

Labour Bulletin special report

Organising



Ciskei, September 1990: Dimbaza workers celebrate their new power

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

in the *Ciskei*

Workers celebrated the overthrow of Ciskei dictator Lennox Sebe with a stayaway. Since then trade unions have made rapid progress. One reason is that unionists and activists in the Dimbaza Workers Council were organising the factories long before the coup, as *Labour Bulletin* found out when we visited Ciskei in September. KARL VON HOLDT reports.

When we visited Dimbaza one Sunday in September last year it was a buzz of organisational activity: union meetings, ANC meetings, COSAS meetings. In a battered classroom workers and SACTWU officials were discussing strategies for fighting to improve the conditions in their Taiwanese-owned plant. Across Dimbaza in a small church, workers from a local furniture factory were telling their organiser from PPWAWU that they wanted to strike on Monday for recognition. Nearby in another small church - a tin shack in fact - shopstewards from several factories organised by CWIU were discussing problems and how to solve them.

A changing Dimbaza

This Dimbaza - where ANC flags fly, and comrades walk the streets in T-shirts of every political and mass organisation - is a different world from the Ciskei of dictator Lennox Sebe, ousted in the military coup of 4 March this year. Under Sebe's ruthless reign trade unions were banned, mass protest was smashed with beatings and shootings, and activists were detained and tortured.

Sebe was widely hated. At the SACTWU meeting one worker, a tall, middle-aged,



A new Dimbaza - residents joining their ANC branch

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

dynamic woman, who spoke with great anger, asked if we were from TV. "We want Sebe to see us and what we are doing without him," she said. We explained that we were not from TV. "I want you to do something," she said. "Go and tell him in Pretoria, where he is hiding - tell him that you have seen us, and that we are making great progress without him. Tell him that," she said, with enormous contempt, and to the delight of the other workers.

But this Dimbaza is even more different to the Dimbaza of the 1970s, when it became a symbol of apartheid's rural 'resettlement camps'. Hundreds of thousands of black families were

evicted from farms or shipped out of cities and towns to these barren rural areas without jobs in the ethnic 'homelands'. Dimbaza became a symbolic rallying point for human rights organisations and churches trying to expose the 'resettlement' programme. The film *Last Grave at Dimbaza* made at the time had a great impact.

Dimbaza and other resettlement areas at that time conjured up an image of an uprooted and crushed people, passive victims of apartheid policies. Under Sebe there was resistance, but that was centred on Mdantsane, the vast working class township outside the city of East London. Now, in Dimbaza as in

SPECIAL REPORT

the rest of Ciskei, organisations are mushrooming, taking advantage of the space opened up by Ciskei's new military ruler, Brigadier Gqozo.



Brigadier Oupa Gqozo, Ciskei's new leader

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

Organising underground

But as we spoke to unionists over a period of two weeks it became clear that even under the tyranny of Sebe, workers and residents had been organising and resisting. We learnt about a clandestine organisation, the Dimbaza Workers Council (DWC), that had operated underground in Dimbaza during the rule of Sebe. The DWC had been initiated by another underground organisation, the Dimbaza Residents Association - some said in 1985, others said in 1989. Its aim was to try and organise the factories in the area. We also learnt that COSATU affiliates had managed to organise several companies

in Sebe's time.

Dimbaza is the biggest of Ciskei's two main industrial growth points (the other is Fort Jackson, next to Mdantsane).

It has 103 manufacturing companies, out of a total of 207 for Ciskei as a whole. These range in size from small workshops to a several large plants employing 400 or more workers. This industrial development provided the base for workers and unions to begin organising in the mid-1980s.

Good for the bosses...

It was a difficult job. Many of the employers had been attracted to the Ciskei precisely because there was no union organisation. A glossy brochure put out by the Ciskei People's Development Bank in 1989 stated baldly that, "One of the biggest advantages in Ciskei is that trade unions are not welcome and as such have no representation within the borders of Ciskei. So too are there no minimum wage laws, or any other restrictive barriers. The true market of free enterprise governs all such issues."

This spirit - or rather market - of free enterprise was enticing to many companies. As examples, East London unionists told us about bitter struggles with two companies that were trying to take advantage of Ciskei's attractions. Darmag, a plastic components manufacturer, physically relocated two of its three East London plants

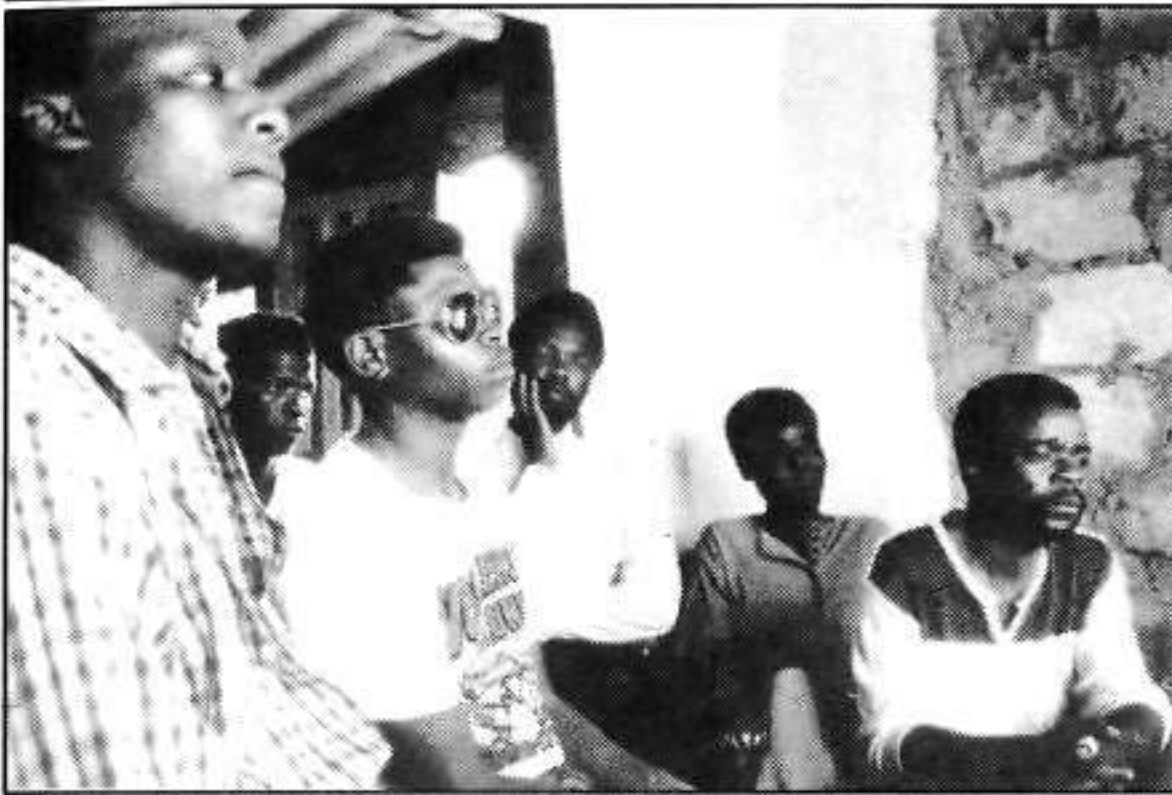
to Fort Jackson and used this to avoid recognising Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). According to Patrick Ntsangane, CWIU branch secretary, the company said it could not meet with CWIU as it was now in another country. "It challenged us to come and organise the majority, knowing unions were banned in Ciskei."

Da Gama Textiles tried a more imaginative approach. Their Cyril Lord plant is close to the border of Ciskei, and they actually applied to the state for the Ciskei boundary to be re-drawn to include their factory! This is how serious they were about avoiding the determined organising efforts of SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU - at that time ACTWUSA).

... bad for the workers

What was good for the bosses was bad for the workers. Many companies were paying wages in 1989/90 between 45c and 65c per hour - an outrageous R30 per week! Workers were often employed with no employment contracts, and the law gave them no bargaining rights. As one group of workers told us: "The bosses had the final word about money and hours of work. They decided by themselves on increases, and there was no fixed time for annual leave."

Workers from the Taiwanese-owned Comfy Shoes told us, "Employment started again every day - there was



Workers remember the harsh times under Sebe

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

no contract, no stamp in your ID. There was no safety, no sick leave, no maternity benefits. There was no chance to form a committee - it was clock in, clock out, go home. If you got R50 fortnightly, half went to the government. There was R10 for the army, R10 development tax, and R5 for CNIP (Sebe's political party). From the remaining R25 you had to pay rent, water, send your kids to school and feed and clothe them."

Sebe had adopted a '10-point plan for a better way of life'. While the 'plan' is totally uninteresting, workers do remember one clause with special bitterness - it promises 'the provision of a meal a day for every Ciskeian'. Workers remember bosses quoting it as evidence that they should only be paid enough wages to buy one meal a day!

Workers faced a harsh management and vicious police. Trade unionists and some industrialists say the

Taiwanese employers were the worst. The workers from Comfy Shoes said that if they complained management told them, "Your president never told me about that - he only told me I will get people who will do what I want." Workers said, "We could not make demands. Some people knew about unions, but they had no chance. There were no union rights, you could not speak. If you did, the bosses called the police. There are many people who lack an eye, or who are crippled because of police action."

Unions, committees, strikes

Workers from several different companies told us about dismissals, stoppages and detentions as they struggled for basic rights in the workplace. One of the more suc-

cessful stories was told by Martin Zingelo, shopsteward at Unathi Timber Products. Zingelo is also chairperson of the Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU) local in Dimbaza.

Unathi Timber

Zingelo came to Dimbaza in 1987, after being retrenched from an engineering company in Johannesburg. While working there he had become familiar with trade unions, as well as with "underground structures" during the Emergency. "So when I arrived here I asked whether there were underground structures. Comrades told me about the touching points. You would go to the touching point, and find a message about the venue for the meeting. That's how I joined the Dimbaza Workers Council."

Zingelo then started trying to organise fellow-workers. At some stage they made contact with PPWAWU in East London. "Only one guy knew the union, he moved underground, telling the people what's going on about the union." Out of a workforce of about 370, some 180 joined the union and filled in joining forms. The union officials gave advice, and "then we went to the people with suggestions." Management was "exploiting, dismissing people. We told people, 'Look how management acts.' We convinced them."

Then in July 1989 workers downed tools over a dismissal. Management dis-

SPECIAL REPORT

missed everyone. The entire workforce sat down outside the factory, demanding the chance to elect a committee. Eventually management accepted this, agreed to recognise the committee, and reinstated the workers.

According to Zingelo, management was unaware of union involvement. "When they gave our committee a constitution, they stated that they did not want a union." Zingelo believes management was prepared to negotiate because of production: "We did not strike when there were no orders and work was scarce. It is only good to strike when work is under pressure." The committee negotiated over grievances such as provision of kettles, overalls, sick leave and job grades.

The committee also won a wage increase. The minimum wage was 60c per hour. Management offered a 10c increase, but finally agreed to the workers' demand for 20c.

Consol Plastics

PPWAWU was not able to provide much direct support at Unathi. But in several Dimbaza factories which were owned by bigger SA companies, unions had more leverage. One of the more



Zingelo at union meeting: clandestine organisation comes into the open

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

successful was CWIU at Consol Plastics. Organisation at Consol started when a former NUM member began trying to organise workers, and

found one of his colleagues doing the same thing. They went to East London in search of a union, and were directed to CWIU. Armed

with advice and joining forms, they went back to organise among the 130 workers at Consol.

When CWIU demanded recognition the company promised to recognise the union if Sebe undertook not to harass the company for doing this. Of course such an undertaking was not forthcoming. During 1989 the union stepped up its campaign. Workers were preparing to elect their own committee independent of the liaison committee in the plant, when they became aware that fresh elections for the liaison committee were also being prepared. They decided to take over the liaison committee instead.

"From then on there were negotiations," says CWIU branch secretary Patrick Ntsangane. "I would go down to Dimbaza to consult with workers before they met management. If they had problems they would phone our office. The company knew they were members of the union, the only thing was they refused to deal with officials."

CWIU then demanded that the head office of Consol extend all agreements to cover the Ciskei plant. Ciskei shopstewards attended the Consol national shopstewards council in September, and the meeting decided to prepare for solidarity action. According to Ntsangane, "the coup came just as we were poised for national industrial action to back the demand. The company

started discussing recognition with us the next week."

Some successes, some failures

At Van Leer NUMSA used similar tactics to win full union recognition (see box on following page). At Southern Combing despite solidarity workers only won informal recognition for their committee, as at Consol and Unathi (same box). They also suffered a mass dismissal.

Thus workers at several Dimbaza companies waged struggles and won partial victories. It was easier to win recognition - whether formal or informal - in companies already covered by union agreements outside of Ciskei. These also seem to be the companies where COSATU affiliates became more actively involved. Many of the worker activists in these companies were also involved in the Dimbaza Workers Council (DWC).

Victories won ranged from full union recognition as at Van Leer (and Frame in Fort Jackson), to negotiation with workers committees. At Consol and Southern Combing management knew the union had members and was advising the committee. At Unathi it seems management was unaware that workers had joined the union.

Workers in other factories were less successful. In some, such as the Taiwanese-owned Comfy Shoes, organisation was virtually impossible. In others activists

from DWC, and in some cases from former SA Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) structures based in King Williams Town, struggled to establish some kind of organisational base. "SAAWU had an office in King Williams Town. They conscientised people and became quite influential," said one worker.

Dimbaza Foundries

For example, SAAWU tried to organise Dimbaza Foundries in 1988. The company produces castings for quarries and mines, and employs about 400 workers. A committee was elected. When a worker was dismissed the committee members asked management why the committee was not consulted. "I do not have to consult anyone," was the answer.

Workers in that department immediately downed tools. The police arrived and evicted the strikers. Then the whole factory stopped work. Management threatened to dismiss everyone, and workers decided to retreat. Fifty-four lost their jobs.

In 1989 SAAWU and NUMSA merged. But according to Peter Martins, a Dimbaza Foundry worker who was chair of the DWC, it was "very bad" at that time. There was no recognition of the union, and no independent worker structure. Although workers had sent off their joining forms they had no contact with NUMSA. They contacted progressive lawyers to help

Organising at Van Leer, Southern Combing

Van Leer

At Van Leer in Dimbaza, workers joined the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA) in 1988. NUMSA is also organised at nine other Van Leer plants outside Ciskei. Workers struck over a dismissal, and then in 1989 shopstewards attended a national Van Leer shopsteward council. This paved the way for solidarity action.

When Ciskei workers downed tools demanding recognition, other plants were also stopped by solidarity action. After six days shopstewards flew to Johannesburg to meet Van Leer directors, and the strike was settled with recognition. The Ciskei workers also won a company commitment for a three year programme to reach wage parity with other Van Leer factories.

Southern Combing

Southern Combing, a big woolwashing company in Dimbaza employing about 400 workers, experienced three strikes as workers fought for their rights. Workers started organising in 1984, but made no headway. Then there was a wage strike in 1987. Workers were dismissed, and evicted by the police. When workers met in one of their houses, the police surrounded it and detained them. Eventually, however, most workers were reinstated.

In 1988 workers approached ACTWUSA in East London, and started signing up. Southern Combing is owned by Gubb and Ings, which also owns a company in Uitenhage. Through the union, shopstewards at the two companies made contact: "The Uitenhage workers wanted to be kept informed of all issues."

The next time there was a strike at

Southern Combing, this time over a racist insult, the Uitenhage workers took solidarity action. Again management called the police who evicted workers and virtually occupied the factory. According to workers, the Uitenhage company put pressure on management to dismiss the racist foreman, which they did.

Workers elected a committee in the plant, which was recognised by management. According to SACTWU (formerly ACTWUSA) organiser Goodman Rala, management knew the committee was linked to SACTWU, but refused to communicate with the union, stating that "unions are not allowed in the Ciskei". The committee, however, continued to get advice from the union.

Then in 1989 there was a third strike, over wage demands. Again the police intervened. They mocked workers about their "tradition of calling Uitenhage", and banned all gatherings of more than five people. The Uitenhage workers held solidarity demonstrations, but stopped after a lockout. Meanwhile the Ciskei management dismissed and selectively re-employed the strikers. Some 130 workers lost their jobs.

Scabs were screened by the police. Management gave indoctrination classes and showed videos about how bad it was to strike or overthrow the government. The dismissed workers sent a delegation to Sebe to ask for their jobs, but he told them that "there is a big snake hatching eggs at Schornville", the area in King Williams Town where some unions have their offices.

ACTWUSA had more success at the big Frame plant in Fort Jackson, which employs about 1 000 workers. The union was able to win negotiating rights, as it had organised the rest of the giant Frame Group, but management "feared deducting stop-orders, and shopstewards were frequently detained," according to regional secretary Jabu Gwala. ❖

with a court case for the dismissed workers, but the case was lost.

Dimbaza Foundries is in fact owned by the British multinational Lonrho, which has several companies in South Africa. But workers only became aware of that link late in 1989, and it was never used to struggle for bargaining rights.

The Dimbaza Workers Council

In some factories the DWC had links with workers committees or with COSATU affiliates; in other more repressive companies, such as Comfy Shoes, it would be represented by one or two activists. We encountered different stories of when the DWC started. Peter Martins of Dimbaza Foundries, former chair of the DWC and then chair of King Williams Town COSATU local during 1989 and 1990, said the Council was started in 1989. Zingelo of Unathi Timber Products said it already existed in 1987 when he arrived in Dimbaza. He said it was built by three factories - Southern Combing, Van Leer and one other.

Eric Mkengo, a worker at Comfy Shoes, said the Council was formed in 1985. All the workers said it was initiated by the Dimbaza

Residents Association (DRA) because "it could see that the workers were oppressed and they were not clear". According to Mkengo the DRA itself was formed by former Robben Island prisoners and others before Ciskeian 'independence' in 1980.

Mkengo said each company had one representative on the DWC. "If you were clear you would then go to the next factory, find one worker and explain to him. He would then go and organise another factory." If there was a dispute such as assault or dismissal in a factory, the DWC would then send two delegates from outside the plant to speak to management. Sometimes they were successful in resolving disputes, at other times management refused to listen. "The task of the DWC was to teach people how to act in the factories, not just to strike. It was to give direction, and also show workers what sector they belonged to."

During 1989 the work of the DWC seemed to accelerate. In mid-89 they had representatives from seven factories, according to Martins; by the end of the year there were 50-60. By this stage many of the delegates seem to have been elected from factories, rather than coming as individual activists. This growth seems to correspond to a growing sense throughout the territory that Sebe's days were numbered. The Council met on

Tuesdays and Fridays. "People came out of work, went to the touching points, and then went to the venue." The DWC organised parties where organisation could be discussed.

An "interim COSATU local" was established in King Williams Town in 1989, largely on the initiative of the Dimbaza workers. When Martins was elected chair of this he stood down as chair of the DWC. The local met on Wednesdays, and was attended by some of the workers from Dimbaza 30km away.

Martins says: "The aim of the DWC was to organise for COSATU. We collected information on wages and treatment in the factories. We reported to COSATU, and to the National Association of Democratic Lawyers. They provided assistance for legal cases. We organised workers into sectors, for example NUMSA. We knew COSATU had resolved to organise the homelands, but it would take a long time. Workers needed to take steps. We reported to the King local, and to affiliates of COSATU in King Williams Town and East London." The DWC was financed by a fee of 50c per member.

The DWC intended building up pressure of organisation and publicity to compel the Ciskei regime to recognise trade unions. "Our aim was to mobilise and organise a general strike if possible."

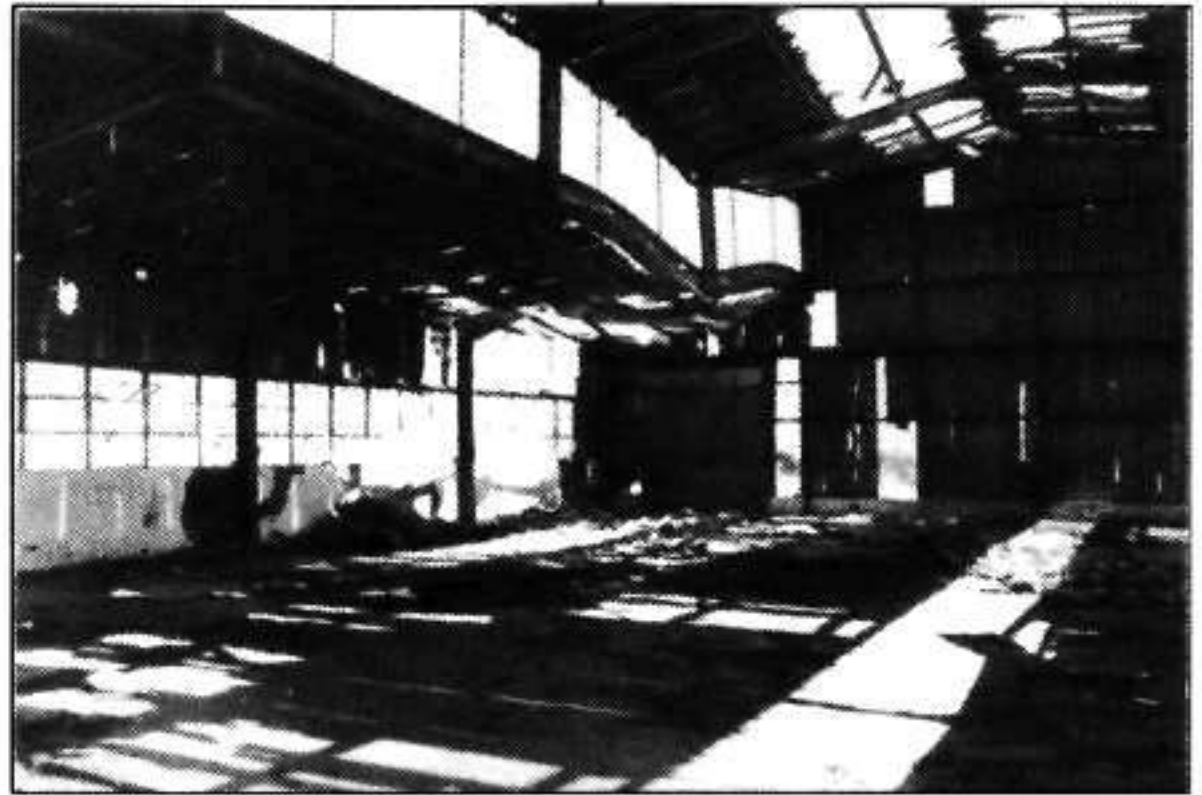
After the coup - the Workers Council emerges

In late February 1990 President-for-life Sebe left Ciskei to visit Hong Kong. The leaders of the Ciskei army took the opportunity to stage a coup. There had been increasing dissatisfaction within the army and the civil service with Sebe's stupid, corrupt and arbitrary rule. The unbanning of the ANC and the release of Mandela had an impact in all bantustans, both on the people and on state structures. Indeed, the South African government probably had a hand in encouraging the coup. Many industrialists were also anxious to see a more efficient and less blatantly corrupt and repressive government.

Throughout 1989 there had been escalating resistance in the countryside, once a base of some sort for the Sebe regime. Peasants were burning their Ciskei National Independence Party cards, which they had been forced to produce when applying for any state licence or social service. Resistance was mounting in the urban areas too. In fact, progressive organisations were planning an anti-Ciskei march in Sebe's surreal capital, Bisho, for 5 March. But the coup got there first.

When the coup was an-

nounced on 4 March, a Sunday, the streets filled with celebrating people. In Mdantsane the celebration turned to rioting as mobs burnt and looted the businesses of Sebe's supporters. Rioting spread to the industrial area of Fort Jackson, where a number of factories were looted and burnt down.



Fort Jackson factory: burnt out after the coup

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

Stayaway, committees, stoppages

In Dimbaza the DWC and other structures immediately surfaced. "We had no problems here with burning factories," said Zingelo. "We had discipline through the DWC and other structures." Martins says they organised patrols in the industrial areas, to protect the factories. This account is echoed by the story of the Triad workers in Fort Jackson (see p. 33).

On the Monday there was a widespread celebratory stayaway in Ciskei. Comfy Shoes workers told us: "People were very excited. We told the bosses that we

can't work, we have to celebrate and organise the people. A giant has fallen." There was a rally in the Dimbaza stadium. The next day several employers, especially the Taiwanese, locked workers out.

There was a flurry of organising in the new conditions after the coup. "The DWC

took over after the coup," the Comfy Shoes workers told us. "We never waited for Gqozo to tell us. We elected committees in every company. There were go slows, strikes, sleep-ins, and employers were forced to recognise us."

Zingelo says: "Gqozo talked as if he recognised unions. We went straight to the employers with our demands. Most companies did not have committees. It was the DWC which organised them, not the unions." Comfy shopsteward Mkengo says: "We explained to workers about trade unions, and organised workers commit-

tees. We told employers that we had representatives in the DWC, and they recognised the DWC because it had authority. They knew it could bring peace." For the same reason employers "appealed to Gqozo to allow trade unions in, to stop the strikes and go slows."

Industrialists meet the DWC

An extraordinary meeting then took place. A group of industrialists under the auspices of the Ciskei Chamber of Industries met with the DWC at the Dimbaza Hotel. A committee of eight employers and eight workers was formed, to help resolve the rash of disputes hitting the factories. Peter Martins had the impression that this group of employers were "co-operative, they did not have a negative attitude."

The first meeting of the committee could not make much progress because none of the industrialists who were actually involved in disputes were present. At the next meeting some did come, and disputes were discussed at length. Eventually the meeting was postponed.

These three meetings had taken place over a couple of months. Meanwhile COSATU affiliates had become increasingly active, and it was decided that the DWC should be phased out, as the unions were handling disputes directly. A fourth meeting was therefore never called.

Although these meetings seem to have been fairly in-

conclusive, worker activists recall them with pride. They were a clear recognition by the employers that workers had to be recognised as they wielded real power in production.

Not all industrialists supported this initiative. Eddie Anderson, a Dimbaza industrialist, told *Labour Bulletin* that the DWC was a "militant type of operation" and that he advised industrialists to have nothing to do with it. But others, such as the president of the Chamber of Industries, Ray Brentnall, had been lobbying the Ciskei government for some years to allow basic worker and union rights. While he seems to have been a key figure in the talks, he refused to comment on them as one should "let sleeping dogs lie."



COSATU moves into the Ciskei

COSATU affiliates became increasingly active after the coup. After the Labour Decree was promulgated (see p. 29) the DWC decided to phase it-

self out as COSATU could do its work. The DWC finally dissolved in September.

There seems to have been a degree of tension between the DWC and some COSATU affiliates. Two union organisers who had been active in Dimbaza before the coup had had no contact with the DWC, even though it turned out that some of their members were active in it. They believed the DWC only came into existence after the coup.

One official said that COSATU affiliates suspected that the DWC was trying to organise a separate federation for Ciskei, in opposition to COSATU. Apparently there were similar suspicions that the Umtata Workers Council was proposing just such an approach for Transkei. He said that when his union discovered that some members were involved in the DWC it decided it was not a problem, unless the DWC tried to interfere in the union's work. The official said there was no formal relationship between the DWC and COSATU. An official from another union said that while there was no contact, there was also no conflict between the two, as the DWC was trying to fill the vacuum until COSATU could organise.

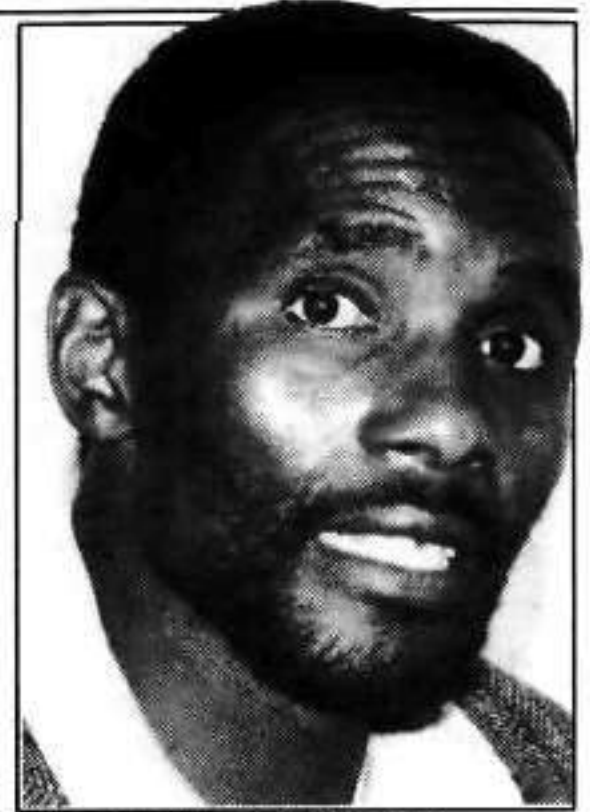
Martins stresses - as do other DWC activists - that the intention of the DWC was never to compete with COSATU, but to organise workers into COSATU's sectors.

Some of the tensions may



COSATU local meeting in King Williams Town

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin



**Thembinkosi Mkalipi,
COSATU regional chair**

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

have sprung from older tensions between SAAWU and COSATU affiliates. There were several SAAWU activists operating out of King Williams Town, which is much closer to Dimbaza than East London, where most COSATU affiliates are based. It is clear that some residual tensions remain. Some former SAAWU activists complain that their factories have not been adequately serviced, while COSATU unionists say that they often do not know that a factory has been organised in their name when it is organised by community structures.

It is difficult and probably unnecessary to unravel these differences. Several points are clear. The DWC was not a SAAWU structure. There was considerable overlap between DWC structures and activists and COSATU structures and activists. There seem to have been no cases of conflict between the two. The organisation established by the DWC both before and after

the coup laid the foundations for COSATU's rapid growth. And the DWC enjoyed substantial credibility among workers and to some extent industrialists in Dimbaza.

COSATU meets the military government

Meetings took place at other levels too. The wave of industrial action after the coup alarmed the military government and industrialists. "They convened a meeting with us," says COSATU regional chairperson Thembinkosi Mkalipi, "and asked us to normalise the situation and give them a breathing space. We said the employers and government must allow us to operate normally before we can 'normalise' any situation that we feel needs normalising."

The result was a series of meetings which eventually produced the Labour Decree, promulgated on 1 July. This is in many ways a fairly progressive law, incorporating many aspects of the COSATU-

NACTU-SACCOLA accord on the Labour Relations Act. However, COSATU had several objections, both with the content of the Decree and with the way it was drawn up (see p. 29).

Even after promulgation of the Decree unions ran into resistance from employers and obstructions from the Department of Manpower.

Mkalipi told us in September that unions found themselves in a difficult position. "You would try to register, but there were delays. The Department of Manpower would demand the original of the union's certificate of registration, but that is lodged with Manpower in Pretoria.

Meanwhile workers were waiting, they were impatient. You must deal with the company, but the company says it cannot meet you because you are not registered. You go to the Department, and it refers you to Pretoria again. We believe these actions are

purposely designed to frustrate the trade union movement.

"The fact of the matter is that we are very strong on the ground in Ciskei, and a relationship should exist on that basis. Registration is not a precondition for establishing a relationship."

Recognition in Dimbaza

Meanwhile, on the ground, workers and union officials were establishing themselves in the factories. CWIU met with Consol immediately after the coup and started negotiating agreement. Substantial progress was made by May, but the union and the company were still ironing out differences in November. In the meantime, the two parties had negotiated an agreement on conditions and wages, which took the Consol minimum from R1,05 to R1,80. Management also agreed that the Ciskei plant would join the national bargaining forum, where CWIU bargains with the Consol Plastics division, in 1991.

SACTWU negotiated a recognition agreement at Southern Combing in July, using the same agreement as they have with Gubb and Ings in Uitenhage. A wage agreement was finalised at the end of August. Workers won a 32c increase backdated to July, with an additional 26c from January, which will take the minimum hourly rate to R2.40 per hour. The agreement also covered bonuses, maternity leave and shift allowances.

Zingelo and his fellow shopstewards at Unathi Timber introduced PPWAWU to management in June, and rapidly signed an agreement.

NUMSA won recognition at Dimbaza Foundry and entered into wage negotiations. Negotiations deadlocked on the union demand for a R1,50 across-the-board increase, which would have taken the minimum to R2,50 per hour. The company offer was 50c, plus 10c in April 1991. In an effort to break the deadlock towards the end of November the company instituted the first legal lock-out in Ciskei. Management told the union that overtime bans and go-slows over the previous two months made it useless to run the factory.

However, after three days the company settled at 50c backdated to 1 October and 50c from the date of the agreement - a 100% wage increase on the minimum rate! Agreement was also reached on shift allowances and overtime rates.

Protracted struggles

Many newly-organised factories had not yet entered negotiations over recognition in September. CWIU and others are understaffed and overstretched, and have a number of factories waiting for negotiations over basic union rights. In September PPWAWU had workers in four factories waiting for letters from the union to management requesting recognition.

At one meeting we attended, workers from a furniture factory were expecting the letter to arrive on Monday. They were impatient to take action against their employer: "Is there not some kind of action we can take, anything, even for only two minutes, to show the letter comes from us?" they asked the organiser. The organiser explained that action could only be taken if the employer did not respond to the letter within the stipulated time limit.

"Can we not do something, like damage the boxes?" they asked. They expressed a deep anger after so many years of oppression without voice. This was not surprising - they were earning around R25 per week starting wage! They eventually agreed on a lunchtime demonstration, and further action if the employer did not respond.

On the other side of Dimbaza some one hundred Comfy Shoes workers were meeting in a school classroom. Mostly women workers, they described their conditions: a 9 hour working day, no maternity, sick or leave pay, a shocking 55c per hour. Union officials suggested that they tackle the smaller issues first, to build a foundation for taking up the wage issue early in 1991. The workers agreed on this approach. But one woman stood up to speak very forcefully: "I have a fear. There is nothing said here that they will accept. Even stop-orders

SPECIAL REPORT

are not acceptable. My colleagues will support what I am saying. The bosses are closed people, they will accept nothing."

A man then spoke in response: "I don't believe we can come to a stop now. The union has come into the factory. We have come onto the road of struggle. We must go straight now and not turn around. We will force them!" There was a chorus of Vivas! from glad faces and shining eyes. Despite the fears and doubts, they would fight on.

By December SACTWU organiser Goodman Rala reported that the union had won full union rights at Comfy, with shopstewards elected and fully functioning. Stop-order deductions were to begin in January, as well as negotiations for a recognition agreement. He says the relationship with management is improving: "They did not seem to understand trade unionism, but it seems they are taking good advice now."

There are still employers who are resisting unions. Triad in Fort Jackson, for example, dismissed striking NUMSA members and introduced a sweetheart union (see p. 33).

The smaller workshops can also be difficult to organise. CWIU branch secretary Patrick Ntsangane told us about a small chemical company in Dimbaza, Romber Pharmaceuticals. After a series of strikes, police interventions and delays in signing recognition, the company reduced the workforce to less than 20

workers. According to the Labour Decree (since changed) this automatically made it a 'small business' with no union rights!

NEHAWU faces the most serious problem of all the unions (see p. 30). The Labour Decree excludes the public sector from union rights, and there is a deep hostility towards the union from the military government. COSATU is, however, committed to winning the right for this sector to organise.

Assessing progress since the coup

The labour movement has developed extremely fast over the ten months since the coup. Industrial relations in Ciskei is rapidly catching up with the rest of South Africa. These developments have taken place at three levels.

Firstly, labour law in the Ciskei was non-existent and unions were banned. Now Ciskei's labour law enshrines basic union rights and in several respects is more advanced than South Africa's. Despite problems and inadequacies, the Labour Decree emerged out of consultations, negotiations and struggles between the military government, employers and COSATU.

Secondly, the unions have grown dramatically in membership and number of comp-

anies organised and recognised (see box). The unions are close to organising about half of Ciskei's 24 000 industrial workers, with progress in the commercial and catering sector too. Inroads in the public sector have also been made, despite the ban on unions in this sector.

Thirdly, the unions have made qualitative gains. They have won bargaining rights in many companies, and workers are able to assert their interests on the shopfloor. The unilateral power of management is being rolled back. Minimum wages in some companies have doubled. National standards and centralised bargaining are beginning to have an impact, especially in factories which are owned by bigger South African companies. Thus Van Leer workers will have parity with the rest of Van Leer by 1991-2. Consol will be party to Consol Plastic national negotiations in 1991.

An even more interesting move towards regulation of Ciskeian industry is being made by NUMSA. The union is pushing to establish a centralised bargaining forum for the metal and engineering industry in Ciskei (NUMSA is also pushing for an industrial council in Transkei). This is seen as an interim measure, pending re-incorporation of Ciskei into South Africa; when that happens the bargaining forum would merge with the metal and engineering industrial council of South Africa. NUMSA regional secretary

Enoch Godongwana says most employers are responding favourably. For example, the recent substantive agreement reached at Dimbaza Foundries makes provision for the company to come into the forum when it is established. A meeting between NUMSA and metal and engineering employers is planned for January.

Tough struggles ahead

These developments show that Ciskei is rapidly becoming integrated into the wider South African industrial relations scene. But Ciskeian industry is starting from a very low base. There is a history of arbitrary dismissals, poverty wages, lack of basic employment contracts, long overtime, dangerous conditions, and lack of benefits such as sick leave and maternity leave. There is likely to be a series of tough struggles ahead as unions consolidate their organisational base, fight for a living wage and better conditions, and challenge the authority of management.

The demands of organised workers will confront Gqozo with a new set of problems. Ciskei's workers will want to bring their wages closer to what is paid in the rest of South Africa. With the days of a cheap and repressed labour force disappearing, many industrialists will face bankruptcy or simply pack up and leave. Some industrialists believe this may be especially true of the Taiwanese owners.

How will Gqozo respond

to this situation? Will he start trying to re-impose the clamps on unions, in order to encourage industrialists to stay? And how will the unions respond? Will they consider curbing their demands? Will they watch employers closing the gates and pulling out their investments? A third option might be to demand that any employer intending to close down has to hand his/her factory and equipment over to the workers, to be run as a co-operative. Such an approach would open up interesting possibilities. Maybe the unions should demand of Gqozo that he pass a Decree to enforce it.

These dilemmas do point to broader issues of the development of the SA economy. How will a future democratic South African government deal with the integration of rural and urban economies, the development of the underdeveloped rural areas, the question of decentralisation? With the current rapid growth of union organisation in the bantustans, workers will at least have a platform to voice their interests when development strategies are debated.

The military government: friend or foe?

Although they acknowledge that the Gqozo regime has opened up space for popular and trade union organisation, trade unionists are sceptical about how sympathetic 'the little soldier' is to their movement. "There is no question that the Labour Decree is an

advance," Mkalipi told us in September. "But the statements of the military government, and the actions of the Manpower Department, make a mockery of the decree. Statements made by Gqozo that trade unions which do not register are cheap political criminals indicate to employers that they should not deal with us. The Manpower Department issued a directive saying employers should not deal with unions which are not registered. The military government is trying to undermine COSATU."

Unionists are particularly angry about the government's attitude to NEHAWU. They also point out that there is still a high level of police intervention in labour disputes, such as at Triad. Mkalipi says: "If the police know there is a problem at a factory they will come, even if they are not asked. If they are requested not to come in they will mingle around outside, intimidating workers."

Where is the Ciskei bureaucracy going?

To what extent are these the understandable mistakes of a regime groping its way towards an open society? Or do they reflect a deeper reactionary character of the regime?

This is a difficult question to answer at this stage. Unionists feel that the Gqozo regime is less hostile to the SA government, and less sympathetic to the democratic movement, than the

SPECIAL REPORT

Holomisa regime in Transkei. It is, as Councillor for Manpower Nyikana told us, trying to "tread a difficult tightrope between the government and the ANC."

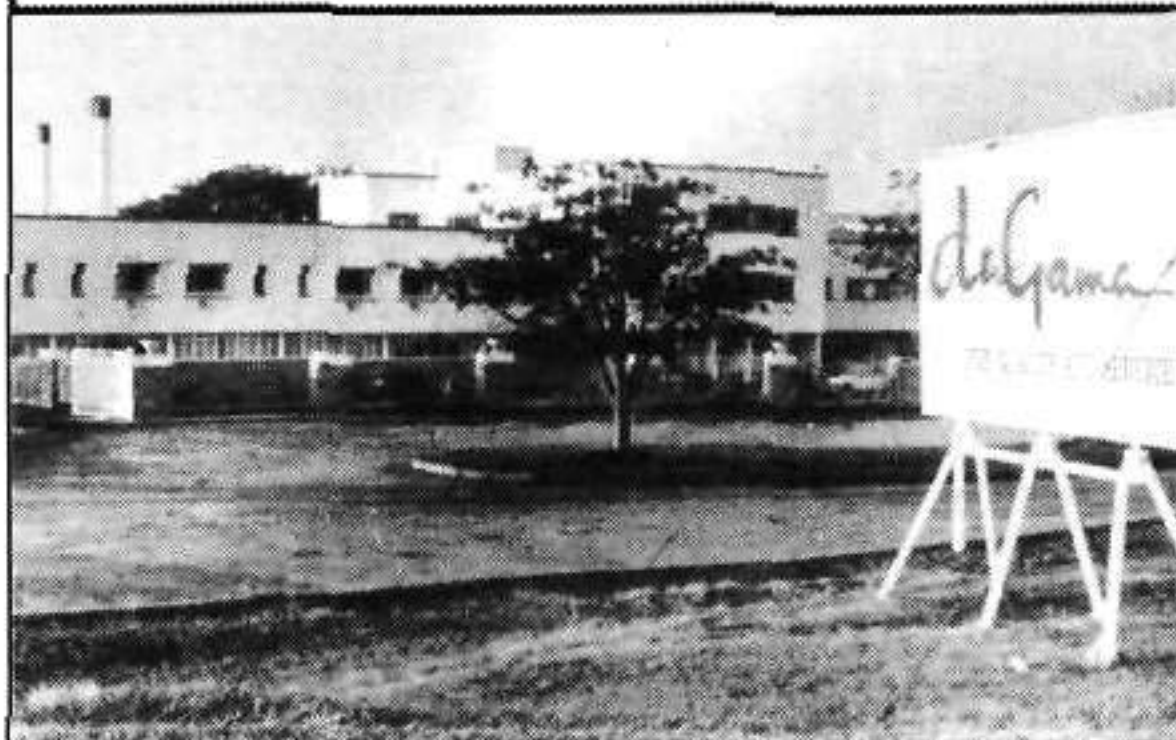
While the Military Council retired the top civil servants and Ministers who had been Sebe supporters, the rest of the bureaucracy is relatively intact. Nyikana told us that under Sebe "we pretended all was well when visitors came, but really we were very unhappy." Civil servants resented favouritism and arbitrary promotion and demotion. Nyikana himself had been director-general of the education department until 1987, when he was suddenly demoted and given a small office. Now he is the equivalent of Minister of Manpower. The department has the same director-general as before the coup.

This bureaucracy has not suddenly become 'progressive' overnight. Nor has the police and army. It would probably like to see itself remain, not as a 'homeland' bureaucracy, but as a regional bureaucracy in a democratic South Africa. This explains its relative openness to the ANC and mass organisations. However, it is a bureaucracy with a long tradition of anti-people, repressive and self-seeking policies and practices. This is one reason why the Gqozo regime is so opposed to trade union organisation in the public sector. It fears losing control of its own institutions. ❖

Union membership in the Ciskei

Trade unions have made impressive progress in Ciskei since the coup. The figures below are for membership claimed by the unions. Many figures are rough since often stop-order facilities have not yet been established.

- SACTWU is recognised at 8 plants in Dimbaza, 5 in Fort Jackson, and at Da Gama's Good Hope Textiles, which employs some 2 000 workers and is sited in Zwelitsha outside King Williams Town. The union claims a total of about 5 000 members in Ciskei. It is soon to open a branch at Dimbaza.
- CWIU claims some 1500 members in 15 Ciskei factories. They range in size from 450 (Dimbaza Fibre) to 12. The union has basic rights in only four of these factories, because of being understaffed.
- NUMSA is recognised at about 8 Dimbaza companies, with some 1 000 members, and in a number of Dimbaza factories.
- PPWAWU is organised at 5 Dimbaza factories, where it also has a local.
- NEHAWU has organised general assistants and clerks at hospitals and state departments. It is impossible to estimate membership figures, as it is not permitted to organise and does not have stop-order facilities. However, it claims majority support in the state sector, and is establishing structures.
- SACCAWU claims 2 700 plus members in Ciskei, organised in branches of national chain stores, Sun International Hotels, and local shops. ❖



Da Gama textiles: SACTWU cracks a tough nut

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

'You can't operate in a vacuum'

Stewart Dorrington, retired MD of a King Williams Town company, was appointed director of the Ciskei Chamber of Industries in June. "There has been a dramatic change since Brigadier Gqozo's coup," he says. "Wages were iniquitous - in the old days R160 per month was regarded as an excellent wage. Now that is common, and many pay over R200." He says the response of employers to the labour reforms varies: "some are dogmatic, some fearful, some pragmatic." After the burning and looting at Fort Jackson "businessmen were frightened. Quite a few disappeared. It was chaotic, the unions came in too quickly, intimidating employees."

However, he believes as soon as negotiations start the unions will become "less political, more labour orientated." One cannot wish the unions away, he says. "They were here all the time, underground. They came up like magic after the coup, with very good structures... You can fool yourself for just so long."

Industrialist and head of the Chamber's security portfolio Eddie Anderson confesses that he "hates unions" because they "ruined" his native Scotland. However, employers "are going to have to recognise unions whether they like it or not. It's not a problem as long as they're reasonable." Anderson concedes that a lot of industrialists paid "very unfair wages". Sebe could not have stopped the unions, he says. "They were underground, and homelands are the favourite hit spots." He says there are "mixed feelings among industrialists"

about the unions. CWIU and NUMSA, he believes, are a "militant bunch" who generally cause strikes.

Anderson strongly opposed Dimbaza industrialists meeting the Dimbaza Workers Council. He claims to have been actively involved in trying to smash the DWC after the coup. He is the chairman of a security company, which was established by Dimbaza industrialists to protect their properties. "We had black guys working undercover, and they penetrated the Council. We got the names of the ringleaders and had them locked up. The Workers Council was a political type of operation - if you wanted to employ someone you had to go through them." (Martins was somewhat perplexed by these claims, as none of the former leadership of the DWC had been detained recently).

Ray Brentnall, Ciskei industrialist and president of the Chamber of Industries,



Stewart Dorrington, Ciskei Chamber of Industries director

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

believes unions "can be an asset to a company - I'm talking about non-political unions." He was part of the employers delegation that met the DWC after the coup, and he had been part of the Chambers' effort to lobby Sebe to introduce a basic labour legislation.

According to Brentnall, in 1987 the executive of the Chamber of Industries held two meetings with Sebe, and proposed that the government should establish a basic framework of worker rights with a contract of employment, and grievance, disciplinary and appeal procedures. Sebe agreed and a steering committee with representatives from the Chamber, the Ciskei People's Development Bank,

SPECIAL REPORT

the Department of Manpower and government lawyers, was set up to look into the issues. After several meetings they reached agreement that "something was needed", but that they required outside expertise.

Accordingly, the committee commissioned Johannesburg-based industrial relations consultants, Levy & Piron, to produce a report on the various options and implications open to the Ciskei government. Levy & Piron were scheduled to present the report to Sebe and the government but "this never happened". They presented the report to the Manpower Department, and "then it died". Sebe had clearly lost interest and refused to meet the steering committee again, says Brentnall.

So as soon as they heard of the coup "we said let's meet Brigadier Gqozo and discuss legislation."

Why was the Chamber so keen to establish labour legislation? "We were very concerned about the vacuum," he says. "We had to do something to give workers rights, even if the government had to establish a trade union itself. Employees have a right to know their position such as hours of work, rate of pay, disciplinary and grievance procedures." Brentnall said employers were aware of what was happening in the rest of South Africa and knew they could not avoid it forever. He says there were *undercurrents of dissatisfac-*

tion, although there were no strikes or serious union activities. However, he and other employers must have been aware of what was happening at Van Leer, Southern Combing and other companies in Dimbaza.

Generally industrialists are "very realistic" according to Brentnall, and realise "unions are here to stay." They know they "cannot operate in a vacuum, and there is overwhelming support for the new legislation. Now at least there are rules you can play the game with. If anyone wants changes they have to be negotiated by agreement."

Won't many industrialist leave, since they established factories in the Ciskei in the belief that they could avoid unions? Brentnall doesn't think so. "But if a company becomes enviable because of labour unrest, they will leave." He refers to a company which had to retrench 93 workers because of too few orders. On payday "workers refused to collect their wages and toyi-toyed through the area. They pulled out three other companies. The parent company in Cape Town said that's it, and closed down the factory."

Dorrington says that if a company cannot increase productivity and pay decent wages, it should not be in business. The only way for Ciskeian industry to develop, he believes, is through higher productivity and training.

The views of Dorrington and Brentnall represent the

'enlightened wing' of business in Ciskei, but even they seem to have a limited view of trade union rights. Brentnall, for example, believes Triad management called in the police because "the union was not playing the game properly" - whereas it seems to be a fairly straightforward case of union-bashing (see p. 33)

But many employers in Ciskei are far more conservative than them, with harsh management styles and a very limited notion of 'acceptable unionism'. As Mkalipi told us, "They will use anything to avoid recognising unions." They are used to calling on Sebe's ruthless police at the least sign of 'trouble'. One industrialist referred to close links between employers and police, and mentioned a specific police officer as a "good chap, you could call him head of our local hit squad". They are used to managing without restraint; to paying outrageously low wages; to employing without contracts or any basic employee rights; and to the right to dismiss at will.

Unions, on the other hand, are being driven by a deep-seated anger among workers who have been oppressed for too long: "Now we have freedom of speech and we can organise. We can show we are people just like them," say the workers from Comfy Shoes. There are likely to be tough fights over the next year, as workers struggle for their humanity and employers try to protect their control and their profits. ❖

Ciskei's Labour Decree

Soon after the coup the military government convened a meeting with industrialists and COSATU to 'normalise' the situation. After another meeting to discuss basic principles, the three parties agreed to set up a three day meeting where their respective legal advisors could draw a draft agreement. This was duly done, and the draft became law when Gqozo promulgated it in July. Gqozo, the Department of Manpower and the Chamber of Industries lay great store by the 'tripartite' nature of this Decree.

COSATU, however, see it differently. Regional chairperson Mkalipi says COSATU expected to meet the government and negotiate around the lawyers' draft. "But they drafted the Decree without further negotiation. Some clauses were negotiated by the lawyers, but other clauses were not. The military government said that they were not negotiable."

COSATU held two further meetings with the government to raise its objections, but to no avail. According to Mkalipi, this meant COSATU could not be bound by the document.

"This proves the military

government is not that interested in trade union rights."

Nonetheless, the Labour Decree is quite an advanced labour law. As Mkalipi says, "It gives basic trade union rights, there's no question about it." (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 15 No 4 for a full description of the Decree)

COSATU had four objections to the Decree:

- it excluded government employees from trade union rights and the right to strike;
- workers in small businesses (defined as employing less than 20 workers), and farmworkers and domestic workers were excluded from trade union rights;
- the Decree imposed a time limit of 180 days after a dispute for applying for a conciliation board (the unions want an indefinite limit);
- the Decree stated that, once the conciliation procedures have been exhausted, a union still has to give 24 hours notice before embarking on industrial action.

These objections were discussed at a COSATU regional shopstewards council held in King Williams Town in mid-September. The meeting also discussed the negotiations with the South African state about the COSATU-NACTU-SACCOLA accord on the LRA.

COSATU had called for a national stayaway on 8 October if the state refused to accept the accord. This was

to be preceded by nationwide marches on Saturday 29 September.

The shopstewards felt that the struggle over the Ciskei Labour Decree should be linked to the broader LRA campaign. A COSATU delegation would meet Brigadier Gqozo on 26 September, to try to negotiate changes to the Decree.

If the meeting was fruitless, the East London, Queenstown and King Williams Town locals would jointly organise a march at Bisho, the 'capital' of Ciskei just outside King Williams Town, on the 29th, to present Brigadier Gqozo with their demands.

The COSATU delegation, led by Mkalipi, accordingly met a delegation of the Military Council, led by Gqozo, on the 26th. The Military Council made a number of significant concessions.

- It agreed to remove the 180 days time limit and the 24 hour notice period from the Decree.
- It agreed to remove the exclusion of small businesses from the scope of the Decree.
- After lengthy discussion the Council accepted that domestic and farmworkers could be included in the scope of the Decree, on condition that COSATU accepted the Council's position on state employees. But there was disagreement on this. The Council proposed that municipality and para-statal workers, and labourers in



Gqozo meets COSATU in September: demanding public service union rights

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

government departments, should get trade union rights, but that all other state department employees and police, security and army personnel should be excluded. COSATU accepted the exclusion of the security forces, as well as top civil servants, but not the blanket exclusion of all employees in state departments. The parties agreed that this issue could be further discussed in another meeting.

COSATU also raised the problem of registration complications, anti-union propaganda from the Military Council, and police intervention in labour disputes. The parties agreed that COSATU and the Department of Manpower would meet to discuss a simple registration procedure.

The Council explained that it was under the impression that unions were refusing to register, and that was why

it had attacked the unions publicly. The Council did not respond on the question of police intervention.

The Bisho march proposed for 29 September was called off in the light of the relative success of this meeting. The stayaway scheduled for 8 October was called off by COSATU when the SA government agreed to pass the SACCOLA accord through parliament.

In December, Mkalipi reported that the meeting between COSATU and the Department of Manpower had taken place, and that all the problems of registration had been sorted out.

Most of the COSATU affiliates are now registered in Ciskei. However, the agreed changes to the Labour Decree have not yet been gazetted. In addition, the conflict over union rights for the public service has not been resolved - in fact, it is worsening (see the following section of this article). ❖

'Negotiate with NEHAWU!'

The most protracted labour dispute in Ciskei is NEHAWU's struggle for trade union rights in the public sector. The relationship between NEHAWU and the Military Council has been filled with animosity since March. The Labour Decree promulgated by Brigadier Gqozo in July explicitly excludes public sector workers from trade union rights.

Despite this, Ciskei was hit by a series of public sector strikes in November last year, as public servants demanded recognition of their union and wage parity with the civil service in the rest of South Africa. The antagonism between NEHAWU and the Military Council has also led to some tension between COSATU, the ANC and the UDF.

According to NEHAWU general secretary Sisa Njikelana, the Military Council has been antagonistic from the start. After the coup NEHAWU made approaches to the new government, but "received the cold shoulder." The response of NEHAWU's King Williams Town branch was a heated attack on Gqozo's regime. However, in April a constructive and lengthy meeting was held between the Military Council and COSATU's public sector

unions, where the Council "indicated its problems and misgivings about public sector organisation, and we discussed these." NEHAWU followed up the meeting with a written document outlining the union's views, but received no response from the government.

Then at the end of April the nurses strike at Cecilia Makiwane Hospital erupted. "This was misrepresented as a NEHAWU strike. They were not yet our members. We simply got involved in order to resolve it," says Njikelana. Gqozo took an extremely hostile attitude to the strike. He also claimed that he had ANC and 'MDM' support for his argument that public sector strikes - such as a hospital strike - hurt the community.

NEHAWU 'rash'

Several COSATU unionists told *Labour Bulletin* that they felt NEHAWU's Ciskei organisers had been somewhat rash and undiplomatic in outspokenly attacking Gqozo when the situation was still very fluid. Njikelana concedes that the Military Council "had cause to complain about our initial attitude, but we amended that with more constructive approaches."

However, unionists were also upset at what seemed to be the unwillingness of the UDF and the ANC to condemn Gqozo's position. While UDF and the ANC were establishing cordial relations with the Ciskei regime, and addressing joint rallies with Gqozo, NEHAWU was being vilified and de-

nied bargaining rights. UDF and ANC - and even COSATU - appeared to adopt a diplomatic and cautious "let's not rock the boat" attitude. Njikelana says the problem was that NEHAWU was approaching Gqozo as an employer who refuses to bargain, while other organisations had a broader political perspective.

Alliance tensions

These tensions point to difficulties that may continue to surface in the COSATU-ANC alliance. In specific situations, COSATU and the ANC have different perspectives and concerns, and these could easily lead to conflict if there is not ongoing and structured consultation between the two parties. This, in fact, is

the chief lesson drawn by activists. In September a meeting was held in East London between a large COSATU delegation and the regional ANC, where the issue was thoroughly debated. They agreed

that establishing alliance structures which met regularly was an urgent priority. The first meeting of the COSATU-ANC-SACP alliance took place in November.

Rash of public sector strikes

In November a rash of strikes spread through the Ciskei's

public sector. A strike of clerical and domestic staff began at Cecilia Makiwane Hospital on 6 November. The strikers were demanding pay parity with workers in the SA civil service, after these categories of civil servant



Manpower Councillor Nyikana: "We don't like NEHAWU"

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

were passed over when nurses, teachers, police, prison a defence personnel got salary increases. The strike ended on 17 November, after they were threatened with dismissal.

But by that time the strike had spread to two other hospitals, as well as the government bureaucracy. On 12 November clerical workers and general assistants walked off their jobs in Bisho, also demanding pay parity. The strike soon spread to government offices in other towns. Gqozo threatened the strikers with evictions, dismissals and force if necessary. NEHAWU estimates some 8 000 workers were involved, mostly general assistants and clerks.

After several days workers decided to suspend the strike and try to meet Gqozo. When Gqozo rejected a meeting, workers decided to launch a fully-fledged Ciskei-wide civil service strike on Monday 3 December. However, after a meeting between COSATU, the ANC and the SACP, it was decided to postpone the action and try once again to meet Gqozo. The ANC and SACP pledged their full support for the call for Gqozo to meet NEHAWU, and will also support NEHAWU actions if Gqozo fails to meet the union. NEHAWU officials believe this has solved any tensions that may have remained in the alliance between COSATU and the ANC.

The Military Council, however, has adopted an intransigently hostile attitude to NEHAWU. Councillor of Manpower Nyikana told *Labour Bulletin*: "We don't like the NEHAWU crowd. It is very unruly, they misbehave. They bring out scurrilous pamphlets insulting high officials. Why do they not teach themselves to operate like a trade union?" When asked how the union could operate like a trade union if it did not have bargaining rights, he simply answered: "We don't see it that way. We just don't allow public servants to join unions."

No doubt the Military Council is driven by the fear of losing control of its bureaucracy. Bantustan governments are unstable and weak. Their sources of power are the repressive forces and the control of patronage within their bloated bureaucracies (often employing up to 70% of bantustan workforces) - and public service unions pose a direct chal-

lenge to these sources of power.

If the Military Council persists in its attitude it will be inviting massive strikes in the public service, of the kind which have shaken other bantustans. It is difficult to see how the regime will be able to withstand the demands for public service union rights without resorting to repression. This would provoke a mass backlash from the people, COSATU, the ANC and the SACP. Thus, if Brigadier Gqozo wishes to continue his political career he should probably behave with caution.

NEHAWU in the 'homelands'

The Ciskei government is out of step with the majority of bantustan regimes. According to NEHAWU general secretary Sisa Njikelana, since the February unbanning of the ANC, NEHAWU has made rapid progress towards recognition in all the bantustans except the repressive Bophuthatswana, Buthelezi's KwaZulu and Ciskei.

The Venda government has agreed to recognise NEHAWU when labour legislation has been finalised. At this stage interim arrangements are being negotiated. Njikelana expressed concern at the recent strikes in Venda hospitals so soon after agreement had been reached. "There is a tendency to respond to issues as they arise," he says, "because union rights have been denied for so long. There is still a lack of communication procedures."

Lebowa has negotiated an interim recognition agreement, after a wave of strikes hit 17 hospitals in November. The union is expecting to negotiate organising rights in Gazankulu, but meetings have been delayed by the wave of strikes in Ciskei.

In KaNgwane and QwaQwa full recognition has been negotiated. NEHAWU has met the KwaNdebele government, and an agreement is to be negotiated. The Transkei government has decided to draw up new legislation governing labour relations in the public service, and it has invited NEHAWU to submit proposals. Njikelana sees this situation as "very positive". NEHAWU is exploring the possibility of working together with TRA-POA, the Transkei staff association in the public service. ♦



Triad workers: eager to tell us about their struggle

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

Fort Jackson strikers locked out, arrested

Ciskei workers have won basic trade union rights in law. But they often have to engage in tough battles to establish them in practice, as employers who enjoyed unfettered authority under Sebe do not change their attitude overnight. The strike and lock-out at Triad Electronics in Fort Jackson shows this clearly.

We visited the workers - mostly women - in the second week of their strike. They were scattered in groups on the open stretch of grass in front the factory, their union, ANC and UDF umbrellas bright in the midday sun. They were eager to tell us about their struggle for union rights, and how management was trying to smash NUMSA and install a dummy union.

Workers protect the factory

The workers were very bitter about this. They explained that they had saved their employer from enormous losses when mobs started looting and burning factories in Fort Jackson after the coup. "We heard that people were burning

factories, so went to our factory and stood around the fence. When looters came we said, 'If you have to take TVs then take them, only don't burn the factory because then we'll lose our jobs.'

"Afterwards we would see houses in Mdantsane where there were TVs from Triad, sometimes three or four in one house. We would ask the people to return them. Or we would call the police to return them to the company. In that way many TVs were returned. We felt bad that we who produce the TVs do not have them in our houses, whereas the thieves did.

"The bosses did not even thank us once for

SPECIAL REPORT

this. All they say is that they don't want NUMSA. People are very angry about that. Wages are very bad, about R60 per week. But the main point isn't to talk about wages, but to get the union into the factory to improve the treatment. We even told this to the bosses but they are not interested."

At this stage union organisers arrived, and the workers gathered to hear a report back from negotiations with management. There was a sense of solidarity and determination under the bright umbrellas. On the other side of the dirt track, closer to the factory gates, were groups of women sitting with their backs to us, their faces turned hopefully towards the



Strikers discuss negotiations with the union.....

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

factory. They were unemployed workers. Having heard about the strike they came to scavenge for jobs. When the strikers ended the meeting with freedom songs, toyi-toying and ululating, the would-be scabs watched with expressionless faces.

The dispute

The workers had organised themselves before the coup, joined NUMSA and won informal recognition. It seems, however, that as workers began to demand formal recognition of the union, management began resisting. Management introduced something called the United Democratic General Workers Union, which union organisers allege is actually an employment agency. Workers told us, "You don't see an organiser, you don't see an of-



fice."

The dispute started on a Friday in mid-September, when a number of NUMSA members in the plant were informed that they would have to move to different premises, also in Fort Jackson. Workers were suspicious because management had previously threatened to dismiss workers who were members of NUMSA. They asked why only NUMSA members were being moved, but got no satisfactory answer.

The NUMSA members gathered outside the factory that evening to discuss the issue. They concluded that management was trying to divide the workers and get rid of their union.

On Monday morning, when they reported



.....while unemployed workers wait outside the factory for jobs

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

for work, the workers who had been told to go to the new premises were turned back by the security guards. Those inside the factory were alarmed and refused to work. Their shopstewards met management but again got no satisfactory explanation. The next day they were locked out. "Our main grievance is that management failed to consult with the shopstewards," workers told us. "They are our mouthpieces. It seems management is playing hide-and-seek - they pretend to recognise the shopstewards, but practically they don't."

Police arrest strikers

Police then arrived, allegedly called by management, loaded the workers in vans and then dumped them in places scattered all over Mdantsane. The workers all made their way

back to Triad and gathered outside the gate again. This time the police came in great numbers and carted the workers off to cells at various police stations.

A shopsteward told us how 160 workers were crammed into six cells at one police station. "The cells were dirty, full of blood, and toilets that could not be flushed. Some slept standing up." The next day they were taken to court. They were not charged and the case was remanded. "The government is working with the ANC while it is jailing members of the ANC," she said.

Organising before the coup

Shopstewards told us how they joined the union before the coup. "The unity of workers forced us to join the union early this year. It was the time. About six of us called a general meeting and put our views. All agreed to join. We brought joining forms the following week. We did not have that workers council they had in Dimbaza - we organised through a general meeting, went to the office in East London, got forms, filled them in, and took them back to the office. Three-hundred-and-two workers joined." The Triad workers did not know of other Fort Jackson workers organising under the Sebe regime.

They told us, "Management was not negative, they kept telling us unions were not allowed in Ciskei, and that they were doing us a favour to consider it. Shopstewards were already elected, negotiating with management before the coup. They were bringing problems within factory - not taking action or demanding agreement with the union. It was not the time to do that."

A NUMSA organiser told us Fort Jackson workers are now "pouring into the union like water". Triad shopstewards told us workers are well organised and are militant. "They don't compromise anymore, they are looking forward. The bosses are no different, they are becoming brutal. Even this thing - management instructed the police to take us away. And all over they are trying to oust NUMSA with this United Democratic General Workers Union."

By the end of last year Triad workers had still not been reinstated. ❖

Industrial development in Ciskei

The industrial development that has taken place in Ciskei is focused on two main areas: Dimbaza and Fort Jackson. The main attraction for industrialists has been economic incentives, and the extremely low wages, which seem to vary between 45c and 65c per hour. About 40% of the investment is channelled through the Ciskei People's Development Bank, often in partnership with private capital.

Manufacturers starting up in Ciskei used to be eligible for a package of incentives on their wage bills, interest rates and rentals. However, these incentives were not really conducive to economic development, as Ciskei discovered in 1987. The package was short-term, lasting for seven years.

In 1987 the first seven-year cycle came to an end, and a number of companies simply closed shop. Ciskei lost 4 000 jobs in that year! Some companies were receiving more money on wage incentives than they were actually paying out to employees. As soon as the incentives ended they closed their factories.

In order to circumvent this kind of exploitation of incentives, Ciskei abolished the short-term package and introduced two permanent incentives: no company tax on profits that stay in Ciskei, and a ceiling of 15% tax on profits leaving Ciskei; and a ceiling of 15% on personal income tax.

Government officials and the Chamber of Industries believe that this is attracting "companies of substance", and cited the recent opening of Rehau, a German car components manufacturer which will supply Mercedes Benz SA as well as export markets.

According to director of the Chamber of Industries Stewart Dorrington, there are some 15 companies in Ciskei which supply MBSA. There are also some substantial textile and clothing companies with large investments.

SPECIAL REPORT

However, there also many companies, especially in the plastics sector, which are fairly lightweight investors.

There are a significant number of Taiwanese industrialists in Ciskei. Unionists and industrialists agree that they are often the employers most opposed to unionisation. Dorrington and Chamber president Brentnall both suspect that many Taiwanese employers are likely to pull out because they are more mobile internationally, they insist on a cheap, stable labour force, and they can't speak English.

Dorrington believes that the era of cheap labour sweatshops is past. Ciskei industrialists, he believes, will have to go the route of higher productivity and more training together with the rest of South African industry. He hopes to see training incentives and export incentives encouraging manufacturers to go this route. Employers that cannot afford to pay decent wages don't deserve to stay in business, he believes.

Whether Ciskeian industry is strong enough to take this route is an open question. Ciskei does not have a recognisable economy of its own. The economy is not integrated and there are few forward- and backward linkages (by this is meant that companies do not buy raw materials in Ciskei, nor do they sell their products to other companies in Ciskei). The linkages are with other companies and markets in South Africa and overseas.

Ciskei is very much part of the larger regional and South African economy, as Ciskei Development Bank officials acknowledge. Its future does not lie in the direction of a special enclave with peculiar conditions, but in the integration of its population and its economic activities into a regional and national development strategy which links South Africa's underdeveloped rural areas with its industrial urban centres. ☆

Tables and graphs supplied by the Ciskei People's Development Bank

List of industries

Area	No of firms	No of jobs
Dimbaza	103	11 929
Fort Jackson	78	4 343
Mdantsane	6	1 645
Sada	8	1 558
Other	12	4 442
Totals	207	23 929

Categories of industries

		%
Clothing	32	15,6
Food	14	6,3
Textiles	17	8,3
Iron, Steel and		
Other	10	5,0
Metals	18	9,0
Non-metals	9	4,4
Timber	10	4,7
Motor		
Vehicle/Transport	13	6,3
Chemical and		
Rubber	17	8,3
Electronic and		
Scientific	14	6,8
Furniture	8	4,0
Plastics	12	5,7
Miscellaneous	33	15,6
	207	100

Investment in industry in Ciskei

Rm cumulative

