,' the organiser added.

The second worker to be sacked was Brother Ntshalintshali who is a steering committee member at Blue Ribbon and was a member of the strike committee.

Prior to going on strike, Brother Ntshalintshali was sick for two weeks. When he went back to work after the strike management refused to let him in because he had not let them know he was sick.

'It is common practice at the factory for workers to only present their medical certificates at the end of sick leave but management were obviously keen to make an example of him,' a SFAWU organiser said.

'The company suspended him until an enquiry was held. At the enquiry management decided to take him back,' he added.

with the Board's Business Undertakings department.

But, this had to be referred back to the Minister of Cooperation and Development in Pretoria who controls the Administration Boards. He rejected the increase.

The union went ahead and declared a dispute. Because government employees are barred from taking legal strike action, the dispute was automatically referred to the Industrial Court.

The Industrial Court recently awarded the Administration Board workers increases ranging from 55 percent on the lowest grade to 11 percent for the highest grade, backdated to March 1. This effectively raises the minimum wage from R2,15 to R3,33 an hour.

And this was not all! On top of this, workers also received a general 5,5 percent increase backdated to January 1. How lucky can you get.

Apartheid

After 37 years, that terrible disease called Apartheid has reached its crisis. Its deep and evil sores are now festering on the surface of our land for everyone to see. There are some people who believe that government reforms will solve the problems. But if we look at the problems that we've got we'll see just how big those reforms will have to be if we are to solve them.

Unemployment and poverty

No one is sure but there are somewhere between one million and three million people unemployed. On top of this there are many more millions living in poverty and near starvation. This means that not only will jobs have to be created for the nearly 250 000 youngsters leaving school each year, but also for the more than one million people who have no jobs now. As well as this, those newly created jobs will have to pay a wage that takes people out of poverty — a living wage.

Starvation in the homelands

One of the greatest tragedies of apartheid has been the effect it has had on the land and on production in the rural areas and in the so-called homelands. These areas have collapsed and cannot produce enough food to feed even a small part of their population. To change this requires that a lot of money be spent on roads, dams, irrigation, better crop seed and proper marketing facilities so that the people can sell their produce. Towns, schools and hospitals will also have to be built.

The apartheid cities

Apartheid was a policy that made a minority very rich by keeping the majority poor. A look at the apartheid cities shows this clearly. In their centres we find big

and beautiful buildings. Around their centres we find good and plentiful housing for whites. But further away from these we find millions of people living in 'matchbox' houses or in shacks. They have poor roads, no electricity, not enough schools, not enough hospitals and no real places for entertainment. These are the apartheid created slums. More people live in them than in the beautiful centres of the cities. How much will have to be spent to

different parliaments and on the 'independent' and 'semi-independent' states. Such a large organisation is very, very expensive and takes up more and more of our wealth, only to produce more and more misery and repression.

The giant monopolies

The South African economy is controlled by a few very big and powerful companies. These companies started with the gold mines but have now expanded to cover almost

spend it on machinery rather than creating jobs for people.

South Africa's wealth is being misused

What faces us? We have a situation of unemployment and poverty that must change. We need to rebuild the rural areas. We need to rebuild the cities. But in the present situation this is not possible because the apartheid State swallows up all the wealth and the monopolies export their profits and create no jobs here in South Africa. Also, South Africa relies heavily on selling or exporting products to other countries. But these countries for some years now have been having economic problems so they are not buying South Africa's products.

Faced with these problems the government is spending more money than it is able to collect in the form of taxes. This causes inflation which once started keeps on going as everyone increases their prices to protect their profits.

These things affect the balance of payments and then the value of the Rand compared to the money in other countries falls. This is because the South African monopolies and everyone else are trying to get their money out of South Africa.

The real problem is that the wealth of this land is being misspent. It needs to be spent on creating jobs, rebuilding the rural areas and cities. But at the moment the wealth is being spent on the apartheid State. Also, it is being misused by the giant monopolies.

What we need is a government that will be prepared to make very big changes as to how we spend our wealth. And a government that is large enough to be able to challenge the monopolies for control of that wealth.



make these places liveable? The answer to that is very, very large amounts. What increases in wages are needed so that people can improve their lives? The answer is very big improvements.

The apartheid State

To oppress millions of people for a long time, a very big and expensive kind of State is needed. Huge amounts of money are spent each year on the police, the army, the Administration Boards, three

every sector of the economy.

Their decisions control millions of Rands and millions of jobs. Their decisions have been a major cause of unemployment. These companies have taken the large profits they have earned in South Africa and put them in other countries to open factories there. The profits have been used not to create new jobs but rather to buy hundreds of smaller companies. When they do use the money in South Africa they prefer to

in crisis